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Fromm's Notion of Spontaneity as a Solution to Foucault's Problem of Freedom

Abstract

In this paper, I attempt to apply Fromm's notion of spontaneity to Foucault's system of repression. It tends to shed new light on Foucault's problem of freedom, using the notion which Foucault largely underestimates. Difficulties of such an application arise because of differences in Fromm's and Foucault's starting points in analysing the causes of human submission throughout history. Nonetheless, there is a point of convergence: Foucault and Fromm both describe a type of individual's escape towards the institutions of power. Whether these institutions are highly formalised or not, highly complex or rather simple, dispersed or centralised, they designate repression on account of their lack of spontaneity.

Keywords

freedom, spontaneity, power, repression, Erich Fromm, Michel Foucault

Introduction

Spontaneity, as a significant notion introduced by Erich Fromm, is employed in reference to Michel Foucault's system of repression, control of sexuality, and the general control over individuals as the members of society. I will attempt to provide argument for the claim that Fromm's notion of *spontaneity* can serve as a solution to the problem of freedom as postulated by Foucault primarily in his work *Will to Knowledge*, but I will also make the use of other Foucault's works, such as *Discipline and Punish* and *The Birth of the Clinic*. The notion of spontaneity is maintained throughout Fromm's work. Not only does he directly oppose associating spontaneity with negative behaviour, e.g. aggression,¹ but he also widely uses this notion as his suggested solution to the problem of freedom,² sometimes to the point of using it as a synonym or a near-synonym for freedom.³ I particularly paid attention to Fromm's work

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“[A]ggression is biologically given in man's genes; it is not spontaneous.” – Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York – Chicago – San Francisco 1973, p. 435.

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“The aim of socialism was man's emancipation, his restoration to the unalienated, uncrippled individual who enters into a new, rich

and spontaneous relationship with his fellow men and nature.” – Erich Fromm, *On Disobedience*, HarperCollins e-books 2010, p. 33.

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“[A]fter the age of six [children] become docile, unspontaneous and passive.” – E. Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, p. 241.

which highlights spontaneity as the core element of human liberation, *The Fear of Freedom*. In this work, Fromm gives his psychological analysis of human attitude towards freedom. Insights from *The Sane Society* accompany this examination.

I use the phrase *problem of freedom* in the sense of either lack or absence of individual's freedom due to relations with other individuals or groups of individuals regardless of their complexity. This is a notion which can be understood by common sense and appertained to both Fromm's and Foucault's theories, as well as to all the other authors mentioned herein. It only remains to bring to understanding which definition of freedom is used in this paper. Firstly, I accept the synonymy between the terms *freedom* and *liberty*, given that these terms are "normally used interchangeably by political and social philosophers".⁴ I singled out Isaiah Berlin's views on positive and negative freedom and, using an important passage from Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society*, I merged them into the notion of freedom used herein. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, Berlin offers a twofold and elaborate notion of freedom that can be widely used for social and political philosophy: it properly applies to the problem of freedom covered herein, i.e. to the absence of autonomous human actions.⁵ Secondly, Berlin's twofold notion of freedom can be reduced to one of its sides without excluding the other, and as such, it can be linked to Fromm's views, which are central to this paper. Hence, freedom is not defined anew here, rather a compound of already existing definitions is obtained to acquire a comprehensive and widely acceptable (and, in case of Berlin, already renown)⁶ notion of freedom in a social and political sense.

For Berlin, *negative freedom*, or freedom *from*, means freedom from coercion, a "degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity";⁷ while *positive freedom*, or freedom *to*, means "to be my own master (...) my life and decisions [should] depend on myself, not on external forces of any kind".⁸ However, Fromm, following Berlin's distinction, adds that

"... modern man, free *from* medieval ties, was not free *to* build a meaningful life based on reason and love, [and] hence sought new security in submission to a leader, race or state."⁹

Therefore, in usage herein, the notion of positive freedom will be adopted. It follows from these quotations that a) positive freedom necessarily includes the negative one and b) negative freedom does not suffice to constitute a comprehensive meaning of freedom. Furthermore, this comprehensive notion of freedom – "freedom to", as defined by Isaiah Berlin, which also necessarily includes "freedom from" – is based on the fact that the distinction between positive and negative freedom might often be blurred, as Berlin himself acknowledges.¹⁰ As Nicolas Veroli puts it:

"Totalitarianism is defined strictly in terms of hard techniques of coercion (spying, torture, arbitrary arrests, show trials, etc.), [while] the definition of 'free societies' is broadened to incorporate all forms of manipulation, overt or covert, though they might accomplish similar functions."¹¹

Fromm and Foucault: Convergence and Divergence

First and foremost, if parts of Fromm's work are about to be applied to Foucault, a point of convergence between the two authors has to be explicated. Such a point will be found not primarily by searching for positive analogies (e.g., common roots or similar interpretations) between them, but by trying to find a

common place for a solution: if one author sets a problem whose solution can be found at the other author, then and in that sense they converge. I suggest Fromm's notion of spontaneity as a notion that fills the allegedly empty space in Foucault's theory. This 'empty' space consists of a positive solution to the problem of freedom.

