

## **OBJECTIVES OF PLATO'S PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY**

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Plato in his different dialogues inquired into the underlying nature and structure of the being, man, society and their relationship. The concepts of good, justice, beauty, love, friendship, soul, cosmos, knowledge etc. engaged his attention. From these diverse interests of Plato it seems that he is frantically trying to bring the study of man and nature into an integrated mode of inquiry. He did so because he was convinced that the inquiry into the realm of nature is of no use without the proper understanding of man and his nature. Most of his predecessors neglected the questions of human good. Socio-political structures and individual morality, in their inquiry. They in the framework of their inquiry put nature at the centre and placed man at the periphery. As a result, their pursuit remained incomplete, and *ipso facto*, defeated the real purpose of inquiry. So the main problem before Plato was to fill this void in the realm of inquiry and to put it in right perspective. For this, Plato focused his attention primarily on man. Nevertheless, he followed the pre-Socratics and was determined to base his inquiry on rational principles without indulging in any sort of rhetoric, sophistry and wild persuasion. Thus, Plato gave a new direction to the concept of inquiry. This approach was, in fact, initiated by Socrates, and Plato resumed his master's programme and worked it to a reasonably satisfactory consummation.

Following his master Plato strove for the knowledge of certain concepts significantly related to human beings but which were not directly known nor could they be directly verified. "...Look at the matter thus, if you and I were to differ about numbers, on the question which of two was the greater, would a disagreement about that make us angry at each other, and make enemy of us? Should we not settle things by calculation, and so come to an agreement quickly on any point like that ? And similarly if we differ on a question of greater length or less, we would take a measurement, and quickly put an end to the dispute? And so, I fancy, we should have recourse to scales and settle any question about a heavier or lighter weight? .... What sort of thing, then is it about which we differ, till, unable to arrive at a decision, which we might get angry and be enemies to one another? Perhaps you have no answer ready, but listen to me. See if it is not the following -right and wrong, the noble and the base, and good and bad. Are not these

the things about which we differ, till unable to arrive at a decision, we grow hostile, when we grow hostile to each other, you and I and everybody else? "(Euthyphro, 7 CD).

Plato was in search of the underlying nature of certain things because of which a thing was what it was. He felt that one should not accept anything on its face value. One has to delve deeper into it and find out what makes X as X. He believed that a person might have a good deal of skill and efficiency which he could use himself yet, he could not impart it to others unless he had a principle or technique to collect and arrange them. He had the practice but not the theory (*episteme*), art but not the science. Plato undertook his inquiry not for its own sake, but to attain a theory, science or *episteme*.

According to Plato, the underlying principle cannot be had by citing any example nor by simple enumeration of different illustrations or facts which may be based on particular attributes because particular attributes may either lead to contradiction or circularity.

In *Euthyphro* when Socrates asked Euthyphro for the definition of holy, Euthyphro came out with a definition, by citing a particular example that "Well then I say that the holy is what I am now doing (Like Zeus) prosecuting the wrong doer who commits a murder or a sacrilegious robbery, or sins in any point like that, whether it be your father, or your mother, or whoever it may be" (*Euthyphro, 5E*). But Socrates immediately pointed out "And you actually believe that war occurred among the gods, and there were dreadful hatreds, battles, and all sorts of fearful things like that? Such things as the poet tell of, and good artists represent in sacred places, yes, and at the great panathenic festival the robe that is carried up to the Acropolis is all in wrought with such embellishments? "(*Euthyphro, 6 C*) Socrates wanted to say that what is holy to some god may be unholy to others, since there are differences among gods. Thus if we ever try to define anything by citing a particular case, we cannot get proper definition: rather we would be confronted with contradictions.

Again, in *Meno*, when Meno was asked for the definition of virtue, he defined it by telling different kinds of virtue, like courage, temperance, wisdom, and magnanimity. But Socrates pointed out that these definitions are of no use since one will ask again the meaning of courage, temperance etc., and you cannot explain it without bringing in the virtue itself. Thus, if we define anything by any of its particular instance we would be confronted with the problem of circularity. "So it follows from your own statements that to act with a part of virtue is virtue, if you call justice and all the rest parts of virtue. The point I want to make is that whereas I asked you to give me an account of virtue as a whole, far from telling me what it is itself you say that every action is virtue which exhibits part of virtue as if you had already told me what the whole is, so that I should recognise it even if you chop it up into bits. It seems that we must put the same old question to you, my dear Meno - the question, what is virtue? - If every act, becomes, virtue when combined with a part of virtue. That is, after all, what it means to say that every act performed with justice is virtue. Don't you agree that the same question needs to be put?" (*Meno, 79 B.C.*).

