

Liberty as Non-Interference, or Negative Freedom Assignment 3

Consider the following example and answer the following questions:

Imagine an absolute king, or tyrant. In the tyrant's country, his word is law. He can do and have whatever he wants. He seems like the freest person imaginable because nothing interferes with him doing or having anything he desires.

Because the tyrant can have and do whatever he wants, he learns to enjoy himself. He hosts great parties for his friends where they eat and drink to excess; he takes any property—any house, any car, anything—that he fancies for himself; he takes any woman, or any man, that he wants as a sexual partner. He comes to enjoy dominating other people, finding a thrill in making them serve and bow down to him.

The tyrant soon finds that enjoying himself takes more and more. Plain food cannot satisfy him, he must have the richest foods, and more of them. He can only drink the finest wines and liquors, and must drink more and more of them to become drunk. Perhaps he takes drugs, and finds he must take more and more of them to get high. One sexual partner is not enough, he must have more. Making ordinary people simply bow to him isn't enough, now he must utterly humiliate the highest and most accomplished people of the country to feel powerful. He needs more and more and more to feel anything.

These desires that he has create in him many needs—he needs food, he needs wine, he needs sexual partners, he needs servants, he needs drugs, and above all he needs money. Always, he needs more. More and more and more. He is always in need. He is always hungry, always starving, always famished to feed his needs. His desires are like a bottomless pit. He is driven by a painful need to throw more and more into them, yet they are never satisfied.

Doing these things used to bring the tyrant pleasure, but not anymore. Now, whenever the tyrant is not doing these things, he feels the sting of longing. It *hurts* him not to be feasting, drinking, having sex, dominating others, etc. He is now driven by this pain, like a mindless beast, to grab whatever his desires require. He lives his life being pulled in every direction by these raging, bottomless desires. He races between satisfying his desires—from drink, to food, to sex, to domination, etc. He must take more and more property from his subjects to pay for his needs, and more women and men to be servants and sexual partners. This angers his subjects, and the tyrant comes to fear them. He must hire guards to protect him at all times, but still lives in constant fear for his life.

The tyrant long ago lost all the things he used to love. His friends who are decent people have long since become disgusted by his behavior and fled; only the most vile and depraved people surround him now. They serve him and praise him and flatter him, and encourage him in his excesses, but they are not true friends. They hate and fear him in their hearts. He abandoned the values and religion in which he was raised. He stole, first from strangers, then from the churches

and temples of his country. Later, he stole from his friends and even from his own parents. He even hurts his parents—he will punch his father, he will slap his mother—when they stand in the way of him feeding his ravening desires.

1. How would you summarize or describe the tyrant's situation to someone who hasn't read this story?
2. Would you trade places with the tyrant? Why or why not?
3. Is the tyrant free? Why or why not? If not, in what *specific* way is he unfree?
4. What is the tyrant lacking? What would it take to change his situation?
5. What conception of freedom does the tyrant suggest to you? In other words, what sort of freedom would one need to have to escape the tyrant's fate?