Introduction

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In 1809 Russia seized Finland from Sweden. Paradoxically, perhaps, this event ensued in the first chapter of Finland's road to independence and autonomy: the Grand Duchy, or Grand Principality, of Finland. The following hundred years featured periods of weaker and stronger Russian influence, with emperors more and less benevolent towards Finland's relative independence. This story is important in itself – at least to the Finns – but serves, here, as a heuristic tool to introduce the topic of this collection of essays: Platonic autonomy or self-government. In general, the notion of autonomy, its different features as well as political and personal strands, poses challenges to its users. Applied to states, it refers to something approximating sovereignty of states, but falling short of it. Applied to human individuals, it can refer to at least moral, existential and personal variants, all leading to different assessments as to what, if any, normative significance it has, and whether minimal conditions can be given for it.[1] Its Platonic version seems particularly difficult to pin down. It may even be argued that Plato does not operate with a concept of personal autonomy. In difficulties, Plato teaches, storytelling may help, and looking at large letters may help in understanding the small (as in *Republic* 368c7–d7).

This volume is an exploration of the features that both connect and separate Platonic interest in self-control and self-government from modern conceptions of personal or individual autonomy. This happens through disentangling a couple of core ideas that mark the notion of autonomy in its many different usages, both old and new, political and agential, starting through reflection of certain distinctive features of the Grand Duchy of Finland. Such a naïve approach, if we can entitle it in this way, allows us to evaluate continuities and departures better, for it

[1] See, e.g., S. Buss and A. Westlund, 'Personal Autonomy', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018), E. N. Zalta (ed.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/personal-autonomy/, or M. Piper, 'Autonomy, Normative', in *International Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* https://iep.utm.edu/normative-autonomy/.

does not predetermine the Kantian self-legislating, or the contemporary preferentialist-individualist understanding, as starting-points for our enquiry. On the view emerging from this volume, personal autonomy is not primarily a matter of individual preferences or achievements, but involves a broad range of concerns relevant for the pursuit of self-rule, self-government and the constitution of non-coerced sources of motivation. As we will see, even features that are not far from certain contemporary relationalist views are exposed.

But let us open with disentangling four features of the autonomous Grand Principality of Finland we believe help in approaching what we will identify as the Platonic variant of personal autonomy. First, of the main properties of the autonomy that Finland came to enjoy was, obviously, its *self-determination*. This meant that it had power over its internal affairs, its own senate, its own representative in St Petersburg, and, with varying success, self-control. Autonomy, in this sense, meant *freedom to exercise one's own decision-making,* and (apart from foreign policy) a *lack of external rule.* Second, the absence of external rule was not enough to render Finland autonomous. Quite the contrary, autonomy was built on, and bestowed upon, a complex but *unified network* of existing administrative bodies, developed during the Swedish reign, both nation-wide and more local: provincial and legal administration. It was these magistracies, as well as the inherited traditions, customs and laws, culture and languages, Finnish and Swedish, and the distinctively Lutheran (as opposed to Orthodox) church, that created *an entity* capable of autonomy in the first place. Without both the felt and the factual unity, the *shared values* and the *inner organisation* that tied different parts of the country and population together, and the efficacious self-rule and activities arising from these organisations, there would not have been a body capable of aspiring, much less realising the autonomy of the Principality. This we might entitle its capacity for *self-governance*.[2] Third, autonomy had its limits. Finnish autonomy was not

[2] The terminology connected to these issues is, as might be expected, not generally agreed upon, but for this shortish, introductory purpose, let us mention one helpful categorisation. According to C. Mackenzie (in her various works, but usefully summed up in her 'Three Dimensions of Autonomy: A Relational Analysis', in A. Veltman and M. Piper (eds.), *Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender* (Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 15–41, we should distinguish three dimensions of autonomy: self-determination, self-government and self-authorisation. The first, suitably for our example, has to do with freedom and opportunities, the second with skills and capacities to make choices that are according to our diachronic, practical identity, and the last with the normative authority to be self-determining and self-governing. The volume at hand as a whole does not adopt this classification, but for the purposes of the introduction it seems to come rather close to the naïve, unassuming picture we started with.

a matter of either having or lacking it. During the period of the Russian rule, the grade in which Finland enjoyed autonomy varied, which shows that, in the real world, autonomy *comes in degrees*. Fourth, one of the main areas where the Grand Duchy was less than ideally independent was self-legislation. The Grand Duchy had a law-making body, but it had to petition the tsar to initiate legislation. Autonomy, then, *can*, *but need not*, *involve self-legislation*.

