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Plato's Theory of Education

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# Plato's Theory of Education

By

Zaheer Masood Quraishi

The fundamental premises on which the philosophic structure of Plato is based arise out of the criticism of the materialistic notions of the Ionian philosophers that are regarded as the predominant note of Greek Philosophy before Socrates. The Ionian philosophers from Thales to Democritus as well as the unknown writer of Hippocratic corpus regarded man as the product of natural evolution, his power of speech and thought as the product of his life in society, and his science as a part of his technique to control his natural environment.

## *Pre-Socratic Thought*

Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes and Heraclitus had made at least a three-fold contribution to philosophy. In the first place, they attempted to explain the phenomena of nature without supernatural intervention. In the second place, they relied on the observation and experiment as the genuine methods of discovery and proof. In the third place, they recognized the vital connexion between natural philosophy and technique. It is very interesting to note that the Doctrine of Opposite Tension, which Heraclitus applied to the interpretation of nature was derived from his observation of the state of the string in the bow and the lyre. Brunet and Mieli rightly observe; "The Ionians observed the phenomena which presented themselves to their eyes and putting aside all supernatural or mystical intervention, they endeavoured to give strictly natural explanation of them."<sup>1</sup>

When Permenides developed the religious tradition of Phythagoras and Alcmaeon, by attacking the observational method of research and asserting that reality is a solid uncreated eternal motionless changeless uniform sphere, Empedolces and Anaxagoras came to its rescue. They asserted sense-perception to be the only reliable source of knowledge of external world. Democritus utilized the same method in his speculations, which wonderfully anticipated some of the conclusions of later experimental science.

Similarly, the Hippocratic doctors who were the superintendents and directors of gymnasia emphasized the scientific methods. The writer of the corpus bitterly attacked the metaphysical doctrines of Phythagorean and

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Cnidusian schools and concluded that mysterious affliction epilepsy was considered divine, because they did not understand it.

The impact of scientific thought on the then philosophy of history is visible in the passages from an unknown writer quoted by Diodorus Siculus that contains the elements of the modern philosophy of history. The author concedes that human consciousness is the product of social life. His doctrine has been elaborated by Protagoras, Gorgias and Hippias.

The main tenet of pre-Socratic thought is materialistic. Zeller<sup>2</sup> does not accept this view. He contends that it was not free from Idealistic notions. It is right that due to the limited knowledge and experience, Greek materialism could not liberate itself from religious and mythological influence. But it does not mean that it contained the elements of Idealism. Zeller's confusion arises out of his liability to distinguish religion from Idealism as a school of thought. Burnet's<sup>3</sup> contention that it was predominantly materialistic is well-founded, because the exponents of the pre-Socratic schools of philosophy generally accepted the primacy of matter. At a time when philosophic thought was germinating and crystalizing, we cannot expect the flights of philosophic idealism.

Plato, nevertheless, had a distaste for such an approach to natural as well as social phenomena. Through Socrates, he is linked up with the Pythagorean tradition.

Though the religious tradition existed side by side with materialism, yet materialism was the prevailing mode of thought. It was Socrates who represented the major shift in Greek philosophy. It was said that he brought philosophy from heaven to earth and that he insisted that proper study of mankind is man, which in this context really means that attention was diverted from physics to ethics. The Ionians recognized no distinction between heaven and earth, because their philosophy sprang out from the new outlook on the world resulting from the control over nature by the technicians.

The shift of emphasis from natural science to ethics is very much related to the separation of philosophy from the technique that find its first expression in Pythagoras and reaches its culmination through the Sophists and Socrates in the well-integrated philosophy of Plato. Plato interpreted the phenomena of nature from a supernatural point of view, which is found particularly in his astronomical science. He strongly discouraged the method of systematic experimentation which was going forward at that time and selected for himself the Idealistic method which regarded the eye of soul as the only authentic source of human knowledge. Finally, he executed the mission of separating philosophy from technique. This spirit of Plato's

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philosophy, much to his own surprise, changed the fundamental issue of the Republic. It has been summed up by the Prof. A. E. Taylor in a beautiful passage : "The Republic, which opens with an old man's remark about approaching death and apprehension of what may come after death and ends with a myth of judgment, has although its central theme a question more intimate than that of the best form of government or the most eugenic form of propagation : its question is, How does a man attain or forfeit eternal salvation?" The end of the educational system is precisely this.

*Growth of Slavery*

Plato's place among great philosophers is uncontested. Undoubtedly, he was the greatest social thinker of the antiquity. But being the child of his time, he could not transcend the life around him. For a clear understanding of his ideas, his social background must be studied.

