



Feel Free To Set A Better Example, by Ryan Holiday

At the core of legal theory is this idea that there are essentially two forms of liberty—positive and negative. Positive liberty is the freedom to do something, such as the freedom of speech or the freedom of worship. Negative liberty is freedom from something, which is a little more complicated. For instance, in the United States, the Third Amendment to the Constitution stipulates that the government cannot quarter troops in the home of any private individual. The Fourth Amendment protects citizens from unreasonable searches and seizures. As FDR famously pointed out, freedom from want and fear are just as important as speech and worship.

The complicated part of all this, of course, is where somebody else's freedom to do something intersects with somebody else's desire to be free from it.

You get to speak your mind...but that may offend or hurt someone else. You should be able to do whatever you want on your own property...but walking around naked blaring music makes it hard for your neighbors to do the same. You should be able to make your own medical decisions for your family...but the decision not to vaccinate affects everyone they meet.

The specifics of these issues are the proper realm of politicians and lawyers, but Epictetus leaves with a tricky and timeless question: What is up to us and what is not up to us?

In a world of snowflakes and outrage porn, it's easy to get pulled off track and to focus on stopping other people from saying hurtful or offensive things rather than to measure what we say and manage how we respond. We want to get up in other people's business, when really, at the end of the day, all we control is our own.

Which is ridiculous because there is so much to focus on in our own lives. What kind of person are we going to be? What are we going to do with our freedoms? Are our decisions negatively impacting other people? Are we really as free as we like to think we are?

And here's the counterintuitive thing about all of this: Marcus Aurelius talked over and over again about the best way to influence and inspire other people. It was not with force, but by example. If you want to be free from the tyranny of other people's opinions and bad behavior, feel free to set a better example.