These four features – self-determination as opposed to being ruled by others, unity and organisation of an entity capable of self-government, degrees versus ideal and the role of self-legislation – are also, we argue, fecund as a frame within which Platonic ideas can be examined. To begin with, already the term 'principality' used of the Grand Duchy of Finland captures two first strands relevant for chiselling out a distinctly Platonic form of autonomy.

The definition of 'principality' in political theory and its history locates it typically in smaller polities governed by lesser monarchs than the king. 'Princehood' here captures *being 'first' in the order of command*, and thus enjoying a rule, perhaps derivative or lesser, but not unlike that of the self-determination of a true princeps, in this case the emperor. This feature of the Grand Duchy of Finland – its hegemonic *priority* – is in some form or another shared both by ancient, and by more recent, discussions on personal autonomy. An agent is, at least ideally, an entity that enjoys some level of self-determining, in originating her own actions, and not being coerced to do them, nor merely instrumental in bringing them forth. Plato, too, values activities that are self-originated. He discusses myriads of challenges connected to being led or controlled by an external agency or authority, and the ways we could overcome such external determination. He explores widely the way in which the external world imposes its allure on us through the directness and unreflectiveness of bodily desires (e.g., *Phaedo* 66b–d on the enslavement of the body and its desires; sense-perceptions as disturbances in the *Timaeus* 69c–e, *Laws* 644c–645c). While in its reflexivity potentially paradoxical, the ideal of self-rule (*auton hautou archein*) and self-mastery (*to kreittō heautou*) is clearly attractive to him (e.g., *Republic* 443d–e; *Protagoras* 358a–c; *Laws* 645b).[3]

[3] This is not meant to suggest that all these discussions would be cases of discussing autonomy, merely in different terminology. Rather, they come close or are parts of what many would think to have autonomy requires. In his monograph *Autonomous Agents: From Self-Control to Autonomy* (Oxford University Press, 1995), Alfred Mele studies, following Aristotle, self-control as the absence of *akrasia*. A self-controlled person is not weak-willed, nor coerced. This, according to Mele, is not yet sufficient

In the Neoplatonic variants, as we will see, self- versus other-determination is finally explicitly conceptualized.

Second, the independence bestowed upon a territory by any monarch also means that the territory enjoys a *unified principle*, one basis and a code of ruling, something that makes a political entity governing itself a unit, and a unit capable of self-determination. Plato puts heavy emphasis on the unity of agency.[4] While disunity and disorder in antiquity are seen as signs of something potentially devoid of value in general, for self-governance they pose an even more specific kind of threat. In the *Republic*, internal conflict is likened to a civil war (440b), and civil war, famously, disintegrates and considerably weakens a polity. Plato famously explores different variants of internal conflict at the level of persons, such as weakness of will and self-defeat (e.g., *Republic* 430e–431a: *to ēttō heautou*; *Protagoras* 352d; 358b–c). To be an agent at all, an entity capable of having some degree of freedom as regards herself, the agent must be more than a collection of parts. Partitioned into different psychological drives and abilities, the parts of a human agent must display structural organisation that ideally forms a functional and solid unit. Disunity – at least in its radical forms – is a hindrance to decision-making, action, and self-determination. Though not explicitly offered as indicating certain competence conditions, Plato is worried about epistemic disunity, self-deception, and blind acceptance of external authority. He famously seems to endorse thinking for oneself, and the priority of grasping and striving for a logically unified belief-set transparent to the moral agent herself. He values a directness of the relationship to the objects of knowledge, one that is not mediated by anyone or anything. (E.g., *Protagoras* 330c–331c; *Phaedo* 79d.)

Both first features, namely self-determination and its foundation, psychic-cum-cognitive unity, are hard to come by in the ordinary, real life. The third feature, degrees of success in being self-determined or -governed, is thus a natural backdrop against which the thematic is

for autonomy. An autonomous person must have the capacity of evaluative reasoning, and autonomous actions are both intentional and based on the reasonings thus provided. Autonomy, then, comes out as a more complex and demanding notion than self-control. Hence discussions of self-rule and self-mastery are integral to what we think of as autonomous agency, but need not coincide with nor be sufficient to it.

[4] As we will be reminded in Chapter 3, Christine Korsgaard's work, influenced by ancient and Kantian conception, shares this heavy emphasis. In more general terms, contemporary coherentist theorizing from H. Frankfurt ('Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 11–25) onwards suggests connections between self-governing agency and synchronic or even diachronic psychic unity. These theories have some connections to – and perhaps an early predecessor in – the Platonic approach.

discussed. Somewhat typically for many ancient discussions,[5] Plato's dialogues lay out uncompromising ideals, but, as we will see, also inquire into challenges these ideals face. The contributors draw attention to the way in which less than ideal circumstances cause specific problems and highlight the need for the recognition of the sophisticated complexities involved in trying to solve them.

