CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Plato was one of the greatest of the Greek philosophers whose influence on Western thought and philosophy has been continuous for more than two thousand years. He was the earliest thinker who has produced a comprehensive system of philosophy which touches almost all aspects of thought and existence. The philosophical issues which he has raised and the problems which he has tackled are genuine issues and problems. He has inherited the philosophical legacy of his great teacher, Socrates and has undertaken the task of solving the problems of the meaning of human life, human knowledge, human conduct and human institution. He has taken up serious inquiry into the true nature of reality. In the course of the quest for the meaning of the nature of reality, Plato "developed not only a theory of knowledge, a theory of conduct, and a theory of the state but crowned his work with a theory of the universe." He gave full exposition of his metaphysical conviction in his theory of Ideas or Forms. In his theory of ideas, he was writing about a world of reality which exists

1. Frank Thilly, A History of Philosophy, Revised Edn., p.73.
beyond the perceptions of the senses and which is intelligible only to the purified soul. According to him, philosopher and the philosopher alone, is endowed with the capacity to have the vision of reality. Such a vision was considered by Plato as a unique experience which can afford the greatest happiness to the experiencer. Philosophy itself was regarded by him as the vision of the true nature of reality.

There are many other important issues on which Plato had made lasting contributions. According to Bertrand Russell, "The most important matters in Plato's philosophy are first - his Utopia, which was the earliest of a long series; second, his theory of ideas, which was a pioneering attempt to deal with the still unsolved problems of universe; third, his argument in favour of immortality; fourth, his cosmogony; fifth, his conception of knowledge as reminiscence rather than perception." There are many more in the list of Plato's contribution to human thought than what has been given by Russell in the above quotation. Plato's dialogues give us a mine of thoughts and ideas which are singular in their depth of insight and literary beauty. These

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ideas are not to be treated as museum items, rather they provide the foundation of new and curative thoughts and ideas for generation after generation of thinkers, even to the present. Alfred North Whitehead has rightly stated that the history of western thought is nothing, but foot-notes on the philosophy of Plato.

Plato not only had made spectacular contributions to different branches of knowledge, but opened vistas for the advancement of learning and the dissemination of knowledge. The Academy which he founded served as a permanent institution for the prosecution of studies in both exact and human sciences. Some scholars like A.E. Taylor and F. Copleston have even maintained that the Academy was similar in function to a university. Plato had given support and inspiration to the mathematicians like Theaetetus and Eudoxus by inducting them as teachers of mathematics in his Academy. He encouraged new studies in the natural sciences and in association with capable researchers he introduced the study of astronomy, theoretical chemistry, anatomy, philosophy, pathology and the mechanism of sense perception. He had even developed a theory of the sciences in the Dialogues like Republic (Book VII), the Phaedo and the Timaeus. Plato had made lasting and valuable
contribution to the theory of knowledge and the philosophy of logic. The distinction which he had made between knowledge and belief in the Theaetetus has been still considered as an important contribution to epistemology. His account of the conditions of valid knowledge is an original contribution which has been relevant to contemporary studies in the theory of knowledge. His theory of "knowledge as reminiscence" is an interesting theory which has its influence in metaphysics. The method of dialectic which he had developed in a variety of forms is an important contribution to philosophical method. Plato had attached so much importance to this method that he regarded dialectic as the Cornerstone to the knowledge of reality. In his quest for real knowledge Plato had developed a genuine philosophical method in the form of dialectic. He started initially with the method of arriving at true conclusion by means of a series of systematically related questions. This method of inquiry he inherited from his master Socrates and this method was better known as the Socratic method. He also followed the method of arriving at truth by means of the elimination of rival hypothesis. This method probably he adopted from the method of reducere ad absurdum which was introduced for the first time in philosophy by Xenocrates. He also
adopted the method of division by dichotomy to drive home a philosophical point of view. In this way, Plato followed different pathways for arriving at truth. Sometimes, he even adopted some sort of linguistic analysis with a view to explaining difficult concepts and statements. He proceeded systematically to the path of truth like a skilled craftsman. His foremost concern however was to have true vision of reality. Although reason served as the beacon light in his inquiry, he ultimately depended upon some sort of mystic vision at that level of higher thinking when he was concerned with reality as such.

