

# Heading Towards Autonomous And Dynamic Press Freedom In Indonesia

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## Heading Towards Autonomous And Dynamic Press Freedom In Indonesia

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### Abstract

Rather than being absolute, human freedom is relative because human situation and condition limits it. Also relative is press freedom. History of press in Indonesia recorded that press freedom is experienced once more by Indonesian people after the 1998 reform. At implementation level, there are numerous debates on the definition of freedom. This research attempts to analyze autonomous and dynamics press freedom in Indonesia as observed from Erich Fromm's perspective. This research is a qualitative research on philosophical problem analyzed by means of historical-factual approach. Research result indicates that autonomous and dynamic press can be achieved through two actions. First, opposing the parties who prevent press from becoming themselves. Second, developing the "culture" of rationality, i.e. accustoming the press to develop their common sense to reach each of their realistic point.

**Keywords:** freedom, press, autonomous, dynamics, Erich Fromm

### Introduction

*Man is born free.* It is such a well-known adage that it becomes a kind of universal postulate particularly in terms of human freedom. People often easily agree to the statement without reflecting upon the meaning behind it. Rev. Cormac Burke (without year: 1) asserted that, *man has always talked about freedom; but never so much as today.* The intense discourse about freedom has two causes. *First*, it is due to the unlimited or rampant freedom experienced by people in this world. *Second* is the contrary where freedom is lacking or missing in this world, hence people are longing for it in their lives.

In terms of human freedom, it faces two views at the least with similar powerful argumentative bases. On one hand is a view that freedom in human life is merely nonsense. Humans have no freedom at all in their lives. Since their birth, humans have certain fate and cannot escape from inherent factors destined for them. When a person's life cycle today is determined more by genetics factor since birth, as well as circumstance factor, ranging from physical to social circumstances such as education and culture, it is clear that advocates of this view confront freedom.

However, several thinkers straightforwardly stated the contrary – that human beings are creatures blessed with freedom. Even Sartre expressly stated that human beings are determined to live free, or destined to act free (Bertens, 2007: 118). He argued that in performing their behaviors, human beings are different from animals. In performing behaviors, animals are driven more by their instinctive force. On the other hand, human beings are equipped with intellect, hence each of their action is already contemplated. This means that, wherever possible, every behavior has to be

accounted for. Human's every action requires acknowledgment or validation from others. Humans will be happy when their behaviors are praised and good deeds are reciprocated by others. Conversely, they will be regretful when their actions cause them to be scorned, sued, or even incarcerated by others. All of those are only possible when human actions are founded by human freedom (Schierbaum, 2019). Without freedom, it is difficult to demand for accountability from every person for his actions. A person's freedom can determine which action to take and not to take. And he/she should be responsible when making a choice without any pressure from others.

Both of the views above indicate that human freedom is not absolute. Rather, it is relative due to limitations put by human situation. Therefore, human freedom is certainly the type of freedom that is fused with limitation. Next question: What is the actual definition of freedom, and how humans realize it? In a discussion about freedom, does it refer to absence of coercion, both physical and moral coercion? (Leahy, 1993: 152). Or, does freedom refer to a situation of being discharged from any obligation or demand? (Diester, 1993: 45).

The emergence of various theories and views regarding freedom is closely related to the complexity of issues within it, particularly in relation to certain highlighted aspect of freedom. Indeed, various views on freedom have enriched and deepen the understanding on the matter. However, considering the difference between one view and another is subtle and occasionally diametral, which eventually causes confusion, a comprehensive study is required to examine what and how freedom really means.

History recorded one of the social changes in Indonesia is the change caused by Reform movement in 1998, as stated by Sahrasad (2014) in his research. Indonesian people vastly experienced reform outcomes, i.e., the realization of freedom for the citizens, both individuals and groups, to express their political aspirations verbally and in writing and to establish organization/association, including political party. Furthermore, freedom in seeking, expressing, and conveying opinion and information, particularly by the press, was greatly approved of during this period. Press is finally free from apprehension of censorship. In short, today's press freedom is undoubtedly experiencing such an encouraging freedom to be utilized as a means to develop a more democratic national life where citizen's civil rights are properly exercised and each citizen has the opportunity and capability to oversee the exercise of power by the government.

