REFLECTING ON KANT'S AND FROMM'S MORAL AUTONOMY THROUGH AN ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP CURRICULUM

Charikleia Pitsou[1i],
Sofia Nikolidaki[2],
Nikolaos Koios[3]
[1]PhD,
Lab. Teaching Staff,
Department of Educational Sciences and Social Work,
University of Patras,
Greece
[2]PhD,
Lab. Teaching Staff,
Department of Preschool Education,
University of Crete,
Greece
[3]PhD,
Associate Professor,
Department of Theology,
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki,
Greece

Abstract:

Autonomy remains a key concept in contemporary philosophical and educational debates, especially within democratic contexts that seek to foster responsible, critically minded citizens. The central question addressed in this paper is how the philosophical concept of moral autonomy can be applied to pedagogical practice. To answer this question, the notion of moral autonomy is first examined. Drawing on the work of influential thinkers -most notably Immanuel Kant and Erich Fromm- the analysis traces how moral autonomy has been theorized as a central feature of human agency. It then shifts focus to the educational field, examining how such philosophical insights can be meaningfully translated into pedagogical practice. Particular attention is given to Greece's recent initiative to embed the "Active Citizen Initiatives" curriculum into primary and secondary education (Ministerial Decision 130372/GD4, 01.11.2024). A curriculum emphasizing its relevance for shaping individuals capable of making ethical decisions based on internalized values rather than imposed norms. Given the above, this paper contributes to bridging the gap between theoretical philosophy and practical pedagogy by arguing that moral autonomy is not merely a theoretical ideal, but its principles can be actively cultivated

[i] Correspondence: email xpitsou@upatras.gr

in educational settings. By integrating philosophical reflection with educational policy and practice, this paper highlights the potential of school classrooms to serve as spaces where ethical autonomy becomes a lived and practiced dimension of democratic citizenship.

Keywords: moral autonomy, reflective thinking, active citizenship curriculum, ethical development, pedagogical practice, philosophy with children, educational settings, teachers' training

1. Introduction

The concept of autonomy plays a central role in contemporary debates on education policy, biomedical ethics, legal rights and broader discussions in moral and political theory. In the context of the 21st century, a primary goal of any democratic society should be the cultivation of autonomous citizens-individuals guided not by imposed norms, even if those are presented as ideal solutions, but by their own well-formed worldviews that inform their choices and actions. Amidst rapid global developments and their far-reaching consequences, what is urgently needed are citizens equipped with knowledge and competencies, inspired by democratic values and the principles of human rights, who act with moral autonomy, always mindful of humanity's well-being and the protection of a shared but uncertain future.

Education is an institution that can contribute to the promotion of active citizenship, which refers to meaningful participation in civic life that upholds democratic principles, advances social equity, and contributes to the common good. Rather than being limited to voting or adhering to laws, it encompasses proactive forms of engagement such as advocacy, volunteerism, and sustained involvement in community and political affairs (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Education has served as a foundational process through which young people are formed not only as future contributors to the workforce and society, but as reflective and active citizens capable of engaging meaningfully with the world around them (Wyn & Mellor, 2009). One kind of education that aims to form such kind of citizens is citizenship education. Dewey (1916) defines citizenship education as a means of forming democratic, autonomous, critical, and free citizens. Cogan & Derricott (2000) define citizenship education as educating children, from early childhood, to become clear-thinking and enlightened citizens who participate in decisions concerning society. In the Eurydice Brief 2017 (European Commission, 2018:9) on 'Citizenship Education at School in Europe', it is understood as a subject area in school curricula:

> "…that is promoted in schools with the aim of fostering the harmonious co-existence and mutually beneficial development of individuals and of the communities they are part of. In democratic societies, citizenship education supports students in becoming active, informed

and responsible citizens, who are willing and able to take responsibility for themselves and for their communities at the local, regional, national and international level".

This formation of such citizens can be cultivated at times through specific school subjects, at other times through cross-curricular themes, and occasionally through extracurricular experiences that extend beyond the formal classroom (Kennedy, 2025; Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions, 2019). According to Eurydice Brief 2017 (European Commission, 2018) 'Citizenship Education at School in Europe', citizenship education is part of national curricula for general education in all countries part of the study. EU member states incorporate the subject into their curricula through diverse approaches: as a cross-curricular theme, within another subject, or as a distinct discipline. Notably, the Brief identifies France as allocating the greatest number of instructional hours to citizenship education, followed by Finland, Estonia, and Greece. Regarding Greece, on November 1, 2024, a Ministerial Decision was issued (Law 130372/ΓΔ4/01-11-2024-Β΄ 6048: 61521–61522) by the Deputy Minister of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports of the Hellenic Government. According to this decision, the curriculum titled "Active Citizen Initiatives" (Greek Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports, 2024), based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), was incorporated into the existing primary and secondary education programs. The Greek context is employed as a case, both as a purposive sample and as a distinctive curriculum beyond individual school subjects, within which the aims of citizenship education can be advanced. The curriculum's aim is to prepare citizens equipped with skills in critical thinking, collaboration, and social responsibility, who can actively contribute to the development of a sustainable society grounded in sustainability, social justice, and environmental protection. Among its core objectives are:

"a) self-awareness, understood as the ability to recognize aspects of students' personalities, explore new interests, and utilize their multiple abilities; b) critical questioning, referring to the development of critical thinking skills regarding opinions and all kinds of stereotypes; c) goal orientation and personal commitment to achieving specific objectives; d) active participation, meaning a sense of obligation to engage in democratic decision-making and to take initiatives in the social sphere; e) ethical deliberation, which emphasizes the moral dimensions underlying individual choices and actions, and promotes shared values at the group level." (article 1:61522-61523).

It emerges from the above that citizenship education's curriculum should integrate ethical and social principles and competencies in order to respond effectively to the challenges of a rapidly evolving world that embraces new forms of openness, participation, and collaboration (Abdellatif Mami, 2020). The question that arises at this point is: How can such a curriculum ensure that students do not merely adopt principles passively, but instead develop an internal, critical capacity to choose them?

For scholars of moral philosophy, the above question, in conjunction with the concepts of self-awareness, critical thinking, commitment, social responsibility, and moral values, when viewed through the lens of active citizenship, directly points to the broader philosophical concept of moral autonomy. In modernity, Immanuel Kant introduced a radical shift in the field of ethics by establishing autonomy as the foundational principle of moral action, in contrast to heteronomy, the subjection of moral will to external rules or authorities. The dialectic between autonomy and heteronomy offers a rich field for philosophical reflection, one that can fruitfully inform pedagogical discourse and educational practice.

Based on the above, the aim of the present paper is to highlight selected aspects of moral autonomy as expressed in the work of prominent thinkers and to critically explore their relevance for educational theory and practice, within the framework of the objectives set by the Greek national curriculum "Active Citizen Initiatives". Generally, this paper seeks to address the following question: "How can the principles of moral autonomy be actualized within an educational context?" In order to respond to this inquiry, the concept of moral autonomy is first examined from a theoretical perspective. Subsequently, an attempt is made to connect this theoretical framework with pedagogical practice through the implementation of an Active Citizen curriculum.

2. Moral Autonomy: A Brief Overview

Professor of Ethics Johannes Gründel (1980) highlights that the connection between autonomy and freedom was first made by Herodotus, primarily in reference to political freedom. However, traces of the search for an unmediated inner moral law are already present in ancient Greek tragedy, particularly in Sophocles' Antigone, where the tragedy of living according to one's own internal moral law is profoundly expressed. Nonetheless, ethical inquiry is chiefly developed by the major philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Important insights into the historical understanding of moral autonomy can also be found among the Sophists. While the three classical philosophers do not explicitly problematize the source of moral judgment, their ethical teachings revolve primarily around the pursuit of good and virtue. However, the significant value they place on reason and the freedom of human will in the quest for moral knowledge and the shaping of ethical principles could characterize them as precursors of autonomous morality. This notion is confirmed by the manner in which they themselves engage in philosophical inquiry.

