

# THE PROBLEM OF FREEDOM IN THE WORKS OF MICHEL FOUCAULT

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## *Abstract*

*The article deals with Michel Foucault's vision of freedom that is shaped by his alternative understanding of power and resistance. Foucault repudiates the modern idea of liberation through truth about the real nature: there is no liberating truth about the "real" situation, essence and good. Truth is not free from power relations, it is embedded in them, in a certain regime of truth. There is a certain truth about freedom, and the latter is not opposed to government; on the contrary, it is its most important resource. Thus, there is no escape from power into freedom. Power is omnipresent, it is not localized, but dispersed, productive, flexible and reversible. This reversibility allows for resistance, which is inherent to power relations: where there is power there is a resistance. The notion of freedom is mostly present in Foucault's later works. Freedom is a practice, a kind of positive resistance. Foucault sees the ethic of the concern for the self as a practice of freedom. Although the individual cannot get outside of power relations, which produce her own self, she can participate in the self-making. So, freedom can be understood as participation in the process of defining oneself and the meaning of freedom.*

## *Introduction*

There is no escape from freedom. It is restless in chasing our bodies and minds. One hears about freedom almost every day and is encouraged to love it and struggle for it. The wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are fought in the name of freedom of individuals, nations, and the world. Modern political vocabulary reflects the value of this notion; it "has become the central value of our [Western] culture"<sup>1</sup>. As a result, not many are questioning its value, and problems are usually seen as the result of its shortage.

An individual of the twenty-first century cannot be conceptualized outside of the notion of freedom because it orders all spheres of human life. In the words of Nikolas Rose "[t]he ethics of freedom have come to underpin our conceptions of how we should be ruled, how our practices of everyday life should be organized, how we should understand ourselves and our predicaments"<sup>2</sup>. To build life on the basis of freedom and to demand to be governed in its name has become normal. But not many people

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Taylor, "Kant's Theory of Freedom," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences. Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 318.

<sup>2</sup>Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 61.

reflect on the question when and how it actually became normal. Why are we talking about one kind of freedom and not the other? Why do we define freedom in the way we do? The notion of freedom became dominant with the birth of liberalism, where “for the first time the arts of government were systematically linked to the practice of freedom”<sup>3</sup>. Thus, all we know about freedom is the knowledge about some kind of liberal freedom. We are its voluntary hostages.

Critical reflection is the best way of thinking about any phenomena, even the most praised ones. Freedom is not an exception. First of all, it is necessary to realize that there has been a variety of notions of freedom. We can trace several phases in the process of its “transformation”. The ancient notion of freedom as political phenomenon, with its priority of a political matrix and acceptance that not all men are free, contradicts the modern liberal one, born through the works of the Enlightenment thinkers. But the enchantment with reason, autonomy, and individuality seems to have lost its power in the light of the post-modern death of the subject, meta-narratives and metaphysics. If liberalism is concerned with human freedom as such, with freedom as a “part of the natural condition of man, the ‘state of nature’”<sup>4</sup>, which exists outside of any social order, the “post-modern vision” seems to be ironical or even cynical about freedom. Such a variety of notions makes us think about freedom in an alternative way: what

we actually see is not just a natural, neutral state but one that has gone through changes and modifications in meanings, and is still doing so. We can look at freedom as a social construct, truth that is designed to make people governable.

There are different ways to approach the study of freedom in the modern world. There are many different tasks that one can follow. But if one wants to think about freedom critically I think the works of Michael Foucault, a key philosopher of the twentieth century, are the best place to look for inspiration. He presents an alternative view on freedom, which opens the way for a critical assessment of its existing version. Foucault presents an alternative view of power, resistance and freedom. For him, power relations are dispersed and, moreover, productive. They create a regime of truth – “a field of discourse that enables the emergence of a specific kind of subjectivity or allows the elaboration of a particular rationality”<sup>5</sup>. An important part of any such regime is freedom. A certain understanding, definition, and exercise of freedom are presented as self-evident and only possible.

In this article I will try to follow Foucault in thinking about power, resistance and freedom. I am not going to look for one more final and deterministic definition of the latter or for the new strategy of the universal liberation. My aim is to present Foucault’s alternative view on the existing

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<sup>3</sup>Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 68.

