CHAPTER VI

THE NATURE AND DESTINY OF MAN

Plato's account of human nature is based on his metaphysics and physics. In our discussion on Plato's metaphysical view, we have referred to his dualism of the ideal and the phenomenal. Plato maintains that man is a composite of a phenomenal body and a soul akin to the ideas and the gods. He, however, emphasizes that in human nature, the soul has prominence over the physical character.

For Plato all living beings are copies of the one intelligible living being. These beings exhibit the same general structure and characteristics as the most perfect copy of the cosmos. There is a gradation among these living beings in the scale of reality. The higher each is in the scale of living being, the closer it approximates the body and soul of the cosmos. Thus the stars and planets are formed by the Demiurge as deities, which are intelligent and immortal, bright and fair to see in keeping with their motions which are uniform and circular. The symmetry and perfection of the universe also demand that there be living beings to dwell in the other primary bodies - birds for the air, fish for the water and animals to walk the earth
(Plato believed that the gods dwell in the fire). According to Plato, man is the highest among the living beings.

**Origin of Man**

Plato maintained that man was brought into existence by different powers. The lower gods formed portions of the four elements (air, water, fire and earth) into the human body and within it constructed a lower soul as the subject of feeling and passions. The demiurge reserved to himself the fashioning of the higher soul, "the part of them worthy of the name immortal, which is called divine and is the guiding principle".1 It is not clear whether Plato believed that the rational soul "fell" into the body by physical necessity or as punishment for moral fault. Plato said allegorically that the imperfect soul, loosing her wings and drooping in her flight at last settles on the solid ground there, finding a home. She received an earthy frame which appears to be self moved but is really moved by her power and this composition of soul and body is called a living and mortal creature".2

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Plato believed in the pre-existence of the soul. This belief was based on his scientific theory of anamnesis. The origin of the rational soul's stable and universal ideas cannot be in sense perceptions, which objects are changing and particular. Hence, these intelligible ideas must be in the soul before and independent of sense experience. The soul existed before its union with the body and like the gods contemplated the realm of Ideas. Because of its union with the physical body, it forgot what it formerly knew. But what has been forgotten persists as "slumbering" knowledge is the soul and is able to be awakened. Upon repeatedly perceiving the sensible images of beauty, truth and goodness, the soul remembers the ideas of beauty, truth and goodness. Thus "the truth of all things always existed in the soul." Plato maintains that knowledge is recollection.

We have already referred to this theory of learning in the context of Meno. By questions and a diagram Socrates elicited from a slave boy with no mathematical education, the solution to a problem in geometry. For Plato, learning consists in drawing out

3. Ibid. 249-250.
4. Meno, 86; Phaedo 72-73.
of the soul what it knew before birth. Some people glimpse the ideas without recognising them as eternal truth or retaining them for long. The philosopher, however who enjoyed greater vision of the ideas in his pre-existence knows that the true cause of his remembrance is the intelligible being of which the sensible is but an image. For him reminiscence is the beginning of long effort to reach the ideas. According to Plato, the human soul has two basic characteristics, namely, life and consciousness. Men live because he possesses a soul or "self-moving power" as the inner source of motion in the body. As a conscious principle, the human soul exercises psychic activities such as understanding and willing. Being mind and self-motion, the human soul mediates between the realm of the ideas and that of the sensibles.

Plato gave stress on the pre-eminence of mind. This was probably due to the influence of Anaxagoras. But Plato did not develop a psychological theory independently on scientific lines. His views on mind formed part and parcel of his epistemological and metaphysical theories.

Plato's Doctrine of the Tripartite Soul

Plato recognised two aspects of the soul, the higher or the rational and the lower or the irrational
part. The lower soul is further divided into the spirited and the appetitive parts. Hence, his division of the soul was in fact, tripartite.