Besides, if we try to define something by particular cases, it may lead to a fallacy of too narrow definition which would leave many things out which are supposed to be included in it. But, then, Socrates pointed out that this virtue does not apply to child or slave. He told that if a slave is capable of governing his master, he is no longer a slave. Besides, capacity to govern man did not speak anything as to govern justly or unjustly. (*Meno*, 79. D).

Concomitant with this Plato rejected sense perception as an inadequate method for getting hold of the underlying principles of things which were the subject of his inquiry.<sup>1</sup> This, he felt, could best be achieved by reason and by it alone without the help of the sense. The complaint against the senses is that enquiry confined to sense observation cannot supply knowledge on a given range of questions and a range to which alone the answers deserve the name of knowledge. Such enquiry is at best useful for seeing to the satisfaction of the body's need, to which Plato seems to think it will be typically directed. The senses, in fact, in this context, do not refer to the mere fact of perception, but to the range of intelligent enquiry that in Plato's view necessarily fails to produce answers of timeless validity, or even adequate explanations of the phenomena investigated".<sup>2</sup>

Plato believed that the underlying principle being sought must give an account of everything that falls in the class of which the thing inquired into is a member. In *Euthyphro* and *Meno*, Socrates repeatedly asked Euthyphro and Meno to come out with a definition of holy and virtue respectively which not only explains a particular act of holiness or virtue but gives an account of all acts of holiness and virtue and would distinguish them from unholiness and non-virtues.

Such an underlying principle has been identified by Plato as the Form. In the course of his inquiry he constantly emphasised the need of getting to know the Forms. "But, on the other hand, Parmenides continued it, in view of all these difficulties and others like them, a man refuses to admit that forms of things exist or to distinguish a definite form in every case, he will have nothing on which to fix his thought, so long as he will not allow that each thing has a character which is always the same and in so doing he will completely destroy the significance of all discourse". (*Parmenides*. 135, C).

The features of Platonic form drive one to believe that he was striving for theory under the guise of a notion of Forms. The Platonic Forms possess most of the characteristics of a theory. Plato seems to have believed that these Forms (theories) are highly indispensable for any type of significant inquiry.<sup>3</sup>

Plato pursued these Forms not arbitrarily but systematically through the help of some methods. It should be noted that Plato was not interested to go for the solution of individual problems, instead he is all out to get hold of an underlying principle by which not only he solves the problem in question but also all the problems coming under the framework. He believed that only by methods we can reach at the forms or theories which constitute the explanation of things

we want to understand. Hence he embarked upon the task of, undoubtedly most important one, developing methods by which we can reach at the Forms or theories.

His concern for methods are quite evident in his rejection of sophistry and rhetoric from the scope of his inquiry, "The sophist possesses a sort of reputed and apparent knowledge on all subjects, but not the reality" (*Sophist*, 233, D). Again towards the end of *Sophist*, Plato after a long analysis came to a conclusion that sophistry is the art of contradiction making, descended from an insincere kind of conceited mimicry, of the semblance making breed, derived from images making, distinguished as a portion, not divine but human, of production that presents a shadow play of words" (*Sophist*, 268, D). The sophists, Plato felt, use an eristic method, which aims at winning an argument at any cost. In other words, the eristic method compels the interlocutor to contradict the thesis which he had held before for the sake of contradiction.<sup>4</sup> But, in contrast, Platonic methods aim at reaching underlying principles which can explain things related to human being. Plato has used the dialectic method not the eristic.

Thus Platonic inquiry must be clearly distinguished from eristic. Platonic inquiry also cannot be identified with rhetoric. In *Gorgias*, rhetoric has been rejected outright as a part of any genuine inquiry. "This (Rhetoric) then I call a form of flattery, and I claim that this kind of thing is bad - I'm now addressing you, Polus - because it aims at what is pleasant, ignoring the good, and I insist that it is not an art but a routine because it can produce no principle in virtue of which it offers what it does, nor explain the nature thereof, and consequently is unable to point to the cause of each thing it offers. And I refuse the name of art to anything irrational. (*Gorgias*, 465, A). Rhetoric is nothing but a demagogue. It pays lip-service to various questions related to man and society. It does not have any methods of its own. It is a power of persuasion without any respect for truth and objectivity. Besides, Platonic inquiry basically intended to get at the truths and hence must be kept aside of the rhetoric.

