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Abstract

Some researchers who examine the similarities between philosophy and psychology conclude that engaging in philosophy can improve one's mental health, instead of, or in addition to, traditional forms of therapy. This article reinforces this by establishing the relationship between self-knowledge as self-improvement in Plato's dialogues and in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Despite multiple important points of congruence, some authors have rejected the idea that self-knowledge in Plato can be assimilated to self-knowledge in psychotherapy. Here, I argue against this criticism by focusing on three key areas of interest: (a) self-knowledge as improving one's beliefs via objective (nonsubjective) means, (b) self-knowledge as resulting in objective (nonsubjective) outcomes, and (c) self-knowledge as progress towards the Good. I reinforce the link by demonstrating that CBT uses methods which are equally objective as those of the Platonic dialogues. I then continue by claiming that the outcome of self-knowledge in both is also equally objective. Finally, I explore the nature of their relationship. Instead of arguing that self-knowledge in CBT is a modern version of Platonic self-knowledge, I propose that although not intended to, it functions as a preparatory process for one to be able to participate in Platonic self-knowledge.

Keywords

history, philosophy, psychotherapy, scientific progress, theory

Exploring the role philosophy has in psychotherapy contributes to literature which claims that engaging in philosophy can improve one's mental health and well-being (Stammers & Pulvermacher, 2020). The identification of alternative methods of promoting mental well-being is important, in the context of an increase in mental health issues, a lack of resources and long waiting lists for psychotherapy (Richards &

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Suckling, 2009). Increasing awareness of the similarities between philosophy and psychotherapy also highlights a practical role for philosophy and the benefit of lifelong engagement with it (Quickfall, 2021). This article contributes to this attempt by demonstrating similarities between Platonic self-knowledge and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

CBT is a popular form of psychotherapy which emphasises the interactive, mutual effect that thoughts, emotions, and behaviours have on one another. Maladaptive thoughts, feelings, and behaviours result in mental health difficulties. The aim of CBT, therefore, is to alleviate distress by enabling one to better manage these factors and to promote more adaptive ones. It is a directive yet collaborative, time-limited, structured therapeutic approach with the goal of enhancing one's quality of life (A. T. Beck, 1979).

Various critiques of CBT are noted in the literature. These include that it does not take sufficient account of early development (Haverkampf, 2017); it is demanding for clients and not suitable for everyone (Blenkiron, 1999); relevant research has limitations (Leichsenring & Steinert, 2017); it entails a "one size fits all" approach; and it does not sufficiently address comorbidity (Schaeuffele et al., 2021).

Despite these potential shortcomings, I focus on CBT because it is considered, by some, the golden standard of therapy (David & Cristea, 2018). It is a primary treatment option for common mental health disorders (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2011), with a strong evidence base (Hofmann et al., 2012); it is comparable with pharmacological intervention and often has longer lasting results (Cuijpers & Gentili, 2017). CBT is overall an influential tradition within psychological therapy, and it focuses on self-knowledge and self-improvement, which are prima facie themes of the Platonic dialogues.

As Platonic dialogues are part of philosophy but not the only form of philosophy, so CBT is a form of psychotherapy but not the only one. My conclusions, therefore, about the relationship between CBT and Plato's dialogues may not apply to therapy and philosophy more generally. Similar comparisons, however, have taken place with other ancient philosophers, for example the Stoics (Robertson, 2018) and Aristotle (Lee, 2008). I have chosen Plato because self-knowledge is prevalent in his dialogues, and it has many commonalities with self-knowledge in CBT. It is not clear, however, whether these similarities are deeply rooted and essential or only superficial. Also, if there is a strong link between the two, what is the nature of this relationship?

In this article, I clarify the scene by examining arguments which oppose a substantial link between the two. As a starting point for my case, I present Rowe's (2010) objection to the idea that Platonic self-knowledge is related to self-knowledge in psychotherapy. I then focus on two aspects of Rowe's argument, which represent the foundation of his objection.

The first aspect relates to objectivity in method, and it involves a comparison of the nature of Plato's dialectical process to the psychotherapeutic process, as well as the role of the individual in each. I demonstrate that Rowe uses a limited account of the nature of psychotherapy and therefore reaches an inaccurate conclusion regarding its relationship with Plato's dialectic process.

The second aspect relates to the Good or the end, towards which each process of self-knowledge is directed and particularly whether these are equally objective. This

criticism suggests that Platonic self-knowledge leads to knowledge of the Good, which is objective, independent of all individuals. The outcome of self-knowledge in psychotherapy, on the other hand, is portrayed as being strictly personal and subjective, related solely to the individual (Rowe, 2010). My response to this is that Platonic self-knowledge has a subjective and an objective aspect, which *similarly* applies to self-knowledge in CBT. In other words, I will demonstrate that *if* one considers Platonic self-knowledge to have an objective aspect, then one should accept that CBT has an objective aspect for analogous reasons.

In the final section, I focus on the nature of this relationship. I do not believe that the only way to perceive the link is by assuming that self-knowledge in CBT is a modern version of Platonic self-knowledge. Instead, I propose an alternative, which is that self-knowledge in CBT is a lower stage of self-improvement, which can function as a preparatory process or a requirement for one to be able to participate in Platonic self-knowledge. In this case, the aim of both would be self-improvement in the direction of the same ultimate Good.

Self-knowledge: Points of convergence between Plato's dialogues and CBT

Before proceeding, I shall present three aspects of self-knowledge which will facilitate a better understanding of my main argument, and which are common between Plato's dialogues and CBT.

