CHAPTER - IV

PLATO'S THEORY OF IDEAS

The metaphysical foundation of Plato's philosophy has been laid mainly in the dialogues of the middle period. In these dialogues, especially in the Phaedo, Symposium, Phaedrus and Republic the philosophical themes covered immortality, love, true rhetoric and justice. Through the discussion of these subject-matters Plato developed a system of speculative philosophy. How much of this system is a report of Socratic thought and how much Plato's own thought is a matter of controversy. However, there are considerable evidences for these thoughts being the extension and systematization of Plato's own philosophical position. The principal themes of Plato's systematic philosophy in the middle speculative Dialogues may be put under the following topics :- (1) the theory of Forms or Ideas, (2) the nature of love, (3) the method of dialectic, (4) the form of good, (5) the nature of soul, and (6) the ideal society.

With a view to giving a general picture of Plato's speculation on these themes, we may start our discussion with the following brief sketch of his view on these subject matters. Then we shall devote on the discussion of the theory of Ideas or Forms.
1. Forms or Ideas

In the *Phaedo* Socrates presents the theory of forms or ideas which is the central doctrine of Platonism. When we try to answer such a question as "what is justice" we are not trying simply to make a list of individual actions that are called just. On the other hand, we are trying to find the common nature that all just acts share. This common nature giving them their identity is the forms or ideas of justice. It can be recognised only by reason, for it is not itself a sensible process or thing. In the same way, we call some plane figures triangle because we recognise that they share the form of triangularity. It is the form that constitutes the real identity of each thing. These forms do not change, they are the same for every observer (as distinct from individual thought in our minds which are personal experiences). They are completely intelligible, and each is exactly "what it is". It is for this reason that the forms are said to be more real than the transitory individuals in space and times, the realm of "becoming" in which instances forms appear. It is because there are such objective forms that general words in our language have meaning and referent.
According to Plato, these forms themselves are logically connected system in which each form included some other forms and excludes some. For instance, the form of "hot" excludes that of "cold". Again if the form of "fire" necessarily includes that of "hot", fire must exclude "cold" too. This relation also hold for the particular things that there the forms.

2. On the nature of love

Plato holds that the forms have an additional role. They are ideals which have natural attraction for man and higher animals. This attraction is regarded as love and desire. Ideals the forms give us standards of value. For Plato ethical inquiry into what we really want is a search to find what we really are and what is really good.

3. Dialectic as the method of inquiry

As we have already discussed in the preceding chapter, dialectic is a method of attaining true knowledge. In the Republic Plato contrasts different kinds of knowing as illustrated in the simile of "the divided line". When we say, we know something this may be knowledge only by hearsay; it may be technical
knowledge, knowing how without knowing why; it may be hypothetical knowledge, where we see how a general law could explain a situation. But it is not knowledge in the strict sense until we have compared and tested our various theories and in this manner found the best one.

4. The Form of the Good

The final goal of the speculative inquiry is a theory of value. The Form of the Good occupies the highest place in the system of Ideas. It is the cause of the orderly relation among the forms and the source of the attractive force which makes physical things illustrate that formal order. This indicates that value is prior to fact. According to Plato, the system of the Form is a hierarchy with the Good at the apex.

5. The nature of soul

According to Plato, the soul is the centre of will, self-motion and knowing. The soul has three parts or functions, namely reason, passion and appetite. The soul is immortal, especially the rational part can be demonstrated to be so. In its bodily incarnation the soul desires an immortality that is beyond its reach.
Glimpses of some ideal cause our love of the beautiful. Such a love leads towards immortality. Likewise, the instinct of men and animals to reproduce ensure the immortality of their species. The object of love is beauty. But beauty appears in many degrees of purity. We begin by recognising it as the property of a single beautiful body. But in the Symposium, Plato suggest that one can go on to an appreciation of the beauty of virtuous souls, of works of art, or human societies and laws, to a final vision of the pure form of beauty itself.

