

## The ideal Theory of Plato:

We meet a large number of objects which we can call as 'particulars' for convenience. For example, cows, dogs, tables etc., are so many particulars. Each class of particulars has some common qualities. Some of these qualities essential and some others as accidental. For instance, the colour, shape and size of cows may be deemed as accidental. The smallness and largeness are not the essential qualities. Similarly some cows may not be black but white, and some others may be black but not white or piebald. Hence, the colour of the cows is its accidental quality. In contrast, cowness is an essential quality of the whole class of cows, for without the quality of cowness, no animal can be called a cow. Hence, cowness is said to be universal and cows comprising the class cow are said to be particulars. Now what is the status of a universal like cowness, dogness, beauty, justice and so on? are called

Ordinarily we do not think that universals have their own independent existence as trees or flowers and other particular objects have. Realism is the doctrine that universals have their own independent existence in their own rights. This is the view of Plato. Aristotle criticized the realistic theory of universals accepted by Plato. According to Aristotle, universals do exist but only in individual things. For example, beauty does exist but only in beautiful things viz., beautiful flowers or birds, butterflies etc. Hence, Aristotle's views are somewhat like Platonic realism, even though he admits that universals do not exist apart from particulars. In other words, according to Aristotle, a universal must be instantiated. But what about unicornness? It is certainly a universal even though it cannot be instantiated. But let us leave aside this difficulty with the Aristotelian view of universals. Another important view about universals is known as conceptualism.

Conceptualism is the doctrine that universals are constructed by the human mind after the observation of particular instances. This is the view largely held by the British empiricists. According to conceptualism, universals have their locus in the mind. We find that Plato rejects the subjectivity of universals. (Parmenides There is the third theory of nominalism concerning the status of universals, 1326)

which was first propounded by Roscelin and Ockham (1290-1350). According to nominalism, universals are mere words to think about the class of objects, and, they have no independent existence, nor even their existence in the mind. But 'dogness' is no quality, then how do we think about dogs as soon as the word 'dog' is uttered? Nominalism was defended by resorting to the principle of resemblance exemplified by an eminent member of a class. This obviously is putting the cart before the horse. How do we select an eminent member of the class known as "Type"? In recent years Wittgenstein has propounded the theory of 'family resemblance'. We need not go into further detail. We are concerned with the realistic theory of universals propounded by Plato called Ideas or forms, by contrasting this from conceptualism and nominalism. But how and why Plato has held the theory of Realism?

Parmenides and Heraclitus have made very sharp distinction between the worlds of Being and Becoming. According to them, reality is to be known through reason and not through the senses. Of course, Parmenides and Heraclitus differed with regard to the nature of reality, but they kept to the absolute distinction of reason and senses. Again, we have already seen that for Socrates knowledge is not perception, but through concepts which again are quite different from sensation (Phaedrus 247c). Socrates did not clearly establish the status of concepts, but for him too concepts are not perception and are not to be found in perception. Perceptible objects imitate the real ideas just as the many copies of Mona Lisa do today. But no copy can be taken for the original. It was Plato who made a sharp distinction between intellect and senses, universals and perceptibles. Ideas as universals are the real originals which can be copied by the perceptible, but no perceptible can even be the original idea. Ideas can be thought but not sensed, and, percepts can be sensed but not thought

And the one class of things (perceptibles) we say can be seen but not thought, while the ideas can be thought but not seen. (Republic 507b)

But why should we make such a sharp distinction between Ideas and perceptibles? This point was suggested by the Pythagorean concepts in mathematics. Take the notion of equality. It is not to be found in objects, given by senses. No two lines, two sticks and two stones are exactly equal.

Is it not true that equal stones and sticks sometimes, without changing in themselves, appear equal to one person and unequal to another? (Phaedo 74b)

Then from where have we got the idea of equality or beauty? Well, both Socrates and Plato hold that the ideas are hinted at by the perceptibles on account of recollection or the theory of reminiscence which we will soon describe.