In the Republic we find the tripartite nature of the soul, a doctrine which is said to have been borrowed from the Pythagoreans. The doctrine reappears in the Timaeus. The soul consists of three parts - the rational part, the courageous or spirited part and the appetitive part. These parts are forms or function or principles of action. They are not parts in the material sense.

(1) The rational part is primarily an intellectual one. Such noble traits of character as gentleness, humanity and reverence, although not purely intellectual, are associated with it. The rational outlook is philosophical in disposition.

(2) The courageous or spirited part as an executive faculty some what resembles the will in being dynamic. Plato incorporates within the spirited faculty such emotions, sentiments and traits of character as ambition, anger, resentment and righteous indignation.

(3) The appetitive part is associated with desire. Under this part Plato has existed desire for pleasure,
desire for wealth, desire for good, shelter and other bodily satisfactions. Plato, however, maintained that pleasure is not exclusively appetitive. There may be pleasure of reason which are enjoyed by the mathematicians and dialecticians. There may also be the pleasures of honour and fame accompanying successful pursuit of political power, social and military advancement. The pleasure of sense are base and lowly, because they consist in satisfaction of sensual appetites only. The criticism of the ordering of the appetites is determined by judicious judgement of competent critic, who is acquainted with all three types of appetites. Plato advocated the adoption of middle path or the doctrine of the mean (like Aristotle) in the pursuit of pleasure. He maintained that though pleasure and pain are both positive feelings, there is a neutral state between pleasure and pain which appears pleasurable in contrast to preceding pain, or painful in contrast to our earlier pleasure. He adopted doctrine of psychological relativity.

According to Plato, the soul functions through its parts, which are to some extent separate and distinct principles. The separation of the faculties rests on the principle of contradiction, the principle
that one and the same thing cannot produce opposite effects at one and the same time. By appealing to this principle Plato argues that the reason and the appetites are distinct faculties, that the soul may be pulled in opposite direction by the two, as when reason restrains thirst when only pious and delicious drink is available, or the spirited faculty rebels against dirty bodily appetites. The conflicts among the faculties prove that they are distinct from each other. But Plato maintains that there may be interplay and cooperation among the faculties. The spirited faculty generally goes with reason in the control of the appetites and even our natural desires may be in conformity with reason. The soul, in the midst of plurality and separate functioning of its parts, possesses a unity and indivisibility. Plato locates the rational part of the soul in the head, the spirited part in the breast and the appetitive part below the waist. The location of the spirited element in the heart and lungs was an ancient tradition, going back to Homer. Plato thought that the rational soul inhabits the head because the head is round (the most perfect shape, and hence, an appropriate place for the seat of reason)
and the part of the body nearest to the heavens. It makes contact with the brain, which was conceived of as a kind of marrow encased in the skull. The irrational soul makes contact with the marrow of the spinal code in the bony sheath. The better part of the irrational soul, spirit inhabits the heart and functions as energy, courage and ambition. The lowest part desire, functions below the diaphragm in appetite, nutrition and reproduction. The rational and irrational parts effect each other through the liver, which acts as a sort of mirror of thought.

Plato attached greatest importance to the rational faculty of the soul. He maintained that the god within man's soul is reason. Reason is man's pride and glory. Reason distinguishes man from the brute and lower animals. This principle of reflection and judgement centred in the head, acts as a charioteer checking the impulses of the instinctive and spirited horses in man. It is called the divine, because of its affinity to the intelligible Ideas, it contemplates. The predominance of one of these three tendencies in the human soul

5. Republic, 589.
6. Timaeus, 46.
determines an individual's character. The man in whom the spirited part prevails is ambitious and desirous of glory. These psychological inclinations also determine the ethnological types of classes of people. Thus, the Greeks in whom the love of knowledge is strongest, are an intellectual people, whereas the warlike Thracians are a spirited classes, and the money-loving Phoenician and pleasure seeking Egyptians are an appetitive class of people.\footnote{Republic, 435.}

As we have stated at the beginning of the present chapter, the Demiurge formed the immortal element of the creatures leaving the mortal part to the gods whom he has made. He has created the rational soul, which is the immortal element in man. In the Timaeus, Plato writes: .... he turned once to move to the same mixing bowl wherein he had mixed and blended the soul of the universe, and poured into it what was left of the former ingredient blending them this time in somewhat the same way, only longer so pure as before, but second or third in degree of purity" (41D).