6. The good society

A well ordered soul will have the proper subordination of the three parts. Wisdom will be dominant, passion and love of honour will be subordinate to reason, but this will still be superior to appetite. This inner order is the condition of happiness and self realization. By analogy, Plato suggested that a good society should have the functional classes — legislators, protectors and producers. In the Republic this is developed in the man of a society that attains its good through proper subordination of national wealth and power to the true general welfare without friction
among the classes. This ideal is offered as a criterion for assessing the worth of actual societies.

Plato laid the foundation of his moral and political doctrine in the works of the middle period which are basically speculative. In these works the conviction of Plato is that the great concern of man's good life, success in this task depends on rational insight into the true nature of the good. The reason why man forfeit felicity is that they mistake apparent good for real, the conditional for the absolute 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". The philosophical moralist, who has achieved an assured insight into absolute good is thus the only true statesman, for he alone can understand the rational character and manage the affairs of the state. These convictions clearly imply a far-reaching metaphysics as their foundation and justification. The principles of this metaphysics have been briefly listed above. The Dialogues which characterise these principles not only expound the metaphysical standpoints, but they also bring out explicit theory of knowledge and scientific method of inquiry.
The Forms or Ideas

From the Phaedo, we gather that there is a form corresponding to each "universal" predicate which can be significantly affirmed of a variety of logical subjects. In the Republic (VI. 507b-x969) the same thing is explicitly stated. The Phaedo, which purports to report the conversation of Socrates on the day of his death, has explained the philosophic life as consisting in "practising for dying". There Socrates has remarked that the genuine philosopher is one who regards it as criminal to put an end to his own life. The philosopher knows that his soul, as opposed to his body, is the element in him which has close affinity to the Divine. He knows that the soul is immortal whereas the body is mortal and perishable. The object of the Phaedo, therefore is to justify faith in immortality by showing that it follows from a fundamental metaphysical doctrine, namely the doctrine of form or the theory of idea. This theory for Plato, affords as rational clue to the structure of the universe. Plato has a passionate faith in immortality. He has maintained that a true philosopher's whole life has been

1. A.E. Taylor, Plato, Man and his works, p. 286.
spent trying to liberate the soul from dependence on the body. In life the body is always interfering with the soul's activity. Its appetite and passions interrupt her pursuit of wisdom and goodness. Plato has given certain reasons for thinking that the soul is immortal. In one of these reasons Socrates refers to a fundamental improved postulate, namely the theory of Ideas, which holds that there really is a single determinate and immutable something answering to every significant general, or abstract term and apprehended only by pure thought. The sensible things of which a man predicates general terms temporarily partakes in or communicate with the idea or form. When he says that a thing becomes beautiful what he means is that the form "beauty" begins to be present to that thing. This is the true account of the cause of coming into and passing out of being. As applied to immortality, Socrates argues that there are certain sensible things of which it is an essential character to partake of a given form. Such things will never admit an incompatible form. Similarly, it is an essential character of a soul to be alive, to partake of the Form life. It refuses to partake of the Form death. The proof of immortality given in this particular argument is hypothetical, because it is shown as a consequence of the
doctrine of Forms. This doctrine, however, has not been
developed as a metaphysical theory in the Phaedo.
As we have stated already, it is mainly in the Republic
that this doctrine has been developed as a metaphysical
theory.

Plato's theory of ideas is the metaphysical
answer to the fundamental question of philosophy,
namely, what amid the changes and appearances of the
things in the world, is that permanent and ultimate
reality, from which every thing else is to be explained.
Plato maintained that Form or Ideas alone amidst their
changing thing are real. In this context a question
may be raised: why did Plato say that there are Forms,
and what problems did he suppose that the postulation
of Forms solve?2

In defence of the theory of Forms several argu-
ments have been given. One such argument which is
known as "the argument from the sciences" reads as
follows: knowledge is possible as the existence of
geometry and arithmetic shows. Knowledge cannot be had
unless there are stable entities to be known. The
things we know through the senses do not fulfil this

