

PHIL 121: AUTONOMY

Georgetown University ♦ Summer 2017

M-Th 5:45-7:45pm ♦ New North

INSTRUCTOR: Molly Wilder ♦ EMAIL: mbw40@georgetown.edu

OFFICE HOURS: T 1-3pm and by appointment ♦ New North

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Do you want to be autonomous? Most likely, you do. Contemporary American politics and culture greatly value autonomy. And some research suggests that a level of autonomy is necessary to live a happy life. But what does it mean to be autonomous? Having control over your life? Freedom from external constraints? Living according to your own principles? Where did the concept of autonomy come from? This course will trace the evolution of autonomy and its relation to similar concepts such as self-sufficiency, liberty, and authenticity. We will explore how the meaning of autonomy has been and continues to be contested. We will consider understandings of autonomy from a variety of perspectives, including from determinist, constructivist, libertarian, and feminist stances. Readings will include excerpts from Aristotle, Spinoza, Kant, Nietzsche, Emerson, and Mill, as well as from contemporary philosophers. The focus of the course will be on understanding and working with the ideas that animate these texts. Students will be challenged to develop and defend their own understanding of what it is to be autonomous. Students will be assessed on class participation, brief reading responses, one short paper (approx. 2-3 pages) and one longer paper (approx. 4-6 pages).

COURSE GOALS

1. Become conversant in a variety of philosophical theories and arguments about autonomy.
2. Empathize with and understand perspectives on autonomy that you may not share.
3. Develop the ability to read thoughtfully and write effectively in response to difficult philosophical texts.
4. Develop and defend your own understanding of what it is to be autonomous.
5. Apply your understanding of autonomy to your analysis of current events, what you are learning in other classes, and how you make decisions in your everyday life.

TEXTS

All required reading materials will be made available on Canvas.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING BREAKDOWN

25% Reading Briefs/Attendance

25% Short Paper

50% Long Paper

READING BRIEFS

For each class reading assignment, you are required to complete a reading brief, which is intended to prepare you for class discussion. Reading briefs must be 200-300 words (1-2 pages double spaced) and will respond to questions I will provide you. Reading briefs will ask for your general comprehension of a piece; I will not be asking for highly specific detail. They will then ask you to engage with the text in some way, to say whether you agree or disagree, to connect the material to your own life, etc. **Reading briefs are due at 3pm on Canvas the day on which we will be discussing the relevant material.** No credit will be given for late reading briefs, but you may write extended briefs of 400-500 words to earn make up the lost credit. Reading briefs

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will be graded as excellent, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory. Assuming perfect attendance, completing all reading briefs at a satisfactory level will earn full credit for this portion of your grade. Writing three or more excellent reading briefs can raise your overall grade by 1/3, for example, B to B+.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is required, and absences will lower your reading briefs/attendance grade. You may, however write extended reading briefs to make up for missing a day of class. **You may write extended reading briefs for up to four missed classes. If you miss more than four classes, you may write an additional short paper to make up the lost credit. If, however, you miss more than eight classes, you will fail the course.** These policies apply to all absences regardless of reason, although exceptions may be made for extreme circumstances in consultation with me and your dean.

PAPERS

Short Paper (600-800 words): This paper will focus on the explanation and interpretation of a brief excerpt from a text. I will provide you several prompts to choose from.

Due: June 12th

Long Paper (1000-1500 words): This paper will focus on argumentation. I will provide prompts, but you will also have the possibility of developing your own topic. Students will be required to meet with me to discuss their long paper topics. We will have an in-class writing workshop with peer review to help you revise your papers. A draft of your paper will be due in class on the day of the workshop, June 22th.

Due: June 26th

Long Revised Paper: You will have the option of revising your long paper for a higher grade.

Due: Date scheduled for final exam (there will be no in-class exam)

PAPER EXTENSIONS

You may have an extension of up to three days for any reason on either of the first two papers.

You must, however, request the extension from me by email at least 48 hours in advance of the deadline. Do not assume the extension has been granted until I confirm the extension in a reply email. Less than two days before the deadline, I will only consider giving extensions with an excuse verified by a dean. Likewise, I will give no extensions for your final revised paper without an excuse verified by a dean.

PARTICIPATION IN CLASS

The quality of your participation in class can affect your overall grade. Excellent participation can raise your overall grade by 1/3, so B to B+, etc, and poor participation will lower your overall grade by 1/3. Excellent participation includes raising particularly insightful points or questions, raising points or questions that improve the quality of section discussion, and helping create a welcoming atmosphere for other students. Poor participation includes never or rarely participating, speaking in a way that is disrespectful to others, and monopolizing class time to the detriment of classmates.

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READING SCHEDULE

Reading assignments will average 10-20 pages/class.

Week 1 – Precursors of Autonomy

Monday, 6/5

Introduction – no reading assignment

In-class reading activity: Excerpts from Stoics/Aristotle

Tuesday, 6/6

Nancy Sherman, *Stoic Warriors* - “The Downsized Self”

Wednesday, 6/7

Excerpt from Gabrielle Suchon, *On the Celibate Life Freely Chosen; or, Life without Commitments*

Thursday, 6/8

Excerpt from Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*

Week 2 – Kantian Moral Autonomy

LONG PAPER TOPIC MEETINGS MUST BE SCHEDULED FOR THIS WEEK

Monday, 6/12

Excerpt from Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork*

SHORT PAPER DUE

Tuesday, 6/13

Excerpt from Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*

Wednesday, 6/14

Thomas Hill, *Autonomy and Self-Respect* – “Servility and Self-Respect”

Thursday, 6/15

Andrews Reath, “Legislating for a Realm of Ends: The Social Dimension of Autonomy”

Week 3 – Autonomy as Self-Mastery

Monday, 6/19

Excerpt from Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*

Tuesday, 6/20

Robert Pippin, “How to Overcome Oneself: Nietzsche on Freedom”

Wednesday, 6/21

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance”

Thursday, 6/22

WRITING WORKSHOP: DRAFT OF LONG PAPER DUE IN CLASS

Week 4 – Autonomy as Individualism

Monday, 6/26

Excerpt from J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*

LONG PAPER DUE

Tuesday, 6/27

Robert Paul Wolff, “The Conflict Between Authority and Autonomy”

Wednesday, 6/28

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* - “Moral Constraints and the State,”

Thursday, 6/29

Excerpt from Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*

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Week 5 – Relational Conceptions of Autonomy

Monday, 7/3

Excerpt from Marina Oshana, *Personal Autonomy and Social Oppression*

Tuesday, 7/4

FOURTH OF JULY – NO CLASS

Wednesday, 6/7

Andrea Westlund, *Rethinking Relational Autonomy*

Thursday, 6/8

Molly Wilder, “The Elusive Autonomous Client” (work in progress)

LONG PAPER REVISIONS DUE ON DATE OF FINAL EXAM

*****ENJOY THE REST OF YOUR SUMMER!*****