Plato was perhaps the first philosopher who initiated discussion on the nature of being in general or general metaphysics (or ontology), i.e. metaphysica generalis as the medieval philosopher called it. After him Aristotle took up the subject-matter and developed into an important systematic branch of study. Plato's account of general ontology and the discussion on various aspects of the problems of being will be found on different dialogues especially on such Dialogues as Parmenides and Sophist. In the Sophist, Plato tried to provide an account of "being" and the connection of that notion with other very general notions such as
"sameness" and "difference." In that context, it was implied that those terms were the names of certain abstract entities which he called "Forms." Plato's method of inquiry in this dialogue, for instance, is highly analytical. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Plato may even be regarded as the precursor of the contemporary analytical philosophers. But the greatest contribution of Plato lies in the distinction between appearance (that which sense experience consider to be so) and reality. He also raised the genuine metaphysical questions: what is it which is really real? He attempt to determine the qualification of reality and the condition (or criteria) for something's being really real are intellectual pursuits of the highest order.

Plato's theory of reality assumes significant role in his philosophical system because his view of reality serves as the foundation of the system. It serves as the basis of morality and ethics, as the basis of good public life and good government. The knowledge of reality which can be earned through graduated effort and discipline was considered by Plato as the highest knowledge. A life of contemplation, which consisted in the contemplation of the highest reality was regarded by him aspect of Plato's theory of reality is that
knowledge (reality) and value are intimately related with each other.

The objective of our thesis is to study "Plato's theory of Reality". In the course of our inquiry, we shall give an exposition of Plato's theory from the materials derived from his important Dialogues. We shall develop Plato's standpoint from the original sources and at the same time make an attempt to give authentic interpretation on different controversial issues and viewpoints. In the process, we shall give a general survey of Plato's works and the works of the commentators and then we shall try to arrive at a comprehensive account of Plato's position on the theory of reality. Before we proceed with our project, we consider it proper to give a brief account of Plato's life and works.

**Plato's Life** - Plato was born at Athens, most probably in the year 427 B.C. in a wealthy and aristocratic family. His father was Aristocles and his mother Perictione, sister of Charmides and niece of Critias, who both figured in the oligarchy of 404 B.C. His two brothers, Adeimantus and Glaucias, appear in the Republic and he hold a sister named Potone. After the death of
Ariston, Periandros married Pyrilampes, and their son Autiphon (Plato's half brother) appear in the Parmenides. Several prominent members of the family had been anti-democratic in their political outlook. It has been pointed out by various authorities that Plato's bias against democracy might not be due to his upbringing, but was induced by the influence of Socrates and still more by the treatment which Socrates received at the hands of democracy. It is likely that Plato's distrust of democracy dated from a period very much earlier than that of the death of Socrates. During the course of the Peloponnesian war, Plato was convinced that the democracy in those days lacked truly capable and responsible leaders and that what leaders there were easily spoiled by the necessity of pleasing the populace. Although Plato's early ambition as he write in the Epistle, vii 324b-326b was political, he was repulsed by the activities of the leaders of the Athenian democracy, particularly by their attempt to implicate Socrates in the illegal execution of their victim Leon. Subsequently the condemnation and execution of Socrates in 399 B.C., convinced him that there was no place for a

man of conscience in active politics. Plato was a student of Socrates and had deep respect for him. As a young man who hailed from aristocratic and influential family, Plato must have received a cultured education. Moreover, he lived in the flourishing period of Athenian culture. According to Diogenes Laertius, Plato applied himself to the study of painting and wrote poems and tragedies. He had been acquainted in his youth with Cratylus, the Heraclitean philosopher. 4 From him Plato would have learnt that the world of sense perception is a world of flux, and so not the right subject-matter for true and certain knowledge. That true and certain knowledge is attainable on the conceptual level, he would have learnt from Socrates with whom he must have been acquainted from early years.

After the death of Socrates, Plato went to Megara and took shelter with the philosopher Euclid. He also probably travelled to Cyrene and Egypt. When he was forty years old, he visited Italy and Sicily. He became acquainted with Archytas, the learned Pythagorean. Then, Plato was invited to the court of Dionysius I Tyrant of Syracuse, where he became a friend of Dion,

4. Ibid., p.128.
the Tyrant's brother-in-law. The story goes that Plato's out-spokeness excited the anger of Dionysius, who gave him into the charge of Pollis, a Lacedaemonian envoy, to sell him as a slave. Pollis sold Plato at Aegina (at that time at war with Athens) and Plato was even in danger of losing his life. But at last a man of Cyrene, a certain Anniceris, ransomed him and sent him to Athens.

