



**Collège  
Édouard-Montpetit**

345-101-MQ

Winter 2012

Humanities

## Syllabus

COURS : **Humanities 1**

PROGRAMME General Education  
:

DISCIPLINE : Humanities

Weighting: | Theory : 3 | Practical: 1 | Personal study : 3

PROFESSOR	Office	extension	* email
MICHEL CARRIER	C-185		contact me via MIO

OFFICE HOURS: *To be filled out by the student*

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
AM					
PM					

DEPARTMENT COORDONATORS	OFFICE	☎ Extension	✉ email
Pierre Brière	C-185	6014	pierre.briere@college-em.qc.ca

## AUTONOMY, AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Throughout human history, as our species has faced the frightening, terrorizing fact that we do not know who we are, or where we are going in this ocean of chaos, it has been the authorities, the political, the religious, the educational authorities who attempted to comfort us by giving us order, rules, regulations, informing, forming in our minds their view of reality. To think for yourself you must question authority and learn how to put yourself in a state of vulnerable, open-mindedness; chaotic, confused, vulnerability to inform yourself.

-Timothy Leary

### Course Description

What do we mean by *autonomy*? Individual autonomy is an idea that is generally understood to refer to the capacity to be one's own person, to live one's life according to reasons and motives that are perceived as truthfully being one's own and not the product of manipulative or distorting external forces. Put most simply, to be autonomous is to be one's own person, to be self-directed by considerations, desires, conditions, and characteristics that are not simply imposed externally upon one. This seems quite straightforward and commonsensical. However, can it be that some desires and considerations which seem our own in fact lead to a lessening rather than the truthful affirmation of autonomy? In other words, is it possible that what at first glance seem like the expression of autonomy is, at bottom, self-limiting or even self-destructive? Autonomy then, for it to be authentic, seems to rely upon a specific kind of self-knowledge, where one's authenticity is dependent upon a profound awareness, a deep knowledge of one's nature and one's place in the universe. In this light, autonomy and knowledge seem to be inseparable.

Autonomy in this sense seems an irrefutable good, especially since its opposite — being guided by external forces which one cannot authentically embrace or acting through the impulse of a false or incomplete self-consciousness and therefore *not* authentically — seems to mark the height of oppression, or self-oppression. But, can one not proclaim to be autonomous while all the while submitting oneself to an external authority? This seems to be obviously the case when one considers certain forms of religious belief for example. We all come into this world as creatures highly in need of “external forces” which not only guarantee our survival as newborns but also, and just as importantly, also see to our education. Does one need to be educated in order to become autonomous and thereby think for oneself? Do all forms of education lead to the realisation of individual autonomy? Are there various forms of autonomy? Can one logically speak of the autonomy of a group or of a people?

What do we mean by *authority*? Can we distinguish authority from power? If so, how are they different? When is authority legitimate? To the extent to which human beings have always lived in groups, this is one of the fundamental questions of mankind. The question of authority crosses various disciplines which make up the core of the humanities for, depending on how one understands the concept of autonomy, the authority in question may be perceived as either legitimate or illegitimate. When is religious authority legitimate? Does it have the same legitimacy in the eyes of both atheists and believers? If not, who's right? Who can legitimately claim to hold real knowledge? When is political authority legitimate as opposed to merely and scandalously coercive? Who has the right to exert authority and with which kind of arguments? What is the role of reason, of religion, of mythology, of poetry and do they all have equal claim to authority? Can they all be put to use in the name of autonomy?

What do we mean by *responsibility*? It is a basic fact of human cooperation that responsibilities are often divided up between people: for example, the doctor is responsible for prescribing the right drugs, and the patient responsible for taking them correctly. It follows logically from what we have seen so far that when we speak of *responsibility* we in fact mean two things: responsibility towards *oneself* and *others*. By what criteria can we know that we are, as they say “living up to our responsibilities”? A parent is responsible for caring for his child, an employee for doing her job, a citizen for obeying the law. However there are bosses who act unethically and there can be laws which are by all accounts of justice unjust – there have been various societies in the course of human history for whom slavery was legal. If the idea of autonomy has any weight, responsibility then is at times something more than just blind obedience to the way things are, or more precisely to what others tell us as the way things are.