2. W.H. Walsh, Metaphysics, p.27.
requirement. As thus stated this argument makes explicit the platonic concept of knowledge and declares that it has instances. This argument may better be expressed from the context of meaning. It will then, state that we know the meaning of certain terms such as "straight" and "equal" or again "just" and "beautiful" and cannot have learnt them in experience for the reason that nothing we meet with there truly exemplifies them. To account for our ability to use the terms meaningfully we must accordingly postulate acquaintance with "the equal itself", "the straight itself", etc. that is, with forms. So there must be forms otherwise we could not speak as we do.\(^3\)

According to the above account, forms act as patterns or standard specimens. Plato maintains that the forms are inaccessible to the senses. But he did not clearly state how the forms are to be seen through "the eye of the soul"; they are to be contemplated upon. But Plato nowhere gives an adequate account of what it is to contemplate a form. He leaves us entirely in the dark about the shape in which such an entity is supposed to present itself to our attention. The problem may not be acute when we consider an idea as

3. Loc. cit.
abstract as that of equality but it becomes really
difficult when we pass to some of Plato's others
examples, particularly that of the form of "bed" which
he uses in Republic X. Plato's account there implies
that a craftsman must have the form of bed in mind
when he makes a particular bed. Does this mean that
he "sees" something in his mind's eye, and if so must
not that something have definite qualities, be, for
example, a bed of a certain size and shape. Plato
makes no attempt to answer such questions.

Types of Ideas

The ideas most often referred to in Plato's
writings seem to fall mainly into five classes:

(1) Ethical and aesthetic ideas, such as the idea
of the Good, the idea of the Just, the idea of
the Beautiful.

(11) Ideas for certain very general notions such as
the Ideas of sameness and difference, Being and
Not-Being, likeness and unlikeness, one and
many.

4. A. Wedberg, Plato's Philosophy of Mathematics,
Stockholm, 1955, Chapter III.
(iii) Mathematical Ideas such as the Idea of circle, the Idea of the Diametre, the Idea of Two, Three, etc.

(iv) Ideas for natural kinds such as the Idea of Man, the Idea of Ox, the Idea of Stone.

(v) Ideas for kinds of artifacts such as the Idea of Table and that of the bed.

The Idea of Beauty in (i) is perhaps that Idea to which Plato refers more extensively than to any other Idea. It occurs together with various other ethical Idea in *Enquiry*us, *Hippias Major* Gratius, *Protagoras*, *Meno*, *Haeclrus*, *Parmenides*, *Philebus*, *Theatetus* and *Seventh Letter*.

The general Ideas play an important role in *Parmenides*, *Theatetus*, *Sophistes* and *Timaeus*. Mathematical Ideas occurs especially in *Haeclrus*, *Republic*, *Parmenides*, *Theatetus*, *Statesman*, *Philebus* and the *Seventh Letter*. Ideas of natural kinds occur in *Parmenides*, *Theatetus*, *Statesman*, *Timaeus*, *Philebus* and the *Seventh Letter*. Ideas of kinds of artifacts occur in *Gratius*, *Haeclrus*, *Republic*, the *Seventh Letter* and the *Laws*. In addition to the five types of Ideas enumerated above in some texts references have been made to some others also.
In the Phaedo 103e-106a, hot and cold, life and death are treated as ideas in the Seventh Letter 342d. Such sensible qualities as colours are said to constitute ideas. Similarly in the Philebus, 17a-18d the musical notes and the types of speech, sounds for which the letters of the alphabet stand are given as instances of ideas.

The nature of the Ideas

The principle behind Plato's theory of Ideas is that there must be an idea wherever a concept can be formed and wherever there is a class of many things called by one name. In the last book of the Republic, there is a very clear exposition of the doctrine of ideas. In that book Plato explains that wherever a member of individuals have a common name they have also a common "idea" or "form".

For instance, though there are many beds, there is only one "idea" or "form" of a bed. Just as a reflection of a bed in a mirror is only apparent and not real. So the various particular beds are unreal. Being only copies of the "idea" which is one bed, made by god, there can be knowledge, but in respect of the many beds made by carpenters, there can be only opinion.
The philosopher, as such, will be interested only in the one ideal bed, not in the many beds found in the sensible words. He will have a certain in difference to ordinary mundane affairs how can he who has magnificence of mind and is the spectator of all time and all existence, think much of human life.