The rational soul in man is a less pure blend of intermediate existence, sameness and difference. It
is bound together by the same proportions as the cosmic soul. Thus, the Demiurge created each rational soul as a miniature of the cosmic soul, properly proportioned and functioning in equilibrium. Plato maintained that the highest task of every man on earth is to master his body and rectify the circuits of his soul, disturbed by its mortality. For the mortal body in which the rational soul must be confined is by its nature a complex of changing elements and passions which tend to dislocate and hamper the revolutions of the same and difference. Plato maintains that those who had good lives on earth return to the star divinity to which each soul was sent upon creation, while one who indulges in bad activities is reincarnated as a woman or subsequently as that form of beast which typifies his peculiar vice. Nor is he released from the cycle of reincarnation until, "letting the revolution of the same and uniform within himself drew into its train all that turmoil of fire and water and air and earth that had later grown about it, he should control its unregulated turbulence by rule and return once more to the form of his first and best condition." 


9. Timaeus, 42c.
According to Plato, the first and best condition of man's rational soul is characterised by "logos"—rule, guiding principle, measure—provided by the revolution of the same and the uniform functioning smoothly within him and regulating his bodily components. This condition is the mortal excellence in man.

When the rational soul is confined within a body, its condition becomes closely linked with the bodily components. The effect of confining the rational soul in a changing body is, Plato says, like plunging its balanced circuits into the strong currents of a river, where they neither control nor are controlled but move and are moved by violence. The result is that the new creature, the compound of body and soul, moves at random in all directions without rule and order. In this context F.M. Cornford remarks: "The language hints at a certain analogy between the task of human reason and the task of the Demiurge himself, who took over all that was visible, nor at rest but in discordant and unordered motion and brought it from disorder into order". 10

10. F.M. Cornford, Plato Cosmology, p.147.
Thus, the rational soul in man like the soul of the cosmos, is conceived as a mixture of incompatible immaterial ingredients linked by proportion functioning in equilibrium. The circuits of the same and the different, when operating properly, not only produce knowledge and true opinion, but bring order and proportion to the rest of the soul and to the physical element of the body in which they are confined. On the other hand the interdependence of rational soul and body is so close that the bodily elements when disturbed and disordered interfere with the harmonious operation of the soul. This condition makes a man intellectually and morally degraded.

The immortality of the soul

According to Plato, the soul is immortal. In the Phaedo, he aimed at justifying the faith in the immortality of the soul by showing that this faith followed from the fundamental metaphysical doctrine of the Ideas or Forms. He had deep faith in the divinity of the soul which is at core rational. The four main arguments for the immortality of the soul are derived from Plato’s concept of the soul as life and consciousness. Plato’s argument may be present as follows;
1. **Argument from cycles**

This argument falls into two parts. The two have to be considered in conjunction. What they aim at proving is not immortality but that the soul continues to be "something" after death. The soul is not annihilated with death.

(a) According to the first reason, there is an ancient doctrine of rebirth (having its origin in the Orphic cult) which says that a soul which is born in this world is one which has come back from another world to which men go at death. This doctrine, if true, would establish the immortality of the soul. We may consider the issue from a more general point of view. We see that the world is made up of "opposites". Opposites are generated out of opposites. The hot becomes cold, the cold hot, the waking go to sleep, the sleep wake, the dead return to life, just as the living die. Hence, the soul survives death. Being alive and being dead are opposite, just as being awake and being asleep are. And, since everything comes to be out of its opposites, the living must come from the dead, and the dead from living. Such, according to Plato, is the

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cyclical process of the world. If the whole process were not cyclical, life would ultimately perish, and there would be only a dead universe left. This argument aims at confirming the ancient doctrine of rebirth by showing that it is only one case of the universal natural law of cyclical recurrence.