Based on these premises, Werner Jaeger (1973) argues that humanism, whose fundamental principle is moral autonomy, first emerged within ancient Greek thought. In particular, Sophists can be considered forerunners of the modern understanding of autonomy in ethics. With their core axiom - "*Man is the measure of all things*" - they introduced subjectivism and relativism into ethical judgment (Diogenes Laertius, 1964, 9.51.4–9.51.5). Their belief that each individual can serve as a distinct foundation for moral judgment stands in contrast to the positions of Socrates, who grounded ethics in a

shared human nature. By contrast, Sophists held that as many moralities could exist as there are individuals. Their teaching resembles more a subjective concept of autonomy, as observed in contemporary everyday life, rather than the conception formulated by two of the most significant theorists of moral autonomy: Kant in classical modernity and Fromm in the late modern period. Both thinkers strongly oppose ethical relativism, that is, the denial of the objectivity of moral principles. There is a significant number of thinkers who, directly or indirectly, contributed to the evolution, shaping, and application of the concept of autonomy, from classical to late modernity. Apart from Kant, who laid its philosophical foundation, important contributions were made by Fichte, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Fromm, Popper, Childress, Beauchamp, Engelhardt, Cornelius Castoriadis, among others. In the present paper, our focus will be on the perspectives of Kant and Fromm, whose respective positions and interpretations highlight dimensions of autonomy that may offer valuable insights for pedagogical reflection, particularly in the cultivation of free, responsible, and active citizens. While Kantian philosophy provides the structural framework of rational thought, grounding education in the discipline of reason and moral duty, Fromm contributes the essence of emotional maturity, emphasizing the cultivation of love, empathy, and authentic human connection. An integrated pedagogical design should therefore bring together both perspectives, uniting the rigor of rational autonomy with the depth of emotional intelligence, so as to educate individuals who are not only intellectually rigorous but also ethically responsible and affectively mature.

2.1 Kant: Moral Autonomy

The impact of Kant on Western moral thought has been so profound that it gave rise to an entire "school," with scholars frequently referring to pre-Kantian and post-Kantian periods in ethics. His most significant work, in which his moral philosophy -and particularly his reflections on autonomy and heteronomy -is thoroughly presented, is Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals (Kant, 1785/1983). In this work, Kant attempts to establish the foundations of autonomous ethics and to articulate its defining features. However, the core philosophical inquiry that leads him to his eventual formulation of the principle of autonomy is rooted in two of his other major works: Critique of Pure Reason (Kant, 1781/2020) and Critique of Practical Reason (Kant, 1788/2004).

In order to highlight the aspects of Kantian moral autonomy most relevant to the present study, it is helpful to consider some of his anthropological presuppositions. According to Mantzaridis (1995), every moral theory presupposes a certain anthropology. While some contemporary scholars contest this assumption (Protopapadakis, 2019), a thorough reading of classical ethical texts reveals that even when anthropology is not explicitly stated, this does not imply its absence. On the contrary, anthropological conceptions often underlie the author's moral outlook, even if they remain implicit in the formulation of ethical principles. In Kant's moral writings, one does not find systematic anthropology per se. Nevertheless, anthropological views

are embedded throughout his work and serve as the basis for some of his most essential moral axioms. A close reading of Kant's ethical corpus reveals a kind of anthropological dualism, which at times appears explicitly and at other times remains latent. This dualism distinguishes, on the one hand, everything related to the empirical human reality - whether bodily or emotional - and, on the other, isolates human reason and human will. The defining feature of the former is sensitivity or susceptibility, while the latter is characterized by freedom. At the level of empirical reality, the human being consists primarily of the body, which is subject to natural needs, inclinations, and drives (*Hangen*). The concept of "inclinations" (*Neigungen*), drawn from psychology, plays-as will become evident--a particularly significant role in Kant's anthropology and, consequently, in his ethics. It refers to the persistent sensual desire that arises after the experience of pleasure, which in turn is triggered by a corresponding natural tendency (Kant, 1785/1983). Human empirical experience also includes all emotional states, which can be either pleasant or unpleasant. These feelings give rise to desires and needs, and therefore to inclinations, even if some of them may be more refined or noble than the baser inclinations generated by bodily urges. Like all living beings, the human being is part of the natural world. Thus, both natural needs and emotions produce dependencies that lead to actions and choices which, at least apparently, bear the mark of natural necessity.

For Kant, neither empirical reality nor religion can guarantee pure moral law, because they reflect either base inclinations of human nature or an unwelcome guardianship. In other words, they embody heteronomy in its entirety. The moral laws that emerge from such sources may indeed be better than nothing, but they fall far short of being considered ideal. The defining feature of pure morality, for Kant, is its independence from any external imposition. It is precisely this requirement that leads to the necessity of morality being a priori existing prior to experience. But on what basis can this a priori character of morality be founded, so as to ensure both its independence and its moral validity? Kant's answer lies in his anthropological view of the good human will. Beyond its evaluative function, Kant attributes to the will another, crucial role in the establishment of moral autonomy: the legislative role (Kant, 1788/2004).

The human will create moral law in order to submit itself to it and to obey it. This is the very essence of autonomy for Kant. Careful study leads to the conclusion that autonomy extends only up to the point of the will's establishment of moral law. Once the moral law has been founded, the will is obliged to submit to it and obey it. Within this framework, autonomy can be defined as the capacity of the human will to independently establish the moral law to which it voluntarily submits. The will is thus both the legislator and the subject: it creates the law and subjects itself to it. In this sense, it becomes a law unto itself (lex sui, Kant, 1785/1983). The defining characteristic of the will is freedom. And when the will is also good, it is capable of founding pure morality, that is, of freely establishing the very moral laws it must subsequently follow. Only through the autonomy of the will can a pure and genuine moral framework be established. Therefore, true morality is only autonomous morality.

Autonomous morality, however, does not equate to arbitrary morality. For Kant, to *act autonomously in a moral sense* is by no means the same as *doing whatever one pleases*. The will articulates a priori moral maxims and then acts in accordance with them. The defining feature of these maxims is their universal validity. Although Kant formulates the fundamental moral maxim in several different ways, it may be summarized as follows: *Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law* (Kant, 1785/1983). In this way, Kant seeks to unite the individual imperative ("I ought") with the universal, while also providing what he sees as a secure criterion for evaluating the morality of an action. He calls this maxim the categorical imperative - a term that has since become widely known.

At this point, it is worth mentioning another principle that Kant grounds on autonomy: the principle of dignity (Würde) (Kant, 1785/1983). Dignity functions as a complementary safeguard to autonomy, expressed in the maxim: *Man must always be treated as an end in himself, and never merely as a means* (ibid). In contemporary terms, dignity serves as a foundational concept for the protection of individual rights, personal integrity, and freedom of choice. Typically, these two principles -autonomy and dignity- are not treated as entirely separate; they more often appear jointly, under the general principle of autonomy. However, in certain contexts - particularly when the discussion shifts toward the discourse of rights - dignity is also projected as a distinct principle. Autonomy, as Kant conceived it, aims to serve as a universal moral criterion. Yet its universal character is not unconditional; it is rooted in the maxim: *Act in such a way that the maxim of your action could become a universal moral law* (ibid). The same holds true for dignity, according to which: Every *rational being, such as a human being, possesses absolute and irreplaceable value* (ibid).

Kant's strict formal conception of autonomy -despite constituting the foundation of modern moral philosophy- has been subject to criticism for its psychological detachment (Williams, 2006). Drawing from psychoanalysis and humanism, Erich Fromm (1947) proposed an alternative interpretation, linking autonomy to psychological maturity and what he terms a 'productive' mode of existence.

At the end of this section, it may be useful to highlight the following points: the initial view regarding Kant's influence on modern thought should not lead to an idealization or even absolutization of his moral theory. Barbara Herman (1993) argues that Kantian ethics tends to overlook the moral complexity of real-life circumstances and everyday human needs, potentially resulting in moral decisions that fail to account for human relationships and emotions. Allen Wood (2008) points out that Kant's moral theory is, in many cases, marked by a rigid adherence to form and generality. For this reason, he proposes an interpretation of Kant that acknowledges the moral significance of compassion and practical reason. A more penetrating hermeneutic approach brings to light the possibility that Kantian formalism and moral rigidity may lead to dangerous paths and totalitarian practices (Koios, 2004).