After approximately 22 years of reform, even the people of press do not fully understood press freedom. This is seen in half of the thousands of publication companies who no longer play their role as the responsible press. There are press companies who work halfheartedly, ranging from their coverage practice in the field, news presentation, to their management structure. In other words, countless press companies have low qualification standard, professionalism and integrity, causing the press to be labeled as yellow paper that prioritizes sensation. It is not surprising that the arising press are those without idealism, and runs the press business only as commodities.

On another note, the public who start to be aware of their civil rights begin to boldly express their aspirations, as well as to protest, sue using inappropriate method, apply denim-clad justice, even terrorize the journalist and press office. Thus, a comprehensive understanding is required on the meaning of human freedom, and of press freedom for Indonesia. This paper is going to analyze press freedom by applying Erich Fromm's perspective.

### Literary Review

Freedom is a feature which differentiates humans from animals. In living their lives, animals are driven more by their instinct. On the other hand, humans are driven more by unrestricted choices to determine their attitude and to perform or not to perform an action by means of their own methods and choices from an array of possibilities that they choose themselves. In understanding freedom, there are at least two meanings to be presented, i.e., positive meaning and negative meaning (Magnis, 1975: 44). In negative meaning, freedom is defined as available possibilities to take action that are not restrained by certain coercion from or attachment to others. Meanwhile, in positive meaning, freedom means to be free not only *from* something, but also *for* something. This means that human freedom is within human's capability to determine themselves towards a more complete humanity or to own themselves (Peters, 2019).

There are diverse views of human freedom. In studying freedom, one directly faces the fact that the difference between one view and another is not only harsh, but also frequently contradictory. Such contradiction of views can be understood if we comprehend that human freedom is not an absolute freedom. Rather, it is a relative freedom limited by situations as human's *facticity*. As a relative or situational freedom, human freedom is always fused with limitation (Lau and Hiemisch, 2017). Thus, humans are never 100% free. Human freedom comprises of various inter-influential and interconnected aspects. When contemplating about philosophical freedom, one can highlight certain aspect while pay less or no attention to other aspects. This accounts for the contradictory views on freedom (Dister, 1988: 6).

Bertens (2007: 99-116) differentiates freedom into several categories. *First*, freedom as arbitrariness. By this definition, freedom is understood as being released from any bond and obligation, thus attacking others' interests and rights. One is considered free when unrestrainedly conduct anything one wants, not controlled by any rules. Freedom in this context is similar to a permissive situation. *Second*, physical freedom. This kind of freedom means no outside coercion or obstacle. One is considered free when he transports to any desired destination without any obstacle. A person under chain or stocks is certainly not free. A prisoner is not free when imprisoned, but he can breathe fresh air of freedom when his imprisonment is over. *Third*, juridical freedom. This is closely related to law and must be guaranteed by law. Juridical freedom is an aspect of human rights. Discussion about freedom under this definition also includes people whose rights are taken away. *Fourth*, psychological freedom. It is the ability in human beings to develop and direct their lives. The characteristics of this ability is will. Hence, this ability is also called free will. This is closely related to the fact that human beings are rational creatures. They can think before taking actions. A free person is the one released from mental or psychological pressure. One who suffers from mental disorder, such as kleptomania, is certainly not free. This kind of person is portrayed as a real thief, but he cannot define himself, thus his action is not considered free. *Fifth*, moral freedom, defined as freedom without any moral coercion. This freedom presupposes psychological freedom: no moral freedom is possible without psychological freedom. When threatened using sharp weapon, a person is not completely free in handing over his belongings. He has determined for himself; handing over the belongings is his decision, but he is doing it under coercion. As soon as such moralistic sense is gone with the presence of his friend to stifle the thief, he will do other things. *Sixth*, existential freedom. This is a comprehensive freedom related to all aspects of a human without exception, including the entire aspects of human existence. This is the

ultimate freedom for human beings. A person who is existentially free, as if 'be in possession of himself,' achieves the level of autonomy, maturity, and spiritual maturity.

