CHAPTER - II

INFLUENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PLATO'S THOUGHT

In the course of the development of his philosophical thought, Plato was influenced by the thoughts and ideas of his predecessors and contemporaries. This is apparent from the fact that he did not generally introduce his own thought directly, but through such protagonists of his views as Socrates, Parmenides, the Pythagorean, Timaeus, etc. All these thinkers in his dialogues were historical persons. This manner of presenting his views has led to great initial difficulty in understanding Plato's philosophy. The question thus arises: with what right do we assume that Plato means us to accept as his own the doctrine put into the mouth of these characters of the dialogues which are presented in the dramatic form? Is his purpose dogmatic and didactic or may it be that it is mainly dramatic?

It seems that Plato allows himself freely to develop in a dialogue any view which interests him for the moment, without committing himself to its truth or considering its compatibility with other positions assumed elsewhere in his writings. Scholars in the 19th century assumed that some of Plato's characters, notably
Socrates and Timaeus were mouthpieces through whom he inculcates tenets of his own, without concern for dramatic or historical propriety. Thus, it was held that the most famous philosophical doctrine of the Phaedo and Republic "the ideal theory," the doctrine of recollection and of the tripartite soul were originated by Plato after the death of Socrates. But these views may be accepted with reservations and careful study of the dialogues. It is undesirable that, there is a real difference between the thought of the dialogue, which are later than the Phaedo and those that are earlier. However, there are no serious discrepancies of doctrine between the individual dialogues of the same period. Plato seems to announce his own personal conviction of certain doctrines of the second group of dialogues by a striking dramatic device. In the Sophist and Politics, the leading part is taken by an Eelatic and in the Laws by an Athenian, who are the only imaginary personage in the whole of Plato's writings. Plato takes on himself the responsibility for the logic and for the ethics and educational and political theory of the Politics and of the Laws in a specially marked way. We are, thus compelled to face the question how far Plato means the utterances of Socrates in his
earlier dialogues to be taken as expressions of philosophy of his own.

It is clear from the study of the Dialogues that Plato felt the influences of both mythic and philosophic thought in the issue he confronted and the insight he discoursed. The oldest intellectual factor in the development of Plato's primary notion, the Idea, was the Greek myth which ran like a thread through the life and thought of Greece. Under the critical onslaught, especially of the Sophists, the myths were undergoing a gradual process of dissolution. In the minds of the younger generation myths have become object of mockery.¹ Anxious to retain his own religious and poetic spirit, Plato followed the mythical tradition of his people. For Plato, myths seemed to have a substance of truth and a connection with the origin of things,² even though their dubious picture of the Gods presented a serious danger. With this recognition of both the unique insight and intelligibility of the ancient myths, Plato set out to purify, connect and create them anew. "The Lover of myth is in sense of Lover of wisdom".³

1. Plato, Lysis 205, Phaedrus 229.
According to Bertrand Russell, the purely philosophical influences on Plato were such as to predispose him in favour of Sparta. These influences, speaking broadly, were: Pythagoras, Parmenides, Heraclitus and Socrates.⁴

**Pythagoreans**: Under the influence of Pythagoras (572-497 B.C.) Plato introduced the orphic element in his philosophy. The religious trend, the belief in immortality, the other worldliness, the priestly tone, and all that is involved in the simile of the cave, and also his respect for mathematics and his intimates intermingling of intellect and mysticism owe their origin in the Pythagorean beliefs and practices.

The Pythagorean philosophy was a dualism which sharply distinguished thought and the senses, the soul and the body, the mathematical forms of things and their perceptible appearances. The Pythagorean supposed that the substances of all things were numbers and all phenomena were sensuous experiences of mathematical ratios. For them, the whole universe was harmony. They made important contributions to mathematics and geometry as taught in first book of Euclid. But the Pythagorean

sect was not only a philosophical and mathematical school, but also a religious brotherhood and a fellowship for moral reformation. They believed in the immortality and transmigration of the soul, which they defined as the harmony of the body. To restore harmony which was confused by the senses was the goal of their ethics and politics. Their religious ideas were closely related to those of Greek mysteries which sought by various rites and abstinences to purify the soul. The attempt to combine mysticism and mathematics led the Pythagoreans to the development of an intricate and somewhat fantastic symbolism. Through these ideas the Pythagoreans had considerable effect on the development of Plato's philosophical thought.

Under the influence of the ethico-scientific Pythagoras, Plato began to see an answer to the disorder in man and to the injustice in the relation between the small cosmos that is man and the large cosmos that is the universe. For Plato, the mathematical vision revealed the harmony and proportion of the universe. The mathematical structure of the world promoted the perfect being of the Ideas, things fixed and immutable.