Self-knowledge is an integral part of the theoretical foundation of Plato's dialogues

It is an integral part of the theoretical foundation of Plato's philosophy, and it involves improvement. In *Laches* (Plato, 1992/1997i, p. 673), Nicias comments that whatever Socrates' conversations appear to be about, they are ultimately always about oneself. This is further implied in Socrates' claim that "the unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato, 1981/1997a, p. 33) and the Delphic inscription "Gnothi seauton," or "know thyself," which is highlighted in the dialogues (Jowett, 1892). Due to the prevalence of the topic of self-knowledge in the dialogues, German and Ambury (2018) consider it to be the intersection or the joining element of Plato's work.

In Plato, self-knowledge is in essence self-improvement. It is beyond the purpose of this paper to provide a detailed analysis of the argument that self-knowledge is self-improvement. A few points, however, are worth mentioning to support my choice of interpretation:

- Conscious acknowledgement of one's weaknesses involves a psychological inclination towards doing something about them (even if one decides not to; McTighe, 1984).
- By improving one's knowledge of oneself, one is automatically a better version of oneself (Gerson, 2018).

- Ignorance prevents a meaningful life, so any reduction of ignorance is a step towards improvement (Bell, 2018).
- An increase in self-knowledge (just as in any kind of knowledge) is a form of epistemic improvement, even if it only has the form of opening one's mind to alternatives (Hyland, 2018).
- Finally, the more one knows about oneself, the more one understands others entailing an improvement in one's ability to empathise (McCoy, 2018).

Self-knowledge is similarly foundational in CBT. It is both an integral part of CBT and a requirement for it to have its modifying effects (Elkin et al., 1989). Clients learn and habituate skills, like thought and emotion monitoring, which directly enhance their self-awareness. This is key to self-constitution and improvement (Greenberger & Padesky, 2015). In addition to this, all skills and discussions in CBT facilitate self-knowledge indirectly, and therefore it is developed throughout the therapeutic process.

Self-knowledge entails knowledge of what is good

Self-knowledge entails knowledge of what is good, since for one to be able to recognise one's limitations and strengths, one will need to have a reference of comparison (Gerson, 2018). In Plato, ultimate, true self-knowledge would require one to have knowledge of the Forms (e.g., true Beauty, Courage, Wisdom, Justice) and the ultimate true Good (which is linked to the experience of Eudaimonia; Plato, 1992/1997k, pp. 1128–1130). In CBT, self-awareness also requires an understanding of one's goals (Law & Jacob, 2013), which are perceived to entail an improved version of oneself, for example a less distressed version. By furthering their self-knowledge, clients become more aware of how to improve their circumstances. This involves becoming more aware of what is *better*, and naturally entails knowledge of what is *good*.

It is worth noting the difference between good as stages of improvement and the true Good, which is the ultimate end of improvement. Gerson (2018) elaborates by stating that each time one believes or desires something, one constitutes a self which is then replaced by a new self when the belief or desire changes. One hopes that the new self is an epistemically improved version. If one was to continue to improve, then ultimately, one would become one's *true* self which represents *true* belief and *true* desire both of which relate to the ultimate *true* Good. I shall further explain this in the section on the objectivity of outcome, however it is worth mentioning at this point that one's perception of improvement, or of what is good at any given point, may not be accurate in terms of the ultimate Good. One does not know for sure, since nobody knows the true nature of the Forms or the Good. As self-knowledge epistemically improves, however, one will come closer to obtaining knowledge of them.

Self-knowledge is a social process in its nature and outcomes

Finally, although the term self-knowledge appears to be an individualistic endeavour, it is rather a social process in its nature and outcomes. It entails collaboration with others,

since a requirement of Platonic self-knowledge is the dialectic process and, in CBT, the therapeutic relationship (Leahy, 2008). In both, self-knowledge also improves interpersonal relationships (Gresham, 1985; McCoy, 2018) and in Plato's dialogues it involves exercising virtue, which is achieved in relation with others.

In the context of these comments, I shall now present the main sections of my argument which include objectivity in the method of self-knowledge, objectivity in the goals of self-knowledge, and my understanding of the relationship between Platonic self-knowledge and CBT.

Self-examination: Objectivity in method

An important aspect of self-knowledge as self-improvement is that it involves the correction of one's beliefs. This is the case for both Platonic self-knowledge and self-knowledge in CBT. Rowe (2010) focuses on the *Apology* (Plato, 1981/1997a) and *Phaedrus* (Plato, 1995/1997e) when discussing self-examination and self-knowledge. He emphasises the importance of knowing what is really good (e.g., knowledge and a knowledgeable life) and what is really bad (e.g., ignorance and a life built on ignorance), to be able to approach and obtain the one, and avoid the other (Rowe, 2010, p. 207).

Rowe considers self-examination to be a way of accessing the truth about oneself, by discarding false beliefs and establishing true ones. In other words, it is the examination of one's belief-sets. The "truth" of these beliefs does not mean that the person truly believes them, rather it means that these are actually true (Rowe, 2010). One way of assessing beliefs is via Socratic *elenchus* during which a thesis is presented and examined by questioning. According to this process, a thesis is put into question when its negation is reached by the answerer. This process resembles Socratic questioning in CBT, during which questions often lead one to doubt previous beliefs by realising that there is an inconsistency in them (J. S. Beck, 2020; Clark & Egan, 2015).