Foucault is often accused of never offering such a positive solution because "Foucault's work is frequently read as denying the very possibility of freedom".¹² Johanna Oksala sums these allegations up:

"According to many of Foucault's critics, [Foucault's] denial of an autonomous subject leads to the denial of any meaningful concept of freedom, which again leads to the impossibility of emancipatory politics."¹³

The mentioned denial of an autonomous subject is based in a kind of social determinism – constraining the individual freedom – brought forward by Foucault:

"Since we are always the products of codes and disciplines, the overthrow of constraints will not free us (...) all that we can do is produce new codes and disciplines."¹⁴

Oksala then proceeds to argue that 'empty space' mentioned above does not exist at Foucault and that he indeed offered a solution. Moreover, Oksala is not the only author claiming this.¹⁵ I do not deny any of these claims; I am not claiming that Foucault left this space empty; in this paper, I am simply claiming that this space can *also* be filled by Fromm's notion of spontaneity. When it comes to Foucault's social determinism,¹⁶ I will also accept its features as

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Ian Carter, "Positive and Negative Liberty", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberty-positive-negative> (accessed on 22 December, 2018).

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"[O]ne is free in the positive sense to the extent that one has control over one's life. In this sense the term is very close to that of 'autonomy'." – Gerald Dworkin, "Positive and Negative Freedom", in: Robert Audi (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999, p. 723.

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I. Carter, "Positive and Negative Liberty".

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Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty", in: *Liberty*, Oxford University Press, New York 2002, pp. 166–218, p. 169.

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Ibid., p. 178.

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Erich Fromm, "Foreword", in: *The Sane Society*, Routledge Classics, London – New York 2002, pp. X–XIV, p. X.

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I. Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty", pp. 178–179.

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Nicolas Veroli, "Freedom is not a thing", *Radical Philosophy Review* 19 (2016) 2, pp. 475–500, p. 475.

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Sergei Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty*, Ashgate e-book 2007, p. 25.

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Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2005, p. 1.

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Ibid., p. 2.

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"[Foucault] practiced critique as a means of maintaining freedom from domination by those institutions that claim to know the truth about individuals." – Stephanie M. Batters, "Care of the Self and the Will to Freedom: Michel Foucault, Critique and Ethics", *Senior Honors Projects*, 2001, p. 13. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/231/> (accessed on 30 December, 2018). More on the link between knowledge and power will be said later in this paper.

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Paul Oliver wrote on such determinism: "According to Foucault, the individual identity is not self-determining. The subjective self does not exist because of the free will and autonomy of the individual. Rather our identity



something to which Fromm's spontaneity – a psychological concept cutting through the social restrictions as described in Foucault's work – could be applied as a solution.¹⁷

At Foucault, an individual seems to be overwhelmed by an invisible societal power that shifts and controls him; social control is an important concept of his, for which several examples can be provided. In *Will to Knowledge*, Foucault asserts sexual oppression as a means of, primarily, “social control”.¹⁸ Elsewhere, Foucault asserts that even the opposite – the free production of sexual discourse – has the same function.¹⁹ In *The Birth of the Clinic*, he posits modern medicine as having the function of augmenting social control:

“For clinical experience to become possible (...) a new definition of the status of the patient in society (...) became necessary; the patient has to be enveloped in a collective, homogenous space.”²⁰

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault applies the same function to the penal system.²¹ This inevitable societal power over an individual, or social determinism, leads Foucault to a sort of pessimism. Even the most renowned writers on Foucault acknowledge his “pessimistic assessment of modernity”²² or his “pessimistic suggestion that modern power (...) produc[es] subjects”.²³

On the contrary, Fromm optimistically²⁴ appeals to one's individuality and self-consciousness. Writing from a different standpoint than Foucault, Fromm claims that our bonds have *psychological* – and not primarily *social* – nature. For example, our struggle to return to freedom is a psychological problem,²⁵ and the solution demands a psychological act:

“The cure of social pathology must follow the same principle [as the] cure in cases of individual mental diseases (...) since it is the pathology of so many human beings, and not of an entity beyond or apart from individuals.”²⁶

Commentators also agree on Fromm's firm belief in human liberation, some of them even exaggeratingly.²⁷ Two basic elements of Fromm's thought can be derived here, one of them relying on the other: his ‘optimism’ (or belief in emancipation) and his appeal to individuality.

From there, a scheme of differences between Fromm and Foucault can be made. The former analyses how the power arises from an individual and how the individual then hands it over to someone else (“escape from freedom”),²⁸ exchanging freedom for security, and the latter analyses not the way power arises from an individual, but how it affects the individual, going as far as to an outright social determinism (one of the most criticised Foucault's ideas, as Thomas L. Dumm warns, is “the idea that power might exist as the medium through which every human phenomenon might be seen only as an effect”).²⁹ The views of the two authors are reversed, since their processes are such: for Fromm, it is more important to find out – for this is also the direction in which a solution can be sought – how the power is *taken from* or *given to* an individual,³⁰ while Foucault analyses how the power is *exercised over* an individual.³¹ From Fromm's point of view, a person or an individual is the cause of power; from Foucault's point of view, a person or an individual is the effect of power. Some support was offered for the perspective from which the authors' standpoints can be seen as being opposite. Thus space is left for Fromm to propose a solution where Foucault does not see one.