After his return to Athens, Plato founded the Academy about 387 B.C. as an institute for the systematic pursuit of philosophical and scientific research. The venue of the Academy was a grove near the sanctuary of the hero Academus. The Academy may be called the first European university, because the study then covered a wide range of subjects like, mathematics, astronomy, the physical sciences, music, etc. besides philosophy. The members of this institution worshipped the Muses. Young people came not only from Athens, but from abroad as well. The unique feature of the Academy was its scientific spirit. Although Plato aimed at making statesman and rulers of his pupils, his method was not confined to teaching those things which would be of immediate practical application e.g. rhetoric, but in fostering the theoretical pursuit of science. His educational aim and the details of the academic curriculum
are described in Book vii of the Republic. The programme of his educational system culminated in philosophy, but it included as preliminary subjects a study of mathematics and astronomy as well as harmonics, in a disinterested and not purely utilitarian spirit. Plato was convinced that the best training for public life is not a merely practical Sophistic training, but rather the pursuit of science for its own sake. Mathematics offered an important field for disinterested study. Plato attached so much importance to mathematics that the right of entry to the institution was reserved for those who know mathematics. Plato felt that the politician who has gone through the academic discipline of the Academy will act courageously and judiciously in accordance with the conviction founded on eternal and changeless truths. Plato definitely aimed at producing statesman and not demagogues. He has clearly spelt out his ideal of the governance of the state by "the philosopher-king" in his Republic. Plato's visits to Syracuse in the hope of assisting in the realisation of his ideal state and the formation of philosopher-king prove futile and he was very much disappointed for the failure in that endeavour.

It is said that he died at the age of 81 years in about 347 B.C. "at a marriage feast" while writing.
He was buried in the Academy. Much of what we learn about Plato's life have been derived from Plato's "Epistles and Letters". About Plato as a great historical figure and personality, Frank Thilly wrote "Plato was a great poet and mystic, as well as a philosopher and dialectician, he combined in a rare degree great power of logical analysis and abstract thought with flights of poetic imagination and deep mystical feeling. His character was noble, he was an aristocrat by birth and by temperament, an uncompromising idealist hostile to every thing base and vulgar."

In his own time Plato had wide reputation as teacher and counsellor of statesman. As a true philosopher he had the conviction of purposes and missionary spirit for "conversion of souls" and service for mankind. For him the hope for mankind within society and the state lies in that "kings should turn philosopher or that philosopher should become king".

**Plato's works** - Plato was a prolific writer and lecturer. His literary career extended over the greater

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part of his long life. He had written about thirty six works, all of which are available. His lecture notes, however, have been lost although his biographers refer to them as excellent works which expounded his thoughts and ideas on various subjects with lucidity. The lectures of Plato in the academy did not appear in published form. As oral teachings seen to have influenced such works as Aristotle's "On the good", some of Plato's unwritten doctrines, which were not contained in the dialogues, were handed down by his student. Aristotle provided a necessary source for Platonic philosophy.

The entire corpus of Plato's works is available. As the eminent Platonic scholar, A.E. Taylor remarks: "No where is later antiquity do we come on any reference to a Platonic work which we do not still possess".7

Scholars however have disputed over the genuineness of some of Plato's work. The scholars are not sure that all the dialogues that have come down to us under the name of Plato are actually by Plato himself. Hence, there is a need for finding out which work is genuine and which spurious.

Two scholars namely, Deroylides and Thrasyllus who lived either shortly before or shortly after the Christian era have been generally considered as the earliest scholars who systematised the text of Plato's works. They prepared a list of thirty-six works (including epistles as one item) arranged in nine tetralogies or groups of four. Plato wrote mostly in the form of dialogues and altogether there are thirty-five dialogues, out of them six are considered as spurious by the modern scholars. They are - Alcibiades II, Hipparchus, Amatores, or Rivalles, Theages, Clitophon, Hinoe, the Hippias Major and the Menexenus are still regarded as doubtful even though Aristotle used both in a way which seems to prove that he regarded them as Platonic. Plato's will preserved by Diogenes is authentic. Some of the 32 epigrams ascribed to Plato in the Anthology may be genuine.

It is very important to determine the chronology of Plato's works. A criterion for this purpose is that of language. The argument from language is dependable because while difference of content may be ascribed to the conscious selection and purpose of the author, the development of linguistic style is largely unconscious.
The use of linguistic style as a criterion for determining the chronology of the dialogues has been proved very useful.