Braintt (1985: 15) stated that in his works, Fromm actually attempted to develop the concept of existential dilemma, i.e. conflict between human limitations and superiorities. On one hand, humans want to be free, to dominate the nature and their environment. However, on the other hand, freedom causes humans to be alienated from their surroundings. Furthermore, Braintt put forward that particularly in *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm proposes three theses: (1) Humans cannot be separated from nature and other people; (2) The freer humans, the more they feel lonely, pointless, and alienated; (3) Humans find security when united and collaborated with others.

There are two ways proposed by *Escape from Freedom* (Galant, 1992: 90) to gain meaning from togetherness in life, namely: (1) Achieving positive freedom, i.e., making attempt to unite with others, without sacrificing personal freedom and integrity; (2) Obtaining security by giving up freedom and completely handing over individuality and self-integrity to something (an individual or institution) that can provide security. The process to obtain security by taking shelter under other power is an escape mechanism.

In his analysis on Fromm's freedom, Chusairi (1997: 74) stated that freedom turns out to have its own threat. Modern human freedom, considered as the substantial value for individuals (West), contains a kind of contradiction. Individuals with freedom turn out to have hidden desire to give up their freedom. Modern human freedom is a two-faced utopia. On one hand, it is a centuries-old dream. With freedom, human beings can develop and have power and self-integration. In addition, humans can also dominate the nature, develop their common sense, and build solidarity with their peers. However, on the other hand, individual freedom brings forth alienation, insecurity and doubt to the role of individual for the universe and meaning of life, which eventually gives rise to a sense of helplessness and pointlessness of self as an individual. The latter reality causes humans to run away from or avoid their freedom. According to Paipais (2016), humans escape from freedom is essentially to rescue them from insecurity and pointlessness, because humans naturally long for close relationship with the world outside them. Alienation and solitude will give rise to mental disintegration, similar to physical affliction that will lead to death.

#### Press Freedom

Law No. 40/1999 on Press, Article 4 paragraph 1 specified that press freedom is guaranteed as citizens' rights. Paragraph 2 defined that expurgation, censorship and broadcast prohibition shall not be applied to national press. Paragraph 3 specified that to guarantee press freedom, national press is entitled to seek, obtain and disseminate ideas and information, while paragraph 4 defined that in accounting for news before the law, journalists have the Right to Refuse. As a matter of fact, Article 28F in the 1945 Constitution specified that every person is entitled to communicate and gain information for developing himself and his social surroundings, and to seek, obtain, possess, keep, process, and convey information by means of any available channel.

In his writing, *Kebebasan Pers dan Belenggu Perundang-undangan*, Sudibyo (2002: 1) specified that Press Law No. 40/1999 is essentially a powerful cornerstone in materializing press freedom in Indonesia. However, in reality, press freedom is not substantially materialized yet. The

freedom is stuck on artificial level, causing press to contribute insignificantly for democratization process in Indonesia.

How did this happen? First, appreciation of the people of press to their profession is still inadequate, causing frequent violations against journalism ethics and professionalism that are counterproductive to the essence of press freedom. Second, widespread people marches against press publication office, which indicate people's low appreciation to press freedom. However, essentially, there is a more serious problem often overlooked. Press Law is not the only legal product to regulate the real situation of press life in post-New Order era. The years-long Reform turns out to have not regulated several legal products that hinder press performance in revealing truth. In addition, press did not succeeded in uncovering KKN (corruption, collusion and nepotism) and human rights violation cases during New Order due to legal products regulating classified information managed by government institutions.

In human's life, freedom is a reality (Dister, 1988: 40). Thus, dimension of freedom can be analyzed ontologically. However, it must be understood that freedom will only find its intelligibility when related to certain reality. It is different from other words, such as thirsty, money, kilogram. Free statement will be meaningless without any additional statement. The statement "I am thirsty" will be easier to be understood than "I am free." When the latter is uttered, others can only guess, "What are you free from? Why are you free?" The statement "I am free" does not tell much to others yet. The content of the statement is meager and almost empty. The statement may have various possible meanings, but the realest meaning is not conveyed yet in the sentence. To know which possibility is the reality, the speaker has to inform others about from what thing has he been freed from. By then the word 'free' starts to have meaning, which depends on the information that is proposed following such word and mentions the type of bond, coercion, obstacle or burden that the speaker is freed from.

