

# E-Content –

## Quadrant 1: Text

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Sem –I

PHIA- CC-II – History of Western Philosophy I b (Plato)

### Some brief discussion about Plato's Theory of Knowledge & Ideas

Plato's theory of ideas is dependent on his theory of knowledge. Platonic philosophy is classified into Dialectic, Physics and Ethics. Nature of knowledge, absolute truth is discussed in Dialectic. Plato **refuted** the view of Protagoras that *Knowledge is perception or perception is knowledge- whatever appears to you as true is true*. Against this view Plato's arguments were :

1. If the view of Protagoras is accepted , if perception is considered as knowledge then which is appeared to me as true in the present will always be true in the future as what is knowledge can never be false. But sometimes what is true to me at present can become false in the future with the development of our knowledge.
2. Perception causes contradictory impression. The same object can appear differently to us in different situation.. As a result which perception is right and which is wrong cannot be determined at all.
3. The theory of Protagoras renders all proof , discussion and refutation futile and impossible. If perception is knowledge and whatever is knowledge is true then every discussion, every proof behind every doctrine will be considered as true and there is nothing to dispute about.
4. The theory of Protagoras by itself involves self- contradiction. If it appears to me as true that the theory of Protagoras is false , Protagoras himself has to admit this . Thus the doctrine of Protagoras being true and false at the same time yields self-contradiction.
5. The theory of Protagoras destroys the objectivity of truth and renders the distinction between truth and falsity as meaningless. Truth becomes subjective by this doctrine.
6. Plato thinks the acts of identification, differentiation, classification, recognition etc. take place while knowing something and all these are performed by mind. Thus while knowledge the role of mind, reason is to be accepted besides sense –organ. Thus perception which mainly depends upon sense-organ cannot be considered as knowledge or the view of Protagoras cannot be accepted.

Plato also **refuted** another view- *Knowledge is opinion*. Reason always plays a vital role in knowledge. Knowledge is based upon reason. But opinion is purely based upon belief , not reason. Besides this opinion can be established and removed by the art of rhetoric. But knowledge is fixed , permanent and not unstable.

After refuting the views – knowledge is perception and knowledge is opinion, **Plato defines knowledge as something which is founded on reason and it is the faculty of concepts.**

Plato's doctrine of knowledge is similar with the doctrine of Socrates. Like Socrates, Plato admits that all knowledge are knowledge through concepts. According to Socrates, concept is something which is fixed, permanent and not liable to change according to the subjective impression of the individual. Plato accepts this view of Socrates. But according to Socrates concept is considered as rule of thought whereas Plato describes

concept as the object of knowledge which is fixed , permanent metaphysical substance – **Idea or Form**. Ideas have objective reality and have their existence and they do not depend upon mind. Plato mentions some characteristics of Ideas :

**Characteristics of Platonic Ideas:**

1. Ideas which are the metaphysical entities are substance. Substance are self –caused and self-determined and self-dependent. Ideas bear these characteristics of substance.
2. Ideas are universal in nature. The Idea of man does not designate any particular man but man- in-general. It is the general concepts of all human –beings.
3. Ideas have their objective reality. They are not things but thoughts. By ‘thought’ Plato does not mean any subjective thought but objective thought i.e., something which has objective reality. *Plato’s Ideas are not subjective Ideas i.e., Ideas in a particular and existent mind. Plato’s Ideas are objective Ideas, thoughts which have reality on their own account, independently of any mind.*<sup>1</sup> [pp 188-189, Stace]
4. Idea is a unity . It is one amidst the many. The Idea of man by essence is one though it belongs to every human beings all over the world.
5. Like definition, Ideas are eternal, unchangeable and imperishable in nature.
6. Ideas are essences. Ideas give what is essential to a thing.
7. Ideas are absolute perfection and anything deviate from this perfection are more or less imperfect. Nothing in this world of individual are absolute perfect. Idea in its own world are absolutely perfect. The Idea of man is absolutely perfect and every individual human being deviate more or less from this perfect type.
8. Ideas are outside space and time. Plato believes in Two- World theory – One is world of individual – the imperfect world and the world of Ideas – the world of absolute perfection. Every individual human being belongs to this world of individual where as the Idea of Man or humanity resides in the world of perfection which is outside space and time.
9. Ideas are rational .They can be apprehended only through reason.
10. Plato identifies his Ideas with Pythagorean numbers. According to Pythagoreans the world can be explained through mathematical numbers. Plato accepts this view and identifies Ideas with mathematical numbers.

Plato is the proponent of the theory of Two –World –world of universal / Idea and world of particular/ sense- - object. Plato identifies the world of senses with the Heraclitus doctrine of Flux. According to Heraclitus , nothing is permanent except change. Everything in this sensible world is changeable just like the flow of river. No knowledge about this world of object is possible. On the other hand Ideas being unchangeable in the world of universal become the object of our knowledge. Plato speaks about **relation of copy/archetype** and **relation of participation** between these two worlds. Particular objects or things are **copies** of Ideas and **participate** in them. For example, every individual human being (H1, H2,H3 etc.) is the copy of Idea of man (Humanity) and participates in it. Thus the world of individual is the copy of world of Ideas and participates in the same.

References:

1. Stace W.T., A Critical History of Greek Philosophy, pp-188-189, 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