2.2 Fromm: Moral Autonomy

The fundamental principle upon which Erich Fromm builds both his anthropology and his ethics is what he terms "*progressive humanism.*" According to this view: "*The aim of man is total independence, and this implies that he must liberate himself from myths and illusions in order to attain full awareness of reality*" (Fromm, 1977a: 20). Fromm remains firmly committed to the idea that ethics cannot be conceived without anthropology. His thinking goes even further by defining ethics as an applied anthropology (Fromm, 1974). Another key point is that both his anthropology and ethics are deeply social in nature. For this reason, he develops them by examining the interactions between the individual and their social environment, especially the cultural context. He stands opposed to both those who claim that human nature is entirely immutable and those who argue for its boundless plasticity and adaptability. For Fromm, the human being possesses both capacities equally: the ability to react and the ability to adapt (ibid). What primarily defines the human, however, is the capacity to become aware of oneself as a distinct entity. This includes self-awareness, reason, and imagination. These qualities differentiate the human being from the natural world, even though they are simultaneously a part of it. By realizing that they both belong to the natural world and yet are somehow different from it, the human being experiences a constant internal contradiction. This contradiction is further intensified by the uniquely human capacity to envision the future -and, more specifically, to be aware of one's own inevitable death. In this sense, reason, which grants humans these profound abilities, becomes both a blessing and a curse (ibid).

According to Fromm, it is through theoretical knowledge of human nature that we come to discover the proper way of living -that is, the art of life. When this art is elevated to the level of science, it becomes ethics. For Kant, ethics operates primarily along the axes of duty and a priori moral principles, which give it a rigorous and transcendental character. Fromm, in contrast, brings ethics "down to earth," rendering it more accessible. For him, ethics is understood as the way of life that accords with human nature and guides it toward its fulfillment. One fundamental point of divergence between the two thinkers concerns the concept of happiness or well-being (eudaimonia in a broad sense). Kant, reacting against utilitarianism -which he views as the pursuit of the satisfaction of all desires generated by human inclinations -categorically rejects happiness as the goal of morality. Fromm, on the other hand, defines happiness as the full development of the human being's innate productive capacities, and thereby considers it to be the very aim of ethics.

According to the foundational theory of progressive humanism, which forms the core of his thought, Fromm refers to the ethics he proposes as *humanistic ethics*. This ethical model appears consistently across all of his writings. Humanistic ethical thought laid the groundwork for value systems based on human autonomy and reason. The core principle of these systems is that knowledge of what is good and evil stems from knowledge of what the human being is (Fromm, 1974:58). In the field of ethics, Fromm identifies anthropology with psychology. This becomes particularly evident in his

integration of ethics and psychoanalysis. Fromm critically points out that many psychoanalysts make the mistake of disconnecting psychoanalysis from the philosophical and ethical concerns of human existence. According to Fromm, the human personality cannot be truly understood unless the person is viewed as a whole. Such a holistic view necessarily includes the existential need to answer the question of the meaning and purpose of life, and to discover the guiding principles by which one ought to live (ibid: 44-45; 75-76).

Humanistic ethics is anthropocentric, not in the sense that the human being is the center of the universe, but rather in the sense that value judgments -and even perceptions- derive from the unique structure of human existence and make sense only in relation to that existence. Indeed, man is *the measure of all things*. Nothing is superior or more dignified than human existence itself (ibid:53). This view significantly moderates the contemporary understanding of autonomy, or more precisely, the practical interpretation of autonomy as it emerges from modern consumerist society and the overvaluation of human achievements, particularly technological progress.

The ideal of autonomous ethics, according to Fromm, is for the human being to become productive (Fromm, 1974:130). The autonomous and truly moral individual is, for Fromm, the productive human being. In Fromm's ethics, productivity is defined as the development of all human capacities, within the boundaries set by the laws of one's own existence. This, he maintains, should be the goal of one's entire life: the full realization of one's inner potential in accordance with the nature of the human being (ibid: 60). In no case should Fromm's concept of productivity be confused with any economic-technical interpretation of the term. Productivity, for Fromm, is a mode of being, a way of living, accessible to every human being-unless one is spiritually or emotionally impaired (ibid:132).

Productivity, in Fromm's framework, constitutes the quintessential virtue, understood as the individual's responsibility toward their own existence. Happiness itself is essentially identified with productivity. It is not a divine gift; it is something that must be earned by the individual. The achievement of this kind of happiness is considered the sole criterion of virtue within humanistic ethics. Viewed through this lens, virtue becomes the art of living (ibid:244). From productivity also arise all the specific virtues. The free, rational, and active human being is the productive individual, and this figure represents the ideal human character. In contrast to the virtue of productivity, evil is understood as a contempt for -and mutilation of- one's own human powers. At its core, evil coincides with the individual's irresponsibility toward the self (ibid:67). The goal of humanistic ethics is not primarily the eradication of human evil, which is more characteristic of heteronomous systems; rather, it is the productive use of the human being's innate potentialities (ibid:287).

The more the human being progresses in the realization of their potential, the more successfully they accomplish the transition from heteronomy to autonomy. According to Fromm's anthropological perspective, the human being constantly experiences a rupture between self and world. They suffer from this disconnection and long for unity. There

are many ways to seek this unity -but only one path preserves the person as an integrated being: the path of productivity. In one's relationships with others and with the world, productivity is understood as an active mode of relatedness, and above all, as love.

For Fromm, love is not something transcendent, as if it were a force sent *from above*, nor is it a duty imposed upon the individual. Rather, it is something inherent in the very structure of human existence, something that radiates from within. It is a human power, enabling one to overcome the sense of isolation and separation, while at the same time allowing one to preserve one's uniqueness and integrity (Fromm, 1978). In order for this kind of love not to degenerate, four essential elements must be present: care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge of the one who is loved. Only then does love become a positive activity, rather than a passion that diminishes the person (Fromm, 1974:143). In human relationships, these four elements are necessary conditions for love to remain productive and fertile, rather than frustrated and fruitless. As Fromm writes, "*To love one person productively means to relate to the core of their humanity-to love the person as a representative of humankind*" (ibid: 148). The concept of virtue is also inseparably linked to productivity. However, in modern societies, the meaning of virtue is heavily influenced by heteronomous ethics, often revolving around self-denial and obedience -a view that ultimately suppresses the individual's personality and prevents its full development (ibid:52). Proponents of heteronomous morality reject any ethical system that arises solely from the individual and their interests, considering it to result in isolated and selfish individuals. Fromm rejects this claim as false, seeing it as an attempt to discredit the human capacity and right to ground their own moral laws.

In humanistic ethics, the truly moral good is defined as what serves the interests of the human being. This concept of interest is not interpreted subjectively, but objectively. Interest is not whatever each individual may define as such for themselves, but rather what serves human nature itself. The one and only true interest of human nature is its comprehensive development-the unfolding of its inner potential (ibid:183). In the pursuit of this genuine interest, self-regard becomes essential. Fromm argues that there is such a thing as healthy self-interest, which he distinguishes clearly from selfishness or narcissism. This form of self-interest is one of the core attributes of autonomous ethics. Its absence leads to problems in the full and free development of the individual, as it signals a suppression of spontaneity (ibid:175). Fromm equates self-interest with self-love and genuine concern for the self. "*If it is a virtue to love my neighbor as a human being, then it must also be a virtue -not a vice- to love myself, since I am a human being, too»* (ibid:177). *To support this claim, he refers to the biblical precept: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself*"" (ibid).