According Bertrand Russell, Plato's philosophy rests on the distinction between reality and appearance which was first set forth by Parmenides; Parmenidean phrases and arguments are found in the Republic. There is however, a religious tone about reality, which is Pythagorean rather than being Parmenidean. These are also frequent references to mathematics and music which are typically Pythagorean. This combination of the logic of Parmenides with the other worldliness of Pythagoras and the Orphics produced a doctrine which was felt to be satisfying to both the intellect and the religious emotions the result was a very powerful synthesis, which with various modifications influenced most of the great philosophers, down to and including Hegel. Plato's theory Ideas is the forerunner to

5. B. Russell, History of Western Philosophy, p.137.
6. Ibid. p.135.
the theory of universals. Plato is the first logical realist in the history of philosophy.

The following points may be noted in respect of the nature of ideas or forms: (1) Forms or ideas are real entities. They are defined as the objects corresponding to abstract concept. They are nothing but the objectification of the Socratic concept. (2) There is a great variety of forms including the forms of classes of things, house, dog, man, etc. of qualities - whiteness, roundness, relation of equality, resemblance etc. of the values - goodness, beauty, etc. (3) The forms belong to a realm of heaven of ideas which separable from concrete particulars in space and time. (4) The forms are superior to particulars in degree of reality and value. The forms are the realities of which the particulars are mere appearances. We have already stated that according to Plato the forms are the objects of knowledge, whereas the particulars are the objects of opinion. For Plato, the forms is a model or archetype of which the particular is a copy. (5) The forms are neither mental nor physical. They exist independently of any knowing mind. Their mode of being is unique. (6) The forms do not exist in time and space. The statement in the Phaedrus that the forms
are located in "the region above the heaven", 7 suggest that the forms do not exist in space. (7) The forms are eternal. The Timaeus has explained the eternity of forms. Thus "the past and future are created species of time, which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to the eternal essence; for we say that it (the eternal being) "was" it "is" it "will be" but the truth is that "is" alone is properly attributed to it and that "was" and "will be" are only to be spoken of becoming in time." 8

In the same passage everlasting time is said to be a moving image of eternity, distinct from eternity itself which rests in unity. (8) The forms are not compounded out of parts. This means that they are "simple" metaphysical entities. This point has been clearly spelled out in the Phaedo, in one of his attempts in that dialogue to prove the immortality of the soul, Socrates takes for granted the following principle: "Now is not that which is compounded and composite naturally liable to be decomposed. And if anything is uncompounded is not that if any thing,

7. Plato, Phaedrus, 247c.
8. Timaeus 372-38.
naturally unlikely to be decomposed? Then it is most probable that things which are always the same and unchanging are the uncompounded things and the thing that are changing and never the same are the composite thing".\(^9\)

Plato's argument is that whereas sensible things belong to the class of compounded changing and perishable entities, that forms belong to the class of simple, unchanging entities. In the Philebus the ideas or forms are called "Monads" a term which in Plato's language usually connotes something simple and uncompounded.\(^10\) As different from the objects of senses perception the forms can be apprehended only by abstract thought. Only the eye of the mind can see them. Sense impressions may remind us of the forms or ideas, but a form is never a part of the content of impression. The specific mental faculty through which we apprehend the forms is designated by various Greek words of which the best English equivalent is "reason".\(^11\)

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9. Rhaedo 78a-c.


11. Wedberg, Plato's Philosophy of Mathematics, Ch. III.
importany feature of the Forms or Ideas is that particular objects "participate in" them. Plato often says that it is "by participation of" the Idea of Beauty, that a thing is beautiful and so on. Thus, it is by participation in the Idea of A-ness that a thing is A. From this it "follows that", if an object participates in the Idea of A-ness than that object resembles the idea (by virtue of their both being A). Plato's theory of Idea is dominated by the conception of an Idea as being, to use Aristotle expressive phrase - "one over many". This means that to every Idea there correspond many objects participating in the Idea. Hence according to Plato, there are no Ideas in which no object participate or which have empty classes for this extensions.

