

8. Self-determination

Etymology: 1680s, ‘determination of mind; determination by one’s own will or powers without external influence’, from self- (‘oneself’, also ‘automatic’) + determination (‘conclusion, boundary’, noun of action from past-participle stem of Latin *determinare* ‘to enclose, bound, set limits to’). The political sense, action of a people in deciding its statehood and form of government, is attested by 1911, popularised in 1918 by US President Woodrow Wilson in reference to the settlement of World War I. The idea itself is from the 19th c., and Churchill compared Fichte’s *Selbst bestimmung*. Related: *self-determined*; *self-determining*.¹

Suggestions for value-specific questions in VISION dialogues

- What is self-determination?
- What is self-determination not?
- What is it to allow others their self-determination?
- How is self-determination related to the stars or the moon?
- What is the relationship between the self and others?
- How can you describe the space for confusion or doubt in self-determination?
- When does self-determination become a battle?
- Is there loneliness where self-determination is?
- How is self-determination related to togetherness?
- How is self-determination related to autonomy?
- How can self-determination be gentle?
- How can self-determination be balanced?
- How is self-determination related to freedom?

Suggestions for exercises and creative activities to inspire a VISION reflection

The king’s successor

Duration: 45 minutes

Description: In pairs or small groups, one person takes the lead, walking around the room—perhaps outside, time and space permitting—using different movements and expressions, such as raising one arm and walking backwards amongst others. The other(s) participants follow and repeat the actions and patterns of the person leading. The person leading can experiment with just doing things without paying attention to others and having all attention directed towards them. Is there a middle way? In addition, both the individual in the lead and those following experiment with ways of tuning into each other, opening their senses to what the others are doing, and shifting the pace and the rhythm. How long does it take before you are tuned in? Does it become easier over time or more difficult? Take turns assuming the lead.

After the exercise, discuss the experiences of assuming the different roles. Do you have a preference? What are the challenges to each role? What are the advantages?

¹ Extract compiled from <https://www.etymonline.com/word/self-determination>, last accessed 1 May 2026.