2.3 Some Reflections on Autonomy in Kant and Fromm

At first glance, the difference between Kant and Fromm appears to stem primarily from a difference in terminology or conceptual framing. However, upon closer examination, one arrives at the conclusion that divergence lies in their overall conception of human life. Kant addresses the issue of material well-being rather briefly, asserting that it is

necessary for the human being only to the extent that it does not obstruct the development of moral virtue. Thus, the pursuit of the highest ideal is clearly directed toward the establishment of pure morality through reason and will. As a rational being, the human person must constantly scrutinize their actions to ensure that they conform to the a priori moral principles -principles the individual formulates themselves, independently of any interest or self-serving motive. In contrast, Fromm holds that the human being realizes moral fulfillment as an integrated whole, despite the internal contradictions experienced by virtue of belonging to the natural world, while at the same time being distinct from it.

The concepts of interest and self-regard, which are categorically rejected in Kantian ethics (Papanoutsos, 1974), acquire a notably positive meaning in Fromm's thought. This divergence may be explained, in part, by the fact that Fromm, writing much later than Kant, did not have to engage polemically with other dominant ethical currents of his time -especially with utilitarianism. However, the more accurate interpretation likely lies in the observation that Fromm, avoiding a rigid adherence to Kantian rationalism, draws upon elements from other philosophical traditions in constructing his ethical framework. This synthetic approach is also evident in the interdisciplinary character of his work. While Kant remains almost exclusively within the bounds of logic and philosophy, drawing only minimally from other sciences, Fromm, grounded in philosophical reasoning, makes extensive and creative use of the social sciences, history, and even theology, interpreted through his own lens. Above all, Fromm draws most heavily from psychology, especially in its applied form, psychoanalysis. He considers it a powerful tool for uncovering the motivations behind human actions, as well as for understanding the structure and dynamics of the human personality more broadly. In sum, the dialogue between Kant and Fromm contributes meaningfully to pedagogical theory - specifically to the development of a balanced educational framework- by offering both rational rigor and psychological insight into the cultivation of moral autonomy in students.

3. Moral Autonomy in Pedagogical Practice through the "Active Citizen" Curriculum

One of the primary goals of the Greek curriculum "Active Citizen" initiative is the cultivation of self-awareness through the recognition of the student's multifaceted personality, the identification of emerging interests, and the harnessing of multiple intelligences. According to this statement, it is obvious that self-awareness must already be present for active citizenship to take place. Self-awareness refers to the ability to reflect on one's own thoughts, feelings, motives, and actions. It allows a person to step back from immediate impulses and examine why they think or act in a certain way. Moral autonomy goes a step further, as it requires self-awareness in order to critically assess one's reasons for action. Both self-awareness and moral autonomy are presuppositions for active citizenship, since only agents who can reason about their actions can participate freely and responsibly, binding themselves to public rules. However, such self-binding

presupposes the capacity to give oneself maxims that one could will as universal laws. Lacking the capacity for moral autonomy would lead to abiding by civic norms heteronomously - therefore driven by reward, fear, or custom. A citizen as a mere rule-follower cannot exist unless the individual is already capable of self-regulation and self-legislation (Kant, 1785; 1996). Similarly, Fromm shows that where autonomy is weak, individuals submit to external powers or merge with the crowd to escape freedom; both patterns make civic participation easily manipulated (Fromm, 1941). Cultivating ethical autonomy is not an optional enrichment but an antidote to the pathologies that corrode democratic publics. In the field of pedagogical science, the challenge of cultivating moral autonomy becomes particularly significant, especially when it concerns childhood and adolescence. As Balias (2011) points out, the central pedagogical concern lies in the transition from heteronomous obedience to rules -an obedience rooted in external authority (parents, teachers, institutions)- to an autonomous moral act that emerges from a conscious, internalized understanding of duty. According to him, this transition presents both a paradox and a pedagogical antinomy: how can autonomy be taught without being imposed?

3.1 Philosophical teachers' training

Teachers' philosophical education is a key response to the need for cultivating moral autonomy in children. If we want children to develop moral autonomy, we must first train teachers who know, appreciate, and have experienced what moral autonomy is and how it can be fostered in children (Nikolidaki, 2023a). We need teachers who are taught philosophy not merely in a historical context detached from everyday social life, but in a way that emphasizes its practical and existential dimensions.

Philosophizing should be understood as a skill that teachers acquire through reflecting on everyday life, questioning, dialoguing, arguing, and engaging in continuous reflection (Nikolidaki, 2023b). Viewing the world through the philosophical lens offered by past thinkers, combined with the practice of philosophizing -which constantly questions and seeks further justification- equips teachers with a deeper understanding of both the world and themselves. Importantly, such skills are not abstract but are directly connected to everyday pedagogical practice.

One essential aspect of philosophizing is the capacity to listen. Philosophical training engages teachers in listening attentively to themselves and to others. According to Fiumara (1995), listening is a form of thinking. Listening to others, and especially to children, allows a deeper understanding of their needs and interests. Listening to children with openness and authenticity enables teachers to connect with them while also reconnecting with the inner child they once were (Egan, 1988; 1997). In this sense, philosophical education fosters not only intellectual depth but also relational sensitivity, transforming teaching into a rich and meaningful experience for both children and educators.

This integrated approach highlights why philosophy should be incorporated into university teacher-training curricula. Philosophy allows future teachers to develop a

deeper understanding of education- not only in terms of achieving specific, usually measurable goals, but also in addressing broader philosophical questions such as *what* to teach, *why* to teach, *who* to teach, and *what is worth teaching*. Philosophy modules such as Ethics, Aesthetics, Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Education, and Philosophy of Mind, when taught not in a mechanical way but in ways applicable to real life, provide teachers with the critical mindset required not only to become better professionals but also to transform philosophizing into a foundational part of their educational theory (Makaiau & Miller, 2012; Pitsou et al, 2025a).

Philosophy for/with Children can serve as a web that connects all educational subjects with one another and therefore should be incorporated into teacher training courses. Initiated by the American philosopher Matthew Lipman, Philosophy for Children was designed as an applied form of philosophy that promotes children's critical, creative, and caring thinking (Lipman, 2003). Lipman first introduced philosophy with children into schools in order to address what he observed at the university level: students who possessed factual knowledge but lacked the essential critical and reflective skills to make sense of what they had learned (Lipman, 1988).

Drawing on the work of pragmatist philosophers such as Dewey and Peirce, Philosophy for/with Children transforms the classroom into a "community of inquiry," where both children and teachers engage as co-inquirers into knowledge. In this setting, teachers act primarily as facilitators who enable children to participate in philosophical dialogues, to argue, and to take thoughtful action (Sharp, 2007). To support this approach, Lipman created a series of philosophical novels inspired by Plato's dialogues but adapted to children's needs and interests. Alongside these, he developed teacher manuals to guide educators in raising philosophical questions, establishing communities of inquiry, and engaging children in dialogue and argumentation (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyon 1980; Lipman, 1988). While Lipman's program has been widely implemented across the world, it has also been criticized for being overly rigid, artificial and context-specific, reflecting mainly the cultural conditions of American children in the 1970s (Reed & Johnson, 1999; Daniel, 1998). Subsequent developments in Philosophy for/with Children have broadened its scope globally, emphasizing the "4Cs" of thinking -critical, creative, collaborative, and caring. Despite the variations in approach, what these practices share is a commitment to deepening both children's and teachers' understanding through philosophizing.

This paper, however, proposes an opposite direction to Lipman's original path: rather than starting with children and adapting philosophy for their use, it argues for bringing Philosophy for/with Children methodologies back into teacher training as an applied form of philosophizing. Integrating philosophy modules and P4C practices into teacher education, alongside a pedagogy of attentive listening to pupils, equips teachers with educational tools that activate and promote children's critical, creative, and caring thinking.

So far, philosophical training in teacher education has been discussed at a *macro level*, as a way to foster moral autonomy in both teachers and students through changes

in teacher preparation and university curricula. Yet, at the *micro level*, within the classroom itself, the question arises: how can moral autonomy be cultivated without being imposed on children? The following section provides examples based on Kant's and Fromm's ideas regarding moral autonomy.

3.1.1. Using simple language that can help children grasp the philosophical ideas

Kant's possible answer to the paradox of how to teach moral autonomy without imposing it on children lies in the idea that, once the moral law has been established on the basis of freedom of the will, the will is then obliged to submit to it and obey it. In this framework, the will is both legislator and subject: it creates the law and, at the same time, subjects itself to it. Yet, the question remains whether such a process is feasible within an educational setting.