In the effort to identify ontological dimension in Erich Fromm's concept of freedom, researcher shall view it from fundamental ontological issues. The issues are as follows:

First, is the reality singular or plural? This is the most essential ontological issue, because the answer to it becomes the first point of view regarding the entire reality and provides the main direction for all ontologies. According to Bakker (1992: 92), the question regarding reality quantity is related to two aspects. First, if the reality is supposedly believed to be singular, difficulty will emerge, because in a reality there are numerous objects and individuals. On the other hand, if the reality is supposedly believed to consist of many 'units' (plural), the emerging problem is whether the plural units are interconnected or independent (released/free). Second is whether the entire reality is homogenous or heterogenous. Homogenous reality is difficult to be understood because countless differences or even disputes are found within it. On the other hand, in a heterogenous reality, the problem is whether or not similarity and togetherness exist in such reality. This theory is applied to identify Fromm's view on freedom in connection with freedom relations.

Second, ontological issues are reflection of reality as fact (Siswanto, 1998: 56). Reality shows that there are certain types of reality constantly experiencing change: birth, growth and death. Meanwhile, there is also reality with fixed, even eternal, characteristics. Thus a problem emerges about what is actually a reality. Is it constantly changing or fixed and eternal? If changing, is it only

on its outer surface concealing the essence or does it pervade into the essence? Both issues need to be examined and even research, regarding whether or not the changing and the fixed ones have intrinsic relation. This theory will be applied to formulate Fromm's idea on freedom in connection with the dynamics of relation (Sutikna, 2008).

Third, an ontological issue to explain and answer the fundamental question about whether reality is material or spiritual in nature (Bakker, 1992: 54). Along the history of human reasoning, there was a philosopher who advocated the idea that the entire reality is always spiritual, or at least spiritual in nature. There was also a philosopher who considered that being is only a physical matter. To put it more concrete, a philosopher argued that reality is material, while another one stated that reality is spiritual. This theory is applied to identify Fromm's view on freedom in relation to the aspects of deity.

Fourth, an ontological issue regarding whether applicable-to-all ontological transcendental norms are found in reality? Three basic structures of reality – one-many, static-dynamic, and physical-spiritual – apply to all types of reality, but cannot be judged on whether they are good or bad, right or wrong. Hence, an ontological transcendental norm which applies to all reality is required. According to Bakker (1992: 194), the essential norm for realization of reality is the harmony of maximal structural bipolarity. Harmony is the goodness and truth of being. This theory is applied to assess the truth and goodness of Fromm's idea on freedom, particularly in its relevance with the concept of press freedom in Indonesia.

## **Methods**

Material object of this research is the concept of human freedom as put forward by Erich Fromm, while the formal object is the study from ontological aspect. Hence, this research can be categorized as historical-factual research (Bakker, 1990: 61), or a research on philosophical problem (Kaelan, 2005: 255). Materials of this research are books (writings) of Erich Fromm: *Escape from Freedom, The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness, The Sane Society, Man For Himself, To Have or To Be, The Art of Loving, Psychoanalysis and Religion, You Shall Be As Gods*. In addition, books on ontology/metaphysics as well as on press and press freedom are also used. Additional literatures include the works of commentaries on Erich Fromm, literatures discussing human freedom, ethics, history of philosophy, encyclopedia, and others.

This research is conducted in four phases, i.e. data collection, data classification, data analysis, and interpretation. Data is collected by collecting writings regarding Fromm's ideas, both from primary and secondary sources. Data classification is to classify data in accordance with systematically-defined categories (Gie, 2011). Next, data is analyzed to gain meaning from the researched concept based on the predefined theoretical background. The analyzed data will then be interpreted to obtain a comprehensible understanding on the characteristics of Fromm's ideas.

Meanwhile, the method to analyze data in order to gain meaning on the researched concept is an analysis using philosophic method, i.e. description, internal coherence, historical continuity, language analytics, abstraction, hermeneutics, and heuristics.