Fourth, just as the Grand Duchy of Finland, Platonic autonomy sets itself apart from many post-Kantian conceptions in its lack of full self-legislation. And as Plato provides interesting reasons for this, let us linger here for a while. Some contemporary scholars think that the ideal of self-legislating is central to autonomy: an autonomous person should be capable of freely determining her preferences, and live a life in accordance with them – that is, self-legislating so as to bring the preferences one has also to the level of the person's actual actions and choices. On this view, personal autonomy is thought to pick out distinctively individual goals. Autonomy is a matter of self-legislation, founded in a discrete deliberative capacity, and is taken to be coextensive with the individual ability to decide one's own goals as an independent agent.[6] Though an agent's deliberative capacity seems central for Plato, we will see that his emphasis is much less on individual preferences. Famously, examples of good or even ideal agents and actions include for example Socrates who does not flee from prison but obeys the laws of his city, even when they are at his personal disadvantage (*Crito* 48e),[7] as well as the philosopher-kings of the Kallipolis who devote their lives to the ruling of the city even though their inclination and best would lie in theoretical-contemplative activities (*Republic* 520a5–e3). The whole centrality of the notion of justice in Plato, and his various explorations to show that the life of suffering injustice is better than committing it, render any emphasis on individual preferences fairly alien.

[5] It is well known that ideals, such as a fully virtuous sage, or perfect, infallible knowledge or intellection, belong to ancient theorising about ethics and epistemology, and thus no wonder that they play a role even in discussions on self-control and self-government. For the role of sage in Platonic ethics, see, e.g., J. Annas, *Platonic Ethics: Old and New* (Cornell University Press, 1998), and for paradigms in ancient and mediaeval epistemology, R. Pasnau, 'Epistemology Idealized', *Mind* 122 (2013), 987–1021.

[6] See C. Fehige and U. Wessels in the introduction of their edited volume *Preferences* (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1998). For discussion, see also H. Frankfurt, 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person'; G. Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (Cambridge University Press, 1988); J. Brännmark, 'Leading a Life of One's Own: On Well-Being and Narrative Autonomy', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 81 (2006) 65–82; C. Rosati, 'Preference Formation and Personal Good', in S. Olsaretti (ed.) *Preferences and Well-Being, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 59 (2006), pp. 33–64.

[7] As we will see in Chapter 9.

For Plato, just as for most ancient thinkers, an agent is closely tied to the society she lives in: its education, its traditions and cultural phenomena all carry a certain set of loosely connected values, a set that a child is quick at adopting, and members likely to share. As also some contemporary theorists of autonomy point out, an agent cannot be properly thought of as a solitary unit in isolation from the society she lives in. The values, commitments, and manifold of other ties that bind her to the communities that she participates in cannot but affect and structure of her desires, priorities and valuings.[8] There is a question, then, to which extent self-legislation is possible or even desirable in Plato's picture. One of Plato's focal lessons is to show that notwithstanding the worth of traditional values, if uncritically held, they can endanger the happiness of both individuals and communities (a Socratic agenda), and, furthermore, that while individual self-search, reflection and deliberation are sorely needed to mend this situation, on a larger scale, change can perhaps only be effected through changing the values and functionings of the larger unit the agents belong to, that is, the state (the lessons of the *Republic*).

Moreover, and closely related, there is an optimistic tendency in Classical antiquity, even in Plato's framework, distrustful of the apparent, to believe in the beauty and organization of what there is, as regards that which truly is, and on a cosmic scale. Understanding and knowledge, moral knowledge included, are conceived of as revealing this good order. From a modern point of view, this could be seen as yet another type of subordination to something larger. For an ancient thinker, however, this is not a matter of oppressive authority. It is a positive opportunity to partake in something larger and better than oneself. Strictly speaking, then, self-legislation can be both epistemically and ethically risky in this framework. The blessings of twenty-first century self-legislating individuals, free to prefer what they like, as long as they do not actively go about harming their neighbour, are from a Platonic point of view eclipsed by the possibility of gaining true knowledge and a solid ethical standpoint.[9]

But perhaps self-legislation calls for a closer look. To brand it merely as freedom to do as one likes may be too hasty. To go back to the political metaphor we started with: the autonomy of any large political unit that

[8] See, e.g., Stefaan Cuypers, *Self-Identity and Personal Autonomy* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2001), esp. at 100 and 143.