<sup>4</sup>Taylor, “Kant’s Theory of Freedom,” 319.

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<sup>5</sup>Duncan Ivison, “The Freedom to be Formed and Normed: Foucault on Power/Government,” in *The Self at Liberty: Political Argument and the Arts of Government* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997), 31.

state of things. For this purpose, first, I will look at the charges against Foucault and how he deals with them and the modern “project of liberation”. I will proceed with Foucault’s notion of power, which is crucial for understanding the place of resistance and freedom in his thought. I will finish with a discussion on Foucault’s notion of freedom.

### ***Critics and Romantics***

I never behave like a prophet – my books don’t tell people what to do. And they often reproach me for not doing so (and maybe they are right), and at the same time they reproach me for behaving like a prophet.

Michel Foucault, *An Interview by Stephen Riggins*

References to resistance and freedom are scattered throughout Foucault’s works and we can see certain shifts between them. There is a widespread opinion about “turn”, even rapture or discontinuity between Foucault’s earlier (1976) and later (1982-1984) works and, thus, it is not possible to talk about one notion of freedom. As a result some authors concentrate only on one of the periods of Foucault’s writings with its version of power and resistance. For instance, John Hartmann points at Judith Butler’s *Bodies That Matter* as an example of the first type, and Richard Rorty’s *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* as an example of the second<sup>6</sup>. I highly doubt the existence of

such discontinuity in Foucault’s works, but accept the possibility of some kind of transformation and shift of the emphases. As Foucault put it in the interview:

I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation. That’s the reason also why, when people say, “Well, you thought this a few years ago and now you say something else,” my answer is ... [Laughs] “Well, do you think I have worked like that all those years to say the same thing and not to be changed?” This transformation of one’s self by one’s own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?<sup>7</sup>

I think one should not build Foucault’s theory of freedom because it would contradict his own attitude towards his writings. What one can do is to trace the flight of his thought at least for the sake of flying with it.

Johanna Oksala briefly discusses the differences in commentators’ understanding of Foucault’s philosophy and comes to the conclusion that it is possible that the source of these disagreements is a different interpretation of freedom. As a result she looks at

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2nd. Available at [http://mypage.siu.edu/hartmajr/pdf/jh\\_fouccirc\\_03.pdf](http://mypage.siu.edu/hartmajr/pdf/jh_fouccirc_03.pdf).

<sup>7</sup>Michel Foucault, “An Interview by Stephen Riggins,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert J. Hurley. Vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 131.

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<sup>6</sup>John Hartmann, *Power and Resistance in the later Foucault*. Paper presented at the 3rd Annual Meeting of the Foucault Circle at John Carroll University, Cleveland, OH. February 28th – March

different possible understandings of freedom in order to show how it might be useful for further thinking<sup>8</sup>. I see this exploration as a good basis for the productive research. Also, I will look at charges against Foucault in order not to get into the “old” traps in the interpretation of his writings.

While some authors say that Foucault is “the philosopher of freedom in post-revolutionary time”<sup>9</sup> others blame him for the pessimistic vision of freedom. The latter criticisms often find the problem in Foucault’s post-structuralist understanding of the subject, which denies traditional notions of autonomy and authenticity. There is no place for an independent agency because we are all made into subjects within power relations (this problem will be addressed in detail in the next section). If there is no authentic subjectivity to liberate, and there is no outside of power then freedom becomes meaningless<sup>10</sup>.

Similar charges come from Charles Taylor, who is a good representative of the modern critique of Foucault. Taylor starts his article with “Foucault disconcerts”<sup>11</sup>. He tries to show that “certain of Foucault’s most interesting historical analyses, while they are original, seem to lie along familiar lines of critical