One of the principal function of the dialectic was to work its way to an ultimate principle.<sup>5</sup> Here the ulterior purpose of Plato was to establish the fact that whatever significant thing we do, we do it for the benefit and good of ourselves and human beings in general, but not for the sake of doing it. Thus human good, he believes, must be a trans-departmental, formal and logical principle which is shared by everything that comes under the scope of his inquiry. Plato wanted to establish that there is an end to which knowledge in all its form is subordinated. To study this end is one of the objectives of his inquiry.

Does the emphasis on this trans-departmental principle hinder the growth and progress of special sciences? Plato was aware of this difficulty and had taken care of this part by his method of collection and division so as to allow for the growth of special sciences. This method articulates, the individual forms and the intermediaries between them and the highest Form necessary for the understanding and development of special sciences. It may be said that special sciences can have a good progress even without the trans-departmental formal and logical principle of good. well, it may be that the absence of the trans-departmental, formal and logical

principle may not hinder the growth of special sciences, but the purpose of special sciences would certainly be defeated in the absence of such a principle because for Plato, we are not doing anything for the sake of doing it; thus everything would be incomplete and unsuccessful unless it is made subservient to human good.<sup>6</sup> This approach of Plato is evident in *Republic* and implicitly present in *Sophist* and other late dialogues. In *Republic* Socrates says to Glaucon "the man who is unable to define in his discourse and distinguish and abstract from all other things' the aspect of idea of the good, and who cannot, as it were in battle, running the gauntlet of all tests, and striving to examine everything by essential reality and not by opinion, hold on his way through all this without tripping in his reasoning - the man who lacks this power, you will say, does not really know the good itself or any particular good, but if he apprehends any adumbration of it, his contact with it, is by opinion, not by knowledge, and dreaming and dozing through his present life, before he awakens here he will arrive at the house of the Hades and fall asleep forever ?" (*Republic*, 534, CD) Likewise in *Sophist*, the stranger says that the man who can do that (dialectic) discerns clearly one form everywhere extended throughout many, where each one lies apart, and many forms, different from one another, embraced from without by one form, and again one form connected in a unity through many wholes and many forms, entirely marked off apart" (*Sophist*, 253. D) Here the reference to the idea of good is implicit in the statement 'that clearly discerns, one form everywhere extend through out many'. Besides, all the political and ethical doctrines of Plato's later dialogues, presumably achieved by the application of the method of collection and division, confirm that this method had a reference to the idea of good.

Ryle perhaps thinks that the allusion to good is virtually given up in the method of Collection and Division. He says "we hear no more of the discovery of non-hypothetical first principles functioning as super axioms for all the special sciences, nor is any reason given for the disappearance of this view".<sup>7</sup> But this does not seem to be correct. As we have pointed out a while before that the allusion to good is very much there, of course, implicitly. Sayer also casts some doubt on the role of the idea of good in Platonic inquiry. He says that "there is no apparent necessity, and indeed no apparent sense, in the suggestion that all applications of this method (hypothetical method) in order to be successful must in some way culminate in the form of good. All that can be said of a positive sort about the objects of mental acts involved in the 'upward way' is that there forms alone, for reason in these operations never makes use of any sensible object, but only of forms, moving through forms, and ending with forms".<sup>8</sup> Here Sayer does not seem to have taken seriously the passage 534, D, at *Republic* which makes the idea of good indispensable for the method of dialectic.

A genuine dialectic method cannot operate without the idea of good. Besides, here the idea is very much a formal principle. Here, by appending all the results of his method to good Plato has not diverted from his commitment to Forms.

On the other hand, many other Platonic scholars support this view. According to Robinson<sup>9</sup> "Most students of Plato believe that he thought there was really only one, namely, the idea of the good. This might be divided into several propositions, but they would form a single,

closely knit organic whole. The evidence for this view is indirect, for Plato does not explicitly say that the *unhypotheton* is the good". Bluck<sup>10</sup> holds that the existence and the nature of the whole world of reality can be verified and confirmed by the philosopher in the light of the Form of good. Berti<sup>11</sup> while characterising the nature of genuine science holds that a true science is not confined to hypotheses but rises above them by means of ideas to a non-hypothetical principle, the idea of good, for the purpose of explaining the preceding hypothesis, and after having attained this principle, it descends to all other ideas, of which it is exactly the first principle.