In his Metaphysics Aristotle has given an excellent account of the doctrine of Ideas and its origin. He writes - "As when Socrates was occupying himself with excellences of character and in connection with them became the first to raise the problem of universal definitions--; for two things may be fairly ascribed to Socrates - inductive arguments and universal definitions, both of which are concerned with the starting point of science; but Socrates did not make the universal or definitions exist apart; they (the Platonists)
however give them separate existence and this was the kind of thing they called ideas. Therefore, it followed from them almost by the same argument that there must be Ideas of all things that are spoken of universally.... For to each things there were an entity which has the same name and exists apart from the substance and so also in the case of all other groups there is one over many, whether these be of this world or eternal.  

Aristotle says that the theory of ideas seems to have grown out of the Socratic endeavour to give definitions of abstract terms. It appears that Plato's theory of universal lies in between extreme nominalism and extreme realism.

The scope of the theory of Forms

The theory of Forms has a very wide range. Professor H.F. Charniss in an article entitled "the philosophical Economy of the theory of Ideas" has argued that by one simple unifying theory, namely, the theory of Forms, Plato was able to solve outstanding problems in ontology, in ethics and in epistemology.


we may briefly comment on the theory under three heads listed by Professor Charmis. (a) Firstly in its ontological aspect, what the theory of Forms is maintaining is that there is a world of permanent, unchanging and perfect entities which are unaffected by the changing circumstances and that these entities are real. It is they that are "completely real" or "truly existent". The ordinary, everyday, sensible world is the world of appearances as opposed to the world of reality, namely the Forms. The theory of Forms then is a metaphysical theory which tells something that is true about what there is independently of human beings and minds. To use a phrase used by Socrates in the later dialogue the Parmenides (1320), the Forms are "as it were patterns fixed in the nature of things that is they are the permanent furniture of the universe". These are various difficulties in this ontological aspect of the theory of Forms. The theory maintained that ordinary objects are not "real" or really real but are in a sense only appearances. This view may sound unacceptable because it goes against common sense. But many philosophers besides Plato have held that the everyday world is the world of appearances, (b) secondly, the theory of Forms figures prominently in Plato's ethical views. In this case, the Forms are considered as ideal standards and
the theory of forms in its ethical aspects in an attempt to account for absolute moral standards. The theory holds that there are forms of moral characteristics e.g. goodness, justice, etc. The forms of justice, for example is a perfect unchanging pattern or model or standard. Plato's ethical theory is interconnected with his epistemology and metaphysics. His ethical theory has its metaphysical foundation in the theory of forms. Plato's political theory in the Republic is again interlocked with his other theories. For Plato absolutely certain knowledge is possible in moral, as elsewhere. It requires men of special ability to reach it and even these people can attain such certainty only after a long and arduous training when they have reached it. They have arrived at absolute truth. At this stage of knowledge they know where good lies. In Plato's view, then, they alone are fit to rule and it is plainly to the benefit of the mass of citizens that the few who have this knowledge should guide their lives for them. It is this interlocking of different facts of his thinking that makes Plato's political theory especially important. For him politics is based on ethics. (c) Thirdly, the theory of forms is very much concerned with epistemological issues i.e. with
questions concerning the nature of knowledge, its distinction with other types of cognition and the objects of various types of cognition. These issues are particularly prominent in Book VI and VII of the Republic. As we have already discussed these epistemological issues already, we shall not go into the details of this aspect of his theory of forms. Many commentators have recognized the importance of Plato’s theory as a theory of universals. Thus W.D. Ross, for example, in expressing approval of the theory of forms writes “in reason we have a faculty by which we can grasp universals in their pure forms and to some extent see the relations that necessarily exist between them”. In the same context he continues, “the essence of the theory of ideas lay in the conscious recognition of the fact that there is a class of entities, for which the best name is probably “universal” that are entirely different from sensible things. Any use of language involved the recognition, either conscious or unconscious of the fact that there are such entities for every word used except proper names every abstract noun, every general every adjective every verb, even  

every pronoun and every proposition in a name for something of which there are or many be instances. Bertrand Russell also recognises the importance of this aspect of Plato's theory. He writes, "Plato doctrine of ideas contains a number of obvious errors. But inspite of these it makes a very important advance in philosophy. Since it is the very first theory to emphasise the problem of universals which in varying forms has persisted to the present day." Status of the Form of the Good

