

Course code(s): -

Title of the course: Personal Autonomy

Instructor: dr. Perica Jovchevski

Time: Wednesdays, 3.30-5.00pm

Office hours: by appointment, requested at least one week in advance via email.

Course description:

Personal autonomy, understood as self-government, is commonly taken to be a fundamental value within liberal democratic societies. However, liberal theorists disagree on many issues concerning autonomy, in particular about the conditions and the value of personal autonomy. Proceduralist and substantive theories of personal autonomy clash on the question of whether the ideal of autonomy should be seen as a content-neutral ideal, or it should include certain value commitments among its conditions, such as for instance that one cannot autonomously enslave oneself or that one cannot autonomously endorse oppressive norms. A further question on disagreement is whether there are conditions for autonomy coming from the external environment or autonomy is purely a psychological notion. Can one be autonomous in a totalitarian state with severe restrictions of one's liberties or such environment is a sufficient condition for one to be non-autonomous irrespective of any facts about one's psychology? In addition, if external conditions matter for autonomy, are they constitutive or causally relevant for one's autonomy? Relational and individualist theories are divided on these last questions, the first opting for the former, while the second for the latter option. Lastly, liberals disagree about what exactly is the ground of the value of autonomy, how much should we value it, and how this value is "nested" within our broader political morality. The controversies between anti-perfectionists and perfectionists, about the value of autonomy and the commitments this value establishes, best illustrate this point. On this course we will examine closely these disagreements by discussing some of the most prominent theories of personal autonomy. In the first part of the course we will examine the conditions for personal autonomy while in the second part we will deal with theoretical and applied questions concerning the value of personal autonomy.

Overview of the weekly program of the course:

Week 1 (September 09): Course introduction: what is personal autonomy?
Week 2 (September 18): Ahistorical procedural conceptions of autonomy
Week 3 (September 25): Historical procedural conceptions of autonomy
Week 4 (October 02): Strong substantive conceptions of autonomy
Week 5 (October 09): Weak substantive conceptions of autonomy
Week 6 (October 16): Relational autonomy
Week 7 (October 23): National holiday
Week 8 (October 30): Fall holiday
Week 9 (November 06): The value of autonomy I
Week 10 (November 13): The value of autonomy II
Week 11 (November 20): Paternalism and the value of autonomy
Week 12 (November 27): Autonomy in plural societies
Week 13 (December 04): Self-termination and the value of autonomy
Week 14 (December 11): Recap and discussion

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the course students will be able:

- to acquire knowledge about key moral issues concerning personal autonomy, freedom, paternalism

- to construct moral arguments on various key topics in the study of personal autonomy
- to use normative methods and conduct independent normative research on other problems concerning personal autonomy, freedom, paternalism
- to develop critical reading and thinking tools while discussing the literature assigned

Course requirements:

- Attendance: students are required to attend minimum 11 classes (85%) in order to get a grade.
- Participation in seminar discussions

Students are expected to have read the compulsory readings and participate in the class discussions. For those students who have no experience in participating in philosophical conversation/discussions, I recommend you to consult this brief overview of the modes of participation on a philosophy class by Olivia Bailey: [Bailey - But how do I participate? 2021 edition \(weebly.com\)](https://weebly.com). The contribution to the class discussions will be marked continuously during the course and it will constitute 10% of the grade.

- Presentation(s) of mandatory reading(s)

Depending on the course size students are required to make one or two individual and/or group presentations of a mandatory reading. The presentation should last no more than 20 minutes and should be focused on exposing the main arguments of the assigned reading in a way that will make it easier for the class to discuss and evaluate them. The presentation should be (1) comprehensive and present all relevant arguments from the reading; the arguments should be presented (2) accurately and (3) clearly; and should include a (4) critical stand or evaluation of the arguments by the presenter(s). The presentation(s) will be graded according to these four criteria and will constitute 20% of the grade.

- Mid-term position paper (max. 1000 words)

During the course students are required to write one position paper of around 1000 words. The position paper is due on **October 16, 2024, at midnight**. The position paper should be written in MS Word format and should be sent to me as an attachment via email. Please name your document, in the following way: "Surname and name_Position Paper_Course name". Papers which do not meet the above format requirements (which are submitted as cloud links, pdfs, ppts, jpgs) or are improperly named, will be penalized with one grade. For papers sent after the deadline the late submission policy applies. The position paper comprises 30% of the grade. More details on how to write a position paper for my course will follow in class in due time.

- Final paper (2500-3000 words)

The final paper is written on a topic of choice by the student which has been discussed or is relevant for the course and has been approved by me upon consultation (in person or by mail). The final paper is due on **December 11, 2024, at midnight**. The final paper constitutes 40% of your grade. More details on how to write your final paper for my course will follow in class in due time.