Thus, apart from striving to get hold of the 'Forms', it seems that Plato has ascribed a major role to the idea of good in his inquiry. His inquiry is, in fact, incomplete and incomprehensible unless it is properly harnessed to the idea of good. In *Timaeus*, he has also explored the possibility of inquiring nature in this framework of good. After all, human life will be more worthwhile and human good would be better achieved if we can harness the things of nature to the service of human life.<sup>12</sup>

Roughly speaking, the Method of Elenchus is designed to examine the statement of a person by putting it to the test of questioning. The method aims at examining any statement made by a person by putting a series of questions to elicit further statements which would determine the truth value of prior statements. Plato has made extensive use of this method in his earlier dialogues like *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, and *Apology* etc. to examine the truth value of some concepts related to ethics and politics.

Plato in his earlier dialogues used this method, as Socrates had done, to examine the generally accepted views about society, individuals and their relationships. Socrates was concerned with questions of ethics and engaged in dialogue with others is an attempt to reach an understanding. For a certain view Socrates would consult an expert who would be a possible source of reliable information in that particular field of inquiry and by asking him questions, and demanding answer and eliciting further statements he would determine the meaning and the truth value of the supposed views. It does not aim at explaining what nobody believes but to explain why we affirm what everybody knows. The structure of this method may be described as follows:

- (i) Socrates considers his interlocutor's belief 'B' to be false. So he wants to reject it. The interlocutor is supposed to be an exponent of that belief.
- (ii) Socrates asserts some well accepted proposition i.e. 'X and Y', the authenticity of which is backed by a comprehensive proof to which he secures the agreement of his interlocutor.
- (iii) Then Socrates goes on deriving consequences from the proposition 'X and Y' the interlocutor is given absolute freedom to put forward his objection if any to these consequences.

- (iv) If the objection is forceful or if the interlocutor is insistent on a particular objection then Socrates would bring another equally forceful proposition such as 'P and Q' in place of 'X and Y'
- (v) Then, Socrates goes on deriving consequences from the proposition 'P and Q'.
- (vi) From the consequence of the proposition 'P and Q' along with some consequence of the proposition 'X and Y' (only and only those which are agreed by the interlocutor), Socrates asserts '~B'.
- (vii) Now Socrates claim that ~B is proven true and B false.

It seems that the enterprise of elenchus points to a principle of irrefutability which states that a statement is true if it stands to the test of all possible refutations pertaining to the statement. In fact, the method of elenchus as it was employed in different dialogues has two aspects i.e., positive and negative. Positively, elenchus strives to establish that only forms can give real knowledge and negatively it seeks to challenge the authoritative source of knowledge and prevent its inquirer from being prejudiced and it also asserts that real knowledge cannot be attained through particular things or instances because they involve the problem of circularity and the problem that our knowledge of some concept would contain its negation. Thus, the method of elenchus, although, seems apparently negative, is very much positive in nature and helps us to have the knowledge of the concept we want to enquire about.

Method of hypothesis is another important method extensively used particularly in the early middle dialogues such as *Phaedo*, *Meno*, and the *Republic* etc. The method of hypothesis is glaringly used in *Phaedo* to inquire into the nature of beauty. While inquiring into the nature of beauty he rejected the use of sense perception and took resort to theories and used them to discover the nature of the concept of beauty. Socrates says, "I started off in this way and in every case, I first lay down the judgment which I judge to be the soundest, and then whatever seems to agree with it - with regard to either causes or anything else I assume it to be true and whatever does not, I assume not to be true." (*Phaedo* 100 A)

Then again Socrates asserts "If anyone should fasten the hypothesis itself, you would disregard him and refuse to answer until you could consider whether its consequences are mutually consistent or not. And when you have to substantiate the hypothesis itself, you would proceed in the same way, assuming whatever more ultimate hypothesis commended it most to you, until you reached one which was satisfactory. You would not mix the two things together by discussing both the principle and its consequences, like one of these destructive critics - that is, if you wanted to discover any part of the truth" (*Phaedo* 101 D).