thought”<sup>12</sup>. The aim of critical theory is to preserve some “good” through the insight into the relations of domination; thus, the main idea is that of rescuing and preserving. Foucault repudiates this idea and takes the Nietzschean neutrality stance, that of an outside observer, which gives possibility of analysis not based on critique. But if we look at Foucault’s analysis of power/domination we can assume that it is unmasking: it brings to light all the deceptions through which people are subjectified. Foucault seems to negate such a conclusion; there is no liberating truth about the “real” situation, essence and good. Truth itself is not free from power relations, it is embedded in it, in a certain regime of truth – “a field of discourse that enables the emergence of a specific kind of subjectivity or allows the elaboration of a particular rationality”<sup>13</sup>. Thus, there is no way of liberation, “no escape from power into freedom”<sup>14</sup>, one can only step from one system of power to another. At least it seems so from the first glance. It is not so obvious for Taylor that it is possible to talk about power/domination without notion of “truth” and “freedom”, about critical analysis without critique. He questions the possibility of talking about power or domination without notions of truth and freedom because the former belongs to the semantic field from which the latter cannot be excluded. Taylor argues that power in Foucault’s sense (closely linked to domination) “does not make sense

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<sup>8</sup>Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>9</sup>John Rajchman, cited in Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 2.

<sup>10</sup>Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 1.

<sup>11</sup>Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth,” *Political Theory* 12, no. 2 (1984), 152.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid, 152.

<sup>13</sup>Ivison, “The Freedom to be Formed and Normed,” 31.

<sup>14</sup>Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth,” 153.

without at least the idea of liberation”<sup>15</sup>. Power by definition requires a target, even if it does not require a defined perpetrator. “Something must be imposed on someone if there is to be domination”<sup>16</sup>. Imposition in its turn requires fraud and illusion. Thus, liberation from power cannot be without dismantling the lie, coming to the truth about the lie. This is liberation through truth. But even if resistance is immanent to power relations, Foucault discredits “as somehow based on a misunderstanding the very idea of liberation from power”<sup>17</sup>. And Taylor finds him incoherent here.

I think the confusion arises as a result of the misunderstanding of Foucault’s aim – to challenge the traditional way of thinking. Taylor understands freedom and liberation still in modern terms, while Foucault rethinks it, and presents an alternative view. He says goodbye to the modern/romantic notion of freedom as liberation from power through truth about our authentic selves. Foucault tries to dismantle this position; he shows that this idea of liberation is a product of a certain regime of power. For example, the romantic notion of sexual nature, which needs to be liberated, is a product of knowledge, which aims to subjectify and control us. By overthrowing sexual prohibition we are not getting freedom because images of what it means to be a fulfilled sexual being still dominate us.

Foucault seems to differentiate concepts

of liberation and freedom; though they may go together. He says that one should be careful with, or even be suspicious of, the notion of liberation because it can lead us to the same Romantic understanding of freedom, which is a dead-end. Without precautions in using the notion of liberation “one runs the risk of falling back on the idea that there exists a human nature or base that, as a consequence of certain historical, economic, and social processes, has been concealed, alienated, or imprisoned in and by mechanisms of repression”<sup>18</sup>. If we accept this hypothesis then all is needed for freedom is to break these “repressive deadlocks” and reconcile the man with himself. This would be liberation through truth. But Foucault, as shown above, challenges this position: freedom is not the product of reconciliation of the self with authentic self. To understand this impossibility one needs to look at how Foucault understands power and resistance, and its interplay with freedom. This is the purpose of the subsequent section.

### ***The New Power and Freedom***

Power is a tricky concept for any theorist. Michel Foucault deals with it but he claims not to have a theory of power<sup>19</sup>. He

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<sup>18</sup>Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert J. Hurley. Vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 282.

<sup>19</sup>It is worth to note that Foucault uses term *power* simply as shorthand for the *relations of power* (Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self,” 291).

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 173.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, 172.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, 173.

says that the aim of his work “has not been to analyze the phenomena of power... [but] to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects”<sup>20</sup>. Foucault says that in his work he deals with three such modes: sciences; “dividing practices”, and “the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject”<sup>21</sup>. The process of subjectification is closely connected with the relations of power; subject is often a product of such relations. That is why it may first seem that Foucault’s major concern is power.