There is another reason which has to be kept in mind. The Greek mind in accepted the pure receptivity of mind in receiving the objects of knowledge. Senses reveal becoming or the objects in constant flux (becoming), and Intellect reveal the ideas. Knowledge is always of something (Theaetetus 167b). But cannot thought be in the mind as subjective, of the knower of ideas? Socrates suggests this and yet at once rejects this genen

No, that is impossible. So it is a thought of something? Yes.  
Of something that is, or of something that is not?  
Of something that is. (Parmenides 132b)

If ideas cannot be found in becoming, then where else it can be? Ideas are to be found in their own being in the realm of reality. In order to explain this realm of reality Plato takes the help of a myth. But from the above account it is quite clear that Plato would reject conceptualism and even nominalism.

The Characteristics of Ideas

We have followed John Burnet in the interpretation of Socratic view of concept and Platonic theory of Ideas. The view of John Burnet given in Greek Philosophy is very different from that of W.T. Stace. Everywhere documentary evidence has been given to justify the Socratic theory of concepts and Platonic Ideas. Both Socrates and Plato, concepts and ideas are quite separate and distinct from percept. Naturally the most important point is to establish a real relation between Ideas and Percepts in the Ideal theory of Plato. As for Plato, the realm of Ideas is the of reality, of Being and that of percepts is the region of Becoming. Therefore, keeping this view of Ideas, we can outline the characteristics of Ideas. and region

1. Ideas are said to be substances. A substance is that which is in itself and for itself and does not require the existence of anything else for its reality For Plato the Idea is in and of itself (Rep. X. 597c).

2. Ideas are universal. For example, cowness or beauty. The beautiful things only imitate and copy the idea of beauty. But beauty is not to be found in beautiful flowers, beautiful birds, beautiful forms of women. These beautiful sensible things simply remind one of the idea of beauty. No doubt a concept is formed by comparing and contrasting the beautiful things and by abstracting the common features found in them. But this is not the Idea. The Idea of beauty and all other Ideas are already there in the intellect of men in their dormant stage. Sensible things simply remind men of these dormant Ideas. In this sense a concept of beauty is not the Idea of Beauty. The Ideas are said to be universal in the sense that all their corresponding sensible things participate in Ideas and serve as provocative agencies for evoking the reminiscence of Ideas which men once experienced them in their pristine glorious existence before their fall in this earthly bondage. Concepts are in our common usage in sensible things and are drawn or abstracted from them by the knower and are in his mind. Platonic Idea on the other hand, are not in the mind either of human beings or God. They exist, in their own rights as objective entities.

3. Hence Ideas are eternal. Now eternity may mean that which endures throughout the whole duration of time, past, present and the future. But Plato's Ideas are said to be eternal in the sense that they are timeless. According to Plato time was created by God along with the world, but Ideas pre-exist the creation of the world and would remain even when the world is destroyed.

4. If Ideas are eternal in the sense that they are timeless, then they are not perishable or mutable. They are immutable. Again, if sensible things mutable are corporeal, then Ideas may be called incorporeal. Plato advises us to reflect on the Ideas without the distractions of hearing, seeing or bodily pleasures, in search of reality with unaided intellect and unadulterated thought (Phaedo 65c, 66a). Hence, the Ideas are nonsensible and incorporeal. They can be only thought and not sensed. (Rep. VI.507b)

5. Each Idea is one and unique (Rep. X.597c, d). In his mythic way, Plato declares that God has created each Idea as one and yet again each in its unique nature. Of course, the Idea of beauty is one, but it is imitated or copied by many beautiful things.

6. Ideas are absolute, for they are eternal verities and form the very standard of knowledge (Phaedo 76d). Plato speaks through Socrates, I am assuming the existence of absolute beauty and goodness and magnitude and all the rest of them (Ideas). (Phaedo 100 b; also see Phaedo 75d)

7. As the Ideas are absolute, so they are invariable and constant. Does absolute equality or beauty or any other independent entity which really exists ever admit change of any kind? Or does each one of these uniform and independent entities remain always constant and invariable...? They must be constant and invariable. (Phaedo, 78d)

8. Ideas are the essence of things, not in the sense in which the common and important qualities abstracted from the observed things are said to be the essential qualities of things e.g., animality and rationality form the essential qualities of man. Ideas are the essence of things in the sense that Ideas are real and sensible things are their poor imitation.

9. In a way Ideas are the causes in the sense that they attract things towards them, just as Sita attracted the princes in her Svayambara. They are the unmoved and unchanging causes of things. This is best illustrated in the case of the Idea of Good (Rep. VI.509b), for it causes an upward urge in men and in all things. (Rep. VII.517c)