(b) The second reason proceed from the doctrine of learning as reminiscence. It argues from Socrates' habitual position that which we call learning a truth is really being "put in mind" of something we had forgotten. If this is true, we must at one time have known all that in this life we have to be reminded of. Our souls must have existed before we were men, and presumably, therefore, may continue to exist when we have ceased to be men. The main argument for the doctrine of reminiscence is the one already considered in the _Gorgias_. There, it has been exhibited that a man can be made to give the true solution of a problem by merely asking him appropriate questions, particularly in the case of problems of geometry. The answer is produced from within not demonstrated by the question. It has been shown that the answerer is plainly in possession of the truth which the questioner elicits. Socrates points out that the conclusion might be
reached by a simple consideration of what we call "association". When we see an article belongs to an intimate friend, we not only see the article, but think of the owner and that is what we mean by saying that the article reminds us of its owner. Again when we see a portrait, we are reminded of the original.

Thus, the doctrine that what men call learning is really "recollection", suggests that men must have become acquainted with this knowledge in the previous life. However, as we have pointed out, the arguments in (a) and (b) should be taken together to prove that the soul is immortal.

2. **Argument from self-motion**

This argument proceeds from the nature of the soul as the originator of its own motion and therefore of life. In *Phaedrus*, Plato said, "That alone which moves itself, since it never fails, never ceases to move, but is the source and beginning of motion for all other things that move". Plato argued that since its very idea and essence is self-motion, the soul must be indestructible and have immortality as its necessary

property. The soul is the source and initiator of its own motions. Its motions are not communicated from without, but spontaneously originated from within. Thus they were never started by anything else. If the soul could come to an end, there would be an end of nature and becoming universally. In talking about the nature of the soul Plato used an analogy. He compares the soul to a charioteer with a pair of winged steeds, forming a single living whole. In the case of the gods, drivers and horses are all as good as they can possibly be. But in the human soul, the driver has to manage two horses of different strain, and this is what makes man's task so difficult. While the horses keep their wings, they travel around the circuit of heaven, and the soul "administers" the cosmos. But they may lose their wings and fall to earth. The soul then acquires an earthly body which seems to be able to move itself and it is this complex of body and soul which we call the mortal animal. By analogy, we come commonly think of God (falsely) as a being with a soul and body which are never separated by death.

13. ibid. 246a.
The Platonic myth proceeds to describe the life of all souls under the image of a great festal procession. The souls progress under the leadership of the god, round the whole compass of the heaven, maintaining the universal order of things. The goal of the whole pilgrimage is reached by an ascent to a region outside the whole heaven "the plain of reality" where the procession pauses and enjoys rest in the contemplation of "bodily reality without figure, colour, or tangible quality." This is the true home of souls and the source of their spiritual food. Plato maintained that it is in the strength of this pure contemplation that gods and man alike execute the practical task of establishing and maintaining natural and moral order in the realm of change and becoming. Thus, the Phaedrus has given an important proof for the immortality of the soul from self-motion and the myth of the charioteer.

3. Argument from simplicity

This argument goes deep into the simple nature of the soul, which is the intrinsic characteristic of the soul. The soul is by nature simple and indivisible. It can neither be proceeded by composition nor be destroyed by dissipation. That which is simple,
cannot be decomposed. This argument from the *Phaedo* is the forerunner of all arguments about the immortality of the soul advanced on the ground that the soul is a simple substance. This was the basis of Kant's attack in that section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* called "Transcendental Dialectic". Kant maintained that the attempt to prove that the soul is immortal on the ground that it is a simple substance commits a fallacy, which he called "paralogism". According to Plato, there are two kinds of existence; that of simple, eternal, unchanging Ideas and that of composite, temporal ever-changing corporeal things. Whereas the complex body resembles mortal and sensible things, the intelligent soul contemplating invisible and imperishable objects is immortal like simple and incorruptible Ideas. The soul "passes into the other world, the region of purity and eternity and immortality and unchangeableness which are her kindred and with them she ever lives, when she is by herself".  