### **Power**

Foucault provides a radically different account of power, and consequently resistance. The traditional understanding is related to a sovereign: a defined, localized authority that owns means of coercion, in other words, of power. For Foucault power is not something owned, conquered or held but rather exercised. It is not a property or privilege of the dominant class or any other group, but “the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated”<sup>22</sup>; power itself is not evil, not bad. The relations of power are through all society, they are not taking

place just between the citizens and state<sup>23</sup>; it comes from below, and there is no ruler – ruled opposition<sup>24</sup>. These networks of relations are not concentrated in the public sphere but rather generally penetrate, and merge public and private (if we understand the latter as a power-free zone). So, power does not have a central point, it is not an institution or structure, it is omnipresent “not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere”; power is “a complex strategic situation in particular society”<sup>25</sup>. This strategic situation does not require central planning. The exercises of power are always local, conscious and intentional but at the same time they form an overall strategic situation, which is guided by the so-called invisible hand. As Foucault puts it, “people know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what what they do does”<sup>26</sup>. That means that while a parent intentionally exercises power over a child, he/she does not see the general picture of the unintended strategic situation of power relations, which emerges in a society when all parents exercise the same power over their children.

Power relations are productive, “the body is invested with relations of power and

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<sup>20</sup>Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), 208.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid, 208.

<sup>22</sup>Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, [1975] 1991), 26-27.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid, 27.

<sup>24</sup>Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction. Vol. 1* (New York: Vintage Books, [1976] 1990), 94.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid, 93.

<sup>26</sup>Cited in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), 187.

domination”<sup>27</sup>. The new economy of body emerges, where the latter “becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body”<sup>28</sup>. This subjection of body happens without any violence; rather the knowledge of the body and mastery of its forces presents the tools for subjection, Foucault calls it “political technology of the body”<sup>29</sup>. He talks about the micro-physics of power that again presuppose that the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to ‘appropriation’, but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory.<sup>30</sup>

For Foucault power rests on the idea of conduct<sup>31</sup>, and exists only in action, “a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action...”<sup>32</sup> It is a “relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other”<sup>33</sup>. Here I actually talk about the

technologies of power<sup>34</sup>, which objectivize the subject. In modern society power operates as Panopticon – universal surveillance; it is transparent and hidden at the same time; it works through measurement, classification and normalization. The subject through training interiorizes the norms and disciplines. In the next chapter on liberal freedom I will look at this mode of power as biopower closer.

There is another important notion in the process of construction of the subject – technologies of the self. Volumes II and III of *The History of Sexuality* are dedicated to the study of the ways the human being turns herself into a subject through different modes of self-understanding and self-formation. Technologies of the self allow individuals to transform themselves, to participate in the process of the creation of their own subjectivity through “a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being”<sup>35</sup>. These procedures exist in every

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<sup>27</sup>Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid, 26.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid, 26.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid, 26.

<sup>31</sup>Iverson, “The Freedom to be Formed and Normed,” 31.

<sup>32</sup>Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 220.

<sup>33</sup>Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self,” 292.

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<sup>34</sup>Foucault talks about four major types of “technologies” that people use in “truth games”: technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power and technologies of the self. These technologies scarcely function separately, “although each one of them is associated with a certain type of domination. Each implies certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes” (Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert J. Hurley. Vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 224-225.

<sup>35</sup>Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” 225.

civilization; they aim to transform individuals by placing on them a command to ‘know oneself’ and to behave in accordance with this knowledge<sup>36</sup>. This should not mislead us to the assumption of the autonomous agent who creates himself through these techniques. On the contrary, “these practices are nevertheless not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group”<sup>37</sup>. Here we again see impossibility or denial of Romantic liberation through the truth about one’s authentic self. The man that is supposed to be freed “is already in himself the effect of subjection much more profound than himself”.<sup>38</sup> A ‘soul’ that becomes the target of punishment and correction in modern times is a “factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body”<sup>39</sup>. There is the reversal of the traditional order, where the body used to be the prison of the soul. Now the soul that is brought into being by experts and human sciences commands over and controls the conduct of the body, it makes it docile and productive. Still, it remains difficult to explain precisely what Foucault means by soul.

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<sup>36</sup> Foucault, “Subjectivity and Truth,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert J. Hurley. Vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 87.

<sup>37</sup>Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self,” 291.

<sup>38</sup>Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 30.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid, 30.