The second criterion is that afforded by the direct testimony of the ancient writers. Thus, which Aristotle's assertion that the Laws were written later than the Republic is a valuable piece of information the report of Diogenes Laertius that the Phaedrus is the earliest of the Platonic dialogues cannot be accepted. Diogenes himself approves of Aristotle's report, but he argues that since the subject matter of the dialogues is "Love" Plato must have written it in his youth. This argument cannot be accepted. As A.E. Taylor points out we should go for wrong were we to argue from the poetical and mythical flights of the second part of Faust to the conclusion that Goethe wrote the second part before the first.  

The third criterion is the determination of the chronology with reference to some historical facts. For example, if there were a reference to the death of Socrates, as in the Phaedo, the dialogue must clearly have been composed after the death. But that does not

8. Ibid., p. 18.
till us how long after. However, critics have obtained some help from their criterion.

Fourthly, reference of one dialogue to another would obviously prove a help in determining the order of the dialogue must have been written after the dialogue to which it refer. But it is not always easy to decide an apparent reference to another dialogue as really a reference. However, there are some cases in which there is a clear reference, e.g. the reference to the Republic that is contained in the Timaeus. Similarly the Politics is clearly the sequel to the Sophists and so must be a later composition.

The fifth criterion is determination of the order by reference to the content of the dialogue. But we should be careful in this respect. Suppose, for instance, that some philosophical doctrine is found in a short summary sentence in dialogue X which in dialogue Y, it is found treated at length. In such cases, it may be maintained that the negative and critical examination of the problems precedes the positive and constructive exposition. If this be taken as a criterion, then the Phaedrus, the Sophists, the Politics, the Parmenides should precede in date of composition, the Apology and the Republic. But investigation has shown that this
cannot be so. But to say that the content criterion has to be used with prudence is not to say that it has no use. For example, the attitude of Plato towards the doctrine of Ideas suggests that the *Theaetetus*, *Parmenides*, *Sophists*, *Politics*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, should be grouped together while the connection of the *Parmenides*, *Sophists* and *Politics* with the Icatic dialectic suggests that these dialogues stand in a peculiarly close relation with one another.

Sixthly - differences in the artistic construction of the dialogues may also be of some help in determining this relation to one another in regard to order of composition. Thus, in certain dialogues the setting of the dialogue, the characterisation of the personages who take part in it are worked out with great care. There are humorous and playful allusion to vivid interludes also. The *Symposium* is one such example.

In other dialogues, however, the artistic side retreats into the back ground and the author's attention is obviously wholly occupied with the philosophic content. In dialogues of this second group to which the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* would belong, form is more or less neglected, content is everything. From all considerations, it may be concluded with some degree of
probability that dialogues written with more attention to artistic form are earlier than the others as artistic vigour flagged in Plato's old age and his attention was engrossed by the philosophical issues.

The chronology of Plato's works manifests the gradual evolution of his philosophy. A number of scholars working independently and using different procedures have attained remarkable unanimity in determining the chronology of Plato's works. Four stages of composition have been differentiated in laying down the genetic order of Plato's thought. 9

1. Early Socratic period (399-388 or 387 B.C.)

These dialogues deal with the spirit and mission of Socrates' inquiry concerning the ethico-political virtue and his analysis of the moral concepts. As a group these writings are mostly anti-Sophistic and most of them emphasise the need for seeking true knowledge by ending without reaching a definite conclusion.

Apology: Socrates' trial and defence.

9 A study of the results of five leading scholars has been given in W.D. Ross, Plato's Theory of Ideas, Oxford, 1951.
Crito: Socrates' refusal to escape after the trial and his adherence to principles.

Euthyphron: On the nature of piety and impiety of which Socrates was accused.

Laches: On courage.

Ion: Against the poets and rhapsodists.

Protagoras: The Sophist theory that virtue can be taught vs the Socratic paideia or theory that all virtue is one and cannot be taught.

Charmides: On temperance or moderation.

Lysis: On friendship.

2. Transitional period (387 - 380 B.C.) with the advancement of his intellectual and literary powers. Plato not only intensified his polemics against the Sophist, but built the Socratic concept into a metaphysical theory of ideas. Where the earlier dialogues had been limited to one facet of virtue, the dialogue of this construction stage broaden and deepen the speculation concerning the more important questions of a systematic philosophy.

Gorgias: On justice and against the rhetoric and power politics of the Sophists in the city state.
Meno: On the acquisition of virtue - knowledge by anamnesis or recollection.

Aristotle: On wisdom that brings happiness and against the fallacy of later Sophists.

Lesser Hippias: On the beautiful, and a theory of language.

Cratylus: On language and on the difference between immutable, sensible, phenomena.

Menexenus parody: On rhetoric in a funeral oration.