Additionally, it is shown in *Alcibiades* (Plato, 1997f, pp. 587–591) that knowing ourselves is knowing our souls (instead of our bodies or a combination of these two) and since, for Plato, the good of the soul is reduced to knowledge, it seems that tending to our souls and therefore ourselves requires us to correct our beliefs. Rowe sees this as a kind of individual *intellectual therapy*. He maintains that from this interpretation if there is "therapy" involved here it is the

> therapy of the academic tutorial (run by a friendly, beneficent, but finally research-obsessed tutor, who thinks that finding out what the truth is, is more important than anything else); it is not at all that of the psychiatrist's—or the psychotherapist's—couch, and anyone who is tempted to assimilate the latter to Socratic practice has simply not understood Plato. (Rowe, 2010, p. 210)

However, in making this statement, Rowe appears to be taking a limited approach to the nature of psychotherapy. This seems plausible when taking into consideration a previous statement of his that knowledge of the truth of beliefs is

nothing individual, in the sense of anything personal, involved; the subject is not Socrates, with all his peculiarities, his history, his traumas, and his genetic inheritance, but a set of ideas and a programme that, as he has proposed, should be taken up by everybody, because—Socrates claims—that will enable them to live better lives—that is to achieve the happiness that we all inevitably want. (Rowe, 2010, p. 210)

A point worth making is that in the first quote Rowe (2010) states, "that finding out what the truth is, is more important than anything else" (p. 210), however in the second quote it seems that this is actually a condition for something more important which is to "enable them to live better lives" (p. 210). This further emphasises the nature of the importance of self-improvement in Platonic and psychotherapeutic self-knowledge.

Based on these quotes, it is implied that the difference between Platonic self-knowledge and that of psychotherapy is that the latter is only interested in these personal aspects of the self. In other words, the psychotherapeutic method is subjective whereas the Platonic method is objective. This could be the case for some types of therapy, for example, psychoanalysis and psychodynamic or humanistic approaches; however, in CBT a lot of focus is directed towards the empirical truth of a client's beliefs (Greenberger & Padesky, 2015). This indicates that it is not subjective in terms of the object of inquiry (the object is not the subject) or the method of inquiry (empiricism and rational deliberation). In both CBT and Plato, one holds a personal belief or subjective opinion; however, the focus is on objectively evaluating the truth (and/or value) of that belief.

It is not uncommon for people to equate all psychotherapy to a type of Freudian psychoanalysis; however, this is not the case for most contemporary forms of psychotherapy, particularly not CBT (A. T. Beck, 1979) and not in terms of the function of clients' self-knowledge or disclosure (Farber, 2006). The process of CBT and collaborative empiricism in the context of self-knowledge and cognitive restructuring is a lot more like Rowe's (2010) idea of an academic tutorial of finding out what is the truth, than he acknowledges. In collaboration with the therapist, clients are encouraged to explore their beliefs based on observations of empirical data. It is a process which focuses on evidence founded in one's environment, interactions, and rationality (Tee & Kazantzis, 2011). The truths which it aims to identify are not solely personal, idiosyncratic, based on a person's history or traumas and genetic inheritance, as noted by Rowe (2010). In terms of objectivity in method, the process is equally objective as that of Platonic self-knowledge. As A. T. Beck (1979) mentions:

The overall strategy of cognitive therapy may be differentiated from the other schools of therapy by its emphasis on the empirical investigation of the patient's automatic thoughts, inferences, conclusions, and assumptions. We formulate the patient's dysfunctional ideas and beliefs about [themselves], [their] experiences and [their] future into hypotheses and then attempt to test the validity of these hypotheses in a systematic way. (p. 7)

This is not to say that a CBT therapist would not show any interest in personal factors. In CBT, these aspects of the client will be examined so that one can receive a possible explanation for one's maladaptive mental states and false beliefs. By making sense of one's difficulties via a formulation or a "personal story," one will feel relief and more in

control. The client will also be more inclined to participate in the therapeutic process and to make necessary changes (Grant et al., 2008). In other words, these personal factors function as enabling, motivating factors which also clarify the person's difficulties and the underlying causes of them.

This is then followed or accompanied by an empirical, nonpersonal, search for alternative true beliefs based on evidence, more informed knowledge of situations, other people and one's own biases and errors. A brief example in Judith S. Beck (2020) is of a man who believes that he is incompetent. As a task, they decide that he will note down and take photos of things that he does in the week, as empirical data against which they will evaluate the belief "I am incompetent." He noted things like paying the bills and helping someone fix a leak (p. 306). This part of the process is nonpersonal because the evidence identified is empirical, free from personal bias and therefore objective, or at least as objective as the Platonic process of achieving self-knowledge through dialogue.

Although Rowe (2010) believes that he is opposing the link between Platonic self-knowledge and CBT, he may alternatively be providing a route linking the two. This function of personal histories in CBT is in congruence with Rowe's (2010) concluding remark:

> But however that may be, here too there is no trace of that thoroughly modern idea that the key to life lies in identifying our personal histories and coming to terms with whatever it is that makes us uniquely ourselves. For Socrates, and for Plato, what we uniquely are, or have become, remains a subject of supreme indifference, except to the extent that it may prevent us from becoming what we could be: that is, becoming as like the gods—that is, as wise—as it is possible for human beings to be. (p. 214)

In other words, the only reason one would look at oneself is to facilitate self-improvement. By examining oneself, one becomes aware of one's location in relation to the Good, and one can identify what needs to be done to better oneself. In CBT, these personal factors help to identify the reason why the person is struggling. In other words, what is preventing one from being what one could be. In terms of CBT treatment, however, these personal factors are not as important as the empirically based correction of one's beliefs when it comes to self-improvement.