Plato has assigned special status to the Form of the Good as the supreme Form. This development in his thinking appears in Book VI and VII of the Republic. Plato maintains that it is the knowledge of the Good which will make the guardians perfect rulers. The guardians will be poor guardians of justice unless they understand wherein is the good of justice. The knowledge of the Good will fill up to their full measures, all the irrelevant ideas of morality which we have thus for come across. "The good is the highest

15. Loc. cit.
object of the speculative spirit will find satisfaction. The good is at once: first the end of life, that is the supreme object of all desire and aspiration. Secondly the condition of knowledge, or that which makes the world intelligible and the human mind intelligent; thirdly, the creative and sustaining cause of the world.

Plato's view on Good is in conformity with Greek ethical outlook. For the Greek, the moral life can only mean that in which a man does all that he does with a view to and in the light of true good. The man to whom the true good is most constantly present in all that he does is the best man. Thus the best life is the most rational life, because it is that in which action and thought are most concentrated upon and regarded most as a means to the central principle or end of life, which is what the Greeks call the Good. In the thoughts of both Plato and Aristotle, we find the inseparable connection between reason and good.

18. loc. cit.
19. ibid, pp.221-2.
Plato maintains that the Good is the source of the being of things. The reality of things is what they mean, what they mean is determined by their place in the order of the world. Again, what determines their place in the order of the world is the supreme Good, the principle of that order. Plato compares the Good with the sun which gives light. The Good is the source of intelligence in the mind and intelligibility the object just as the sun is the source of vision in the eye and the visibility of its object. Truth is the reflection of the Good. Further, as the sun is the source not only of the light and vision but also of the actual generation and growth of the organic world, so the Good is the source not only of truth and knowledge but actually of the life and being of the world. Plato maintains that the entire world is the product of Good. This is clearly a teleological conception of the world. Moreover, the interpretation of knowledge in terms of the good clearly exhibits that there is inseparable connection between knowledge and valuation, just as there is inseparable connection between reality and value. As a matter of truth, for Plato reality itself is value because the real in the true sense of the term, is the Good which is the supreme value.
In the *Timaeus* Plato describes in "picture language" the creation of the world. There God makes the world to be as good as possible because he is himself perfectly good and therefore free from all envy and perfectly beneficent. In the *Timaeus* as well as in the *Republic*, we are told that the highest bliss of man consists in getting to be at one with universe of which he is apart. In the *Timaeus* the supreme power in the universe is described in a personal way, in the *Republic* it is described in an abstract way. In any case, the idea of the Good has been considered as the supreme Idea in both.

According to John Burnet, Plato's doctrine of the good is Socratic in source. However, he adds "I have said that I regard the doctrine of the Good as Socratic, but there are something said about it in the Republic which seems to be Plato's own, for they are directed against the identification of the form of Good with being on the one hand and wisdom on the other and there are the doctrines of Eukleids. According to the Republic the good is neither being nor knowledge, but the cause of both. It altogether transcends and is "on the other side of being as it transcends knowledge".20

This is a beautiful characterisation of the good by a great authority on Plato. John Burnet, further, says that the doctrine of "emanation" in Neo-Platonism is a development from Plato's doctrine of good. He writes, "To a considerable extent Neo-Platonism may fairly be described as a development of the thought that was in Plato's mind when he wrote his part of the Republic." 21

Regarding the manner in which the knowledge of the good dawns upon the mind, Plato stresses on the personal character of knowing, that is, through intuitive vision, speaking about the good, the highest and most important of the forms. Plato says in a letter:

"I certainly composed no work in regard to it, nor shall I ever do so in future; for there is no way of putting it in word like other studies. Acquaintance must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship. When suddenly like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining." 22

The above passage clearly states that the attainment of philosophical truth is a matter of insight, an insight which supervenes on intensive intellectual effort. It is mainly about this conviction of Plato that Plato has sometimes been regarded as "esoteric and mystical" by the modern rationalists.