[9] It is, one might add, also an ideal that, even in the West, perhaps is about to be past its best sale by date, in the midst of the global problems in for example just distribution of resources, in containment of pandemics and especially the ecological crisis that no longer only threatens, but affects all of our lives.

lacks the capacity for self-legislation may be, after all, a problem, if this capacity is denied for a longer period of time. Perhaps autonomy should involve the capacity of realizing, even if imperfectly and as watered down compromises, but nonetheless to some degree, the changing values of the population in question. In the case of Finland, this pressure would have increased, had not the early twentieth century brought Finland its independency and thus the opportunity of bringing the changing values of a swiftly developing nation to bear in its self-legislation. The possibility of self-legislation, then, is not only about the state's freedom of doing what it can, but also about the ability of mirroring the values of its parts in its negotiated laws and other norms. Analogically, we may well think that while radical preferentialism does not suit the Platonic picture, in a plausible theory of autonomy, an agent ought nonetheless to be able to act in accordance to the values actually held by her. We will suggest that it is possible that Plato would have liked one particular variant of self-authorization much better than the radically self-legislative one. In some contemporary relationalist theories, self-authorization does not require independence from any and every epistemic and normative authority. If self-authorization can arise, for example, from self-respect, self-esteem and social recognition, then it can flourish side by side of at least some kinds of acceptance of authority.[10]

Many of the studies in this volume reveal that Plato is surprisingly perceptive about the complex border between the ideal of unified, self-determining agents that struggle to avoid various forms of other-determination, and the reality – and value – of essentially belonging to frameworks larger than oneself, both cosmic and social.

The studies in the volume elucidate how Plato seeks a balance between ideal and reality, and between, one might claim, uncompromising and contextualized autonomy. On the one hand, the Platonic variant of autonomy emphasizes self-motion, self-determination and self-rule over passivity, slavery and various forms of other-determination. It appeals to unity of agency as the best psychological framework to ground self-governance. Further, it highlights the role of reason in unified and self-determined agency, without severing individual rationality from its social and cosmic context. Hence, this collection of essays examines how autonomy is conditioned by self-sufficiency, what kind of ideal rational self-governance is supposed to be, how unity and self-determination are connected, and to what extent personal autonomy depends on collaboration and social

[10] This is the view propounded by Mackenzie in the mentioned 'Three Dimensions'.

context. But to understand both the unattainable paradigm as well as the more mundane human condition better, approaching less than ideal situations as well as critical problems is needed. The collection asks, on the other hand: Which types of freedom, or lack of coercion and servitude, are the core of the Platonic legacy and why? What is an illegitimate or non-autonomous source of motivation? What kinds of dependencies were seen as a threat to self-government? And, importantly, how do external powers, such as legislation, epistemic authority and social order, on the one hand condition, and, on the other, support the development of personal self-government and rational agency?

In Plato, main vehicles of integration are the competences connected to reason and dialectic, and hence some chapters in the book both analyze and challenge the possibilities for this kind of unification. Rational abilities, as we will see, can provide holistic, complete accounts instead of partial ones, coherent and accurate instead of incoherent and impulsive reasons to act, and at best provide an access to the intelligible structure of being, thereby securing that our reasonings track the truth. Other chapters highlight the ways in which Plato's psychology is not exhausted by reason-centred strategies. To understand what Plato is out to accomplish more generally, it is suggested that we need also to account for how non-rational motivations play a role in both disintegration and integration. Moreover, even though the kind of unity at stake in the ancient sources is almost univocally conceptualized in rational and idealistic terms, the feasibility of individual unification is necessarily also seen as conditioned by various forms of social collaborations, such as legislation and private as well as political dialogue. It is not without reasons that philosophizing itself is often seen as a form of rational collaboration, embodied by Plato's dialogues at large.

Several of the contributions to this volume explore the relation between codependent and discrete sources of rational deliberation against this background, seeking a way to re-conceptualize the more traditional juxtaposition of internal and external sources of authority. The Aristotelian influenced Neoplatonic commentaries highlight, through their discussions of self-motion, the ideal of internally originated activities as one existing Platonic strand of thought here. Such activities are seen as those in which the agent both expresses her own self, actively, and also governs these activities, in the sense that they are self-originated, rather than passive happenings. But while this embodies a generally accepted ideal, selected forms of external authority are nevertheless thought of as necessary and sometimes even as beneficial. Not only is it suggested that an ignorant agent needs external guidance, it is also argued that even a good Platonic

reasoner often finds herself in the need of other people. Social environment, political authority, as well as laws and institutions can provide a framework in which personal freedom can best be attained.[11] And there is a good reason for this: even if this kind of freedom may not be absolute, its interdependent framework often tracks the truth better than any individual agent could do alone.