The Pythagorean influence reached as far as the ideas themselves, which because of their absolute
indivisibility, Plato described mathematically as monads or units. In this account of dialectics, he insisted that the mind should start with one Idea, and go through a process of gradual division until the total number in one of these units allowed. Only then is one of these units allowed to pass into the indefinitely numerous particular things that come into being. The Pythagorean background continues to show itself in Plato’s explanation of the composition of things.

Plato like all mystics, has in his beliefs a core of certainty which is essentially incommunicable except by a way of life. The Pythagorean had endeavoured to set up a rule of the initiate and this is at bottom, what Plato desires. If a man is to become a good statesman he must know the good. This he can only do by a combination of intellectual and moral discipline. If those who have not gone through this discipline are allowed a share in the government, they will inevitably corrupt.5

In establishing the Academy, Plato produced an institution, which resembled the Pythagorean order.

5. Ibid., p.123.
He praised Pythagoras as a leader of education, the founder of the Pythagorean way of life. In both the Pythagorean and Platonic schools the teacher, was the centre surrounded by a circle of disciples who venerated the teacher. There were, however, differences between the two, whereas the Pythagorean mysteries appear deliberate and enforced by prohibitions, Plato's mysteries derive from the view that the highest knowledge "does not admit of exposition like other branches of knowledge, but after much converse about the matter itself and a life lived together. Suddenly a light, as it were, is kindled in one soul by a flame that leaps to it from another, and thereafter sustains itself."6 Where the Pythagorans used an authoritarian approach in deciding questions, it was the Socrates heritage of the Platonic school to philosophise in conversation between teacher and disciple. United by eros in a common quest, they ascended the path of dialectics to the Idea. All these streams of thought converging in the sea of Platonism were transformed by the creative power of Plato's mind and elevated to a higher synthesis under his all-embracing insight the Ideas.7

7. G.R.McLean and Aspew, Ancient Western Philosophy, p.130.
Parmenides (6th-5th Century B.C.)

Parmenides' view on *Being* influenced Plato's thought that reality is eternal and timeless and on logical grounds all changes must be illusory. He was the head of the Eleatic school of Greek philosophy. He developed the conception of "Being" in opposition to the Heraclitean conception of "Becoming". According to him, to think at all we must postulate something that is that what is not cannot be taught, and cannot be. Thought without being and being without thought are impossible, and the two, namely, thought and being are therefore, identical. At the same time, "the Being" of Parmenides is that which fills space, non being is empty space. Empty space, therefore, cannot be, and if empty space or the void cannot be, then the plurality of individual things is equally not real, since this results from the motion of the full "in the void". There is, thus, for Parmenides only one "Being" without inner differentiation. Homogenous and unchangeable Being is the only reality for Parmenides. Using the characteristics of Parmenides' "Being" Plato described each Idea as "true Being" one indivisible limited or complete, self identical, simple, eternal immutable. Plato pointed out that contradictions are involved in any other way then what has been characterised above.
It may be maintained that the entire structure of Plato's world of being and of the corresponding stages of knowledge is basically Parmenidean. For both Parmenides and Plato, beings is knowledge and diametrically opposed to absolute not-being, that is unknowable since the Idea is, it is the truly real and the fixed object of true knowledge. Plato's natural philosophy also seems related to Parmenides' cosmology, in as much as both place the sensible world between the two poles of being and not-being. Plato went further by attempting to relate the Heraclitean world of becoming to the Parmenidean world of pure being and paradoxically to mark the eternal distance between them. Plato also joined Parmenides in considering knowledge of the sensible world to be opinion (doxa). However, he was far more constructive in envisaging different degrees of knowledge.

Plato used Idea as the point of rapprochement in attempting to mediate between the seemingly antithetical world of Heraclitean becoming and Parmenidean being. He counterpoised the two world views in order to integrate them a new in the dualistic synthesis of being and becoming required by the Ideas. In Plato's new world, being penetrates not-being and unity becomes visible through multiplicity.
Heraclitus (536-470 B.C.)

From Heraclitus Plato derived the thought that there is nothing permanent in the sensible world. According to Heraclitus, all things and the universe as a whole are in constant flow and flux. Nothing is real, only change is real. For this reason the world appeared to Heraclitus to be an ever living fire, a consuming moment in which only the orderliness of the succession of things remains always the same.