W.H. Walsh has summed up Plato's philosophical position with particular reference to the theory of forms as follows: 23

1. The philosopher has knowledge as opposed to opinion or belief; his thought is clear and connected where the thought of other men is confused and fragmentary.

2. The philosopher has access to real things which are stable, unchanging and for what reason fully knowable; he therefore recognised sense-appearances for what they are in constant flickering, unreal like dream objects.

3. The philosopher will not accept appearance at their face value, it is his aims to penetrate

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"Walsh has characterised Plato's metaphysics as an instance of *Metaphysics as news from nowhere.*"
behind appearances and to explain them in the light of first principles.

4. Philosophy differs from other branches of inquiry (e.g. geometry) (a) in taking nothing for granted (b) in its scope, which is universal (c) in being fully intellectual in no way dependent on sense experience.

5. Philosophy aims at changing man’s lives by revealing the truth about things, which is very different from what is commonly thought.

Aristotle’s account of Plato’s theory

It will be proper to say something about Aristotle’s account of Plato’s thought with special reference to his metaphysical views. Information about Plato’s thought may be gathered from statements by Aristotle, although we find some inconsistencies between what Aristotle had written and what we find in Plato’s written works. According to Aristotle, Plato’s doctrine of forms was in its general character, not different from Pythagoreanism, the forms on which Aristotle regards Plato as disagreeing with Pythagoreans and (1) that whereas the Pythagoreans said that numbers
have their constituent the unlimited and the limit. Plato taught that the forms have as constituent the one and the great and small and (2) that, whereas the Pythagoreans had said that thing are numbers. Plato interposed between his forms (or numbers) and sensible things an intermediate class of mathematical. Moreover, as we have stated already numbers figure as a class among the different class of forms or ideas. We shall now refer to Aristotle's criticism of Plato's theory of forms or ideas. On this matter no better summary can be given than what Frank Thierry has written in his *History of Philosophy*: "The Aristotelian notion of substance is formulated in sharp contrast to the Platonic. For Plato, substance was the universal, the type or form which he assumed to reside in a world apart, the eternal and transcendent world of idea. Aristotle rejects this account of substance and adopts its extreme antithesis, substance for Aristotle in the concrete individual. In criticizing the Platonic theory of ideas, he offers seven arguments which group themselves in such a way that there are virtually only two main criticism of Plato. The first criticism is that the ideas, although they are intended to explain the nature of things, are not adequate to do so. This thesis is developed in four main arguments - (1) the
ideas are mere abstraction and as such cannot account for the existence of concrete things (2) they are static and eternal and are unable to explain the motion and change of concrete things (3) idea are posterior rather than prior to particular things and cannot therefore be used to explain them; in short ideas are copies of things not their causes, (4) the ideas are unnecessary duplication of things, not explanations of them. The second broad criticism of the ideal theory is that the relation between the thing and ideas is inexplicable. This criticism is expanded into the following three arguments: (1) nothing is explained by saying that things are "copies of" or "participate in" ideas; to say that the individual man participate in the ideal man adds nothing to understanding of the individual, (2) the alleged relation between the ideas and the corresponding things to lead to an infinite regress for, between the individual man and the type man there exists an ideal relation which must itself be related both to the individual and to the type. This criticism is commonly referred to as the "third man" argument. Since in addition to the individual man (the first man) as the type man (second man), it introduced a third man (the relation between the individual man and the type man). A continuation of the
argument requires a fourth and fifth man and thus leads to an infinite regress. (3) the theory of ideas completely separates the essence or forms of a things from the variance with the unity of the particular as observed by the mind. 24