Freedom throughout History and Possibilities for Solving the Problem of Freedom

It is of utmost importance to describe the difference between Fromm's and Foucault's understanding of history. I am aiming at their comprehension of the development of freedom throughout history. Fromm believes that "the history of man can be characterised as a process of growing individuation and growing freedom".³² Foucault, on the other hand, believes that freedom through

is created through a system of socialization over which we have relatively little control." – Paul Oliver, *Foucault – The Key Ideas*, Teach Yourself, London 2010, p. 17.

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That should by no means lead to a conclusion that I am accusing Foucault of offering only a sociological (and not, e.g., psychological or historical) standpoint.

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Michel Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, translated by Robert Hurley, Penguin Books, London 1998, p. 30.

19

Ibid., p. 23.

20

Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, translated by Alan Sheridan, Routledge Classics, London 2003, p. 242.

21

"... punishment (...) is a generalized function, coextensive with the function of the social body and with each of its elements." – Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage Books, New York 1995, p. 90.

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Beatrice Han, "The Analytic of Finitude and the History of Subjectivity", in: Gary Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, pp. 176–210, p. 178.

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Jana Sawicki, "Queering Foucault and the Subject of Feminism", in: G. Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, pp. 379–401, p. 383.

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"Fromm's optimistic conviction that human bondage is an unnatural state, from which sooner or later people will manage to break free." – David Ingleby, "Introduction by David Ingleby", in: E. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, pp. XVI–LV, p. XVIII.

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Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, Routledge Classics, London 2005, pp. 1–18.

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E. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 266.

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"Erich Fromm's prophetic messianic hope rests at the core of his philosophical, psychoanalytic, and political program." – Kieran Durkin, *The Radical Humanism of Erich Fromm*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2014, p. 204; "[T]otal liberation [is] the basic aim of Fromm's radical humanism (...)." – Joan Braune, "Erich Fromm and Thomas Merton: Biophilia, Necrophilia, and Messianism", in: Seyed Javad Miri, Robert Lake, Tricia M. Kress (eds.), *Reclaiming the Sane Society. Essays on Erich Fromm's Thought*, Sense Publishers, Rotterdam 2014, pp. 137–147, p. 139.

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Escape from Freedom is an alternative title of Fromm's work discussed here, *The Fear of Freedom*.

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Thomas L. Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham – Boulder – New York – Oxford 2002, p. 71.

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"[T]he individual is made to feel powerless and insignificant, but taught to project all his human powers into the figure of the leader, the state (...)." – E. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 230. The same process can be found not only in authoritarian regimes but also in a modern capitalistic society: "... man does not experience himself as the active bearer of his own powers (...) but as (...) dependent on powers outside of himself, unto whom he has projected his living substance." – Ibid., p. 121.

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"[The] major problem [for Foucault is] to understand the manner in which power is exercised." – P. Oliver, *Foucault – The Key Ideas*, p. 46.

32

E. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 26.

history³³ has its amplitudes and, moreover, can never be fully achieved.³⁴ In the first chapter of his *Will to Knowledge*, Foucault claims that, *after* a period (if not an epoch) of lesser or greater freedom of sexual 'expression', it came to the Victorian period, which took control over sexuality and oppressed it.³⁵ Hence, for Foucault, there is no constantly augmenting emancipation. Up to this point, things seem quite simple: Fromm adheres to the idea of historical progress, while Foucault does not take the progress for granted.

Nevertheless, Fromm is advocating not only historical progress in emancipation and individuation, but he also supposes that this process of emancipation is more closely related to the emancipation from nature and natural conditions of subsistence than to a person's emancipation from other human beings.³⁶ He believes that there is another side of the mentioned emancipation and individuation, which consists in insecurity³⁷ and in enhanced alienation from the others, a product and characteristic of the modern society focused on profit and full of selfish, economically and materialistically aimed interests.³⁸ Here, hidden among the alienation mentioned above and insecurity, the roots of one's "fear of freedom" – a fear that can end up as, for instance, fascism – can be found. One can run off from insecurity (which is a by-product of capitalism and enhanced "freedom from", or negative freedom) into subordination to authority, because that way one feels safer, i.e., under the aegis of authority. Therefore, it can be concluded that Fromm is not so close to the naive belief in historical progress, which is also corroborated by his commentators.³⁹ Just the opposite, impregnated with the spirit of Frankfurt School, he tries to answer the question "why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism?".⁴⁰ Fromm is closer to dualistic views (as a successor of traditional continental, precisely German, philosophy), while Foucault advocates asymmetry, pluralism of explanations and amplitudinal instead of linear history (as an adherent to, if not one among founders of, postmodern thought). That is where the impression of Foucault's 'pessimism' concerning historical progress and the evolution of freedom comes from. Sergei Prozorov strikingly explicates:

"... Foucault's ontology of freedom contains no messianic expectation."⁴¹

That is why I think that Fromm is the one who can bring about a solution to this dualistic (one side of the dualism is enhanced freedom, the other side is enhanced insecurity) problem – the solution is contained in spontaneity and solidarity of our human interactions.