Technologies of power and technologies of the self are crucial for understanding Foucault’s concept of governmentality, the important notion for the next chapters: “This encounter between the technologies of domination of others [technologies of power] and those of the self I call “governmentality”<sup>40</sup>. Nikolas Rose nicely outlines two possible understandings of the concept, which cannot be actually separated from each other<sup>41</sup>. The first – *governmentality* – points that governing is the process of shaping mentalities of the governed. The second – *governmentality* – refers to the mentality of rule, to the “way of problematizing life and seeking to act upon it”<sup>42</sup>, to the governmental “hows”. To sum up with the words of Thomas Lemke “[f]rom the perspective of governmentality, government [as a conduct of conduct] refers to a continuum, which extends from political government [I mentioned them as *technologies of power*] right through to forms of self-regulation, namely ‘technologies of the self’”<sup>43</sup>.

## ***Resistance***

Let us now look at the concept of resistance in the works of Foucault, because it always goes together with

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<sup>40</sup>Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” 225.

<sup>41</sup>Nikolas Rose, “Government, Authority and Expertise in Advanced Liberalism,” *Economy and Society* 22, no. 3 (1993), 287-288.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid, 288.

<sup>43</sup>Thomas Lemke, “The Birth of Bio-Politics: Michael Foucault’s Lecture at the College de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality,” *Economy and Society* 30, no. 2 (2001), 201.



power, and lays the ground for the discussion of freedom. First, the omnipresence of power, both as strategic game or state of domination, means the omnipresence of the resistance to it. “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power”<sup>44</sup>; it exists throughout the power network. Power is not univocal; it defines “innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of at least temporary inversion of the power relations”<sup>45</sup>.

Moreover, there is a plurality of resistances; they are mobile and transitory, and pass through apparatuses and institutions, social stratifications and individual unities without being localized in them<sup>46</sup>. There cannot be power relations without at least the possibility of resistance. If there is no such possibility then it is violence but not power.

So, resistance is everywhere as well as power, but at the same time Foucault says that there is no space outside of power; thus, some authors conclude that there is no place for freedom. It seems that there is a misunderstanding here, as resistance and freedom are different concepts. If one is still thinking in traditional terms then freedom is supposed to come through liberation and resistance. But it seems that freedom for Foucault is not the result of

resistance; these are related but different concepts. (I will touch upon the question of freedom in detail in the next section)

It is possible to think about Foucault as skeptical or cynical about freedom but if it is so then there is a contradiction: even throughout his works of the 1970s (in which he is often found to be the most pessimistic) one permanently finds Foucault’s “comments on people’s desire to object to the operations of disciplinary power... [H]e often thematized the felt need to stand ‘against’ the operations of discipline”<sup>47</sup>. If Foucault did not find place for freedom then why would he be so concerned about being “against”, why would he present his genealogies as acts of “opposition”, and his work as a way of resistance?

It is important that the understanding of resistance is derived from Foucault’s notion of power. Due to the fact that power relations are “mobile, reversible, and unstable” there is a possibility of resistance as strategic reversal, violent resistance, flight or deception<sup>48</sup>. Power and resistance are constituted reciprocally: the latter is only possible where there is the former and vice versa. Henry Krips says that resistance is no longer to be seen mainly as a planned and aggressive individual reaction to her or his subjugation. One should understand resistance so that it can be

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<sup>44</sup>Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 95.

<sup>45</sup>Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 27.

<sup>46</sup>Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 96.

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<sup>47</sup>Paul A. Bove, “Power and Freedom: Opposition and the Humanities,” *The Humanities as Social Technology* 53 (October 1990), 82.

<sup>48</sup>Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self,” 292.

nonactive/unintended and dispersed, “manifested in localized acts [“immediate” struggles] of defiance which together form a global pattern of resistance that transcends the intentional engagement of any of the agents (Krips 1990, 177).

Resistance is a kind of “chemical catalyst” which brings power relations to light, locates them, and finds their points of application and the methods used. It is efficient to analyze power not only from the point of view of its internal rationality, but through the antagonism of strategies<sup>49</sup>. Foucault says that three types of struggles are always present but only one of them usually dominates<sup>50</sup>. Nowadays the struggle against the submission of subjectivity becomes more and more important. This struggle can take different forms but Foucault mainly concentrates on the “care for the self”, the way in which one can become a co-author of one’s own self, at least to some extent. He addresses the ethics of the concern for the self as a practice of freedom.