So far, I have argued that Rowe (2010) denies the similarities of Platonic self-knowledge and psychotherapy because of the limited perspective he takes on the nature of the psychotherapeutic process and the role of the individual within it. However, even if one accepts that the process of self-knowledge in CBT is objective, one might still be convinced that the outcome of self-knowledge is exclusively objective in Plato. For this reason, I will now defend the idea that self-knowledge in CBT has an equally objective outcome even though it does not necessarily derive from a metaphysical theory.

The good: Objectivity in end goals

When considering, as previously discussed, that the end goal of Platonic self-knowledge is to reach knowledge of the ultimate Forms and the Good, it seems that there is a lot more to Rowe's (2010) argument in terms of objectivity of outcomes. Rowe is

not the only person who denies the therapeutic value of Plato's dialogues. Martha Nussbaum (1994), for example, is even more extreme in her opposition to this when she argues that since the Good is unknown, objective, and unattainable, it is also irrelevant and useless to humans. I disagree with this and as Richard Kraut (1995) comments in his critique of Nussbaum, it is "preposterous for anyone to take Plato to be saying that 'ethical norms are what they are quite independently of human beings'" (p. 614). He mentions the Republic as an example where justice is related to the tripartite soul of humans. The Forms of justice, courage, temperance, and wisdom are closely linked to human lives, as is the method of improving one's knowledge of them, as I shall demonstrate.

In terms of outcome objectivity, self-examination in Plato's dialogues is aimed at ultimate truths which would be the same for all people whereas, according to Rowe, in psychotherapy, the truths are considered individual and thus entirely different. I do not think that this is the case. Instead, I argue that the truth and good in the context of CBT and self-improvement are no less objective than in Plato's dialogues.

In stating that they are both objective, I am not making or denying a normative assumption. I cannot present an in-depth discussion of the fact–value distinction due to space restrictions, however I believe that my argument regarding objectivity still stands whether one believes that the Forms or Good are normative in themselves or not. The elements identified as objective in Plato's dialogues and CBT are so both because their truth is independent of one believing them to be true, and because self-knowledge in CBT can be expressed by concepts that belong to a common or publicly shared scheme of things (Davidson, 2001, p. 8).

I would also like to clarify that the context of this argument is the *current* understanding of the ultimate aim of both types of self-knowledge. In agreement with Rowe (2010), in Plato ultimate self-knowledge is discovering the Forms and the Idea of Good and it is not expected that anyone will ever discover them. Even if some people manage to reach knowledge of them, they will constitute a very small minority. For everybody else, including Socrates, self-knowledge is about improving one's position in relation to these.

Regarding this, Rowe points out that in the *Charmides* (Plato, 1992/1997h) it is not established that anyone can obtain the kind of knowledge required or what its relationship would be to the substantive knowledge of good and bad; however, as shown in the *Apology* (Plato, 1981/1997a), this does not stop Socrates from trying. He also mentions that various other dialogues indicate that intellectual progress takes place without one needing to have hypotheses about the origins of the soul or the nature of learning (Rowe, 2010, pp. 209–210). In *Phaedo* (Plato, 1977/1997b, pp. 62a–69e), Socrates explains why a philosopher should welcome death, which is the separation of the body from the soul. The primary reason is that the body prevents a philosopher from reaching the Forms or Good: "as long as we have a body and our soul is fused with such an evil we shall never adequately attain what we desire, which we affirm to be the truth" (Plato, 1977/1997b, p. 66b).

I mention these points to strengthen the argument that progress in self-knowledge does not require comprehensive knowledge of a metaphysical theory of Forms or the Good. In other words, Plato's view that self-knowledge is a good is not dependent on the premise that the forms are real metaphysical entities that exist independently of the minds that know them, instead of concepts or anything else one could imagine. Platonic

enquiry then, is about trying to figure out how to improve one's relation with these, or one's understanding of them, without knowing exactly what they are.

The fact, therefore, that in CBT self-knowledge does not involve an elaborate theory of what the ultimate good is, should not be considered an indication of its qualitative difference from Platonic self-knowledge. CBT does not make the kind of metaphysical commitments that it is assumed Plato does, but also it does not deny or reject them, and it would not be purposeful if it did. Both aim at overcoming the impact of distorted beliefs as part of the pursuit of improvement or alleviation from distress or ignorance (so that one can live a better life). There is no reason to believe that the ultimate Good in the one is different to that in the other (since we do not know what it is exactly in either). On the other hand, there are reasons to believe that they are similar due to other similarities in method and short-term goals like examining and correcting beliefs to improve.

The question then arises: "if knowledge is possible, as Socrates seems to propose, even while suggesting that no one actually has it, then how would we know it if we came across it, and what would guarantee its status as knowledge?" (Rowe, 2010, p. 211). Rowe implies that this can be answered by the theory of recollection (Plato, 1977/1997b, pp. 72a–77e); however, it might be the case that we do not need to answer this question. In line with wisdom being the activity of dialectical enquiry, perhaps it is just a mode of living, according to which we are open to alternatives and progressing without being sure about anything. In other words, the closest thing to a criterion of progress is one's attitude to enquiry and knowledge. Certainty is not given, but according to Plato and CBT, progress is made by continuing to examine one's beliefs and to change them if alternative ones are better founded.