On the other hand, Foucault – whose history of repression of sexuality are herein taken as a representative of the history of repression in general⁴² – asks the following: "Have we not liberated ourselves from those two long centuries in which the history of sexuality must be seen first of all as the chronicle of an increasing repression?"; and answers: "Only to a slight extent".⁴³ Nowadays, we have the processes of creating "an apparatus for producing (...) discourse about sex",⁴⁴ and thus any sexual revolution is lost before it has even begun, because of the proliferation of scandalous discourses that ensure nothing is scandalous nowadays. Sex is no longer an opposition's weapon, but just the opposite: a power holders' weapon. Structures of power have (not for the first time) realised the sex could be a servant of "public interest",⁴⁵ i.e. an instrument to maintain the 'status quo'. Foucault claims that if we were to be subjected to repression, then we would be able to emancipate only by "a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions".⁴⁶ Fromm's equivalent might be the spontaneity: for, what is repression (especially in the form of laws

and prohibitions) if not suppression of spontaneity? Laws and prohibitions exist exactly for that cause: to restrain the unpredictability of events, which includes restraining unpredictable and therefore *spontaneous* human actions. Fromm considers that we have achieved “freedom from” (freedom from repression, authorities and outer bonds in general; negative freedom), but we have not yet achieved “freedom to” (freedom to express our individuality completely and in a creative way; positive freedom).⁴⁷ Foucault, on the other hand, thinks that we never made any significant step towards freedom and that repression never ceases. The repression is always present; it only changes its shapes and modes:

“... the quest for freedom is diverted into a series of illusory liberations from repression.”⁴⁸

The change of the modes of repression is found not only in the development of discourses on sexuality but also in the development of medical practices⁴⁹ and practices of punishment.⁵⁰ Discipline as a form of repression has also

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I will principally refer to his thoughts in *Will to Knowledge*. It mostly refers to sexuality, but through it Foucault reflects on the general repression throughout the history.

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“[For Foucault,] there is no escape from power into freedom, for (...) systems of power are coextensive with human society.” – Charles Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth”, *Political Theory* 12 (1984) 2, pp. 152–183, p. 159.

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M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, pp. 3–4.

36

D. Ingleby, “Introduction by David Ingleby”, p. XLVIII.

37

E. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 29.

38

“[T]he central issue of the effects of capitalism on personality [is] the phenomenon of alienation.” – E. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 117.

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“Fromm was not a naive humanist (...).” – K. Durkin, *The Radical Humanism of Erich Fromm*, p. 130; “[Fromm] was not naive about how arduous a struggle it would be to (...) create a future that would better meet [human] needs.” – Nick Braune, Joan Braune, “Erich Fromm’s Socialist Program and Prophetic Messianism”, in: S. J. Miri, R. Lake, T. M. Kress (eds.), *Reclaiming the Sane Society*, pp. 59–95, p. 89.

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Max Horkheimer, Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, “Preface”, in: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by Edmund Jephcott, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2002, pp. XIV–XIX, p. XIV.

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S. Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty*, p. 148.

42

The same representativity stands for his works *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. This analogy will be demonstrated in the continuation of this paper.

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M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, p. 5.

44

Ibid., p. 23.

45

Ibid.

46

Ibid., p. 5.

47

E. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 28.

48

James W. Bernauer, Michael Mahon, “Michel Foucault’s Ethical Imagination”, in: G. Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, pp. 149–176, p. 159.

49

“[M]edical profession [gained] powers similar to those exercised by the clergy over men’s souls.” – M. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, pp. 36–37.

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“[The modern] punishment (...) lost some of its intensity, but at the cost of greater intervention.” See: M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 75.

increased towards modernity, rather than decreased.⁵¹ Although it might, at this point, seem that this paper has walked into a *cul-de-sac* because Foucault and Fromm are too distant from each other, I will bring about one reason why this discussion should go on.

Fromm's attempt to solve this problem⁵² by *spontaneity* could be applied and connected to Foucault's problem of repression, whether it (the repression) is direct or *sub rosa*. Also, spontaneity as a notion is even fitter for (a theoretical) resolution of indirect, disguised and cunning repression that is being carried out through institutional supervision of sexuality. Spontaneity is an especially good answer when it comes to Foucault's query about the solution of contemporary discourse on sexuality, which is wholly artificial and simulated – and that means a complete lack of spontaneity. To strengthen this statement, I shall cite some of Foucault's most important works. Thus, Foucault says that starting with the 17th and rapidly growing throughout the 18th century, there is an “institutional incitement to speak about [the sexuality]”.⁵³ Prohibition is no longer enforced, but just the opposite – encouragement refers to everybody: everyone should speak, as much and as loud one can, about one's sexuality, and, as well, about oneself; this is the meaning of “transforming (...) sex into discourse”.⁵⁴ The same happened to medical practice:

“[The] greater proximity between [the physician and the patient] simply made it possible for the object to reveal its secrets.”⁵⁵

Hence, in modern and contemporary times, this is converted into disclosure to our psychologists, paediatricians, physicians, etc. And, lastly and most important: speaking about sex is turning into “analysis, stocktaking, classification, and specification”;⁵⁶ sex is entering the discourse which does “not derive from morality alone, but from rationality as well”.⁵⁷ Exactly the same goes for the penal system in modernity:

“A whole set of assessing, diagnostic, prognostic, normative judgements concerning the criminal have become lodged in the framework of penal judgement.”⁵⁸

Rationality is exactly the opposite of spontaneity, as is planning *vs* imagination or restriction *vs* wittiness. “Institutional encouragement” is just the same thing, the core opposition to spontaneity. Hence, the “introduction of sex into discourse”, institutionalisation and rationalisation of sexuality, is an attempt to eliminate spontaneity. Therefore, Fromm and Foucault have an important meeting point.

