**The Last Leaf: On Knowledge and Moral Knowledge**

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**Background and purpose**

Is there any connection between knowledge and morality? The common starting point approach to knowledge derives from the tripartite model of knowledge as *justified true belief* (KJTB) (Ichikawa and Steup, 2017). This model of knowledge (and its many variations)[[1]](#endnote-1) is characterized, among other things, in its neutrality regarding morality and its disconnectedness from actions (Segvic, 2000; Weiss, 2001; Fine 2003). For example, if S has read many researches on the subject, a KJTB adherent would attribute the knowledge that ‘texting while driving greatly increases the chance of being involved in a fatal car accident’ to S regardless of the fact that S (sometimes) actually texts while driving. From a KJTB point of view, it is not a contradiction.

 This characteristic is due to KJTB's view that *truth* is a property independent from moral and desirable effects. The most familiar example is placebo which, regardless its desirable effects, is considered a fake/false medicine, since the placebo procedure does not contain any *real* medical content. The person may be cured but the procedure was untrue. For this reason, from a KJTB point of view, a person who holds the belief that a pill she took (placebo) has cured her would be considered as lacking knowledge. And this is the reason why, from a KJTB point of view, Johnsy, the sick young woman in the well-known short story ‘The Last Leaf’ by O. Henry (1907) would be considered as having a *lack of knowledge* and the leaf that was painted by the elderly artist Behrman a fake/false leaf even though it cured her.

 This split also exists in schools. It manifests in the division between what is conceived to be learning towards knowledge on the one hand (facts, sciences, theories, technology), and *other* activities, such as writing in the school newspaper, participating on the student council or in sports groups, that are considered to promote morality on the other (Biesta 2010; Cam 2014; Anonymous 2016).

 Unlike readers of Plato who examine knowledge, belief and ignorance in Plato's dialogs from a KJTB perspective, this article is in line with readers like Hadot (1995), Cooper (2012) and Segvic (2000) that suggest a reading of Plato that connects knowledge with moral action.[[2]](#endnote-2) One of the main grounds for the last perspective lies in the following lines from the *Protagoras* that Socrates directs to Protagoras in which Plato[[3]](#endnote-3) distinguished the two perspectives of knowledge to which I refer above:

How are you regards to knowledge? Do you share the view that most people take of this, or have you some other? The opinion generally held of knowledge is something of this sort—that it is no strong or guiding or governing thing; it is not regarded as anything of that kind, but people think that, while a man often has knowledge in him, he is not governed by it, but by something else—now by passion, now by pleasure, now by pain, at times by love, and often by fear; their feeling about knowledge is just what they have about a slave, that it may be dragged about by any other force. Now do you agree with this view of it, or do you consider that knowledge is something noble and able to govern man, and that whoever learns what is good and what is bad will *never* be swayed by anything to act otherwise than as knowledge bids, and that intelligence is a sufficient succor for mankind? (352b-c, my emphasis)

Many readers of Plato, including Aristotle, think that Socrates is wrong here. For in this passage Socrates actually attacks the idea of lack of self-mastery, while the lack of self-mastery is considered to be evident (Dorter, 1997).

 This article is an attempt to give meaning to this inner connection between knowledge and morality. Through a reading of the *Meno*, I draw a moral Platonic perspective of knowledge (moral knowledge MK) that would *not* enable the attribution of knowledge to a person who acts in contradiction to what that person is supposed to know. Such a perspective undermines our common use of the verb ‘to know’. For example, it uncommonly requires us to *deny* the attribution of the knowledge that ‘texting while driving greatly increases the chance of being involved in a fatal car accident’ to S if S (sometimes) actually texts while driving. On the other hand it provides a perspective from which school learning will be regarded as a moral action and not detached from it.

The MK model will be developed through an esoteric reading of Plato, who is regarded by many thinkers throughout history, as one of the prominent esoteric writers (Melzer, 2004). Melzer criteria for justifying esoteric reading include cases when the 'text contains significant problems that, despite one's very best efforts, resist resolution on literal level' (Melzer, 2014, p. 306). On the basis of this approach I will very briefly describe four textual significant problems in the *Meno* and then show how the analysis and model of knowledge that I suggest (MK) and the interpretation of these textual problems coincide.