## Freedom

There is a change in Foucault’s work: in the latter period he no longer formulates the problem of being “against” in the terms of resistance but in the terms of

freedom<sup>51</sup>. There is the development of his thought but not a rupture: starting with the disciplinary power he proceeds with the work on governmentality and “ethics”. Still, Foucault does not come up with any narrative of repressed freedom that must be liberated<sup>52</sup>.

Foucault discusses “relationships of power as strategic games between liberties”<sup>53</sup>. Power is reformulated in new terms: “exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others... includes an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free”. “The relationship between power and freedom’s refusal to submit cannot be therefore separated... At the very heart of power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom”<sup>54</sup>.

It is not clear how Foucault differentiates between resistance and freedom. The former seems to require “negative” action – against the intentions of the others to influence upon the conduct; it is a strategic reversal of power relations. According to John Hartmann freedom seems to be formulated more in terms of “positive means of resistance which does not devolve to re-action or negation”<sup>55</sup>.

The care for the self is a way of such positive resistance, and the ethics of the

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<sup>49</sup>Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 211.

<sup>50</sup>These are struggles “against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious); against forms of exploitation...; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission)” (ibid, 212).

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<sup>51</sup>Bove, “Power and Freedom,” 83.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid, 84.

<sup>53</sup>Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self,” 299.

<sup>54</sup>Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 221-222.

<sup>55</sup>Hartmann, *Power and Resistance in the later Foucault*, 4.

care for the self is a practice of freedom. Care for the self is “a way of limiting and controlling power”<sup>56</sup>. This statement is interesting and shows the transformation in Foucault’s thought: in earlier works he said that there is no outside of power, and now some kind of outside is possible through the care for the self. Foucault says that these “non-negative means of relating to oneself – caring for oneself as a positive fashioning of a subjectivity – have been with us since the time of the Greeks”<sup>57</sup>. These practices are based on putting our subjectivity into the problematic field, under the permanent critique. The ethics of the concern for the self “is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection”<sup>58</sup>. Thus, freedom is constituted as positive resistance, which “consists in a subject’s becoming-autonomous within a structured set of institutions and practices through immanent critique”<sup>59</sup>.

It is important to notice here that freedom is possible only as a practice and not just an abstract ideal. In order for freedom to exist it has to be lived. But it is important not to present this exercise as a possibility granted exclusively through liberation. It seems that Charles Taylor falls into this trap. He outlines two questions that are among the most fundamental in the work of Foucault. The first addresses the way of

liberation through the truth: even if we know the origin of our identity “[c]an we really step outside the identity we have developed in Western civilization to such a degree that we can repudiate all that comes to us from the Christian understanding of the will?”<sup>60</sup> The second question is rather normative: “Granted we really can set this aside, is the resulting ‘aesthetic of existence’ all that admirable?”<sup>61</sup>. It seems that Taylor might have misinterpreted Foucault: he puts the overthrowing of identity (identity “vacuum”) and self-making in chronological order. Foucault does not presuppose such a “vacuum” before self-making is possible. The care for the self is the practice of freedom itself and does not need preliminary liberation of a person from himself as an objectified subject.

Nevertheless, Foucault does not do away with the notion of liberation completely. Sometimes a certain degree of liberation is necessary before one can practice freedom, but still there is no need (and actually possibility) for an identity “vacuum”, a *tabula rasa* as a basis for a new self writing. This is where Foucault introduces the concept of domination<sup>62</sup>. Power relations are present in all kinds of human relations (among individuals, within families, in pedagogical relationships, political life, etc), and, as I already indicated, they are mobile, reversible, and unstable. But within such

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<sup>56</sup>Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self,” 288.

<sup>57</sup>Hartmann, *Power and Resistance in the later Foucault*, 10.

<sup>58</sup>Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self,” 284.

<sup>59</sup>Hartmann, *Power and Resistance in the later Foucault*, 10.

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<sup>60</sup>Taylor, *Foucault on Freedom and Truth*, 181.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid, 181.