Relating to this, in the *Republic* book 10 (Plato, 1992/1997k), Socrates uses the analogy of the sea god Glaucus to describe the soul. It is hard for anyone to see the true image of this god because it has been distorted, some of its parts crushed, and it is covered with seaweed, shells, and stones. Similarly, the soul is covered with many evils. Therefore, to discover its true nature, one must look somewhere else, in particular to its

> philosophy or love of wisdom. We must realise what it grasps and longs to have intercourse with, because it is akin to the divine and immortal and what always is, and we must realise what it would become if it followed this longing with its whole being, and if the resulting effort lifted it out of the sea in which it now dwells, and if the many stones and shells (those which have grown all over it in a wild, earthy and stony profusion because it feasts at those so-called happy feastings on earth) were hammered off it. Then we'd see what its true nature is. (Plato, 1992/1997k, p. 1215)

Similarly, in CBT, clients can make reasoned judgements about what is right or wrong, and how to self-improve, via discussion and rational deliberation, which will also draw from societal norms, instinct, general concepts about the ideal and mental well-being, without having definite knowledge of ultimate truths. In this case, hammering off the shells would be analogous to the process of discarding clients' false beliefs. In other words, one does not need to know what is underneath to be able to make progress.

Self-knowledge, therefore, in both CBT and Plato's dialogues is about improving oneself in light of ideals which as ultimate end goals are not subjective, rather they apply to all. It is worth pointing out that one does not have a perfect definition of any of these ideals. This, however, does not mean that one cannot make progress in light of them. A useful example is that of well-being. Scholars have offered various definitions in terms of emotions, functioning, resilience, engagement, and competence, good relationships, contributing to a community, even Aristotelian Eudaimonia; some focus on a societal perspective and others on the subjective experience of it (Huppert, 2014). Despite the complexity of the term and the disagreement around the definition of well-being, people continue to use the term and to act and make improvements in light of a general understanding of what it entails.

It is possible that both CBT and Plato are mistaken in the direction and/or the methods they recommend. Self-knowledge as self-improvement in both cases involves processes like exploring thoughts, being open to alternative beliefs, strengthening one's ability for rational enquiry, and looking at empirical evidence to approach things in a more objective way. It might turn out that the path to self-improvement is a very different one, for example, it could be that one should cultivate one's emotions in a different way, maybe by prioritising empathy or love over rational objective deliberation. One cannot be sure at this point, however, this important question is beyond the scope of this paper. Here I do not intend to prove that they are right, only to strengthen the link between them.

As Rowe (2010) notes, everyone wants the real good; the difficulty is to establish what that is in any set of circumstances. For the time being, it is sufficient that one is on the right path towards self-knowledge. Drawing on the notion of practicable happiness in Penner and Rowe (2005), Rowe states:

> It might be tempting to suppose that knowing what is good/bad for me should count as knowledge about myself. But that would be to presuppose not only (1) that what is good/bad for me is specific to me, but (2) that the way for me to be happy may be different from the way(s) in which other people will be happy; and while Socrates might agree to (1), insofar as what is practicably happy-making for a person in any one set of circumstances may be different from what is practicably happy-making for another person in a different set of circumstances, we have no grounds for supposing, and good grounds for not supposing, that he would agree to (2). Were he to have accepted (2), it would be hard to understand, for example, why he should have put so much faith in philosophical argument, which seems capable of getting rather little purchase on what makes one person happy as opposed to another—if indeed there is such a thing. (Rowe, 2010, p. 207)

Therefore, in the quest of correcting one's beliefs, he notes that it is about individual beliefs; however, when talking about the most important subjects, those that affect the quality of one's life, true beliefs will end up being common to all (Rowe, 2010, p. 203).

All people are individual and unique in their personal circumstances and therefore in their distance from, or their relationship with, happiness or the Good. Therefore, as is acknowledged by Rowe, the support that each person needs as well as what is good for each person, is individual and personal, but the ultimate goal remains objective and common to all. There is no reason to believe that mental well-being is different in this respect.

People may take different routes to approach well-being, due to their different needs, but ultimately, it (or its perfect form) is common for all people. In CBT, for example, therapy with a person who is experiencing an acute episode of depression will be significantly different to that with one who has anger management issues. In both cases however, one is trying to regulate one's emotions, to reduce distress, to regain control, and to improve one's quality of life.

In this context, I believe that the good in CBT, in the direction of which clients are improving, is just as objective as it is in Plato. As Belliotti (2004, p. 5) points out, happiness for Socrates is a well-ordered and balanced soul which results in a virtuous character and moral action. This idea of a balanced soul as a goal resembles mental well-being, the structure of which would not vary significantly between individuals. CBT involves beliefs about happy-making goods which are individual, but the more important beliefs, examples of which include values, well-being, happiness, morality, and self-control, will be similar for all and if they differ, this will represent a difference in level of understanding or insight/deliberation, instead of a difference in what these actually are for the person, or for humanity.

Considering a relevant example, someone might decide that for oneself, virtue is being successful at one's career. This does not mean that this is a virtue for everyone or that it is a virtue at all. It is one's personal opinion about what a virtue is. However, this also does not mean that an objective "common set of virtues" does not exist. It could just mean that this person's position in relation to the common and true set of virtues is not the same as someone else's. Also, since Socrates' dialogues do not often make much progress, we should not demand that CBT does.

Further supporting evidence can be found in the type of questions that CBT therapists ask. They are often focused, for example, on (a) what one values, (b) how one should live, (c) how one should interact, and (d) how does one control one's emotions. All these topics resemble Platonic type questions. Socrates usually examines convictions starting off with what one of the virtues is. In other words, the questions will be directly related to a virtue or an idea, for example what justice is (Plato, 1992/1997k, p. 975), or courage (Plato, 1992/1997i, pp. 675–682), or whether it is worse to do injustice or to suffer it (Plato, 1987/1997j, pp. 813–824).

