

## Autonomy

In the western tradition, the view that individual autonomy is a basic moral and political value is very much a modern development. Putting moral weight on an individual's ability to govern herself, independent of her place in a metaphysical order or her role in social structures and political institutions is very much the product of the modernist humanism of which much contemporary moral and political philosophy is an offshoot.

**“Moral autonomy”** refers to the capacity to impose the (putatively objective) moral law on oneself.

Personal (or individual) autonomy should also be distinguished from freedom, although again, there are many renderings of these concepts, and certainly some conceptions of positive freedom will be equivalent to what is often meant by autonomy.

Generally, one can distinguish autonomy from freedom in that the latter concerns the ability to act, without external or internal constraints and also (on some conceptions) with sufficient resources and power to make one's desires effective.

Autonomy concerns the independence and authenticity of the desires (values, emotions, etc.) that move one to act in the first place. Some distinguish autonomy from freedom by insisting that freedom concerns particular acts while autonomy is a more global notion, referring to states of a person.

Feinberg has claimed that there are at least four different meanings of “autonomy” in moral and political philosophy:

- The capacity to govern oneself,
- The actual condition of self-government,
- A personal ideal,
- A set of rights expressive of one's sovereignty over oneself

The concept of self-rule contains two components:

- The independence of one's deliberation and choice from manipulation by others
- The capacity to rule oneself

The capacity to rule oneself is contingent on:

- Mental capacity
- Sufficient economic means
- The liberty afforded to the citizens
- In many countries being of male gender

Many people remain unable to exercise their autonomy

- People underage
  - Unable to vote
  - Unable to marry
  - Cannot make medical decisions

- Not legally competent
- Criminals

Autonomy is proportional

- For a medical professional to exercise their autonomy the patient has to relinquish some or all of their autonomy

### **Bibliography**

Autonomy - Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy – at:  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/autonomy-moral/>