## **Result and Discussion**

One of the keywords to be deduced from Fromm's concept of freedom when connected to press freedom is as follows: Essentially, press freedom includes positive freedom ('free to') and negative freedom ('free from'). The concept of 'free to' refers to a condition which allows press to

take action to achieve their goals, while 'free from' is a condition where press is not forced to perform an action beyond the applicable rules in press world (Koltay, 2015).

In order to reflect Fromm's idea on ontological dimension of freedom, issues of press autonomy and freedom, as well as of press dynamics and freedom, are tracked back.

### **Autonomy and Press Freedom**

Fromm put forward that spontaneous activity is the answer to the problem of freedom (Fromm, 1941: 262). Through spontaneous activity, a person can overcome the terror of loneliness without sacrificing his own self-integrity. In a spontaneous realization, human unites himself with the world, other humans, nature and himself. Spontaneous activity is the activity of free individual, and the most concrete form of it is love and work. When individual materializes himself in an activity, he is essentially building himself with the world. Individual will stop becoming an isolated atom and the world becomes a part of an entirety when he no longer does his activity. Based on the idea, it can be concluded that autonomous role of an individual is crucial in building the concept of positive freedom. In other words, freedom as stated to by Fromm refers more to autonomy, i.e. one who realizes himself as an active and creative individual, as desired by existentialism philosophers.

The understanding of autonomous freedom as proposed by Fromm can inspire press development in Indonesia. As pointed out above, Indonesian press still exists under the vestige of repressions in various forms. Since Guided Democracy and New Order eras, Indonesian press was always helpless when facing government authority. However, in Reform era, people of the press seem like breathing fresh air as laws and regulation on press was ratified and press freedom began to materialized. The opportunity to express an opinion was more appreciated and even protected. The growth of the press during reform era was beneficial for the society because it was considered as being able to fill the lack of public space which becomes gap between the authority and the people. As the Reform moved forward, Indonesian press experienced significant change in expressing freedom. The press' boldness in criticizing the authority also becomes a new characteristics of Indonesian press (Martini, 2014).

Although press freedom began to rise during Reform era, its growth was not as smooth as expected. The once restricted press in New Order era did not grow better all at once in Reform era. As mentioned earlier, there were countless problems in Indonesian press. First, there was 'uncontrolled' freedom, because the press was occasionally exploited by some media industry who want to gain as much profit as possible, both economical and political profit. Second, the authority was still intervening in the form of rationalization of KPI (Indonesia Broadcasting Commission). Third, there was silencing to the press by several groups of people. Fourth, violence is still experienced by people of the press in Indonesia.

The problems above indicate that press freedom is still challenged and is not realized satisfyingly. In relation to the issue of human freedom autonomy according to Fromm, Indonesian press does not realize their position as an active and creative subject yet. It can be said that Indonesian press is still affected by various factors, both internal and external factors. This fact relates to Fromm's idea on freedom as an inspiration to develop freedom. The implementation is certainly by projecting Fromm's ontological dimension of freedom, particularly autonomy dimension in resolving the problem of press freedom in Indonesia.

Fromm's idea on freedom is founded upon the reality of freedom as put forward by existentialism philosophers, that it is a matter of human existence. Freedom is always present in human existence in a certain way that its meaning continuously change based on the level of awareness and concept of human about himself as an independent and distinct creature. In other words, human freedom will always be influenced by various aspects in his life. Human freedom will change along with the development he experiences, thus freedom is bound with various aspects.

Such development can also be found in the problem of press freedom in Indonesia. When press has no clear orientation of characteristics structure, it will move to and fro in various situations. Press freedom will only be an artificial freedom because countless interests are actually hiding behind press to control it. For example, Indonesian press is still easily steered by the interests of certain parties who want to gain benefit in the society, both economical and political benefits. This phenomenon indicates that Indonesian press still have no definite self-awareness.