**Four textual significant problems in the Meno and the model of moral knowledge**

The first textual problem lies in Socrates' first definition of figure while trying to illustrate to Meno how Meno should be thinking of virtue and to define it. ‘Just consider if you [Meno] accept this description of it: figure, let us say, is the only existing thing that is found always following color’ (Meno. 75b). This definition is surprising since while Plato's Socrates had insisted that a definition should express the *eidos* of the concept, its essence, in defining figure as what follows color, he only gives an *indication* of figure, i.e., where one should look when one wants to see figures. The question arises as to what motivates the narrator, Plato, to demand *eidos*, but exemplify a definition without an *eidos* (which is one of the few places where Socrates says he believe it to be true (Meno. 75c)?[[4]](#endnote-4)

 The second significant textual problem is that although Plato's Socrates is of course informed that no one can *tell*, namely put a number to the length of the line on which a square, double in size to the one that is given, would be built, he nevertheless demands the boy *tell* him exactly the length of the line. Then, as if reducing the demand, Socrates suggests the boy ‘only’ *show* the line, turn a finger at it (Meno. 85b, translated by Benjamin Jowett 1871; and see Day, 1994, translation, p. 52). Asking to put a number to that length is an impossible demand since it is an irrational number, and at that time there were no numbers for that kind of length. Plato of course knew it, but still puts the demand to say it in the mouth of Socrates. Why did he do this?

 The third textual problem is situated right after the talk with the boy is ended, where Meno at last states his conviction in the theory of recollection and Socrates responds that he is not confident in most of the points he has made. The only thing he is "determined to do battle" is in the duty of inquiring after what we do not know (Meno. 86b-c). Why Plato had chosen to place a declaration of Socrates that all the theory he had described and defended for the last ten pages or so (theory of recollection) was not something he was confident about (see also Fine, 2003, p. 64)? This declaration of Socrates both undermines all he had tried to do until that very moment, and is prima facie not necessary, since, again, Meno at last has stated his conviction in the theory of recollection.

 Lastly, the fourth textual problem is Socrates’ analogy of knowledge and true-belief to the statues of Daedalus which are so akin to a living reality that they might run away if not bound. What is the meaning of this analogy? What does it say about knowledge vs. true-belief?

Interpretation of these problems reveals the MK perspective on the nature of true-belief and knowledge and their connection to morality.

 I would like to suggest that the *Meno* allows us to see that *the truthfulness of proposition P (or theory T) is derived from its actual leading a person to act towards what will increase goodness in situation C.* For example, assuming that texting while driving is not one of the good possibilities of situation C, and assuming that person S has had the opportunity to identify that it is a bad option, and that S is free to act as she wants, then the belief that S holds when texting while driving is *false* *no matter what its content*. By choosing the bad option in situation C (texting while driving) it follows that S holds false belief. If the action manifests the good, then the belief, or the combination of the many beliefs that led one to perform the chosen possible act (rather than the many others) should be considered as true. Thus, *doing* the good and the right thing in a situation expresses that one has what Plato calls true-belief.

 Knowledge is different from true-belief, even though either possessing true-belief or knowledge one would avoid texting while driving, or get to Larisa as Socrates says (Meno 97a). But although true-belief may lead one to the right and good action, it does not *guarantee* it. This is in contrast to knowledge, which *guarantees* the right and good action in *every* situation. We saw that Plato's Socrates compares true-belief to the statues of Daedalus when they are not bound (Meno. 98a). Just as their animated character may cause them to run away from time to time, so true-beliefs may run away from the consciousness from time to time. *Knowledge* on the other hand is a state in which the true-belief is *bound* in the consciousness. Knowledge manifests in the right and good action under *any circumstances*. One can be hungry, under public pressure, in love, intimidated, tired, very happy, or being awakened from a deep sleep – it does not matter. One will *always,* and under every circumstance, do the right and good thing.