Kant's and Fromm's ethical perspectives can, however, be meaningfully adapted to kindergarten and school life, provided that developmentally appropriate language and practices are employed-those that children are able to grasp and engage with. According to Bruner's theory (1960) of the spiral curriculum, any concept can be introduced at an early stage in a simplified form and then revisited repeatedly at increasing levels of complexity as children mature. Bruner (1960) also emphasized that understanding the underlying structure of a subject -its core ideas and their interrelationships- enables learners to transfer and apply knowledge in new contexts.

Children are, of course, not expected to read *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Using simplified language does not diminish Kant's work; rather, it makes it accessible to younger learners. For example, the following table (1) summarizes some of Kant's and Fromm's key ideas in a form that children can understand:

Table 1: Kant's and Fromm's Key Ideas Simplified for Children

Kant's vocabulary	Simplified vocabulary used for children
'Maxim'	"a rule I want everyone to follow"
'Universal law'	"what is fair for all"
'Treating people as ends and never as means'	"people are not things"
'Duty'	"doing the right thing because it is right" (not because reward, or punishment is awaiting)
Fromm's vocabulary	
Ethical Autonomy	"I choose what's right because I believe in it."
Being over having	"Who I am matters more than what I own-have"
Productivity	"Make and care in ways that help life grow"

Several important issues arise at this point. First, who is responsible for this "translation"? How can we ensure that educators have genuinely understood Kant's and Fromm's ideas and are not unintentionally imposing their own interpretations on children? The use of simplified vocabulary presupposes that teachers themselves have engaged meaningfully with Kant's and Fromm's philosophy and are willing to philosophize personally, as emphasized earlier. Only then can they carefully select

vocabulary that supports children's development of moral autonomy. Second, teachers are not expected to present these simplified conversions of Kant's and Fromm's vocabulary on the blackboard for children to memorize or repeat mechanically. On the contrary, through philosophical training, teachers become able to recognize situations in everyday school life that invite philosophizing, listen attentively to children's comments, and facilitate dialogue and further action. Third, such processes may also create opportunities for constructive disagreement among children, as they attempt to defend Kant's or Fromm's perspectives or to find common ground between them. For instance, how might Fromm's notion of ethical autonomy - "*I choose what is right because I believe in it*"- be reconciled with Kant's idea of a universal law? Ultimately, these linguistic transformations become lived experiences, grounded in children's needs and interests within the everyday life of the classroom, as will be shown below.

3.1.2. Linking moral autonomy with everyday school life and dilemmas

Moral autonomy is best cultivated through children's lived experiences in everyday school life. According to Hadot (1995), philosophy is a way of life, and moral autonomy may also be understood as a skill developed for children's lives. Many conflicts naturally arise in classrooms on a daily basis. Expressions such as *"I was playing with this toy and he took it from me"*, *"He is lying to me"*, *"He took my turn"*, *"He interrupts me when I speak"*, *"They don't play with me"*, or *"They make fun of me"* often lead to verbal or physical fights, requiring teacher intervention. In such cases, teachers may respond by shouting, punishing, or depriving children of privileges. This approach, however, provides heteronomous solutions, in which the teacher decides and the children learn merely to obey.

Instead, these moments of conflict can be transformed into opportunities for autonomous thinking. Children may be invited to apply the universalizability test: *"If everyone did this, would our class be a happy place?"* When children ask, *"How can we know what the right thing to do is?"*, one possible response could be to reflect upon a rule that they would want everyone to follow. In this way, children themselves generate the solution, exercising autonomy in their thinking. Moreover, they can later evaluate each other's strategies in new conflicts according to the mutual, and ideally universal, rules they have collectively established. Here, the teacher's role becomes supportive, opening up dialogical spaces (Haynes, 2008), recording the children's rules, and inviting them to test these rules for consistency, flaws, or exceptions.

Class council meetings could also become weekly routines that nurture children's autonomous thinking and decision-making. Drawing on Freinet's pedagogy, children may participate in their own council meetings, write down ethical issues that arose during the week, and dedicate time to discuss them collectively. They may propose solutions, evaluate their effectiveness in the following week, and make revisions where needed (Nikolidaki, 2024). Through this process, children come to see ethical autonomy as a work in progress, one that gradually fosters fairness. Regular discussions in which rules are evaluated not on the basis of personal preferences but in terms of fairness and

respect resonate with Kantian ethics applied to the classroom. Short daily "reflection circles" may also be useful. In these, children share experiences in which they helped others or felt proud of making the right choice. Such practices build self-esteem not in an atomistic sense, but in relation to the common good. A "*language of respect*" can likewise become a daily routine. Embedding phrases such as *"we treat people as important"* or *"we do not use friends as tools"* into the classroom vocabulary can help children internalize respect for others. Through repetition, this practice becomes an *ethos* -as Aristotle (2009) describes in his Nicomachean Ethics- a lived experience rooted in habit.

The teacher's role remains supportive, enabling children to engage in autonomous thinking and acting. Teachers may provide meaningful options in projects and activities, supporting children's sense of agency (Pitsou et al, 2025b). They can also model acting from inner conviction by explaining why they make particular choices for the class, thereby showing that their decisions stem from principles and care. For example, a teacher might say: *"I am asking everyone to clean up, because if no one cleaned, our space would not work for anyone."* Collaborative problem-solving can also be embedded across the curriculum, provided that teachers remain attentive to the issues raised among children. Rather than relying on punishment, teachers can listen carefully, focus on the needs of all involved, and guide children toward shared solutions. Importantly, they should praise effort, creativity, and cooperation -not only completed assignments. Finally, teachers may share personal stories of helping, creating, or learning for its own sake. Such narratives invite children to share their own experiences, reflect upon their decisions, assess them against universal criteria, and engage in self-correction (Echeverria, 2007). In general, teachers should avoid over-reliance on extrinsic rewards and instead foster intrinsic motivation.

3.1.3 Embedding Moral Autonomy and Active Citizenship in the Curriculum

Teachers can cultivate moral autonomy by embedding meaningful activities throughout the curriculum, enabling children to think, reflect, and act ethically in diverse contexts. By linking narrative, play, art, and philosophical inquiry to everyday experiences, children develop independent moral judgment while learning to care for others.

Story-based ethical reasoning provides a natural entry point. Picturebooks, such as Pfister's *The Rainbow Fish*, present characters facing moral dilemmas that children can analyze and discuss. For instance, when the protagonist must choose between keeping his shiny scales or sharing them, pupils can consider what they would do, explore questions like "Would the fish lose his identity by sharing?" or "Do the other fish have a right to the scales?" and relate these reflections to their own experiences. Through this process, children practice evaluating choices, considering fairness, and applying universal ethical principles in line with Kantian thought (Nikolidaki, 2024). The story can also be explored through Fromm's lens, prompting discussion about care, selfishness, and productive action, and helping children connect moral reasoning to their own dilemmas.

Ethics through play complements story-based reasoning by engaging children actively. Role-play scenarios -sharing toys, helping someone hurt, or telling the truth- invite pupils to act, reason, and discuss consequences. By considering "What if everyone acted this way?" in a Kantian framework, children develop argumentation skills, reflect on moral responsibility, and test ethical reasoning in practice (ibid).

Art-based activities further expand ethical exploration. Creating "Our Class Rules for Everyone" posters or analyzing artworks, music, films, and animations encourages children to reflect on fairness, respect, and exceptions to universal rules. Such activities foster critical thinking, ethical dialogue, and the application of moral principles to classroom life (ibid).

Philosophical inquiry provides a structured space for reflection and dialogue. Open-ended questions -such as "What does it mean to act because you care?" or "What is more important: what we have or who we are?"-allow children to express reasoning, listen to peers, reconsider positions, and self-correct. Teachers can record insights to sustain discussions over time, ensuring continuity and depth in moral exploration (ibid).