<sup>62</sup>Foucault says that these states of domination are what people ordinary call power, but he differentiates these notions (Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self,” 299).

relations one may encounter “situations or states of domination in which the power relations instead of being mobile, allowing the various participants to adopt strategies modifying them, remain blocked, frozen”. These are states where an individual or social groups “succeed in blocking a field of power relations, immobilizing them and preventing any reversibility of movement by economic, political, or military means...”<sup>63</sup> In such states practices of freedom do not exist or are very restricted and constrained. Options and stratagems that are available in such situations never succeed in reversing them. So, “liberation is sometimes the political or historical condition for a practice of freedom”<sup>64</sup>. But here again Foucault understands liberation in a different way from Taylor as it is not connected with truth and satisfying happiness of the relationship with one’s true nature. “Liberation paves the way for new power relationships, which must be controlled by practices of freedom” (ibid, 283-284). Foucault closes the circle by coming back to the ethics as a practice (conscious practice) of freedom. Even the states of domination should be analyzed in terms of freedom because those who dominate are free to use certain instruments to govern others.

To sum up, Foucault thinks that society cannot exist without power relations. However, power is not evil in itself, as a result the aim should be not to break free of or dissolve them “in the utopia of completely transparent communication”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid, 283.

<sup>64</sup>ibid, 283.

<sup>65</sup>Here Foucault expresses his disagreement with

but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the *ethos*, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible”<sup>66</sup>. The latter is the “hinge point of ethical concerns and the political struggle for respect of rights, of critical thought against abusive techniques of government and research in ethics that seeks to ground individual freedom”<sup>67</sup>. So, Foucault sees the need for positive resistance, a practice of freedom with as little domination as possible. Foucault insists on analyzing power relations through the concept of governmentality, which presupposes the existence of both an individual and others, outside. Thus, the basis for analysis of interaction in society is “freedom, the relationship of the self to itself and the relationship to the other”<sup>68</sup>.

Although freedom is always present in power relations and does not need to be conquered or liberated, still there are different strategic situations. They determine the space or the scope for a practice of freedom. In some cases there are only negative ways of resistance, in others there is more room for positive resistance. As a result, there is a normative claim about freedom: to ensure that in a society the individual has room for practicing freedom, so he does not need to jump out of the window in order to resist.

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Jurgen Habermas and calls his theory of communicative action “utopian”.

<sup>66</sup>Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self” 299.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid, 299.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid, 300.

This criterion can be used for thinking about different types of governmentality because the definitions of freedom in certain regimes of truth determine the allowed practices of freedom, which can actually be extremely limited.

## **Conclusion**

For Foucault freedom is always a part of the regime of truth in a society, it is denaturalized and deconstructed, there is no freedom as an objective reality beyond power relations. The notions of power, resistance and freedom are all interconnected in the works of Foucault. He abandons traditional view of power, connected with a central authority and coercion, and sees it as dispersed, flexible and reversible. Power is omnipresent and productive: people are subjectified within power relations, they are made into subjects and start to perceive themselves as subjects with certain characteristics and behavior. Power is everywhere but so is resistance. Foucault sees resistance as inherent to power relations and not opposed to them. There is no outside of power but resistance is possible within power relations. Power is power and not violence only because its objects are able to resist, to reverse the situation, and to be free. Foucault's notion of freedom as well as resistance is closely connected with power: freedom is at the heart of power relations.

There are two ways of thinking about freedom: freedom as an ethic and freedom as a resource of power. The former is about the ethic of the concern for the self, which Foucault defines as a practice of

freedom: to be free means not to step outside of power relations but to participate in the making and production of one's own subjectivity. Freedom as a resource of power is connected with the regime of truth, which produces certain subjectivity (free individuals) and allows and legitimizes a certain rationality of government. Subjects are governed through freedom.

Foucault's alternative vision of freedom, especially its two dimensions, presents a good ground for a critical research on both ethics of freedom and on freedom in different regimes of truth and in different governmentalities. It is interesting to see, for example, how the truth and practices of freedom differ in liberalism and neo-liberalism, and which of them allows for as little domination as possible and thus presents more space for practicing freedom.

Research on freedom within the framework of a Foucauldian approach should be continued because it is important to look at the self-evident definitions and terms of the everyday life from the critical perspective. It is always intriguing to deconstruct important notions such as freedom because one might find out either the variety of its possible meanings or simply its emptiness. And if the latter is the case then the question arises: what are the wars of the twenty-first century actually being fought for?

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