There appears to be a great logical force in Aristotle's arguments against Plato theory of Ideas. But the criticism is mainly to drive home his own metaphysical point rather than bringing out the full content of Plato's metaphysical position. Moreover, there is little evidence that Aristotle has thoroughly studied Plato's written works. What Aristotle has written about Plato appears to be from what he gathered from Plato's oral teachings. It is no wonder that great thinkers sometimes support different viewpoints. There is no doubt difference in metaphysical standpoint between the teacher and the pupil. But both agree in accepting the Form (in the sense of the universal) as the reality, although there are differences between the two great philosophers on the ontology of the Form. It must also be conceded that a philosopher like Plato

cannot be criticised without studying his works thoroughly and taking different aspects of his though as a whole. 25

General observation

Plato transformed the Parmenidean Being into a multiplicity of Ideas or Forms. Besides the ethico-aesthetical Ideas of Good, Beauty and justice, there are logico-ontological Ideas of equality, difference apposition and all essences in general. The doctrine of Ideas covered the whole realm of being, both natural and artificial. Radically departing from Parmenides, Plato affirmed that the Idea of otherness or not being, is real and that participation in it accounted for the real plurality of being. Everything conceptual and physical, whether small and worthless or great and perfect, sense to have its place among an indefinite numbers of ideas.

The Ideas or Forms are hierarchically structured based on their ontological relations. At the apex of

25. Diogenes Laertius, while poking fun at the theory of Idea said "I see the table and the cup, but tableness and cupness - I cannot see them at all". To this Plato's reply was "of course, because the cup and the table are seen with the eyes, which you have, but tableness and cupness are seen with the nous which you lack. This quotation from R.M. Hare, Essays on Philosophical Method, p.60.
the pyramid of Ideas, there is the idea of Ideas, viz. the Good. This is the unconditioned first principle to which all others point, upon which all depend, and in which all are embraced.

Plato explained unity and plurality with the help of his theory of Idea. On the one hand, he acknowledge the Being of Parmenides as either one of the most general of the Ideas or the principle of identity in idea. On the other hand, recognizing the reality of Heraclitus opposition, Plato reified — Not-Being or otherness as the principle of difference in Ideas. "Every class then has plurality of Being and infinity of Not-Being." Since it is not every thing, but only itself. Every Idea is a participation of Being with regard to what agrees with it and of Not-Being with regard to what is different from it. This dual principle of Being and Not-Being runs through the whole realm of Ideas. Participation in the community of Ideas is Plato's way of reconciliation of Heraclitean differentiation and Parmenidean identity in a unity in plurality and a plurality in unity. Thus through his doctrine of Ideas Plato explained unity and plurality,

one and many. Further since ideas are the first principle of knowledge and reality, Plato considered motions as well as rest to participate in being.27 As ideas existing in the realm of perfect being, motions and rest share in sameness (being) by which they are themselves and in otherness (not-being) by which they differ one from the other.28 In this way, Plato accepted the Parmenidean permanence of being and still admit that the Heraclitean motion in some way exists.

Plato attempted to harmonize ideas as the realm of being by means of the two poles of experiences, namely, the order and beauty of the empirical world and the ideas of order and beauty. Things are what they are by partaking in the ideas. Plato said that "nothing make a thing beautiful but the presence and participation of the beautiful.... as to the manner, I am uncertain, but I stoutly contend that by beauty all beautiful things become beautiful."29 Although Plato made it clear that the idea as such is not found

27. Sophist 248-249, Theaetetus, 153.
28. Sophist 256.
29. Theaetetus, 100.
in the things, he believed that something real is contained in things. He said, the ideas are as it were, patterns, fixed in nature and other things are like them and resemblance of them, what is meant by the participation of other things in the ideas, is really assimilation to them. Sensible things are real in so far as they share in ideas, but as particular and changing they are neither truly real nor intelligible. "Participation" is the theoretical bridge by which Plato reconciled the Parmenidean standpoint with the herachitean view about reality.