According to Plato, the visible things are composite and subject to dissolution and death, but the soul can survey the invisible and unchanging and

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imperishable forms and by coming thus into contact with the forms, the soul shows itself to be more like them than it is to visible and corporeal things which latter are mortal. Moreover, from the fact that soul is destined to rule by body, it appears to be more like the divine than the mortal. The soul is "divine"-which for the Greeks meant immortal and unchanging. "This argument has developed into the argument from the higher activities of the soul and the spirituality of the concept to the spiritual and uncompound nature of the soul." 15

4. Argument from Idea

This argument focuses on the idea of soul. Just as one idea excludes its contrary, a particular thing participating in one idea cannot share in an opposite idea. Thus, the soul which is life in virtue of its participation in the idea of life, can never share in the contrary idea of death. 16

A dead soul is an impossibility. The soul can be destroyed neither by the physical evil of death nor

by moral evils. Thus the argument for the immortality of the soul is deeply rooted in the fundamental metaphysical doctrine of Ideas. According to Plato, particular sensible things partake in or communicate with the idea or forms. When Socrates 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 first 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 of life, it refuses to partake of the form of death. This proof of immortality is thus hypothetical because it is shown to be involved as a consequence of the doctrine of Forms. Herein, immortality has been deduced as a conclusion from the doctrine of Forms which is taken as a postulate.

The practical bearing of Plato's view on immortality

regarding the real morale of Plato's discussion on the immortality of the soul, it may be observed
that the faith in immortality has great significance for human conduct and destiny of man. In this issued A.W. Taylor writes: "It follows that the tendency of the soul is incomparably the most serious of human interests, and the danger of neglecting this tendency the most awful to which we can expose ourselves. If death ends all, it may not matter so much what sort of soul a man has, since, in a few years, his wickedness will end with his life. But if the soul lives forever, it takes with it into the unseen world nothing but its own intrinsic character for good or evil and its unending future depends on that. This is really what the Orphic stories about the judgement of the dead should teach us on the character we bring with us into the unseen world, our company there will depend on our company. As in the Gorgias and Republic, the hope of immortality is thus used for a moral purpose. The value of faith in it is that it drives home the question what manner of man we ought to be, if there is an endless future before us and thus invests the choice for moral good and evil with an awful importance it would otherwise not have. In the end, for Socrates and Plato, no less than for Kant, immortality is a postulate of the practical use of reason. Ethical theorists

in the history of modern philosophy have taken cue from Plato in presupposing the immortality of the self as an important moral postulate.

According to Plato, the soul being immortal and eternal, is at home in the contemplation of eternal things, but is confused where it contemplates the world of changing things. We have mentioned on earlier occasions that for Plato, the body is a hindrance in the acquisition of knowledge. True knowledge of existence, if revealed to the soul at all, is revealed in thought, not in sense. When the soul contemplates into the region of purity, eternity and immortality without hindrance from physical impediments, the soul is in an elevated state which is called "the state of wisdom."

Plato is all praise for the life of the true philosopher. For him, as for Aristotle, the life of contemplation is the best life. Plato maintained that the soul of the true philosopher, which has, in life, been liberated from thraldom to the flesh, will after death depart to the invisible world, to live in bliss in the company of the gods. But the impure soul which

has loved the body, will become a ghost haunting the 
sepulchre, or will enter into the body of an animal." 19

The true philosopher enters into the heaven when he 
dies. "No one who has studied philosophy and who is 
not entirely pure at the time of his departure is 
allowed to enter the company of the Gods, but the lover 
of knowledge only." 20

The moral goal of man

The main objective of Plato's philosophical 
thought is to pave the foundation of morality, value 
and well-being of man. For Plato, man is not only a 
rational but also a moral being. Most men neither know 
the meaning of the goal of human existence nor lead a 
good life. Majority of the people are enslaved in the 
prison of ignorance. On the ground work of his ethics, 
Plato attempted to show how men can be liberated from 
this cave. His aim was to determine the end of human 
life and the means to that end.