The method of hypothesis involves two procedures: (1) testing the authenticity and relevance of the hypothesis and (2) substantiating the hypothesis. The first procedure consists of the following steps.

- (i) Lay down a hypothesis which appears to be the most probable and sound which explains most satisfactorily the concept in question.
- (ii) Deduce consequences from the hypothesis.
- (iii) Check the mutual consistency of the consequences derived from the hypothesis.
- (iv) If the consequences are found inconsistent the original hypothesis is to be replaced by a more general hypothesis and repeat the steps (ii) and (iii). This procedure is to continue till we reach a hypothesis of which all the consequences derived are mutually consistent.

The second procedure - substantiation of the hypothesis-consists of two steps.

- (i) Posting a more general hypothesis than the original one whose consequences are found mutually consistent such that the original one can be derived from the general hypothesis.
- (ii) Repeating Step (i) till one arrives at a statement or proposition which is true by itself and needs no further justification.

Thus, the above two procedures of the method of hypothesis though different, complement each other. The first discovers the underlying principle or the form of the thing we are trying to inquire about and the second demonstrates its truth. Thus, the method of hypothesis aims at discovering the forms through hypothesis and involves the procedure of refining a hypothesis till it defines the form completely. Here the refinement is done in the light of the principle of irrefutability. Hence; the Elenctic method forms a part of the method of hypothesis. The method of hypothesis, in fact, goes beyond the Elenctic method and works its way to an ultimate principle by which everything is properly explained.

Besides the method of elenchus and the method of hypothesis, Plato has used another method namely the method of collection and division quite extensively in the middle and later dialogues. It is considered to be the most well-articulated, systematic and original platonic method. The method of collection and division is depicted in *Sophist* under the name of dialectic. "And the man who can do that discerns clearly one form everywhere extended throughout many, where each one lies apart and many forms, different form one another, embraced from without by one form, and again one form connected in a unity through many whole and many forms, entirely marked off apart" (*Sophist* 253 D).

Thus, the method of collection and division aims at discerning precisely one form which runs throughout the many forms to be defined and articulating a formula specific enough to distinguish it from the rest. By relying on this method of collection and division we can explain any individual form precisely and uniquely.

This method of collection and division is very clearly and comprehensively exhibited in the dialogue, namely *Sophists*. Here the main concern of a stranger is to find out the explanation for Sophist in a clear formula. (*Sophist*, 218 C). Before embarking on the explanation of *Sophist*, he first gives an example, as to how an explanation, which is relatively easy and simple, can be achieved. He tried to give an explanation of an angler. Here he has assumed Arts, through a clandestine process of collection, as the most satisfactory statement to explain angling. But in order to uniquely explain it, we have to take the help of the method of division. For the explanation of the angler first the stranger divides the 'Art' at which he arrived through an assumed method of collection. Firstly, he divides it into productive and acquisitive art. After this division, although we find that angling is more closely explained by acquisitive art than productive art, yet angling is not uniquely explained simply by acquisitive art as there are many acquisitive arts which may not be angling. So again the stranger divides acquisitive art into acquisitive art done by exchange and acquisitive art done by force. But now we can see that angling is more closely explained by an art which is acquisitive and is done by force than an art which is acquisitive and is done by exchange. But still the latter does not uniquely explain angling, since angling is not done openly. Then, again we have to divide between acquisitive art done by force openly and acquisitive art done by force secretly. After this division we find that although angling is more closely explained by the latter than the former, it is not uniquely explained by it since we can also secretly capture the lifeless animal too. Then, again we have to divide the acquisitive art done with force secretly into the acquisitive art done with force secretly of a lifeless animal and acquisitive art done with force secretly of a living prey. After this stage of division again we find that angling is more closely explained by the latter than the former. Again, since it includes the capturing of land animals we have to divide the acquisitive art done by force secretly of living animals into acquisitive art done by force secretly of living preys which live on land and acquisitive art done forcefully secretly of living preys which live in water. Here, although the latter explanation explains angling more closely than the former, yet it does not explain it uniquely since it can be done by following and as well as by fishing. Thus, again the latter explanation of angling as that of an acquisitive art done forcefully secretly of living water animals is to be divided into the acquisitive art done forcefully, secretly of living water preys by following and an acquisitive art done forcefully secretly of water preys by fishing. After this division, again, angling seems to be more closely defined by the latter explanation than the former. But still it is not uniquely defined by the former since it includes both fishing by enclosures and fishing by striking. So, again, we have to divide the latter explanation of angling as that of an acquisitive art done forcefully, secretly of living water animals by fishing into an acquisitive art done forcefully, secretly of living water preys by fishing through enclosures and as acquisitive art done forcefully, secretly of water living preys