In developing his philosophy of Ideas Plato recognized the value of Heraclitus' primary intuition, the Logos, as the rational principle governing all becoming. Later, under the influence of Socrates, Plato denied the Heraclitean view that the Logos is absolutely immanent in the world of becoming. For Plato the ultimate principle of intelligibility transcends the particular changing "river" of phenomena. Plato held a life long distrust for sense perception. But Plato never lost sight of the Heraclitean Logos in solving problems of unity and plurality, being and becoming. The ultimate principle unifying all opposite stabilizing all things and orienting all orderly change must be supersensible and rational. Logos is the key to the nature of things.
The influence of Heraclitus is evident from Plato's dialogue Cratylius. Aristotle ascribes to Plato an early familiarity with the Heraclitean Cratylius, a younger man than Socrates and apparently an admirer of the philosopher. Plato was drawn into metaphysical issues mainly by Parmenides and Heraclitus.

Socrates (469-399 B.C.)

Plato was influenced by the thought of his teacher Socrates in respect of the method of his philosophical inquiry, the development of theory of knowledge, reality and morality.

Plato employed the Socratic method of evolving truth in the form of the dialogue. Socrates' main purpose was to refute the Sophistic teaching that truth is subjective and that it is based on the information given by the sense experience of particular individuals. As such for the Sophists knowledge is identified with opinion. There is no such thing as objective truth and universally acceptable knowledge. Socrates pointed out that this is a dangerous mistake. It is true that there is a diversity of thought. But it is our duty to discover some common ground beneath the individual differences. To evolve universal judgement was the
purpose of the Socratic method which is an ingenious form of cross examination through a series of interrelated questions. Socrates pretended not to know anything about the subject under discussion, indeed, often professed to know less than other people (the Socratic irony). Yet they soon felt that he was master of the situation, that he was making them contradict themselves, and cleverly guiding their thought into his own channels. You are accustomed to ask most of your question when you know very well how they stand, complained one of his listeners.

Socrates generally stands from the hastily formed opinions. There he tests by means of illustrations taken from every day life. Showing, wherever necessary that they are not well founded and that they are in need of correction. He helps those who take part in the discussion to form correct opinion of their own, by suggesting relevant instance, and does not rest content until the truth has emerged subsequently.

Socrates also adopted the method of evolving definition by a process of induction, with the help of examples, a provisional definition is formed. This is tested by other examples, until a satisfactory definition is finally reached. His aim is always to discover
the essential characteristics of the subject to be defined, to reach clear and distinct notion or concepts. At times, Socrates tests the statements made by going back at once to first principles, by criticising statement in the light of basic definition assumed to be correct. Here the method is deductive. For instance in the case of stating that this man is a better citizen than that one, one cannot decide whether the person concerned is really a good citizen unless one can precisely define who a good citizen is. For Socrates, a given definition is tested by drawing out its implications. Sometimes the method assumed the form of the method of *reductio ad absurdum*. A hypothesis is proved false by pointing out its counter example. This method was introduced by Zeno, as Aristotle has pointed out. This method has been widely used by Plato as well as Aristotle. It will be seen that in several of his dialogues, Plato made wide use of the method of definition and division, which we find in the Socratic method. It was part and parcel of Plato's dialectical method.

Plato adopted the Socratic method of seeking enlightenment by advancing from particulars to universal concepts and definitions. He amplified the Socratic approach by the use of hypothesis, conversion, myth and
dialectic to meet problems unknown or untreated by Socrates. It is difficult to exactly locate the sources of Plato's methodology. But it may be maintained that he derived the method of hypothesis from the followers of Zeno and Socrates, conversion from the mysticism of the Orphics and Pythagoreans, myth from popular religious conceptions, and dialectic from Socrates' interrogative discussions. We may remark that it was Socrates' doctrine on man and universal, that was the turning point in Plato's philosophic life.

Regarding the method adopted by Plato, John Burnet gave the following observation: "No methods are specially associated with Plato's name, that of Analysis and that of Division. The former, indeed, is said to have been invented by Plato, who deliver it to Leodamas, and it is significant that in Book XIII of Euclid, which is in a pre-eminent sense the work of the Academy, analytical proofs are given for the first time in addition to those in the usual form. It can hardly be supposed, however, that analysis is no older than Plato. The proof called apagogic (reductio ad absurdum) is an application of the analytic method and it was certainly used by the Pythagoreans. Moreover, Plato himself represents Parmenides as teaching it to Socrates,
while in the _Meno_ and _Phaedo_, Socrates himself explains it. It follows that what Plato did was at most to formulate the method more clearly and very probably to show the necessity of supplementing analysis by synthesis. The other Platonic method is that of division which even the comic poets know to be characteristic of the Academy. Its analysis aims at explanation or proof, so division is the instrument of classification or definition. The method is this. The thing to be defined or classified is first referred to its genus and then by a series of dichotomies, the genus is divided into species and sub-species. The examples of this method which Plato gives in the _Sophist_ and _Statesman_ are only to be understood as more or less popular and playful application of it.