What sort of creature can properly be held responsible for its actions? The simple answer is: a normal human adult. To explain and justify this reply, we often turn to psychological and philosophical features of normal adults, such as the capacity to autonomously choose the course of their thoughts and actions, in other words, in our capacity to reason, in our capacity to *know* what it is we are thinking and doing. It follows then that democratic society should have as one of its main concerns the universal development among its citizenry of the human capacity to act and think autonomously while all the while nourishing a shared sense of responsibility.

## Course Objectives

This course is an introduction to philosophical thought and an exploration of some of philosophy’s perennial questions: what is the difference between an opinion and a reasoned argument? How to differentiate appearance from reality? How is belief not the same thing as knowledge? More specifically, at the end of this course you will have a greater comprehension of philosophy’s attempt to give a rational foundation to both individual and collective human existence and to thereby harmonise the ideas of autonomy, authority and responsibility

---

## **Course Requirements and Relative Weighting of Assignments**

**Required Text** (available at the Coop): *recueil de textes* No. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Evaluations**

One Essay Papers:	30%
Three exams:	60% (#1 = 15%, #2 = 20% & #3 = 25%)
Pop Quizzes:	10%

---

## Table of Contents

### **Weeks 1 through 3**

- Syllabus
- What is philosophy ?

\*\*\*\*\*FIRST EXAM: 7<sup>TH</sup> CLASS\*\*\*\*\*

**Reading:** Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom*

**Weeks 4 through 6**

- Authority confronts Autonomy: The Life and Death of a Philosopher

\*\*\*\*\*SECOND EXAM, 14<sup>TH</sup> CLASS\*\*\*\*\*

**Reading:** Plato, *Apology of Socrates*

---

**Weeks 7 through 10**

- Philosophy's Authority and Political Responsibility

\*\*\*\*\*ESSAY PAPER 21st CLASS\*\*\*\*\*

**Reading:** Plato, *The Republic*, Books V-VII

---

**Weeks 11 through 14**

- Autonomy and the Good Life: Responsibility towards self and others.

**Reading:** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

---

**Week 15**

- Review of the course material

**FINAL EXAM**

---

**Rules and Regulations:**

(I) Use me as a resource. None of us is so brilliant that we fully understand material the first time we encounter it. Please, don't be afraid to ask questions when you are confused. I am delighted with students who try to learn, and asking questions is the best way to learn.

(II) It is important that you (i) attend classes, (ii) arrive at class on time, and (iii) do the readings before the class session for which they are set. **When you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed.** There is no secret to learning: if you put work into a course-- including doing the readings and thinking about them-- you will learn and get a good grade. The readings are an essential part of the course and I expect that you will do them

(III) The assignment **must be submitted on the day it is due.** Any delay that is not approved in advance will result in a penalty. All papers must use standard 1" margins and a 12-point font. There must be a separate cover sheet. Your paper must be stapled and have page numbers. Humour me on this one.

(IV) Plagiarism: Passing off other people's work as if it were the product of your labour-- i.e. plagiarism-- is dishonest and will be punished. **Don't do it.** Whenever you need help with an assignment or with any other aspect of the course, you should come to see me. A very enjoyable part of my job is helping students and you should never hesitate to ask questions in class or to speak with me outside the classroom. In addition, you must write your own paper. It is a good idea to work with other students on assignments, for tests, or on the coursework in general, but you must put your thoughts together in your own words. You cannot simply copy long sections from the assigned pieces and claim that it is your paper. If you are not sure what constitutes an acceptable paraphrase, ask me. Getting help with an assignment is smart; letting someone else write your paper is academically illegal and will earn you zero for the assignment. Any student caught plagiarizing or otherwise cheating will be reported to the Higher Authorities.

*N.B. It is important to keep all copies of your marked papers and exams. These documents are essential in the event that you are moved to plead for a review of your mark*