In CBT, the therapist will not usually ask directly about these topics; however, they may be explored indirectly. For example, clients may not state their ideas about what injustice is, however, when talking about a distressing event in which they felt that someone had been unfair they could end up in a discussion about whether it is ok to be unfair, why one might be unfair, or whether or not they would rather be that type of person. In this case, the dialogue with the therapist would resemble that of Socrates. To clarify, I shall use a clinical example:

A woman became depressed when she did not get the higher paying position she had been working hard towards. This trigger for her depressive state is explored through Socratic questioning in CBT. This could take numerous directions; however, I shall present two.

First, perhaps she perceives this as rejection, which triggers her underlying core belief that she is unworthy, and she is embarrassed because everybody knows that she failed. Further questioning might bring her to discover the epistemically improved truth that her

worth is not dependent on the opinions of people who may not be wise on the topic. Although therapy might end before extensive examination of "what makes a person worthy" takes place, it is not unreasonable to think that if this mode of Socratic questioning in CBT were to continue, it may lead to truths concerning human worth, virtues, and wisdom which are closer to the Forms and ultimately to the Good, which would be common to all who can reach them.

Alternatively, perhaps she really wanted to buy a house. She believes that without one, she is not bringing her children up adequately and they will be deprived and disadvantaged because of this. Using Socratic questioning, the therapist will collaboratively explore the truth of these beliefs with her and this discussion could focus on why the house is so important, what it means to provide security and safety to children, her values, what is important in the upbringing of children, what they need, it could also look at the amount of happy and successful people whose parents did not own a house and the amount of people in adverse circumstances whose parents did own a house. Again, it is evident that these topics are not solely personal and neither are the conclusions reached.

In both cases, the discussion explores areas and progresses to realisations that are not subjective or unique to the woman. If people differ in their therapeutic realisations, that only represents the variety of positions people can have in relation to the Forms, ultimate truths, mental well-being, or happiness.

In another example of a young man with a phobia of spiders, in conjunction with graded exposure therapy, the therapist and client could also collaboratively explore whether the client's fear of spiders is valid. The purpose here is not to determine whether the client himself is justified in fearing them, because "with all his peculiarities, his history, his traumas, and his genetic inheritance" (see above, regarding Rowe, 2010, p. 210), he as an individual might be entirely justified in fearing them. Instead, the therapist and the client will explore what objective reasons people have for fearing spiders, what the intensity of their fear should be in each case, and how they should react as "a set of ideas and a programme that, should be taken up by everybody, because that will enable them to live better lives" (see above regarding Rowe, 2010, p. 210).

Circumstances may differ and therefore so will the conclusions. For example, it is not the same for one living in a flat in central London as it is for someone living in rural Australia who knows that there are spider species in his environment whose bites are objectively dangerous to humans. However, superseding notions of courage, being sensible in the face of risks, and having self-control (analogous to structures or forms of virtues), are common to all. Ideas about virtues in either case would apply to all people. Therefore , it is not unreasonable to argue that part of the purpose of self-knowledge in CBT is to identify what the "virtue," or virtuous action is in each case. "Progress making" tools include Socratic questioning, rational deliberation, social norms, and use of authority figures, like the dialectic process in Plato.

Objectivity is, therefore, not exclusive to Platonic self-knowledge, but it is also an important part of self-knowledge in CBT. Then the question arises: what exactly is the relationship between the two forms of self-knowledge?

Self-knowledge in cognitive behavioural therapy and Plato's dialogues: Two levels on a spectrum

My argument so far has demonstrated that there is a strong link between these two types of self-knowledge; however, it is not clear what the nature of this relationship is. One could say that due to their similarities, self-knowledge in CBT is a contemporary form of Platonic self-knowledge; however, this is not the only option. In this section, I argue that both are on the same spectrum of progress (with innumerable diversions) towards the Good; however, people engaging in CBT may be on a lower stage or level on the spectrum. In congruence with this, I argue that self-knowledge in CBT can function as a preparatory process for Platonic self-knowledge (but not necessarily).

In other words, Plato and CBT differ in terms of the distance their typical interlocutors have from the Forms and the Good. To be able to participate in Platonic philosophical examinations, one must have already advanced to a certain point on the "spectrum," or to be at that point due to innate personal qualities. CBT is a process that can help one reach this point by introducing one to the process, enabling one to regulate one's emotions, and enhancing one's ability to think flexibly. However, just because someone has engaged in CBT, this does not mean that they will get far in Platonic dialogues. It is not a sufficient or necessary condition to engage in platonic type self-knowledge, it is simply an optional step one could take.

If movement on the spectrum is flexible, then it should be clear in the Platonic dialogues that interlocutors can improve and deteriorate in their capacity for philosophical investigation. This is demonstrated in *Theaetetus* (Plato, 1992/1997c, p. 167), where Socrates mentions that some people who associate with him may seem in the beginning to be ignorant but, as time passes, some are able to make progress. Also, when people stop associating with him prematurely, they forget what they have learned. He describes his role in the dialectic process as that of a midwife, but instead of delivering children, he helps people to bring their thoughts to life. Some people who did not understand Socrates' role in their progress, left him prematurely, resulting in a miscarriage of whatever else was in them, and neglect and loss of the "children" he helped them give birth to (Plato, 1992/1997c, pp. 166–168).

In other sections, one can indirectly imply that interlocutors differ in their location on the spectrum due to being "suitable" or not, as determined by Socrates' inner voice. This daimonion would often warn him against collaborating with people who are not suitable or ready for his discussions. In *Theages* (Plato, 1997g, pp. 637–638), Socrates explains that his inner voice or this spiritual entity, makes these decisions, partly based on whether the person will benefit from the association. Not all people that associate with him are able to improve. Some cannot benefit at all; others benefit for a while but then fall back and others benefit for life and continue to improve and self-constitute accordingly (approaching knowledge of the Forms). Similarly, not all clients are suitable for CBT (Blenkiron, 1999). This is because some would not benefit from it, others benefit and then relapse, and others continue to use the techniques for a lifetime.