 *Justification* is what makes the difference between true-belief and knowledge. From a KJTB perspective, justification is the empirical cognitive, logical, methodological reason to hold the belief one is holding; the methodological reason that the content of the belief or theory has reached one's mind, so excluding an accident or guess. On the other hand, from the MK perspective the meaning of justification is that the good and just *act* will not be an accidental one or one that is executed only under specific conditions for example being in position of power or within a convenient environment or situation. Conditioned good acts do not derive from knowledge since in a situation in which these specific conditions are not satisfied the person will not act as she should. From MK perspective, a *justified belief* means that the inner compass[[5]](#endnote-5) is not sometimes accurate and sometimes not, or that sometimes a person acts according to it and sometimes not. A *justified* belief, i.e. a *grounded* belief, an *established* belief, a *valid* belief, - a bounded one – is *always* 1) accurately tuned, and 2) the *only* leader of the person's actions and attitude.

 This analysis of knowledge helps to clarify why Socrates cannot attribute the virtue of knowledge to a living person as well as to himself. It also clarifies why, on the other hand, he is so consistent in his behavior and way of life. The suggested analysis of the meaning of knowledge closes this gap. Socrates cannot attribute knowledge to a living person because of his (and everyone’s) ignorance of how a person, including himself, will act in the next unexpected situation, which no one can really anticipate. On the other hand, Socrates pursues knowledge, and therefore his efforts are directed towards being consistent and, as far as he can, always carrying out the right and good action.

 Looking at the story The Last Leaf from the above perspective clarifies O. Henry's (the narrator’s) intuition that the amount of truthfulness of the ‘false’ leaf is greater than that of any other leaf on the bush. Because, from the MK point of view, the ‘true' (KJTB true) leaves and the way they behaved in the stormy weather dragged the situation towards a bad end, an undesirable result,[[6]](#endnote-6) while the ‘false’ (KJTB false) leaf pulled the situation in a good direction.

**Solution of the four textual problems**

 The MK perspective also coincides with and is developed through an interpretation of the four textual problems. Based on the simile of Daedalus statues, I have suggested above an understanding of true-belief as a belief that leads a person to do the right and good thing in situation C, and so see truthfulness as a tool for morality and goodness. I suggested thinking of true-belief as one part of an inner compass that in specific contingent conditions brings an individual to act morally and be good. In this sense there is no different at particular moment from true-belief and knowledge. Yet knowledge is a state of living in which such a compass, a good and true compass become the one and only leader of one's behavior, emotions, state of mind and life in general. This explains the analogy of knowledge to a bound statue that, without this bonding, would probably run away from time to time, and in these moments of running away would be of no help. In a state of knowledge the statue is bound – it cannot run away. This interpretation also explains why, in the ancient Greek legacy, we can only attribute knowledge to a person after that person has passed away. Only then may we assess if that person was *always* doing the good thing.

**The priority of action and attitude over metaphysics**

Moving now to the textual problem of Socrates declaration, I believe that it is reasonable to deduce from it, as from MK model, that the most important thing – what alone has value within itself – is the *moral action*, the way of life in general and the attitude to the unknown real. The amount of KJTB (propositional) truthfulness of a belief or a theory is negligible from Plato's Socrates declaration and from MK perspective. A belief or a theory are true as long as they lead a person to act morally and be good. Moreover it is seen from this fragment that one should be skeptical and unsure regarding the propositional KJTB truthfulness of one's metaphysical beliefs such as the theory of recollection, or other common beliefs Meno expresses.

 If indeed these conclusions can be derived from Socrates’ declaration, then it should no longer surprise us that Plato set this declaration in that specific spot. On the contrary, if the above is a central moral insight of Plato, then he *had* to put this declaration, boldly, at this point. Otherwise one might wrongly deduce, at that particular point, that the theory of recollection and the immortality of the soul are KJTB (propositionally) true while there are reasonable doubts whether it really is. This danger reached its summit at that specific point after the exchange with the boy. Hence doubting its truth is necessary (and not surprising) if one wants to express that good action and good life are *the only* thing that is worthy in itself and not any other thing – a theory or other propositional belief or doctrine – which gets its value only as a secondary element of the good life.