Spontaneity, as it follows from upper quotes and arguments, appears as the essential opposition to institutional control and especially to the “power [that] comes from below”,⁵⁹ as Foucault calls it.⁶⁰ Spontaneity is directly antagonistic to institutional control. The purpose of institutional control, as stated already, consists in suppressing any spontaneity, any unpredictability, and any accidentality.

On the other hand, it can be assumed why Foucault never considered spontaneity as a solution to the problem of repression: spontaneity is too naive. Spontaneity is inapplicable to the wide range of population; it means the unexpected eruption of spirit, wittiness, unpredictability. It implies more than the average level of intellectual ability, or at least its occasional outbursts; it implies adroitness or skilfulness in unexpected situations. Therefore, spontaneity is reserved only for a smaller percentage of people; it cannot be implemented widely. Consequently, it is delusive to expect spontaneity to undertake the vast step Fromm assigned to it: to build something as utopian as universal

emancipation. It is delusive to expect people to be spontaneously good or to expect spontaneous solidarity.⁶¹

Quite the contrary, these core characteristics of spontaneity – its unpredictability, unreliability, and inapplicability – are an argument in favour of the existence of laws and social institutions. The reason for the existence of laws, as well as the argument against anarchy as a social concept, lies exactly in the idea that majority of people are incapable of autonomously acting morally good, i.e. by themselves, i.e. spontaneously. On some fields, systems of social control transformed the caution towards unpredictability into the restriction of any spontaneous act, any imagination and any deviation. Foucault says that this kind of control (complete, not only cautious) used to be established, for instance, for sexuality: every sex that was not fruitful used to be institutionally sanctioned.⁶² However, today, this kind of systematic control over sexuality is gone. Liberal economy, and particularly such an expanded one like the contemporary economy, necessarily grants (and even stimulates) a kind of sexual freedom, without much control: nowadays, people can fulfil a vast number of their sexual aspirations, and the main generator of this possibility is the profit. This might tell us that, even if spontaneity is allegedly granted, it is turned into a power holder's weapon, i.e. it is turned against itself. Therefrom Foucault's pessimism regarding historical progress: there is no progress in terms of freedom, there is only progress in terms of power – the progress of its cunningness, or its ability to convince us we are free.

The Quality of Repression and the Mechanisms of Bearing the Repression

I will now juxtapose two of the authors' chapters that share – as far as this paper is concerned – an interesting similarity.⁶³ Along with that, I will include those parts of their other works that coincide with their ideas from the mentioned chapters.

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“[The discipline] increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience).” – Ibid., p. 138.

52
Regardless of the possibility of his proposal coming true; the goal of this paper is not to predict, but to point out the space where Fromm and Foucault converge, and where a common solution might be hiding.

53
M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, p. 18.

54
Ibid., p. 20.

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M. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, p. 168.

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M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, p. 24.

57
Ibid., p. 24.

58
M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 19.

59
M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, p. 94.

60
It is more explanatory to say “dispersed power”, which is also an important concept at Foucault, as many of his commentators agree. Cf. Joseph Rouse, “Power / Knowledge”, in: G. Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, pp. 95–123, p. 110; David Ingram, “Foucault and Habermas”, in: G. Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, pp. 240–284, p. 248; P. Oliver, *Foucault*, p. 38.

61
Solidarity implies spontaneity, it does not exist if it comes as a heteronomy; “forced solidarity” is an oxymoron.

62
M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, p. 38.

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Chapters “The Two Aspects of Freedom for Modern Man” from Fromm's *The Fear of Freedom* and “Scientia Sexualis” from Foucault's *Will to Knowledge*.