Community projects provide practical experience of civic responsibility. Caring for public spaces, mentoring younger peers, participating in environmental clean-ups, or supporting animal welfare initiatives allow children to practice duty-based care and observe Fromm's notion of productive action. Recognizing acts of care and collaboration as essential to classroom and community life reinforces both moral reasoning and civic engagement (ibid).

By integrating story-based reasoning, play, art, philosophical inquiry, and community action, teachers can nurture children's moral autonomy while fostering active, responsible citizenship. This holistic approach equips students to navigate ethical challenges thoughtfully and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Commitment and self-discipline in the pursuit of one's goals constitute another point of convergence between moral autonomy and active citizenship as a pedagogical imperative. If we were to identify Kant's most crucial contribution to the notion of active citizenship, it would be the self-imposed binding of the free will to the moral law - a commitment that underscores both duty and responsibility. As previously noted, the essence of Kantian autonomy lies in the capacity of human will, through the exercise of pure reason, to ground the moral law - a law that one freely chooses yet binds oneself to obey. This highlights the responsibility and obligation inherent in that commitment; without it, we risk falling into arbitrariness (Kant, 1984).

A similar perspective can be applied to the sense of obligation to participate in democratic decision-making and to take initiative within the broader social context. Participation in collective actions -especially those related to decision-making -cannot be selective or optional when they concern the subject directly; rather, they entail a dimension of obligation and duty. The concept of duty (*Pflicht*) in Kantian autonomy is central to the realization of morality (Kant, 1984). At this point, it is worth recalling that moral autonomy, according to Fromm, has an inherently social character, and the truly morally autonomous individual is one who is holistically productive—-not isolated or

withdrawn from the social fabric (Fromm, 1974). The final relevant objective outlined in the Curriculum "Active Citizen Actions" refers to the emergence of moral dimensions in individual choices and actions, as well as the pursuit of shared values. This objective may in fact be the most closely aligned with the present inquiry. From a pedagogical standpoint, this discussion could center on examples that explore the search for universal human values.

Fromm offers a clear example when analyzing the concept and value of love. As previously mentioned, for Fromm, love is the force that overcomes human isolation while simultaneously preserving the uniqueness and integrity of the individual person (Fromm, 1978). It is neither an abstract notion nor a mere emotion; rather, it consists of four distinct components -preconditions, as he calls them: care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge toward the person who is loved (Fromm, 1974). The integration of these elements into pedagogical practice can serve as a concrete example of how values may be taught and internalized -not only as theoretical constructions, but through lived moral engagement**.** This allows for the practical treatment of ethical dimensions within active citizenship education.

Fromm's original and fertile synthesis of virtue and interest provides a valuable framework for identifying shared values. Through this lens, the guiding question becomes: *What truly benefits the human being—-not as an isolated, self-centered individual, but as a being rooted in nature and as a representative of humanity as a whole?* (Fromm, 1974:183). In his search for what genuinely constitutes human good, Fromm offers a sharp critique of a particular form of heteronomy produced by Western capitalism. According to him, capitalist ethics generate alienation by fostering identity confusion. In such societies, individuals no longer say, *I am who I am*, but rather, *I am what I do* or *I am what I have* (Fromm, 1977b:228). The ideal of human life ceases to be happiness and becomes *success*. In the name of this success, it means become detached from ends -ends that should be centered on the human person himself. In many cases, means have usurped and replaced the person, claiming his rightful place.

In an educational context, these philosophical perspectives can be concretely explored through storybooks, role-playing, and guided discussions, allowing children to experience moral autonomy and social responsibility in action. Just as Kantian duty emphasizes self-discipline and commitment, and Fromm's relational ethics highlight care and respect, classroom activities can provide opportunities for children to practice these values in tangible ways-making choices, considering others' perspectives, and reflecting on the impact of their actions within a shared social space. This approach ensures that abstract ethical concepts are not only understood theoretically but are lived and experienced through pedagogical engagement.

It should be noted that Kant provides a rigid ethical framework that may be difficult for children and adolescents to fully abide by, given that their reasoning capacities are still in development. Scholars such as Korsgaard (1996; 2008) have emphasized the demanding nature of Kantian autonomy, which may not be easily reconciled with the developmental realities of education. Nevertheless, even if Kantian

autonomy cannot be fully realized within the school environment, it can still function as a regulative ideal, guiding students to practice ethics in their everyday lives. In this way, attention is directed not only to their rights but also to the obligations that these rights presuppose and that are often overlooked. Rather than fostering children who think only of themselves, Kantian ethics, especially, opens up the space for recognizing others as equally important, and for abiding by a universal law that is self-regulated.

4. Conclusions

The main question addressed in this article is how the philosophical concept of moral autonomy can be applied to pedagogical practice and especially through the lens of an Active Citizen Curriculum. The investigation of moral autonomy as both a philosophical concept and an educational objective reveals its decisive significance for the formation of active, responsible, and ethically grounded citizens. The analysis demonstrated that the foundational ideas of thinkers such as Kant and Fromm -when critically interpreted- can provide meaningful criteria for evaluating and enriching educational practices that aim to cultivate democratic consciousness. The Greek curriculum "Active Citizen Initiatives" offers a compelling pedagogical framework wherein the abstract principles of autonomy are translated into concrete educational goals such as self-awareness, critical thinking, responsibility, and ethical engagement.

Through the comparative lens adopted in this article, it becomes evident that moral autonomy is not an abstract or static ideal but a dynamic and cultivated disposition -one that requires structured educational environments, sustained reflection, and dialogical engagement. The ethical tensions between autonomy and heteronomy, duty and freedom, responsibility and participation, when meaningfully integrated into pedagogical design, can help prevent the absolutization or instrumentalization of moral values. Education thus emerges not merely as a vehicle for knowledge transmission, but as an ethical space wherein learners can encounter, test, and affirm the conditions of their own moral agency (Pitsou & Koios, 2025).

The intersection between the philosophical concept of moral autonomy and the pedagogical goals of the *"Active Citizen"* curriculum reveals conceptual affinities, as well as important educational challenges. Through the examination of key thinkers such as Kant and Fromm, it becomes evident that moral autonomy is not a neutral or unambiguous concept; rather, it emerges within historical, social, and ideological frameworks, and requires both critical reflection and applied interpretation. This dual nature of moral autonomy -both conceptual and practical- finds a clear resonance in the *"Active Citizen"* curriculum, which seeks to operationalize the idea in tangible pedagogical terms.

The first key finding is that the *"Active Citizen"* program treats moral autonomy not as an abstract principle, but as an educational objective. Self-awareness, responsibility, active participation, the assumption of initiatives, and the recognition of ethical dimensions are all indicators of autonomy embedded in the curriculum. This

shifts the student from a passive recipient to an active subject with personal responsibility. In alignment with Fromm's view, productivity - understood as a mode of being rather than a utilitarian performance -constitutes the foundation of moral autonomy and is closely connected to self-respect and genuine self-love, as distinct from egocentric narcissism. The second finding is the central role of critical thinking -a cornerstone of the program -which aligns with the philosophical tradition of Enlightenment as expressed by Kant. The requirement that one acts not merely according to external impositions or inner impulses, but in accordance with principles one can rationally endorse, lies at the heart of ethical education. The transition from heteronomous rule-following to the autonomous internalization of moral values is pedagogically demanding but essential for shaping ethically and socially responsible individuals. Critical questioning is also another significant objective emphasized in the curriculum. Critical questioning fosters the development of critical thinking concerning opinions and all forms of stereotypes. Moral autonomy itself, according to Kant, is born through the critical function of pure reason. As noted above, there can be no autonomous ethos without a critical stance toward any form of imposition or influence -external or internal- that a person is exposed to in the process of shaping their moral consciousness, identity, and ethical choices. Even the control of one's internal impulses-such as addictions, inclinations, or emotions- must, according to Kant (1983), be subjected to rational scrutiny so that they do not undermine moral autonomy. A third insight emerges from the dialectical relationship between duty and freedom. As Kant makes clear, moral autonomy does not entail arbitrariness, but rather the self-binding of free will to universally grounded principles. This insight is pivotal to the *"Active Citizen"* initiative, as it shifts emphasis from "entitlement" to "responsibility" in civic engagement, without abolishing personal freedom. Active citizenship is thus framed not as occasional participation, but as a sustained ethical commitment.