**The ineffability of the good and the role of indicative definitions**

But MK has paradoxical characteristic as well. Although knowledge demands a state of constant holding of a true-belief so that one will always do what is good, our language and other analytic and systematic tools cannot help us to formulate, translate, symbolize it once and for all. We can see it only by direct reasoning that examines and contemplates the situation here and now. I will explain that further by interpreting the first and second textual problems.

 The first problem was why, on the one hand, Socrates demands that a definition should catch the one common essence of all uses of virtue and be the source of their meaning, (the *eidos*), and yet on the other hand defines figure *without* giving its *eidos*, emphasizing that this format of definition by Meno would satisfy his demand. The second textual problem is why Socrates urges the boy to *tell* the number of the length and then adds that if the boy cannot tell the number, he can ‘only’ point at a line that expresses that length, when all the time he is aware that no one can *tell* the length (irrational length) in a number.

 Starting with the last problem, we see that the text is playing with the idea of something that we can see and yet our lingual resolution cannot hold it. As we can recognize the taste of an avocado or the sound of a saxophone but cannot reduce or translate them into words, so the boy may *see* the length of the square's side he and Socrates search, but it is impossible for anyone then to put that specific length in numbers (since it is an irrational length). Even if we were able in the future to reduce the sound of a saxophone or the taste of avocado to specific physical states of the brain or to other physical characteristics to which we can give signs, this reduction would not be able to literally hold and convey what we hear or taste when we hear the saxophone or taste an avocado.

 All the more so regarding moral and ethical life. Despite the fact that MK necessitates holding always the true-belief, and no matter how much we aspire to hold it, neither Socrates nor any other teacher can formulate MK for once and for all (in a law or a commandment) and convey it. Regardless how many aspects of human life we believed we have managed to systemize, it is always us with our ongoing reason who are responsible: for the moral particular decisions we are taking in each situation here and now; for the life we live in general, and for our overall attitude to reality.

 The metaethics that underlie this understanding is ethical intuitionism. According to Huemer (2008) the principle of that approach is that as we form ‘beliefs about the physical world on the basis of sensory appearances’ (the sound of a saxophone or the taste of an avocado), and as we ‘form beliefs about… abstract truths… on the basis of *intellectual* appearances’ such as the law of contradiction, ‘similarly [we grasp] moral truth intuitively […]. [W]e are directly aware of moral facts. […And] our intuitions are merely the form that that awareness takes; they (partly) constitute our awareness of moral truth’ (Huemer, 2008, p. 232). In other words ethical-intuitionism is the idea that ethical and moral facts exist in the same way as physical and logical facts exist. Just as we may perceive that ‘the lemon is yellow’, ‘that this is a sound of a saxophone’, ‘that it can't be that contradictory statements would be true at the same time’, so we perceive moral facts like ‘rape is cruel’. This perception is intuitive; it is direct and cannot be reduced to explanations.[[7]](#endnote-7)

 Therefore, and here is the connection to the first definition of figure, the only way to direct an individual or a group towards ends that would keep them in a state of good-moral attitude to reality, is by an *indicative* *definition* such as the first definition of the figure. Like a compass it does not contain the essence, the *eidos*, of the thing (what the North Pole is for example). It rather gives a sign *when* one is oriented in the right direction, or alternatively when one is drawing away (see also Socrates description of his inner voice, Plato, Apology 31d). And the actual tool that we should develop is our reason – the ‘faculty’ that has the ability to ‘see’ the orientation to the good.