One objection at this point is that instead of this indicating different levels on a spectrum of progress, some people may not have the right personality for the dialectic process. In this case, if personality traits are unchangeable, they will never reach the level of

"readiness" or "suitability" for Socratic examination. Similarly, some people will never benefit from CBT (McLellan et al., 2016). People who cannot participate, could be considered as lacking basic tools including the ability to think flexibly.

There are, however, indications in Plato's dialogues that suitability for the dialectic process is not dependent on unchangeable personality features (leaving aside cases of permanent intellectual disability). One example of this is in *Alcibiades* (Plato, 1997f, pp. 558–560), where Socrates states that he had been avoiding the protagonist previously because his daimonion would not let him associate with him. He continues "I think the god didn't let me talk to you because the conversation would have been pointless. But now he has told me to, because now you will listen to me" (Plato, 1997f, p. 560). Now that Alcibiades is ready, Socrates is willing to converse with him. This shows that one's "suitability" status can change. In any case, even if some people will never be suitable for CBT or the dialectic process, this does not affect my argument. The idea of a spectrum, and my argument regarding the relationship between the two forms of self-knowledge would still stand for people who can participate in these processes.

In support of there being criteria that need to be met for one to be ready to associate with Socrates, there are excerpts that further facilitate the clarification of what these criteria are and how to meet them. One example of this, mentioned by Socrates, is that, "a human being must understand speech in terms of general forms, proceeding to bring many perceptions together into a reasoned unity" (Plato, 1995/1997e, p. 527). Some attributes which are required, include that one must be able to think and be able to discuss and understand notions, ideas, other people and situations, and the ability to self-reflect. Two suitability criteria have thus emerged so far which can be developed in CBT. The first is that one is able and likely to continue to progress independently after the association. The second is that one has acquired basic cognitive skills necessary for the dialectic process.

Another criterion is indicated in *Timaeus* (Plato, 1997l), where the soul is initially without intelligence because of the influence of emotions. The soul of the educated becomes rational but it is not whole unless it can function in life (Plato, 1997l, p. 1247). In other words, one can make intellectual progress, and part of this gradual process includes moderation of the emotions. Mental health difficulties are often attributed to emotional dysregulation and a significant part of CBT's goals of therapy include this kind of moderation. Another overall aim of CBT is to help clients to function more adaptively in life. In other words, CBT uses Socratic questioning and other techniques to help clients improve their self-knowledge, in part to enable them to function in life and to regulate their emotions, both of which are requirements and part of the initial stages of the soul becoming rational.

In another section in *Timaeus* (Plato, 1997l), which points towards ways of improvement, and which also mentions mental health difficulties, Socrates speaks about the biological basis of mental disorders and of the role of upbringing, education, society, and peers. Here it is stated that, although madness is not the fault of the person experiencing it, one can still try to change one's circumstances with the help of upbringing, studies, and pursuits. In his introduction to *Timaeus*, Jowett (1892, p. 408) claims that in this source, passions are caused by physical factors; however, just as they are increased by bad education and laws, thus they can be decreased by good education and laws.

Furthermore, in the *Sophist* (Plato, 1993/1997d), when people's souls are in a poor condition, the cause of this is disagreement between one's beliefs and desires, anger and pleasures, reason and pain. One's soul can be cleansed by discarding this disagreement (Plato, 1993/1997d, p. 248), showing again that people can gradually improve their intellectual status and that the difficulties experienced by people in the "lower" stages of the spectrum, are often related to their emotions.

In the *Sophist* (Plato, 1993/1997d), teaching is considered the right "treatment," or, in line with my argument, the method of improving on the spectrum. It is worth noting that according to Plato, there is ignorance in the form of "not knowing," and ignorance in the form of "not knowing but thinking that one knows" (p. 248), which is the worst form. The second kind is more difficult to treat because people do not tend to be willing to learn something they think they know. In these cases, teaching takes the form of cross-examination to reveal contradictions in one's beliefs so that one realises that one does not know. For the cleansing of the soul to be successful, learning needs to be effective and this will not happen until all the opinions that interfere with learning have been removed.

This implies that a necessary step or a criterion to learn from Socrates' dialectic is to be liberated from previous false convictions and have an open mind. This is something which is aimed at and frequently achieved in CBT. An important question that the therapist attempts to answer when developing a treatment plan is what is preventing the client from learning. When clients first engage in the process, they have numerous distorted beliefs and attitudes which are preventing them from functioning and improving. In their initial difficulty to see reality in a different light, they are convinced that their beliefs are accurate. One would say that in the Platonic sense they "do not know, but they think they do." Gradually, clients learn how to question these beliefs and seek alternatives.

This notion of a spectrum upon which people may advance or move backwards depending on whether or not they improve, is reinforced by the allegory of the charioteer in *Phaedrus* (Plato, 1995/1997e, pp. 524–532). Drawing on the same allegory, one can identify criteria and ways of self-improvement. Plato notes:

> Remember how we divided each soul in three at the beginning of our story—two parts in the form of horses and the third in that of a charioteer? Let us continue with that. One of the horses, we said, is good, the other not; . . . The horse that is on the right . . . is a lover of honour with modesty and self-control; companion to true glory, he needs no whip, and is guided by verbal commands alone. The other horse . . . companion to wild boasts and indecency . . . just barely yields to horsewhip and goad combined. (Plato, 1995/1997e, p. 531)

For the charioteer to approach the forms, he needs to control the horses which represent his irrational appetites, his emotions, and his noble impulses. As Griswold (1986) points out, desires may move in different directions creating internal disharmony which is problematic for the soul's progress. The charioteer needs to be in control of the horses and their direction should not be dictated by them. The horses do not naturally follow the charioteer. Instead, force is needed and then training and habituation (Griswold, 1986, pp. 92–93).