In this case, autonomy dimension of freedom as stated by Fromm had its relevance. He stated that the autonomy of human freedom will be achieved when human are capable of attaining awareness about himself as creative individual, where individual is no longer affected by the existing situation. In lay language, such individual is labeled as individual with idealism, principle, and clear orientation of characteristics structure. In the context of press development in Indonesia, press freedom can be founded upon Fromm's dimension of freedom autonomy. Autonomous press are the ones without the control of interests outside of the press, such as economical and political interests. Rather, press should be directed only by the interest to deliver truth to the society, without any tendency. This is the relevance of Fromm's freedom autonomy dimension to the development of press in Indonesia.

### **Press Dynamics and Freedom**

In addition to autonomy dimension, another metaphysical dimension to be examined from Fromm's idea on freedom is dimension of being dynamics or freedom dynamics. This means that as an entity in humans existence, Fromm stated that freedom is dynamic. This is because, in the understanding on modern human, humans are individuals who are constantly changing, in correspondence with the development of 'social process' as affected by various external factors such as economics, politics, and culture. Humans, with their facticity, continuously experience dynamics. Hence, it can be concluded that human freedom is dynamics in nature (Dierksmeier, 2019).

This dynamic feature of human freedom is not aimlessly dynamic and only moving from side to side amongst various influences. Such feature is to develop freedom to a better direction, which is in correspondence with the meaning of positive freedom, so humans can wholeheartedly establish better lives. Fromm asserted that dynamics within freedom should be directed to reach 'freedom to' and not oriented merely to 'freedom for'. Fromm specified that in order to materialize freedom into such dynamic direction, the main instrument is common sense to be developed into an objective point. The purpose of this is for a person to be able to see within himself, others, and the nature in their respective realities and not to be trapped in the sense of having knowledge of certain things and paranoid hatred (Fromm, 1995: 409).

Fromm's idea above on the dynamics of freedom can be applied to develop press freedom in Indonesia. As mentioned earlier, in spite of the freedom granted to press since 1999, however,

until currently, Indonesian press are not completely free yet. Press freedom is already stipulated in Press Law, but the exercise of this freedom still faces numerous obstacles, from both internal element of press workers, and obstacles from external elements.

An example of internal obstacle is obscurity of press mission and vision, which eventually caused the orientation of press character to be unclear. If press still cannot discover a clear identity or character, they will be forever moving to and fro in a world that continuously changing because they simply has not found their principle or idealism yet. This situation will be worse when external factors affecting press existence. When lacking specific orientation, press will be easily steered by interests of various parties who wishes to gain control in certain field. The type of interest commonly emerges in this situation is the one to gain as much economical profit as possible. Another type is even more dangerous than the first one, i.e. political interest. Such situation of press can be easily encountered in Indonesia, particularly in electronic media.

### **Conclusion**

Countless interests affecting press freedom indicate that press freedom in Indonesia is not completely free yet. As claimed by Fromm, freedom should be directed into positive freedom of 'free to.' However, considering press problem in Indonesia, even the actualization of 'free from' is still far from expectation because numerous parties outside of the press turn out to also dictate press performance in Indonesia. To materialize press freedom as mandated by the Constitution, a more comprehensive understanding on the meaning of press freedom needs to be developed. Among the ways is to take inspiration from Fromm's idea on freedom, particularly in relation to dimensions of autonomy and dynamics of freedom.

Fromm's idea on autonomy and dynamics of freedom is basically quite simple. He stated that in order for the freedom to be autonomous and dynamic, two notions are required, at the least: first, self-assertion by the ones owning the freedom, in this case is the press. Self-assertion also includes opposing the parties who prevent the press to be themselves. Second, development of rationality 'culture,' which is to accustom the press to develop their common sense to reach their respective reality point.

As stated by Fromm, both efforts above can be applied to materialize dynamic press freedom. Instead of materializing aimless freedom, it is more important to materialize press freedom to actualize human beings aimed at positive freedom ('free to'). In the implementation, both attitudes above will help 'filtering' and preventing intervention from external parties who want to 'steer' press with their own interests, in order for press to have clear identity and orientation in materializing the predefined characteristics of the press. This is the relevance of metaphysical dimension of freedom autonomy and dynamics based on Fromm's thought for the development of press in Indonesia.

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