 To sum this up, while the telos of the individual is to establish MK, this knowledge cannot just convey a principle or a formula for MK. In order to grasp what the good deed is in situation C, and then ‘define’ and hold the true-belief that will lead to it, we can use an *indication* regarding where one can see it so one can conduct oneself in that direction. Back to the text then, the analogy goes like this: if one should see figures, then one should be directed to follow colors; if one should ‘see’ virtue, then one should be directed to follow a person that is battling the best that person can in word and deed for the sake of a philosophical life in which one is in an ongoing effort to improve, sharpen, strengthen and empower one's reason and awareness of the good.

**Metaphysical images as a source of motivation to lead a consistent philosophical life**

But if it is not possible and not needed, why does Plato nevertheless describe Socrates in the *Meno* and other dialogs as demanding a definition that holds no less than the *eidos* of the concept? One answer that stems from the suggested reading is that we don't really know that it is impossible. The mission is to try and hold it as well as we can, and so the effort should be always directed towards the best case scenario. Another complementary answer to this question is that by describing Socrates' demand for an *eidos* the text shows us how Socrates gives reason and justification for dialectical and philosophical reasoning, (the same as he does in the case of the story regarding the immortal soul and the theory of recollection).

 This metaphysical construction injects sense and meaning to the (‘unreasonable’ and 'nonsensical') dialectical reasoning. Dialectical reasoning seems prima facie to be unreasonable and illogic. Since on the one hand it undermines one's conventional criteria for truth, good, knowledge and so forth, while at the same time it demands an endless effort to achieve a new understanding of them as if without any criteria, since we had to abandon our original ones. How is it possible to find a criterion without a criterion?[[8]](#endnote-8) By giving a metaphysical account regarding the existence of an *eidos*, the text supplies a reasonable justification for getting started and being involved in a dialectical reasoning. And as Socrates declares afterwards, this activity puts a person in a situation that enables her to live a better life.[[9]](#endnote-9)

 I referred earlier to O. Henry's story The Last Leaf in order to illustrate the idea that what makes a belief true is its ability to lead the person that believes in it to the good. Now we can examine it from an educational perspective. Plato's metaphysics, including the entities of the *eidos*, gain their meaning through their ability to lead the person who believes in them to do the right and good thing. If believing in the existence of an *eidos* that is the source for all the meaning of virtue will help us to lead a philosophical life in which we would take care of our reason (the faculty that sees good) and goodness in general, then *eidos* is true and exists.

 Without a metaphysical belief, it would be unrealistic to expect an effort towards MK from children and grownups alike. And this is the role of the educator as a philosopher, as a metaphysician. She should be capable of creating a true metaphysics that would be the rationale for the good life; she should be able to tell the right story for the right person at the right time so that a belief would be created that would lead that person towards doing good here and now and living good in general.

**Conclusion and implication to school**

The model of moral knowledge (MK) we have arrived at begins in a direct intuition of the right and good optional deed in a certain situation and, as far as possible, in an intuition of the good life in general. It continues in constructing a belief which gains its truthfulness, not from mirroring a specific case in the world, but (as the last leaf) from leading the individual that holds it to achieve a good affinity to reality and/or to do the right and good deed in a certain situation. Knowledge (MK), in contrast to true-belief that can easily run away from the mind (from leading the actions or affinity to reality), is a state in which the true-belief never runs away, i.e. one *always* and under all circumstances (hunger, exhaustion, love, social pressures or threats) does the right and good deed and keeps one's good affinity to reality.

 We also saw three characteristics of the model of MK. Firstly the priority of actions and the overall way of life over ideas or beliefs or metaphysics – the actions and general affinity determine the truthfulness of the belief. Secondly we described the inability to define or formulate the content of MK a-priori and convey it in words from one person to others. One can only "see" it by oneself. Therefore the way to guide a person to "see" the good is either by what I called an indicative definition or, as Socrates brought Meno to participate in a philosophical dialog, by leading the person to an actual participation (actual exercising) in an action which manifests the good. Thirdly, and despite the priority of action and affinity over beliefs, we saw that MK is characterized by its search for a metaphysical narrative or idea (i.e. a belief), the holding of which would create an inner balance and an inner compass that would lead the individual to a life of wisdom and MK.