In this way, many of the chapters of this volume question exclusively individualistic accounts. But they do show that a certain kind of autonomous, or, if one prefers, self-governing, subject remains of central interest in the Platonic tradition. The autonomous agent is not the possessor of individual preferences and power to make them laws to herself, nor someone with a personally unique take on the world, but, rather, a unified agent who in both collaborative and personal activities originates her own motion and reasons, and commits in a profound sense to her own actions. In most of these activities, the inescapable human setting is contextual and collaborative.[12] The platonic legacy thus reveals a necessary overlap between questions of individual self-government and two realms larger than the individual: the rational or cosmic order and the socio-political. The general outcome of this is that external forms of authority, such as discursive coercion, law or social pressure, are not always to be seen as degenerative powers, but rather as possibly misdirected sources of rationality. If properly redirected, they can not only accommodate the practical limitations of human vulnerability and help unify the individual into an independent agent, they can also become the source of a strong and codependent form of rational self-government. It is this form of autonomy we want to label Platonic.

To identify and, in detail, characterize what this form of autonomy involves, the volume is divided into five parts, where each part encapsulates one central feature or challenge of personal self-determination and self-rule in Plato, from terminological choices to the inner, motivational puzzles, and from external authorities of various kinds to the possibilities of self-determination of a non-ideal kind and context.

In the first Part *Self-Determination: From Legislation to Giving Rational Accounts*, **Amber D. Carpenter** sets the stage by asking what terminology

[11] We see in the work of M. M. McCabe the deeply conversational and shared features of Socratic-Platonic methodology (e.g., *Platonic Conversations* (Oxford University Press, 2015)). As far as authority is concerned, even having authority over a mind is often considered to be third-personal – only Socrates seems to have ready, first-personal access to his own cognitive state, as argued by R. Woolf ('Socratic Authority', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 90, 1–38 (2008).

[12] In his studies on person and personality in Greek thought, C. Gill uses a closely related terminology of contextual-participant, see e.g. *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

reveals about that Platonic ideal of self-determination. She draws attention to the peculiarity that Plato, in the *Republic*, despite his interest in self-mastery, both of cities and of individuals, never uses any cognates of the word *autonomia*. Her starting point to explain the reasons for this is that the colloquial usage takes it for granted that the basic idea is that there is some value in following laws or customs that are one's own. But this is not Plato's interest, nor does it seem to be the interest of even those ancient authors who do use the word *autonomia* for persons. If autonomy and self-determination are grounded merely in the idea of our actions having originated in ourselves rather being externally coerced, any whimsical and uncoerced action could in principle count as self-determined. Carpenter locates in Plato an alternative framework where both erratic and internally coerced actions are ruled out as truly self-governed. In this framework, thinking, rather than action, is at centre stage. It is thinking that secures that there is a determined thing, an agent, and it is thinking that frees one from the confusion caused by intense pleasant and unpleasant experiences. The activity of giving and defending complete accounts yields self-determination of a better kind, and is essentially tied to such values as precision, aptness, articulability and accountability.

The second Part of the collection, *Motivational Challenges to Self-Rule*, explores Plato's theories of motivation and action. Reason functions, at the best of times, amidst and in co-operation with other 'parts' or motivations of the soul. The role of these motivations is crucial, both in actions that successfully display self-governance as well as in failures to properly be the origin of one's actions. But here, it is shown, our whole understanding of Plato's theory of motivation may call for reassessment. There may be a serious need to reconsider even the number of basic kinds of motivations in Plato, as well as the widespread readings on what functions and roles different soul's capacities take in motivating actions.

Nicholas D. Smith's starting point is the way in which Socrates in the *Republic* introduces the principle of contradiction as a way to understand the soul's desires and the lack of them, but then goes on to give examples that amount, rather, to desires and aversions, that is, active pulls back from an object, rather than merely lacking a desire for them. Plato, then, seems actually committed to motivational pluralism. If this is the case, the project of attaining a unified moral psychology becomes problematic. Moreover, there are worries about internal consistency here. For partitioning of the soul, the compresence of aversion and attraction is not sufficient. Worse still, if we add, as Plato suggests, such qualifications as 'in the same part of itself; in relation to the same thing, at the same time' (*Republic* 436b9–10), it is not at all clear why the resulting partitioning would be tripartite. After