There are two types of ends - namely ontological end and psychological end. Platonic ethics is objectively oriented toward the idea of good as its supreme ontological end in which moral acts participate. Hence the ethical value of a human reaction is relative to the idea of good, which is the ultimate norm of morality.

From the psychological standpoint, the purpose of life is the care of soul. Inflamed by eros, the soul first seeks what is good and beautiful to the senses. Dissatisfied there, it strives to rise to the supreme ideal good and beauty. Since the passions and carnal appetite pull men down to bodily pleasures, he must not depend excessively on the body. He should instead constantly strengthen the dominion of his rational soul over his irrational nature. Once unchained from sensible things, men can soar freely to the divine ideas and to his primary happiness in intellectual vision of the good and the beautiful. Plato tried to establish a delicate balance between men’s simultaneous attraction to relative goods and absolute good. Hence, existence should be a “mixed life” combining innocent pleasure, moderate emotions, and

noble contemplation. Like Aristotle, Plato advocated the doctrine of the "mean". The proper mixture these ingredients make for a good life, just as the proper co-mingling of honey and water produce a pleasing drink.²² The harmonious blending of pleasure and wisdom forms a man of moral order and beauty within the cosmic order.

Plato maintains that the essential means to the attainment of happiness is virtue. Virtue is a unity of contrary elements in man producing grace and harmony; it is an imitation of divine contemplation and love of the good, and a reproduction of the Ideal and mathematical order in human existence. The seat of virtue is the rational part of the soul, for virtue is more a question of knowledge than of strength and passion.

Plato has identified virtue with knowledge. Courage, for instance, is the knowledge of the sounds of hope and fear. As a good of the soul under the guidance of wisdom, "virtue must be a sort of wisdom of prudence."²³ It is as knowledge that virtue can be

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taught, for according to the theory of anamnesis, knowledge is the only thing that can be taught once he knows good. "No man voluntarily pursues evil, or that which he thinks to be evil. To prefer evil to good is not in human nature."24 No man is voluntarily bad. Man lives what he knows. If man does evil, it is out of ignorance. "He who has learned anything whatever is that which has knowledge make him... and he who has learned what is just is just."25

Although all virtue are in human one, there are four expressions of virtue in human activity, wisdom is the virtue of soul's rational charioteer, courage the rein of the appetite man and justice the right order and cooperation of all the soul parts.

Each performs its own function without interfering with others, with these virtue cooperating, the soul rises like the winged pegasus to the good as the sum of true happiness.

Plato maintains that the ideal of perfect virtue is difficult to active. Having forgotten the moral ideals that it enjoyed in a pre-existence state, the

24. Ibid. 67-69.
25. Plato, Corgias, 460.
soul is ignorant at birth and rebirth. As a result man spends life according to common virtue based on opinion. The ignorance of Ideal values results in a life little better than death and composed of days little better than might. Socrates' noble mission was to convert his fellow citizens from his cave of apparent happiness to perfect virtue.

After death the soul appears before the judgement seat of the dead to give an amount of its conduct upon earth. "He who has lived all his life in justice and holiness shall go, when he is dead, to the islands of the blessed, and dwell there in perfect happiness out of the reach of evil, but ... he who has lived unjustly and impiously shall go to the house of vengeance and punishment, which is called Tartarus."26

Plato maintains that man is free to choose. "Virtue is free, as a man honours or dishonours her he will have more or less of her; the responsibility in with the chooser - God is justified."27 Man chooses his own state of life.

27. Republic, 617.