This endeavour reminds one of CBT helping clients to regain control in their lives. The emotional difficulties that clients struggle with and their effort to regulate them

through rational deliberation and habituation of techniques are represented by the horses trying to control the direction of the chariot and the charioteer trying to regain control of them. When the horses are incontrollable and unpredictable, one deteriorates mentally, thus distancing oneself from one's goal or the Forms and the Good. With the help of CBT one can improve in this area, which will enable one to advance on the spectrum, and thus approach knowledge of the Forms or the Good.

In conclusion, the CBT process of self-knowledge (as improvement) is linked to the Platonic one as having the same outlook on a shared spectrum, however it is on a more elementary level and thus it constitutes a step in the right direction (on a common path). Some indications that CBT is on a lower (potentially preparatory) stage relate to the type of difficulties clients usually present with, seek help for, and improve via the therapeutic process. I have shown that these difficulties are considered obstacles in Platonic type progress. Since CBT clients are struggling in these areas more than typical interlocutors, it is reasonable to assume that they are on a lower level of progress. Examples of progress-making criteria include emotion regulation, familiarisation of the dialectic process, realising that one does not know what one thinks one knows, cognitive flexibility, rational deliberation and empiricism, ability to function, self-reflection, and learning how to use skills independently.

CBT, however, is an optional process and not a mandatory requirement for one to engage in Platonic self-knowledge, since one can take a different route to self-improvement. Also, it is worth noting at this point that CBT does not provide the first step in the right direction since not everybody is suitable or ready for CBT. In addition to this, Plato's self-knowledge and the Socratic dialogues may not be the last step on the spectrum, since nobody ever reaches knowledge of the Forms or the Good. Socrates does not necessarily reach a conclusion in each case. In fact, he usually opens more questions than he provides answers to. In both CBT and Plato, one does not necessarily reach eternal truths, but if the process is successful, one will improve one's position in relation to them.

Conclusion

To summarise and conclude, my analysis in this article was based on the interpretation of Platonic self-knowledge as a way of improving oneself. In agreement with Rowe (2010), I argued that self-knowledge as self-improvement in Plato's dialogues involves determining what is truly good for oneself by discarding false beliefs. This is like an individual intellectual therapy guided by a research-obsessed tutor, which, Rowe concludes, makes it incompatible with psychotherapy. I initially examined the validity of this conclusion in terms of process objectivity. I found that, contrary to his statement, CBT and collaborative empiricism, in the context of self-knowledge and cognitive restructuring, are very much like the dialectic process in Plato.

Following this, I elaborated on the notion of objectivity of outcomes or end goals in the context of self-knowledge. Continuous improvement of Platonic self-knowledge would ultimately lead to knowledge of the Forms or the Good, which are absolute truths, common to all. In CBT on the other hand, self-knowledge is assumed to result in subjective goals, which are exclusive to the individual. I argued, on the contrary, that CBT is also directed towards a similarly objective goal or outcome. Clients differ in their

personal circumstances, which are subjective since they relate to the individual, but that does not exclude the objectivity of ultimate well-being. The alleviation of distress or the increase in mental well-being are notions that are independent of specific individuals, and the optimum form of well-being as a concept can be understood as existing objectively, even if nobody has ever experienced it.

In response to the additional criticism that Socratic dialogues focus on abstract notions and virtues, I argued that this can also be identified in sessions of CBT. I examined lines of questioning which characterise CBT, and I demonstrated that they relate to similar topics, even if they proceed in a less direct manner. To support my argument, I used specific clinical examples of depression and anxiety, demonstrating how discussions in therapy lead to realisations of the Socratic type.

After demonstrating that self-knowledge in CBT can be assimilated to Platonic self-knowledge, in terms of objectivity of process and outcomes, I examined what the relationship between the two is. Instead of suggesting that the one is a contemporary version of the other, I claimed that they relate to different levels of progress in self-improvement. I introduced the idea of a spectrum ranging from the furthest one can be from obtaining knowledge of the Forms and the Good, to the closest one can be. Self-knowledge in CBT is related to a lower level on the spectrum than that in Plato. Movement on the spectrum, as indicated in Plato's dialogues and CBT, involves moderating the impact of one's emotions. CBT supports interlocutors in this area as well as other areas of progress making criteria. In this way, it helps people to advance on the spectrum and thus can function as a preparatory process for people to engage in Platonic self-knowledge. Two of the main processes it uses for this are helping people to regulate their emotions and providing skills for people to think more flexibly, facilitating openness to enquiry.

I believe that my analysis has reinforced the link between Platonic self-knowledge and CBT and has offered an alternative proposal about the nature of this link. As far as I am aware, this line of argument has not been attempted in the literature. This paper contributes to the overall comparison of philosophy and psychology. This comparison is of academic interest, however, more importantly, it reinforces the recommendation of engaging in philosophy to improve one's mental health and well-being. This is significant in the context of an increase in mental health conditions and a lack of resources.

This article also indicates areas in need of further research, for example, whether other areas of philosophy are similar to psychotherapy, the role of virtues in mental health, the role of self-knowledge in other psychotherapeutic modes and philosophical traditions, the nature and objectivity of mental well-being and happiness, and any research demonstrating that a refocus on the practical utility and significance of philosophy is long overdue.

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