Fromm describes the development of an individual's attitude towards freedom in the last 300 to 400 years (since Reformation and expansion of Protestantism over Europe and West in general). Foucault also speaks of development,⁶⁴ one of an individual's attitude towards sex, in the last 300 or so years. At this moment, the authors are observing two different aspects of the same process, the process of leaving the 'dark' medieval period behind and stepping into modern (and indeed postmodern) times. Foucault says that the discourse about sex is "multiplied rather than rarefied" and has a "defensive role".⁶⁵ He means "defensive" in terms of the whole 'ancien regime' of repression, which started to collapse. That defensive role is transparent in the development of "scientia sexualis" in contrast to oriental "ars erotica".⁶⁶ "Scientia sexualis", unlike "ars erotica", is stiff and non-spontaneous; moreover, it is an attempt to impose control over sex. Fromm often claims that repression of children is produced by not letting them being spontaneous,⁶⁷ and Foucault shows that repression of child sexuality is present, for instance, in the suppression of masturbation. Thus, at Foucault, "scientia sexualis", a *defence mechanism* of a system, is in the phase of its construction and development during the last 300 years. Equivalent to this (but applied to an individual instead of a society or a system), Fromm has *mechanisms of escape*⁶⁸ that are developed by an individual for the purpose of emancipation from initial childhood repression, which was also pleasant in a way,⁶⁹ and thus an individual tends to return to it. Escape mechanisms are being developed towards the late modern period (19th and 20th century), and they are equivalent to a person's adulthood. Those mechanisms are an effect of an individual's greater individualisation and dissociation, or of one's alienation. The difference between the two authors consists in the following: for Fromm, an individual is the one who creates the mechanisms, while for Foucault, a system is assigned to do that.⁷⁰ Alternatively, it might be better to say that the mechanism is being *created* inside an individual or a system. Fromm states that the individual himself tends to return to the repression (in the form of authority) which earlier made him feel safe. Foucault asserts something completely different about repression. For Foucault, repression is not an offspring of an individual; just the opposite – and opposite of Fromm – the system is the cause of repression. However, Foucault does not deny that the individual is increasingly disciplined and even self-disciplined (albeit because of institutional influence) towards modernity.⁷¹

Both Fromm and Foucault notice that, with the massive changes the West has been experiencing between 16th and 20th century, *mechanisms* are created – whether psychological or socio-political – that accommodate an individual to the modification of the system and accommodate the system to the modification of an individual: chiefly, the modification of individual's self-consciousness. All these modifications are the modifications related to freedom, as both Fromm and Foucault notice and elaborate. Both of them agree that one kind of repression is eliminated throughout these 300 years, while the other problem was set in the 20th century. However, the two authors see this problem differently: Fromm asserts that a 20th-century individual has gained the chance to develop "freedom to" (nevertheless, the individual does not recognise and does not utilise this chance),⁷² while Foucault insists that the system has remained repressive, although changing its approach.⁷³ Therefore, the 20th-century problems as the two authors see them are different; so are their respective solutions. Fromm thinks that an individual has to emancipate himself through spontaneity and solidarity, and also through developing a healthy individuality and self-consciousness.⁷⁴ Foucault thinks that an individual has nothing to do with that. For him, new shapes of knowledge and

power are constantly evolving and transforming: power and knowledge are being perpetuated.⁷⁵ The only question is whether that process will get more sophisticated or more violent form; an individual has no active role here.

The parallel between the two authors in understanding power and freedom can be found in the following quotations. Fromm says that

“... we [in the 20th century] are fascinated by the growth of freedom from powers *outside* ourselves and are blinded to the fact of *inner* restraints.”⁷⁶

Foucault says that power *either*

“... has an external hold on [our] desire [*or*] is constitutive [for the] desire.”⁷⁷

Therefore, we must obey either the restriction of our desire from the outside or the restriction of our desire from the inside (the desire is both an inner and an outer restriction: by shaping our feelings into the desire, outer powers are also restricting those inner feelings and creating our inner restrictions). People express and think, Fromm asserts, the same things other people express and think, and we cannot be truly free that way, despite having the freedom of expression.⁷⁸ Instead of taking care of their inner freedom, people are de-

64

It should be borne in mind here that the word “development” is not synonymous with the word “progress”.

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M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, p. 53.

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Ibid., p. 57.

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E. Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, p. 241.

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E. Fromm, “Mechanisms of Escape”, in: E. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, pp. 117–177.

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An individual in this phase recalls pleasures much easier than pains and he wants to return to that feeling of pleasure, the feeling of “delightful submission”. – Ibid.

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M. Foucault, “The Deployment of Sexuality”, in: M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, pp. 77–131, pp. 83–85.

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“One (...) sees the spread of disciplinary procedures, not in the form of enclosed institutions, but as centres of observation disseminated throughout society.” – M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 212.

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“[T]he great European Revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries failed to transform *freedom from* into *freedom to*.” – E. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 58.

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“[D]iscipline is no longer simply an art of distributing bodies (...) but of composing forces

in order to obtain an efficient machine.” – M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 164; “[D]ecentralization is associated with (...) repression.” – M. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, p. 48; “[A] presum[ption] that there is an opposition between normalizing strategies and the establishment of modern rights (...) is mistaken.” – T. L. Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*, p. 130.

74

“Positive freedom, according to Fromm’s definition, is the ‘capacity for spontaneous relationship to man and nature, a relationship that connects the individual with the world without eliminating his individuality’.” – Vicki Dagostino, Robert Lake, “Fromm’s Dialectic of Freedom and the Praxis of Being”, in: S. J. Miri, R. Lake and T. M. Kress (eds.), *Reclaiming the Sane Society*, pp. 17–31, p. 17.

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For power and knowledge directly implying each other, see: M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 27: “... power produces knowledge (...) power and knowledge directly imply one another (...) there is no power relation without the correlative (...) knowledge.” For the perpetuation of power / knowledge, see: Joseph Rouse, “Power / Knowledge”, pp. 95–123.

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E. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 91.

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M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, p. 83.