 How can this model and perspective be applied to schools? Since from an MK perspective the amount of truthfulness of a rationale, a belief, is derived from the amount of goodness our reason "sees" in the *action* that this rationale or belief had led to (in comparison to other possible actions or ways of life); and since the main activity in school is that of learning classical intellectual subject matters, then before observing specific applications to schools we should begin with assessing whether this main activity – learning intellectual subject matters on daily basis (in comparison to other possible activities) – manifests in itself any goodness.

 I would like to claim that it does (at least in the liberal tradition), and I will briefly explain why. Prima facie, learning intellectual subject matter manifests a lesser amount of goodness than, for example, helping others, saving people from cruelty, nursing and curing illnesses of people, animals or the environment, representing the voice of disadvantaged groups, finding a cure for deadly epidemics and so on. But from an MK perspective all these activities first need a reasonable and moral judgment, intuition, which "sees" their moral worth. From an MK perspective we cannot formulate and define in advance what the good is, let alone for each and every situation; therefore we need first to develop a compass, an ability to see what action here and now would direct the situation to manifest the good. Therefore developing a reason that can here and now assess it, is a no less great moral goal than the actual good deed. In fact, it is the main source for all good deeds.

 But one may object and suggest teaching children (grown-ups too) the normative moral code, the traditional or normative *nomos*, a set of "good" actions or way of life. For example "help the disadvantaged", "don't be late", "return a lost object", "help the whales", "obey the law", "don't text while driving", "speak the truth" and so on. But from an MK perspective, while these commandments look perfectly good, we can never be sure that obeying them will be the best deed in *any* circumstance (see for example Socrates' claim regarding returning weapons to a lender, a friend, who went mad, Rep. 1.331c. The same theme of "time for everything" can also be found in Ecclesiastes 3). Hence from an MK perspective, with all the importance of a list of commandments of how to behave and live, for free women and men it is not enough as a substitute for a developed reasoning and an awareness of the here and now situation's possibilities of good action.[[10]](#endnote-10) This is why from an MK perspective, a skilled and experienced reason is the first and the most important tool for morality.

 This idea lies in the canonical texts of the founding fathers of the liberal tradition (Plato and Aristotle) and throughout the history of philosophy. But moreover it has penetrated our everyday lives, and it is being expressed in the high and very special place that knowledge, education and research have in many human societies; in the huge amount of resources that governments and other bodies invest in research and education for all ages; it is expressed in informal fields like open encyclopaedias such as Wikipedia or other educational projects like TED and the billions of entries they have.

 Returning now to the question above: how can MK perspective be applied to schools? First of all, it helps us to recall that, above the many loud voices that call for changing schools and learning, it is learning itself that is the essence of education and schooling. Hence from an MK perspective the aim of school learning is to carry out schooling, i.e., a gathering for learning in itself, in which the students are being directed to "see" the different aspects of reality and to reflect on their place within it. This ongoing state of schooling should establish learning habits of a gradually experienced reason; habits of thinking, contemplation, observation, questioning; habits that will accompany the graduate as a grown-up throughout life.

 This brings us to see that schooling is paradoxical (in a good sense), since while it prima facie aims at outcomes (intellectual skills and acquaintance with many aspects of reality which is usually assessed by tests) it is not the specific outcome that is the final goal. Rather it is the implantation of habits of study and establishing a reason that will accompany life and lead it (i.e. MK). In other words the "outcome" is neither the knowledge (KJTB) that the student demonstrates in the tests nor a classification of students according to their performance, but the state of learning itself, schooling itself – the setting for exercising the *first* moral state.

 Another thing that the MK perspective highlights regarding school is the central role of the teacher. It is not enough for the teacher to declare that there is a correlation between texting while driving and fatal accidents. The teacher should be an exemplar of the love to learn, of experienced reason. As Socrates and other great teachers in the tradition, they should direct themselves to being a living indication of the goodness and truth of reality. The teacher is also the person who should be skilful in finding the right narrative, the right "painting" (as the last leaf) to encourage students to practice their reason and participate in learning.

