

# E-Content –

## Quadrant 1: Text

Smt. Saswati Ray

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Bethune College

Sem –I

PHIA- CC-II – History of Western Philosophy I c (Aristotle)

### Some brief discussion on Aristotle's Criticism towards Plato's Theory of Ideas and Doctrine of Causation

- (i) Plato's theory of Ideas mainly focus on the objectivity of the concepts i.e., something which has objective reality independent of the subjective mind and which is beyond space and time. Ideas or Forms can be apprehended only by reason. Plato accepts two kinds of world- world of particular – the imperfect world and the world of Ideas or Forms –the world of absolute perfection.

Aristotle's metaphysical theory is also founded upon the Form or Idea but Aristotle criticizes Platonic system. The criticisms are:

1. Plato believes in two world theory but Aristotle believes, there will be no separate world of universal as universal resides in particular.
  2. According to Plato, Ideas are the essence and in separate mysterious world. Aristotle thinks that the Idea which gives what is essential to a thing cannot be separated from it.
  3. Plato speaks about relation of copy / archetype and participation between these two world. Aristotle thinks that Plato by using such phrases is merely uttering some **poetic metaphors**.
  4. World of particular consists of multitude of individual things and Plato in order to explain these, accepts world of Ideas, consists of multitude of Ideas. Aristotle compares Plato to a man who wishes to count a few things but imagines he cannot do so unless he doubles the number.
  5. Plato's Ideas cannot explain the existence of particular things. How can the changeable particular objects be generated by the unchangeable universal Ideas ? If individuals are only the copies of the Ideas then this world of individual will also become unchangeable. But in reality it is not.
  6. There is a common element among every individual human being (e.g., H1,H2,H3 etc ) which is the Idea of man (Humanity). There is also a common element between the individual man (e.g., H1 ) and the Idea of Man (Humanity). Thus another further Idea- the Idea of **Third Man** is to be imagined to explain this. Now between this Idea of Third Man and the individual man (e.g., H1) another further Idea is to be imagined in order to explain what they have in common and the fallacy of infinite regress occurs .
  7. Ideas cannot be compared with mathematical numbers. Numbers can be constituted from other numbers by means of addition, subtraction etc.. But Ideas lack this feature. Besides if an Idea is compared with a particular number then the same particular numerical feature will be present in every singular objects within this Idea and it will be too hard to distinguish them.
- (ii) Aristotle's doctrine of Causation has its own importance in the history of western philosophy. Aristotle accepts four kinds of causes - material, efficient, formal and final .
1. Material Cause – the matter by which a thing is composed.

2. Efficient Cause- the cause of change or motion, the energy or moving force which is necessary to bring about change.
3. Formal Cause- the essence of a thing , in Plato's terminology the Idea/Concept of a thing.
4. Final Cause- end ,purpose, aim towards which the movement is directed.

For example, in case of a wooden table (effect), the material cause is the wood, the carpenter and his tools are the efficient cause, the concept of table i.e., -the table may be of round or square or triangular figured, four or three legged etc. which are necessary for the carpenter to give a shape of it is the formal cause and the end or purpose for which the table is made of is the final cause.

J.S.Mill defines cause as the invariable and unconditional antecedent of a phenomenon. Mill **does not accept** final and formal cause. Final cause is the end or purpose which cannot be considered as antecedent of an effect. Formal cause- the concept cannot be considered as cause also.

Aristotle later considers material cause as **Matter** and formal , efficient and final cause as **Form. Formal and final cause are same.** Formal cause is the Idea and final cause is the realization of the Idea of a thing in actuality. **Efficient cause and final cause are same.** Efficient cause is the cause of becoming/ motion and final cause is the end of becoming and the end itself is the cause of becoming/ motion. Form is universal and matter is particular. **Form and matter cannot exist separately** as universal always exists in particular. But Form and matter are interchangeable – **the same thing is matter from one perspective and Form from other perspective. What becomes is matter and what it becomes is Form.** Wood is matter if considered in relation to bed as it is what becomes the bed. Wood is Form if considered in relation to growing plant as it is what the plant becomes. Aristotelian philosophy is based upon Form and Matter and Aristotle intends to explain the whole universe by these two.

Matter is what becomes Form thus matter is the **potentiality** of what it is to become- what it is to become is already present in it ideally and potentially, not actually. Form is **actuality**, the completed and perfected being, so Form is higher than matter. **Potentiality is the same as matter and actuality as Form.** Matter is potentially everything. It may become everything .It is not actually anything. It is a mere potentiality or capacity of becoming something. But whatever gives it definiteness as this or that, whatever makes it an actual thing, is its Form. Thus the actuality of thing is simply its Form. Every motion is thus the passage of potentiality into actuality , of matter into Form.

Though the world process is a continuous elevation of matter into higher and higher Forms, Aristotle admits exception i.e., absolutely **Matterless Form (God-Unmoved Mover)** at the extreme top and absolutely **Formless Matter** at the extreme bottom. However these two extremes are completely abstract – matter and Form are never separable and whatever comes between these two and the universe exhibits a process of continuous gradations.<sup>1</sup>

References:

1. Stace W.T., A Critical History of Greek Philosophy, pp-279-283, Surjeet Publications, First Indian Reprint,2014
2. Masih Y, A Critical History of Western Philosophy Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., First Revised and Enlarged Edition, 1994