by fishing through striking. Thus, after this stage of division, it again seems that the latter explanation, although better than the former, does not explain angling uniquely since it includes both the possibility of striking at night and day. So again we have to divide the latter explanation of angling i.e. an acquisitive art done forcefully, secretly of living water animals by fishing through striking at night and an acquisitive art done forcefully, secretly of living water animals by fishing through striking at night and an acquisitive art done forcefully, secretly of living water animals by fishing through striking in day time. Thus, the latter explanation seems to be a very close explanation of angling. Yet it still includes both the property that one can strike a fish in day from above and from the below. So the latter explanation of angling i.e. an acquisitive art done forcefully, secretly to capture water living animals by fishing through striking in day time is to be divided into an acquisitive art done forcefully, secretly to capture living water animal by fishing through striking in day time from above and an acquisitive art done forcefully secretly of living water animals by fishing through striking in day time from below. This latter explanation of angling, according to the stranger uniquely explains angling (*Sophist*, 219 A - 221 C).

Thus, in view of the above discussion, it seems that Plato has made extensive use of the method of elenchus, the method of hypothesis and the method of collection and division to comprehend the concepts he inquires about. But dialectic method is widely held as the most superior and genuine method in platonic inquiry. A close study of platonic dialogues would make one see that dialectic as a method has never been discussed so systematically and coherently in any of his dialogues, notwithstanding the fact that the aims and objectives of dialectic are sporadically evident in most of his dialogues which could be put together as follows.

Firstly, dialectic is used not only to arrive at the forms but also works its way to reach the highest of all forms and to relate it to everything else.<sup>13</sup> It strives for the foundation of all forms. It begins with the form, moves through forms and ends with form and has nothing to do with the particular.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, dialectic deals with truth not anything that is false.<sup>15</sup> Thirdly, it does not confine itself to the comprehension of forms in isolation but goes further to devise a way as to how different forms are to be combined and separated to have the exact knowledge of what we would like to enquire about.<sup>16</sup> Although all these objectives of dialectic could not be found systematically together in any of the dialogue yet they are very much reflected in the method of elenchus, method of hypothesis and the method of collection and division.

Despite the differences among these methods all of them strive to discover the form. It is, in fact, the hallmark of Plato's philosophical enterprise and all the discussions on platonic inquiry would be incomplete without making a reference to the notion of form. However, form has been interpreted differently by different scholars in their own way relying on the naive literal interpretation of the isolated fragments of the platonic dialogues. These differences are obvious as there is no single dialogue where we can find a systematic exposition of the notion of form.

As far as the received tradition is concerned, form has been interpreted in its ontological, teleological, epistemological, metaphysical, ethical, aesthetical and mystical perspectives and so on. The source of all these diverse interpretations may be traced to the different dialogues where

we find some conflicting views regarding the nature of form. Sometimes it is held that form is one and sometimes as many, sometimes spiritual and sometimes material, sometimes changing and sometimes unchanging, sometimes whole and sometimes just a part. In *Sophist* we can see that the forms are being held as components which can be touched and felt. In the same dialogue it is also argued with equal force that they are non-corporeal which can be apprehended by mind alone. (*Sophists*, 246). Again in *Sophist* 251 B, forms seem to have been held as both one and many. In *Parmenides* 131 B it is held that forms are both part and whole.

However, all these conflicting characterisation of form do not mean that the notion of form is rejected or abandoned altogether. It seems that the conflicting characterization of the form is deliberate and implicitly seems to indicate that the notion of form has a different perspective from what it seems to be at the first sight. Prof. Moline<sup>17</sup> has aptly shown that the true spirit of Plato's effort in *Parmenides* lies in the fact that if any one uses Plato's theory of form in the way other than it is intended it would lead to ridiculous consequences.