In the earlier dialogues of Plato, we have the foundation of a moral and political doctrine based on Socratic principles from which Plato never departed. The main underlying thought is that the great concern of man, a concern not limited to this earthly life, is the development of the rational moral personality (the tending of the soul). Our welfare depends wholly on our success in this task. And this success, again depends on rational insight into the true scale of good.
If a man ever knows with assurance what absolute good is, he would in practice never pursue anything else. It is in this sense that "all virtue is knowledge" and that "all wrong-doing is involuntary" (i.e. consists in the pursuit of what is falsely supposed to be good) philosophic morality. That there is morality based on rational insight, clearly implies a far-reaching metaphysics as its foundation and justification. It is again based upon an explicit theory of knowledge and scientific method. The deeply philosophical basis of his doctrines are to be found in such dialogues as *Phaedo, Symposium, Phaedrus, Republic, Parmenides* and *Menexenus.*

In answering the question "what is knowledge?" Plato followed implicitly the teaching of Socrates. Plato adopted the Socratic doctrine that all knowledge is through concepts. A concept, being the same thing as a definition, is something fixed and permanent, not liable to mutation according to the subjective mutation according to the subjective impression of the individual. It gives us objective truth. According to Plato, knowledge is not opinion founded on subjective beliefs and conjectures; knowledge is founded on reason. This is the same as saying that it is founded upon concepts,
since reason is the faculty of concepts. Thus Plato followed Socratic teaching to a great extent in developing a rationalist theory of knowledge. Plato's main purpose in developing such epistemological theory was to build up a theory of reality on that basis. Yet Plato had built upon the Socratic theory of knowledge a theory of reality which had little to do with the Socratic theory. In this respect, Plato was innovative and speculative. His theory of the nature of reality formed an important aspect of Dialectic or the theory of Ideas. The concepts had been for Socrates the pulse of thought that keep thought on the right track. But what was for Socrates merely regulative of thought, Plato transformed into a metaphysical entity. "His theory of Ideas is the theory of objectivity of concepts. That the concepts is not merely an idea in the mind but something which has a reality of its own, outside and independent of the mind - this is the essence of the philosophy of Plato".  

Another very important aspect of the Socratic thought which has left deep impression on Plato and has helped him in developing his own philosophy is the

Socratic doctrine of virtue and morality. In fact, Plato had deep respect for Socrates and he was inspired by the life and work of Socrates. This is clearly evident from a reading of the Trilogy - Apology, Crito and Phaedo - on the trial and death of Socrates. Apology and Crito are in-depth study of Socrates. Apology gives real defence of Socrates as contained in the pages which explain that the main spring of his life has been his conviction that he has a mission from God to spend his life in "philosophy". The endeavour to "make his own soul as good as possible" and to in cite mankind to do the same. Socrates considered that he was duty-bound to be strictly faithful to this mission even if faithfulness means condemnation as a traitor by the so-called leaders of democracy in his time. The Apology thus depicts Socrates as carrying out in his own practice the ethical programme of the Gorgias, according to which the truly happy life is that of measure in which gratification of desire is strictly regulated by the regard for justice based on reason.

In the Crito Socrates want - only throws away a valuable life by refusing to escape from prison. Why did he make this refusal "Because though the conviction
was unjust, it was the verdict of a legitimate court, which could not be dis-regarded without real disloyalty. Socrates has been wronged not by the law, but by politicians who have abused the law. If he dis-regarded the conviction he would be directly doing a wrong against the whole social system. It may be observed at this point that Plato never departed from the Socratic principles in respect of the political and moral doctrines. The main underlying thought is that the great concern of man, a concern not limited to this earthly life, is the development of a rational moral personality.

The *Phaedo* follows from a fundamental metaphysical doctrine, namely, the ideal theory or the doctrine of Form. It highlights Plato's belief in the immortality of the soul, the diversity of the soul and disembodied existence. The argument of this dialogue may be put as follows: A true philosopher may naturally look forward to death without dismay. For death is the separation of the soul from the body, and the philosopher's whole life has been spent in trying with the souls activity. Its appetites and passions interrupt our pursuit of wisdom and goodness; its infirmities are perpetually hindering our thinking. Death, then, only completes a liberation which the philosopher has
been rehearsing all through life if, that is, the soul continues to exist after death as there are reasons for thinking.\textsuperscript{10} Thus, Plato was influenced by the life and example of Socrates. Socrates was for him the model of the ideal philosopher.

\textsuperscript{10} Encyclopaedia Britannica, Article on Plato, By A.E. Taylor.