The Heroic age was a period of great technical progress which was calling into existence a new class of manufacturers and merchants. They very soon captured the apparatus of state. In the sixth century B.C., Solon, the representative of the new forces attempted to modernize Athens with the help of sculptors like Pheidias and architects like Ictinus. This was the period in which persons like Theodorus of Samos, Anacharsis and Glaucus of Chios were busy in technical inventions. The dramatist Aeschylus and the poet Sophocles glorified the role of technique in human progress. To be brief, manual labour was regarded as a noble profession and much honoured.

The growth of technique in this period led to the development of the institution of slavery which brought about a manifold change in the social structure as well as in thought. In the first place, the society was bifurcated into what Farrington<sup>5</sup> calls the 'head' and the 'hand'. Manual labour ceased to enjoy the honour that was the characteristic of the Heroic Age. It came to be regarded as the exclusive business of the slaves, while the slave-owners were left with intellectual labour. Plato and most of his contemporaries had a contempt for it. Xenophon recorded a very interesting argument for his stand : "What are called the mechanical arts carry a stigma and are rightly dishonoured in our cities."<sup>6</sup> Consequently, technique stagnated, because the technical development require the collaboration of head and hand. This was missing in the city-states. Thus, the bankruptcy and the obsolete character of the slave economy was revealed, which ultimately led to the decline of the city-states. In this, the Sophists had their contribution to add.

Secondly, the slaves as a standard of wealth tended to be concentrated into fewer hands. This led to the rich becoming richer and poor, poorer, leaving a class of poor citizens, much more like the proletariats except that

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they were divorced from the labour process. According to Rostovtzeff, "The social and economic life of the fourth century Greece was marked by two dominant features—the lapse of the mass of population into proletarianism and closely connected therewith the growth of unemployment, and secondly, a shortage of foodstuff."<sup>7</sup>

Thirdly, it provided a background for a new type of philosophy, which was divorced from technique. The heterogeneity of the society reflected in the separation of art from science. It is significant to note, as W. H. S. Jones observed, that "the arts were distinguished from sciences only when Greek thought was past its zenith."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, if diversity in hand and head tolled the death-knell of the cities, the distinction between arts and sciences became its funeral oracle.

And, finally, the collapse of civic organization produced a systematic political literature for the first time in the history. As Hegel puts it, "Minerva's Owl begins its flight in the gathering dusk."<sup>9</sup> The enquiry into city-states, the first political organization began when it tended to decline. Plato observed a crisis in the moral, social and political life. It was by way of the prescription to cure the disease of the cities that Plato propounded his political theories.

Greek cities achieved the pinnacle of their glory during the Periclean Age. The decline of the 'polis' started with the advent of the fourth century B.C. For Athens it coincided with the defeat in the Peloponnesian Wars in 404 B.C. The Athenian life reflected Greece as a whole. There was moral decline, social chaos and political anarchy everywhere. Since Plato did not have a deeper historical insight, he attributed wrong causes to this crisis. He argued that there were two causes : firstly, the ignorance and incompetence of the politicians and, secondly, the violence and selfishness of the party struggles. The remedy also was a two-fold one — the removal of the hindrances and the provision of the positive conditions to good life. This involves an elaborate plan of the Republic. As the good of the state consisted of the good of the individuals, Plato took the individual as the primary unit. The concentration on the individual or rather the development of the individual soul reflects the change that has taken place in the set up of the society.

*Theory of Knowledge*

"Virtue is Knowledge" is the proposition which serves the basis of the educational theory of Plato. The particular significance that Plato attaches to it in the context of his teleological philosophy, shows how much different his conception of science was from that of the early Greek thinkers. For them science meant some profession; for Plato it was knowledge, which in

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the absence of any practical test, meant talking consistently and constantly. As G. M. A. Grube points out, the Socratic proposition meant that "to be good at something is a matter of knowledge" which began to mean to Plato that 'to be good is a matter of knowledge'.<sup>10</sup>

Plato had a teleological conception of universe, based on the teleological conception of mind. By virtue of reason, mind in action is purposive; it is a unity which moves towards one ultimate purpose. Similarly, on the cognitive side also, mind is purposive : it grasps the objects when it finds purpose in them. Knowledge of a thing is the recognition of its place in the science or in what Plato calls the Idea. Knowledge is the integration of all the schemes into a single scheme, the Idea of the Good. This postulates a purpose that makes it a single scheme. Consequently, existence or the world we know is a unity with a definite purpose which is the purpose of the existence. Knowledge of the idea of the good alone can guarantee right action.