Despite the differences as to the interpretation of the theory of forms, almost all the scholars share a common view that, firstly, forms are objective, fixed, unchangeable and different from particular objects. Secondly, forms are beyond spatiotemporal relation. Thirdly, forms can be approached only by reason and body of thought in a sequence or methods. Fourthly, forms embody both necessary and sufficient condition which make a thing what it is. In other words, they are not merely regulative but constitutive character of the thing of which it is a form.<sup>18</sup>

From all these discussions it seems reasonable to hold that Plato here used the form in the sense of theory. The search for the forms may be described as the search for a theory. It is more perspicaciously advocated in the middle and later dialogues although there are evidences in favour of search for forms or theory in the early dialogues. "Well bear in his mind that what asked for you was not to tell one or two out of all numerous actions that are holly; I wanted you to tell me what is the essential form of holiness which makes all holy actions holy" (*Euthyphro*, 6.DE)

Theory, as it is normally understood, is not merely a reasoned and unified body of thought but it also constitutes the underlying structure of which the theory is thought to be an explanation and description. The platonic forms explain the nature and underlying structures of certain concepts which have to do with human beings and their relationship with society and nature. Besides, theory can be constructed only by some methods. Plato has used various methods such as Method of Elenchus, Method of Hypothesis Method of Collection and Division and the Dialectic Method very explicitly to attain to that end. Platonic forms not only regulate but also constitute objects of his inquiry. So it does not seem misleading to talk of theory and form on equal footing. In view of this fact, notion of form as developed by Plato may be treated at par with modern notion of theory not without sufficient reason.

Thus it seems, in Plato, one can see a greater awareness of method to attain knowledge and episteme and in the light of these methods which strive to get hold of form or theory , we can

clearly know not only the things of the world but also the ideas related to ethics and politics being harnessed with human good.

### FOOT NOTES

1. *The point raised here does not mean that the senses cannot yield truth at all but senses cannot help us to obtain truth which would count as knowledge or episteme,*
2. *J.C.B. Gosling. Plato. (London : Rutledge & Kegan Paul, 1973). p. 173+,*
3. *This view has been accepted by almost all the scholars working on Plato.*
4. *C, J. Rowe, Plato. p. 160 has distinguished two types of Sophists - one takes the help of verbosity and other employs the eristic, nevertheless, he says that from Plato's point of view both types still belong to the same genus. Both value verbal dexterity more than knowledge. Both are therefore, in some sense mimicking the true educator.*
5. *R.M. Hare, 'Plato and the Mathematician; New Essay, on Plato and Aristotle, (Ed) R, Bram bough, (New York: Humanities Press, 1965), p. 36 suggests that the knowledge of the Idea of good is necessary to complete our knowledge of all other ideas.*
6. *J. Stenzel. Plato's Method of Dialectic (New York : Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 46 says that only the philosophers who in their dialectic survey the connection of all the sciences with the highest rational knowledge, are in a position to make right use of all these sciences for the good of the state.*
7. *Gilbert Ryle, Plato's Progress, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 135.*
8. *K.M. Sayer, Plato's Analytic Method, p. 46.*
9. *R. Robinson, Plato's Earlier Dialectic, p. 159.*
10. *R.S. Bluck, Plato's Phaedo, (London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1955, P.12.*
11. *E, Berti, 'Ancient Greek Dialectic as Expression of Thought and Speech', journal of History of Ideas, Vol. XXXIX, 1978, P.358.*
12. *G. Vlastos, Platonic Pessimism in Platonic Studies (ed.) Gregory Vlastos. (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1973). pp. 216-17 says "The Timaeas, which, I have no doubt been written not long before the laws, reflects a similar interest in the world. Plato still refuses on principle to call empirical inquiry as knowledge. But he pursues studies like Physics and Physiology with such gusto, such inspired imagination, that we feel transported back to the fifth century to the world of the pre-Socratics. The eagerness to understand the world so far as it can be understood and to improve it so far as it can be improved, is the dominant mood of his last years"*
13. *Republic, 511BC.*
14. *Republic, 110D.*
15. *K.M.Sayer, Plato's Analytical Method, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982, pp.204-14.*

16. *Sophist*, 253D.

17. J.Moline, *Plato's Theory of Understanding*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981, P.235.

18. D.J. Allen quoted Natrop, in his introductory remarks of the English translation of Julius Stenzel's *Plato's Method of Dialectic*, New York: Russell and Russell, 1964, XXIII, saying "It then reminds to suppose that Plato's ideas were the same as the categories of Kant- a principle employed by the mind in its explanation of the sensible world".