Last but not least, it has been argued that changes at the macro level concerning teacher education and training -which incorporate philosophy lessons, Philosophy for Children methods, and a pedagogy of listening- can enable teachers to transform themselves into critical thinkers who value moral autonomy for both themselves and their pupils. At the micro level, some practical approaches have been provided that can transform school classrooms into communities of inquiry benefiting from Kant's and Fromm's ideas on ethics and moral autonomy. Using language that meets children's developmental needs, embedding moral autonomy into the curriculum through meaningful activities, and linking moral education to children's everyday lives in school are just a few examples described above.

In summary, the connection between the theory of moral autonomy and the *"Active Citizen"* program provides fertile ground for rethinking the aims of education. Autonomy is not merely a means to social adaptation; it is an end in itself -the core of human dignity and a prerequisite for democratic ethos. In such a framework the challenge for educators is not simply to teach about autonomy, but to embody and foster it in ways that respect the dignity, complexity, and evolving self-understanding of each

learner. This is perhaps the most demanding -and most vital-task of citizenship education today. In light of the above, an education aimed at shaping morally autonomous and socially engaged citizens cannot overlook the complex relationship between individual responsibility, collective interest, and internalized values. Moral autonomy is not built upon hollow narratives or imposed authority; rather, it is cultivated through experiential examples, dialogue, and reflection within a framework that respects pluralism while also seeking a shared human foundation.

5. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This paper is primarily theoretical. It draws connections between philosophical concepts and educational goals, but it does not include empirical evidence. Another limitation concerns the context. The focus is placed on the Greek curriculum "Active Citizen Initiatives," which, although important, reflects a specific cultural and institutional framework. The conclusions may not apply directly to other educational systems with different values, structures, or challenges. Interviews with educators and students could offer insight into how such program is understood and received and how the principles of moral autonomy are actually implemented in classrooms. Surveys using questionnaires and interviews could also investigate whether teachers feel adequately prepared to integrate Kantian and Frommian ideas into their pedagogy, and whether students perceive the "Active Citizen Initiatives" as empowering or merely as another set of imposed norms. Case studies from schools using the curriculum would be especially useful. Additionally, future research should examine its implications across different contexts and populations including. Comparative research across countries could show how different educational traditions approach the teaching of autonomy and civic responsibility. Finally, further philosophical inquiry could address tensions and contradictions within the concept of autonomy itself. This would help educators avoid dogmatic interpretations and instead promote a more open, reflective approach to citizenship education.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Authors
Charikleia Pitsou (PhD) specializes in Human Rights Education, with her research interests encompassing Human Rights, Rights of a Child, Active Citizenship, Applied Pedagogy, and Lifelong Learning. She is a member of the permanent Teaching Staff (EDIP) in the Department of Educational Sciences and Social Work at the University of Patras and is also an Adjunct Lecturer at the Hellenic Open University. She possesses

over 25 years of experience in educational contexts. Her scholarly contributions include books, book chapters, and scientific articles published in Greek, English, and French. She serves as a reviewer for international and Greek academic journals. She has participated in numerous research and European programs as well as in conferences. She is an active member of various educational and scientific institutions, as well as a member of the Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination Committee of the University of Patras. Finally, she is the coordinator for the implementation of the Child Protection Policy at the University of Patras, and a collaborator with both the Child Rights Centre at the same university and the education office of the Greek branch of UNICEF.

Email: xpitsou@upatras.gr

Sofia Nikolidaki (PhD) holds two Bachelor's degrees from the University of Crete, in Preschool Education and Philosophy Studies. She also holds two Master's degrees: one in Pedagogy and Kindergarten Teaching Methodology, and another in Philosophy, awarded with an IKY scholarship. She earned her PhD in Philosophy for Children from the University of Wales, supported by a scholarship from the Academy of Athens. She has extensive experience as a preschool teacher in Greece and abroad, as well as in facilitating philosophy sessions with children. Currently, she serves as a member of the permanent Teaching Staff (EDIP) in the Department of Preschool Education at the University of Crete. Her academic interests include Preschool Education, Philosophy of Education, Philosophy with Children, Children's literature, children's critical and creative thinking, and the training of student teachers. Sofia has presented her research at national and international conferences, has published several peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, and is the author of the Greek-language book *Philosophy with Children through Children's picturebooks* (DISIGMA, 2024). She also writes and publishes stories for both children and adults.

Email: s.nikolidaki@uoc.gr

Nikolaos G Koios (PhD) is an Associate Professor in the field of "Christian Ethics and Bioethics" at the School of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (A.U.Th.). He holds a degree from the same School, where he also completed his postgraduate and doctoral studies. He pursued further studies in Ethics and Bioethics at the University of Munich and at the Hastings Center in New York. He has served as Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Priestly Studies at the Higher Ecclesiastical Academy of Thessaloniki. He has been a research associate at the Department of Orthodox Theology of the University of Munich, the Postgraduate Program in Orthodox Theology at the Hellenic Open University, and for several years, he taught theology in secondary education. He is the content coordinator of the online journal Pemptousia and a member of the Pastoral Training Foundation of the Holy Archdiocese of Athens. His academic interests include Christian ethics, bioethics, environmental ethics, the ethics of digital media, the relationship between experience and theology, and the dialogue between philosophical and Christian ethics. He has authored monographs and articles in both Greek and international journals. Part of his work has been translated into foreign

languages. He has also participated in Greek and international conferences as an invited speaker.

Email: nkoios@theo.auth.gr

References

Abdellatif Mami, N. (2020). Citizenship Education in Post-conflict Contexts: The Case of Algeria. In: Akkari, A., Maleq, K. (eds) *Global Citizenship Education*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44617-8_9

Aristotle. (2009). *The Nicomachean Ethics* (translated by D. Ross). Oxford University Press. https://books.google.ro/books/about/The_Nicomachean_Ethics.html?id=4APQIW -TWwkC&redir_esc=y

Bruner, J. (1960). *The Process of Education*. Harvard University Press. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/The_Process_of_Education.html?id=Iaq5R8 vPujAC&redir_esc=y

Balias, S. (2011). *Ta dikaiomata tou paidiou – O dromos pros tin eleutheria* [In Greek] [*Children's rights – The road to freedom*]. Papazisis.

Cogan, J. J., & Derricott, R. (Eds.). (2000). *Citizenship for the 21st century: An international perspective on education*. UNESCO. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315880877

Daniel, M. (1998). P4C in pre-service teacher education. *Analytic Teaching*, 19(1):13-20. Retrieved from https://philpapers.org/rec/DANPIP-3

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. The Macmillan Company. Retrieved from https://nsee.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/KnowledgeCenter/BuildingExpEduc/B ooksReports/10.%20democracy%20and%20education%20by%20dewey.pdf

Diogenis Laertii. (1964). Vitae Philosophorum (9.51.4–9.51.5). Oxford University Press. Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/bibliothecaoxoniensis/page/n1/mode/2up

Echeverria, E. (2007). Children and philosophy: is this possible? *Gifted Education International*, 22(2/3), 128–134.

Egan, K. (1988). *Primary understanding: education in early childhood*. Routledge. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248917131_Primary_Understanding_E ducation_in_Early_Childhood

Egan, K. (1997). *The educated mind: how cognitive tools shape our understanding*. University of Chicago Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1585992

European Commission: European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Sigalas, E., & De Coster, I. (2018). *Citizenship education at school in Europe, 2017*. Publications Office. Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.28965

Fiumara, G.C. (1995). *The other side of language*. Routledge. Retrieved from https://www.routledge.com/The-Other-Side-of-Language-A-Philosophy-of-Listening/Fiumara/p/book/9780415049276

Fromm, E. (1941). *Escape from Freedom*. Farrar & Rinehart. Retrieved from https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1942-01072-000

Fromm, E. (1947). *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics.* Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.28965

Fromm, E. (1974). *O anthrōpos gia ton eautó tou: Éreuna stē psychología tēs ēthikēs* [Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics, Greek transl. and intro. by D. Theodorakatos, 2nd ed]. Boukoumanēs.