 Lastly, an MK perspective on school emphasizes that the subject matter, the curriculum, must be general enough and abstract enough so that it will be intellectually effective. Intellectual growth will not be generated from playing chess, polishing nails or surfing. This is too narrow. The curriculum should also include the *history* of chess, *model* of offensive moves; *theory of* cosmetics and the *philosophy of* the beauty; *an analogy* of surfing to other human activities and other life situations. In short, while entering into small details, the curriculum should also create a wider view on reality and hence should be varied and wide (Anonymous, 2016).[[11]](#endnote-11)

 To conclude, school, from a KJTB perspective, is a place where facts and skills (that are true and useful) are learned. Students do not *have to* (morally speaking) do anything special with this knowledge; it is just information and skills ‘one may find useful to have’. From a KJTB perspective, while these facts and skills belong to one sphere, i.e. the sphere of epistemology, knowledge, science, and technology; acting morally belongs to another, i.e. ethics, morals, politics and ‘good-behavior’. How is this split to be reconciled by observing school from an MK perspective?

 From an MK perspective it means firstly that, if learning abstract and contemplative subject matter is the *main activity* of school, then the activity of learning itself i.e. human beings sharpening, strengthening and empowering their reason, is a manifestation of goodness and needs no other justification. Therefore, as opposed to a KJTB perspective, students and human beings in general *have to* (morally speaking) be part of an ongoing learning activity, *have to* be part of a school.

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1. I use the basic-classic model of KJTB and not its later adaptations--which include Gettier's counterexamples--since both the classic and later modes of KJTB derive from a propositional approach to knowledge, to which the following moral knowledge approach to knowledge (MK) is meant to serve as an alternative. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cooper (2012, p 36) points out that knowledge for Socrates has an ‘extreme power’. ‘[I]f you have it, it will […] unwaveringly and irresistibly govern your life […]’. He also states, regarding Plato's Socrates, that ‘understanding the truth about what is good or bad for you inevitably and necessarily leads you to act in the way that is indicated in that knowledge’ (ibid.). Furthermore, Segvic claims, reading Plato, that ‘the virtuous person's actions express his evaluative knowledge’ (Segvic, 2000, p. 38). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. I shall ignore in this article the usual distinctions between Socrates and Plato and relate to the texts as one organic unit of meaning. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. For a different analysis of the problem of Socratic definition, which differs from the reading suggested in this article, see Beversluis, 1974 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. For the connection between developing inner compass and autonomy see Assor (in press). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. I am using here a subjective and consequentialist terminology only for illustrative purposes. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. See also Enoch (2011) on ethical realism. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. This problem is called Meno's Paradox. I will not focus on it since in my reading it is not one of the main problem of the text. For a different understandings of the paradox's place see e.g. Fine (2003), Philips (1948) Weiss (2001), Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. In this sense the ratio between Socrates and Plato is opposed to the one researchers sometimes ascribe to them. While it is common to see Socrates as the folk involved philosopher that is open to the public and in communication with it, and Plato on the other hand as a detached philosopher who ran away from the public to the ivory tower of abstract metaphysics (Rorty 1991; Castoriadis 1997; Humphrey, 2008), in the suggested reading the ratio is the opposite. While Socrates was the uncompromising philosopher who demanded to live philosophical life without giving it a sense to the general public, Plato on the other hand understood that if philosophical lives are the telos, then there needs to be a manageable ladder for the people to get there. The metaphysics he invented, the creation of the *eidos,* is the ladder. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Actually from MK perspective these commandments may be seen as indications, as elements of the compass that reason should consider in each situation in which there is a relevant commandment. But again, it can never substitute reason here and now. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Another aspect of the curriculum, which I will not elaborate upon here, is that since the curriculum is meant to help develop *one* reason, and direct *one* person, it should therefore constantly call for integration. Thus while it will help the student to develop an awareness of the many aspects of reality, the call for integration will help to use this awareness, this reason, as a guide to act. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)