Moral Autonomy in the Republic
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Liberal individualists do not like Plato's Republic. One reason for this is that the social and political proposals contained in it do not, in their estimation, embody adequate, or any, recognition of and respect for the moral autonomy of the ordinary citizen. And this is found objectionable.

If we are to agree that this is objectionable, we must know enough about what moral autonomy is to know that it is something that urgently requires recognition and respect in any civilized political order. And if the absence of autonomy is to be an objection to Plato, we must agree that his proposed political order, in the Republic, fails to provide this.

Some of this discussion will be about the notion of moral autonomy as such, with its allied ideas of individual freedom, self-determination, human dignity, without any immediate reference to Plato's arguments. Only when we have some reasonable idea of what moral autonomy is supposed to involve can we usefully look at Plato's ideas to see whether these involve recognition of and respect for it, and can we determine whether or not they should. But the governing purpose of the discussion overall is to consider
the justice of the complaint against Plato that he does not take proper account of the moral autonomy of individuals; the discussion of the nature and significance of moral autonomy will be circumscribed by this purpose.

My treatment will have five parts. In the first, I summarise some of the points in Plato's proposals which strike proponents of the importance of individual moral autonomy as particularly untoward. Secondly, I shall present, also in summary form, the objections laid against those points which I want to examine. Third, I shall try to work out from these objections what conception of moral autonomy is being employed in them. I shall subject this implicit conception to critical examination. Fourthly, I shall return to Plato to see how his ideas fare, once we have to hand a critically scrutinised and clarified conception of the nature of moral autonomy - that conception which issues from the argument of section three. Fifth, and finally, I offer some brief comments of a more general kind on the overall significance of controversy on this topic.

I begin, therefore, by outlining some of those points in Plato's views expressed in the Republic which give pause to those committed to the idea that respect for 'moral autonomy', in some sense, must be incorporated in any just and humane political order.