Fromm, E. (1977a). *Kai hōs Theoi esesthe: Mia rizospastikē ermēneia tēs Palaias Diathēkēs kai tēs paradosēs tēs* [*And as gods you shall be: A radical interpretation of the Old Testament and its tradition*, Greek transl. and intro. by D. Theodorakatos]. Boukoumanēs.

Fromm, E. (1977b). *Pera apo ta desma tēs aftapatis* [*Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, Greek transl. by M. Korniliou]. Boukoumanēs.

Fromm, E. (1978). *H technē tēs agapēs* [*The Art of Loving*, Greek transl. by E. Grammenos; ed. by G. Koulouridou]. Boukoumanēs.

Gründel, J. (1980). *Normen im Wandel: Eine Orientierungshilfe für christliches Leben heute.* Don-Bosco-Verlag.

Greek Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports. (2024, November 1). *Curriculum of Studies "Active Citizen Actions" for Kindergarten, Primary, Gymnasium, and Lyceum* [In Greek] [Programma Spoudon «Draseis Energou Politi» gia Nipiagogeio, Dimotiko, Gymnasio kai Lykeio] (Ministerial Decision No. 130372/ΓΔ4; Government Gazette, Βʹ 6048). Retrieved from https://act.digitalschool.gov.gr/

Hadot, P. (1995). *Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault.* Blackwell. Retrieved from https://ascetology.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/pierre-hadot-philosophy-as-a-way-of-life-spiritual-exercises-from-socrates-to-foucault-1.pdf

Haynes, J. (2008). *Children as philosophers: learning through enquiry and dialogue in the primary classroom. (2nd ed).* Routledge. Retrieved from https://www.routledge.com/Children-as-Philosophers-Learning-Through-Enquiry-and-Dialogue-in-the-Primary-Classroom/Haynes/p/book/9780415446815?srsltid=AfmBOopSOMO_fh7fyz2_yOnnq3jQI6ChREjSX8yqNw1rASNqEz9PX8JE

Herman, B. (1993). *The practice of moral judgment*. Harvard University Press. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/The_Practice_of_Moral_Judgment.html?id=RzdYu_6TzZ8C&redir_esc=y

Kant, I. (1956). *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen des blossen Vernuft*. Vorländer. Retrieved from https://meiner.de/fmv_de/die-religion-innerhalb-der-grenzen-der-blo-szligen-vernunft-15728

Kant, I. (1984). *Ta themelia tis metaphysikis ton ithon* [Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Greek transl. by G. Tzavara]. Athens, Greece: Dodoni. Greek ed., ISBN 978-960-558-0568. (Original work published 1785).

Kant, I. (2004). *Kritiki tou practikou logou* [Critique of Practical Reason, Greek transl. by K. Androulidakis]. Hestia. ISBN 978-960-051-1765. (Original work published 1788).

Kant, I. (2020). *Kritiki tou katharou logou* [Critique of Pure Reason, Greek translation by A. Giannaras]. Papazissis. Greek ed., ISBN 978-960-02-35913. (Original work published 1781).

Kennedy, K. J. (2025). *Disruptions and civic education: How should young people be prepared for an uncertain future*? (SpringerBriefs in Education). Springer. Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-96-5875-6

Koios, N. (2004). *Ep' evletheria ekklithete: Autonomia kai eteronomia stin Ithiki* [In Greek] [You were called to freedom: Autonomy and heteronomy in ethics]. Stamoulis.

Korsgaard, C. (1996). *The sources of Normativity*. Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from https://tannerlectures.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/105/2024/06/korsgaard94.pdf

Korsgaard, C. (2008). *The Constitution of Agency. Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology.* Oxford University Press. Retrieved from https://philpapers.org/rec/KORTCO-2

Lipman, M. (1988). *Philosophy goes to school.* Temple University Press. Retrieved from https://philpapers.org/rec/LIPPGT

Lipman, M. (2003). *Thinking in education. (2nd Edition.).* Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511840272

Lipman, M., Sharp, A. M. & Oscanyon, F. (1980). *Philosophy in the classroom.* PA Temple University Press. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/Philosophy_in_the_Classroom.html?id=3k9zEAAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y

Makaiau, A., & Miller, C. (2012). The philosopher's pedagogy. Educational Perspectives, Journal of the College of Education, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 44(1,2), 8–22.

Mantzaridis, G. (1995). Eisagogi stin ithiki: I ithiki stin krisi tou parontos kai tin proklisi tou mellontos [In Greek] *Introduction to ethics: Ethics in the crisis of the present and the challenge of the future*. Pournaras Panagiotis.

Nikolidaki, S (2023a). Student-centered education as presupposition to child-centered education: A case study of trainee pre-school teachers. Proceedings 1st International Higher Education Pedagogy Conference, *Developing Academics' Pedagogy Acuity* (15–17 September 2023), Rethymnon, Crete. https://tott.uoc.gr/conference/proceedings-2023/

Nikolidaki, S. (2023b). Listening philosophically: Developing an ear for emergent philosophising. *Journal of Philosophy in Schools, 10*(2), 23–46. Retrieved from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/2bd0/5892648b5358c2bae407a4e7cf7bfa018125.pdf

Nikolidaki, S. (2024). Filosofia me paidia mesa apo eikonografimena paidika vivlia [In Greek] Philosophy with children through picturebooks. Disigma Publications.

Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions. (2019). *EU CONVINCE research report: Challenges and good practices related to promoting citizenship and values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education*. OBESSU. https://www.obessu.org/resources/documents/other/eu-convince-research-report-challenges-and-good-practices-related-to-promoting-citizenship-and-values-of-freedom-tolerance-and/

Papanoutsos, E. P. (1974). *O nomos kai h aretē: H ēthikē suneidēsē kai ta problēmata tēs - Parallagēses sto idio thema* [*The Law and Virtue: Moral Conscience and Its Problems – Variations on the Same Theme*]. Dodoni.

Pfister, M. (1992). *The Rainbow Fish*. Simon & Schuster. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/The_Rainbow_Fish.html?id=td0nDwAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y

Pitsou, C., Koios, N., & Nizamis, K. E. (2025a). Bioethical Literacy in Higher Education: Insights from Postgraduate Students. *International Conference on Next-Generation Innovations and Sustainability 2025*. Futurity Research Publishing. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15114314

Pitsou, C., Katsantonis, I. G., Katsantonis, A., & Gorozidis, G. S. (2025b). Empowering and Promoting Children's Rights by Implementing Skills Labs Using Engaging Learning Activities. *Societies*, 15(4), 84. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc15040084

Pitsou, C., & Koios, N. (2025). Empathy as a Common Ground Between Moral Development and Active Citizenship: An Aristotelian Approach. *Futurity Philosophy*, 4(1), 52–70. https://doi.org/10.57125/FP.2025.03.30.04

Reed, R. and Johnson, T.W. (1999). *Friendship and moral education. Twin Pillars of P4C*. New York: Peter Lang. Retrieved from https://philpapers.org/rec/REEFAM

Sharp, A. M. (2007). The classroom community of inquiry as ritual: how we can cultivate wisdom. *Critical and Creative Thinking*, 15(1), 3–15.

Protopapadakis, Evangelos D. (2019). *From Dusk till Dawn: Bioethical Insights into the Beginning and the End of Life*. Logos Verlag.

Westheimer, J. and Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(2): 237-69. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312041002237

Williams, B. (2006). *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. With a commentary on the text by A. W. Moore. Routledge. Retrieved from https://www.ias.edu/sites/default/files/sss/pdfs/Ethics%20and%20the%20Limits%20of%20Philosophy.pdf

Wood, A. W. (2008). *Kantian ethics*. Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from https://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/54948/frontmatter/9780521854948_frontmatter.pdf

Wyn, J., & Mellor, S. (2009). *Touching the Future: Building skills for life and work* (Australian Education Review No. 55). Australian Council for Educational Research. Retrieved from https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=aer