

Autonomy is the capacity for self-governance, allowing individuals, groups, or institutions to make their own informed, uncoerced decisions. It involves acting in accordance with one's own values and interests, rather than being pressured by external forces. Key aspects include self-definition and the ability to make a personal choice, from the Greek words for "self-rule".

In psychology

- Definition: The psychological need to be in control of one's own behavior and actions.
- How it works: It means acting on genuine interests and values, which is linked to greater well-being and is different from mere independence, where actions aren't necessarily value-driven.
- Examples: Engaging in a hobby you enjoy because you are intrinsically motivated, or setting boundaries to protect your personal values.

In ethics and philosophy

- Definition: The right to self-determination and the ability to make an informed, uncoerced decision.
- Key concepts:
 - Personal autonomy: Individuals have the right to make their own decisions without external coercion.
 - Political autonomy: A state or region's ability to govern itself independently.
 - Autonomy of thought, will, and action: These are distinct capacities that allow for free and independent thinking, deciding, and acting, respectively.

How autonomy is practiced

- In relationships: Maintaining a sense of self-definition and having a support network beyond a single close relationship.
- In decision-making: Researching options and making choices based on what you genuinely want.
- In professional and political life: A group or state's ability to operate and govern itself without outside influence.