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E. Fromm, “Mechanisms of Escape”, in: E. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, pp. 117–177.

manding freedom from outer restrictions. Foucault asserts, similarly to that, that we internalise norms that have been set outside us; these norms are outer restrictions, which means they come from the outer forces, i.e. from some structures of power. So we found a similarity here: Fromm also thinks that what we internalise is something brought to us by outer powers; hence, our 'inner' bondage also comes from the outside. Both authors agree that people are naively assured they are free. At this point, Foucault's sentence can be adopted as the link between the two authors:

"Power is tolerable only on condition that it masks (...) itself."⁷⁹

Foucault's "capillarity"⁸⁰ of power is analogous to Fromm's opinion that people do not possess "freedom to". People are eager to give themselves into institutionalised authorities if they can justify that act to themselves. It is much easier to do that if the authority is invisible while still providing security for them. That authority, in Fromm's work, is an authoritarian personality, while, in Foucault's work, the authorities are the experts who are rarely brought into question, e.g. physicians. Fromm points to an *authoritarian* person, while Foucault points to the *authoritative* one (at this point, it is visible why Foucault's notion of power bears much more cunning and fraudulent connotations, and hence indicates something more dangerous than Fromm's slightly naive one). Withal, Fromm says that submission to others includes a certain amount of joy.⁸¹ The joy is even greater if we are, along with that, persuaded that someone else is taking care of us because we have managed to overcome the feeling of "aloneness and powerlessness".⁸² Foucault's institutional care-taking⁸³ is providing the same feeling of security as Fromm's authoritarian personality. Exactly because of the existence of (e.g.) a psychologist who takes care of our sexual life,⁸⁴ which means that someone competent (an expert) is interested in us and our problems, we feel that we are not left alone with our problems, that our problems are not meaningless or insignificant.

Conclusion

The conclusion about freedom and repression in the (post)modern society, again, exposes a similarity between Fromm and Foucault. They both argue that modern liberal democracies, doing as they do, conceal their power. The subjects of modern democracies suppose they are free while they are still under the heavy impact of heteronomous powers. Foucault claims that the mechanisms of power in the Western world are changing substantially as they are closing into the 20th century. *Right over death* (the right sovereigns had during early modern times) is transferred into *power over life*, the power that governs life.⁸⁵ The negative determination of power is allocated to the positive one. Something quite similar can be noticed at Fromm, in the last chapter of *The Fear of Freedom*, which holds a suggestive title, "The Illusion of Individuality":⁸⁶ the general opinion is that democracy brings freedom and individualism, and formal confirmation for that is one's right to express his own opinion. Nonetheless, "the right to express our thoughts, however, means something only if we can have thoughts of our own".⁸⁷ Fromm wants to say that the Western system of massive consumption – 'liberal democratic', 'capitalist' or 'neoliberal' structure of power, regardless of its name – made us, in fact, opinionless. Both Fromm and Foucault agree that this system is not emancipating us: the only thing that occurs is the transformation of power; the power is becoming differently shaped. However, Fromm, once again, still hopes that the spontaneity, i.e. our prowess, is a kind of salvation for hu-

mankind. Foucault could not end in such an optimistic manner, but his final verdict is an abstract of both his and Fromm's standpoint: the contemporary system of power is "having us believe that our liberation is in the balance".⁸⁸

Fromm and Foucault are starting by advancing in opposite directions (one goes 'uphill', the other 'downhill'): Fromm studies which way human *psyche* improves the power, which way human subjection and fear of freedom brings advantage to power, as well as which way it creates power. Foucault, on the other hand, investigates which way power works in the opposite direction: which way an already existing, present, 'positive' power makes an impact on individuals, and also which way the power is transformed and how it makes an impression that it does not come from the 'above'. These areas and directions investigated by the two authors should not be strictly separated, since there are many points of their convergence, as it has been demonstrated. Nevertheless, it has become quite clear that Fromm starts from an individual's inner world, while Foucault starts from the existing power itself.

There is some similarity between Fromm's example of Germans' running off to Hitler (as an extreme form of escape from freedom, the escape towards ultimate authority)⁸⁹ in the 1930s and Foucault's example of people's escape to institutions, psychiatrists, psychologists, paediatricians, and physicians. Both escapes provide safety, shelter, protection from spontaneity and from something unexpected. The bigger the power is, i.e. the bigger the knowledge is (regarding Foucault's authorities who are experts, the relations of knowledge are turned into power relations),⁹⁰ the safer one feels. Hence, the bigger the authority is (whether it is an institution, based on knowledge as a kind of power, or a physical person, based on 'pure' power; whether it is an authoritative or authoritarian power), the better one feels. Both kinds of authority are paternalistic. Fromm says that authority is "rationalised".⁹¹ that does not necessarily mean it is rational, but it surely gives an image of rationality. Likewise, Foucault claims that 'scientia sexualis' is a rationalisation of sex (e.g., it invents the discourse of "sexology"),⁹² not necessarily being crucial

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M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, p. 86.

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Cf. J. Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, p. 99; Hans Sluga, "Foucault's Encounter with Heidegger and Nietzsche", in: G. Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, pp. 210–240, p. 232.

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E. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 127.

82

Ibid., p. 130.