Grade composition:

- Participation in class discussions - 10%
- Presentation(s) of mandatory reading(s) - 20%
- Mid-term position paper -30%
- Final paper - 40%

Grading Scale:

0-49 points: fail (1)
50-54 points: sufficient/pass (2)
55-69 points: satisfactory (3)
70-84 points: good (4)
85-100 points: excellent (5)

Late submission policy:

The position and the final paper are due on the dates indicated above. If papers are up to one day late, they will be penalized a whole grade. Thereafter, one more grade for each additional day they are late.

Accommodations:

In case you have a documented disability, which affects your performance on the course, please let me know through mail or after the classes, so that we can discuss on time the appropriate provisions to accommodate your needs.

Policy on academic honesty:

All position and final papers will be checked for plagiarism. Plagiarism on any of the papers will result in automatic failure of the course irrespective of the rest of your performance. Be careful how you present the works of others: use appropriate citations and full bibliographic references to the literature you are using! You are free to use any reference style but please be consistent!

Course schedule:

- **Week 1 (September 09):** Course introduction, no reading assignment
- **Week 2 (September 18):** Ahistorical procedural conceptions of autonomy

Mandatory reading:

- Frankfurt, Harry. *The Importance of What We Care About*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Ch.2

Supplementary reading:

- Dworkin, Gerald. *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Ch.1

- **Week 3 (September 25):** Historical procedural conceptions of autonomy

Mandatory reading:

- Christman, John. "Autonomy and Personal History." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* Vol.21, No.1(March, 1991): 1–24.

Supplementary reading:

- Christman, John. *The Politics of Persons: Individual Autonomy and Socio-Historical Selves*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

- **Week 4 (October 02):** Strong substantive conceptions of autonomy

Mandatory reading:

- Oshana, Marina. *Personal Autonomy in Society*. New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2006. Ch.4

Supplementary reading:

- Christman, John. "Relational Autonomy, Liberal Individualism, and the Social Constitution of Selves," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* Vol. 117, No. 1/2, Selected Papers from the American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division, 2003 Meeting (January 2004), 143-164.

- **Week 5 (October 09):** Weak substantive conceptions of autonomy

Mandatory reading:

- Anderson, Joel and Axel Honneth. "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition and Justice." In *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism*, edited by John Christman and Joel Anderson, 127-150. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Supplementary reading:

- Benson, Paul. "Free Agency and Self-Worth." *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 91, No.12 (December 1994): 650–668.

- **Week 6 (October 16):** Relational autonomy

Mandatory reading:

- Mackenzie, Catriona. "Relational Autonomy, Normative Authority and Perfectionism." *Journal of Social Philosophy* Vol.39, Issue 4 (Winter 2008): 512–533.

Supplementary reading:

- Stoljar, Natalie. "Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition." In *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*, edited by Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, 94-111. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000

- **Week 7 (October 23): National Holiday**

- **Week 8 (October 30): Fall Holiday**

- **Week 9 (November 06):** The value of autonomy I

Mandatory reading:

- Raz, Joseph. *The Morality of Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Ch.14

Supplementary reading:

- Dworkin, Gerald. *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Ch.2

- **Week 10 (November 13):** The value of autonomy II

Mandatory reading:

- Raz, Joseph. *The Morality of Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Ch.15

Supplementary reading:

- Waldron, Jeremy. "Autonomy and Perfectionism in Raz's 'Morality of Freedom'." 62 *Southern California Law Review* (1989):1097-1152.

- **Week 11 (November 20):** Paternalism and the value of autonomy

Mandatory reading:

- Dworkin, Gerald. "Defining Paternalism." In *Paternalism: Theory and Practice*, edited by C. Coons and Michael Wal, 25-39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Supplementary reading:

- Quong, Jonathan. *Liberalism without Perfection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Ch,3

- **Week 12 (November 27):** Autonomy in plural societies

Mandatory reading:

- Deveaux, Monique. "Appeals to Choice and Sexual Equality: Debates Over Religious Attire." In *Personal Autonomy in Plural Societies*, edited by Marie-Claire Foblets, Michele Graziadei and Alison Renteln. Routledge, 2018.

Supplementary reading:

- Colburn, Ben. *Autonomy and Liberalism*, New York/London: Routledge, 2010. Ch.5

- **Week 13 (December 04):** Self-termination and respect for autonomy

Mandatory reading:

- Velleman, David J. "A Right to Self-Termination." *Ethics* Vol. 109, No.3 (April 1999): 606-628.

- **Week 14 (December 11):** Recap and final discussion

No reading assignment