3. Period of Maturity (380-361 B.C.): At the highest stage of his genius, Plato fully evolved his own ontological theory of Ideas and expressed the ramifications of this doctrine in epistemology, psychology, ethics, politics and aesthetics. Hence, the third group is made up of dialogues which either apply the speculative insight to new fields or subject them to new facts and difficulties that are raised from other points of view.

Symposium (or Banquet): On inspiration by Eros (Love) of the soul; its ascent from shadowy to true beauty.

Phaedo: Clearer revelation of the theory of Ideas, the immortality and destiny of the soul - discussions set against Socrates's last days.
Republic: On the ideal state, the primacy of good, the four grounds of cognition and the tripartition of the soul.

Phaedrus: Philosophic rhetoric, the soul - its tripartition, vision of Ideas in pre-existence anamnesis: The structure of the world of Ideas.

Theaetetus: The relation of knowledge to unchanging objects and to other cognitional experiences such as sense-perception and right opinion.

Parmenides: Defence of the theory of Ideas and introduction of mathematical and axiological concepts; the problem of one and many.

Sophist: Critical consideration of Ideas and of change in life, soul, intellect, analytic search for a definition of Sophist.

4. Period of Old Age (361-347 B.C.): In this later philosophic maturity, as his dramatic power declined and his critical acumen increased, Plato was moved by reflection upon new problems and socio-political changes to refine his philosophy, with brilliant intellectual apperception, he critically elaborated on his epistemology, modified his ethicopolitical concepts, made greater use of logic and found new interest in questions of the cosmos.
Statesman or Politicus: Definition of a statesman by the method of division by dichotomy, importance of knowledge in the true ruler.

Philebus: Development of Plato's ethical doctrine by attention to concrete conditions, to the hierarchy of values as a norm and to the relation of pleasure to good, enhancement of the theory of Ideas by further study of unity and multiplicity.

Timaeus: Cosmologic discourse on the origin of the physical world and the role of the Demiurge.

Critias: Contrast of ideal agrarian state to the imperialistic sea-power, Atlantis.

Laws: Modification of the Republic's Ideal state according to concrete condition of life.

Economic: Continuation of the Laws, on the wisdom of the ruler and divine cult.

Letters VII and VIII: Politics and the relevance of Ideas.

This chronological arrangement of Plato's works indicates a clear though gradual evolution of Plato's philosophy in response to the intellectual challenges of his day. The dialogues, however, could not give a
complete picture of Plato's philosophical system. Though his mind did not stop at any definite concept, his thought was coherent. It possessed the unity that characterised the continuous development of intellectual personality maturing with a definite point of view. Plato had developed highly general patterns of thought exemplified by concrete insights into particular facts. The unity of Platonic thought, therefore, is primarily "the unity in his abstract thought with his concrete intuitions".  

In the dialogues, Plato adopted the dialectic method of investigation of concepts by question and answer - which had been the characteristic approach of Socrates. Like Socrates, Plato was interested not so much in asserting a definite position as in the virtue of a clear and reasonable enquiry. Like Socrates again, Plato's emphasis was ethical rather than scientific. For him knowledge is not separable from virtue and the good is also the true. Beyond this relationship between Socrates and Plato, it is difficult to determine how much of this figure (i.e. Socrates) is historical and

how much has been created by Plato for the exposition of his own philosophy.

The early dialogues of Plato are short and simple. Regarding their thought they are entirely under the influence of Socrates. It seems that Plato gave exposition of Socrates' thought in these dialogues. However, throughout these dialogues, there are evidences of freshness and originality. The literary quality of the early dialogues is superb. The pet theme of most of these dialogue is that "virtue is knowledge".

In the dialogues of the second period, Plato developed his own philosophy of Ideas. Every other thought centres round the Ideas. It may be said in the context of the dialogues of this period, that the whole of Plato's philosophy is nothing but the theory of Ideas. This period is the construction stage of the development of Plato's thought. He was seized with the central issues of philosophy, and thus cared less for the literary style which was, mainly ornamental. There was little room for anecdotes and humours. The emphasis was a reasoning and serious discussion. The dialogues of the third and fourth period are the works of Plato's maturity. If the first period was marked chiefly by literary beauty, the second by the depth of thought,
the later dialogues combine both. The later period is the systematic and synthetic period of Plato's thought. "Every part of his philosophy is here linked up with every other part. All the details of the system seem to flow from the one central principle of his thought, namely, the theory of Ideas. Every sphere of knowledge and being is in turn exhibited in the light of that principle, is permeated and penetrated by it."¹¹

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