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It must be taken into consideration that Foucault is not insisting that the power is solely formally institutional or directly top-to-bottom aimed; institutions are more like some kind of 'branch-office' system of power, widely organised. Cf. P. Oliver, *Foucault*, p. 38, 40, 165.

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M. Foucault, "Domain", in: M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, pp. 103–115, pp. 110–112.

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M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, p. 136.

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E. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, pp. 207–221.

87

Ibid., p. 208.

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M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, p. 159.

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E. Fromm, "Psychology of Nazism", in: E. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, pp. 178–206.

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M. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, p. 36–37.

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E. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 124.

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M. Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, p. 5.

for a healthy sexual life, but surely representing itself as such. Nevertheless, the difference between Fromm and Foucault is that Fromm ascribes positive connotations to some authorities (not to a dictatorial leader, but certainly to authorities like teachers), while Foucault, on the contrary, considers knowledge to be itself a form of power, which entails that (e.g.) a teacher is also a 'power holder'. Foucault is recognisable just because of that assertion: he brings in the idea of the intersection of knowledge (in particular, science) and power.

Fromm reveals the human tendency to submission; Foucault reveals how that tendency becomes less and less obvious (individuals being less aware of it) and, as a result, less and less painful. These modifications are being produced throughout the Western civilisation for the last four centuries. For Foucault, power itself is the matter of consideration; unlike him, Fromm sees individuals as the matter as well as the solution.

I believe that the problem of freedom, which I have made the title of, is an inevitable subject for both authors, in *The Fear of Freedom* and *The Sane Society* by itself, and in *Will to Knowledge* and other Foucault's works by its necessary implications: power and repression are categories which necessarily entail the problem of freedom, which is why Johanna Oksala notices that "freedom is not the opposite of power, but rather its precondition and permanent provocation".⁹³ Another interesting observation from Oksala, who sees Foucault as an author who offers a solution to the problem of freedom, suffices to finish this discussion:

"... for Foucault, freedom refers to (...) the contingency of all structures."⁹⁴

Fromm's individualistic spontaneity fits in here as that which makes all (social) structures contingent. It is not only the case that Fromm's and Foucault's problems converge, but also their respective solutions do.

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Frommov pojam spontanosti kao rješenje problema slobode kod Foucaulta

Sažetak

U radu pokušavam primijeniti Frommov pojam spontanosti na Foucaultovu teoriju sustava represije. Ovom analogijom pokušava se iznova sagledati Foucaultov problem slobode, pomoću pojma koji Foucault uglavnom zanemaruje. Osnovna je teškoća takvog pristupa u različitim polazištima dvojice autora pri analizi uzroka ljudske podčinjenosti kroz povijest. Unatoč tome, članak će pokazati da je moguće pronaći točku konvergencije između Fromma i Foucaulta: oba autora opisuju svojevrsni bijeg pojedinca prema institucijama moći. Bilo da su te institucije formaliziranije ili rudimentarnije, raspršene ili centralizirane, zajednička im je osnova represija utemeljena na izbjegavanju bilo kakve spontanosti.

Ključne riječi

sloboda, spontanost, moć, represija, Erich Fromm, Michel Foucault

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**Fromms Begriff der Spontaneität als
Lösung für Foucaults Problem der Freiheit**

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel versuche ich, Fromms Begriff der Spontaneität auf Foucaults Unterdrückungssystem anzuwenden. Er neigt, ein neues Licht auf das Problem der Freiheit bei Foucault zu werfen, indem er den Begriff verwendet, den Foucault weitgehend vernachlässigt. Schwierigkeiten bei einer solchen Anwendung ergeben sich aus dem Unterschied zwischen Fromms und Foucaults Ausgangspunkten bei der Analyse der Ursachen für menschliche Unterwerfung im Laufe der Geschichte. Nichtsdestotrotz haben die Autoren einen Punkt der Konvergenz: Sowohl Foucault als auch Fromm beschreiben eine Art der Flucht des Individuums zu den Institutionen der Macht. Unabhängig davon, ob diese Institutionen hoch formalisiert oder nicht, hochkomplex oder eher einfach, verstreut oder zentralisiert sind, stehen sie für Unterdrückung infolge mangelnder Spontaneität.

Schlüsselwörter

Freiheit, Spontaneität, Macht, Unterdrückung, Erich Fromm, Michel Foucault

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**La Notion de spontanéité de Fromm
comme solution au problème de liberté de Foucault**

Résumé

Dans cet article, je tente d'appliquer la notion de spontanéité de Fromm au système répressif de Foucault. Par cette analogie, nous cherchons à éclairer de nouveau le problème de la liberté chez Foucault, en utilisant la notion que Foucault sous-estime largement. Les difficultés d'une telle application sont dues à la différence des points de départ de Fromm et de Foucault dans l'analyse des causes de la soumission humaine à travers l'histoire. Néanmoins, les deux auteurs ont un point de convergence : Foucault et Fromm décrivent tous deux un type de fuite de l'individu vers les institutions du pouvoir. Que ces institutions soient hautement formalisées ou non, très complexes ou plutôt simples, dispersées ou centralisées, elles désignent la répression en raison de leur manque de spontanéité.

Mots-clés

liberté, spontanéité, pouvoir, répression, Erich Fromm, Michel Foucault