This gives rise to a problem. How knowledge of the Idea of the Good is to be acquired. Obviously Plato adopts the Idealistic method. Instead of starting from nature and society to arrive at man, he does just the opposite. He assumes that mind is active. It is attracted towards every object of environment. Knowledge is therefore, the result of operation of thought. Plato believed that the method of his contemporary teachers, the Sophists, was dangerous because they did not concede this fact. He thinks that the true art of the teacher is setting right objects to bring the best out of the taughts. They cannot originally produce the power of vision in them as they cannot completely destroy it, for want of a good method. Philosophically, this idea is founded on the Doctrine of Reminiscence, which expounds that learning is the revival of the memory of a former life in which soul has seen everything. The wild minds in this world were blind in the previous one and the society has no course but to put them out of the way.

The teleological view of life and the doctrine of reminiscence are two aspects of Plato's idealism, which regards idea as primary and fundamental. In the opinion of Zeller,<sup>11</sup> Platonic Ideas were substantialized concepts or universals. Natorp<sup>12</sup> and other exponents of Marburg school believed that Plato anticipated the categories of Kant. Lustoslawski holds that Platonic Ideas have no real existence outside divine or human mind. Stenzel,<sup>14</sup> however, emphasizes the chronological development of Plato's views. According to him Plato's Theory of Ideas was subjectivistic. The whole material being is the product of the Idea, as the external being is the product of mind. It is through this contact that mind develops. Since state is also a product of mind, a man must be educated in civic action too, along with other things. He must know all the past products of mind. In Plato's opinion, the evolu-

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tion of human soul must resume in itself the evolution of mankind. As Barker<sup>15</sup> points out, this is the spiritual counterpart of modern theory of physical evolution on every human being.

As education is concerned with the reaction of the soul on its environment, it is a matter of lifetime. It must continue as long as the soul has an urge to react, that is, till the time of death.

But the implication that virtue is an objective good, which can be learnt by rational investigation rather than by intuition, guesswork or luck, cannot be very happily accommodated to the general plan of Plato's philosophy. Had Plato been able to follow the train of his thought to its logical conclusion, the result would have disrupted his philosophy as dramatically as the sudden assassination of Mahatma Gandhi did to the activities of the communalists. To take up Reason, an abstract entity, as the standard of judgment is fallacious, because what is reasonable to one may be quite unreasonable to others. The reasonableness of a phenomenon, hence, can be verified through experience and practice, where we shall have to rely on sense-perception. If knowledge is the reflexion of simple sensation matured by education and experience, the human consciousness is externally conditioned by nature and society. The imperfect knowledge or 'the correct opinion' gained through sense-organs is far more authentic than the Perfect Knowledge acquired through 'the eye of the soul.' All 'a priori' propositions are tautologies, though some of them are very useful and important. Reason, unaided by any faculty, is capable only of giving us a set of 'a priori' propositions. It cannot give us knowledge of matter of fact. Propositions regarding matter of fact are meaningful only if they are verified in our ordinary life and experience.

Plato's metaphysical theory suffers from a contradiction. As Popper<sup>16</sup> has elaborately discussed, Plato has a historicist tendency. He concedes a process of historical change. It was to strive for the "possibility of arresting all political change" that he evolved his social philosophy. Field<sup>17</sup> also took almost the same stand. He says that Plato's social philosophy was "an attempt to re-establish the standard of thought and conduct of civilization that seemed at the verge of dissolution." But having conceded the law of change, Plato wanted to escape it. He built up an Ideal State to escape the Heraclitean flux. It was a type of state that is to be found in the distant past and now built, it will not participate in the general trend of the historical development. His Idea does not parish because it is outside space and time, though in contact with them for the actual states are its corrupted prototypes. The Ideal State historically occurs at the beginning. Thus, it puts definite limitations to the historicist tendencies of Plato and creates a

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contradiction in his philosophy. Popper<sup>18</sup> rightly asserts; "Much as he disliked and despised the empirical world of flux, he was, at bottom most deeply interested in it." The Pythagorean influence on the one hand, and the reality of the problem, on the other are the source of trouble.

*Theory of Education*

Rousseau made an observation about the Republic, which though not precise, contains much truth. He said: "The Republic is the finest treatise on education ever written".<sup>19</sup> The Republic is not a treatise on education, nevertheless, education occupies the most important place in it. It is a treatise on the life as whole. It sketches an ideal life with its varied aspects. Education is a means to attain that end and, hence, predominates the book.

The importance attached to education in Greek life and particularly at her educational centre, Athens, was primarily due to the growth of wealth, or as Sabine uses a phrase "an urbanity of life".<sup>20</sup> It led to a feeling that a higher level of education was needed in those arts that had a direct relation to a successful political career. The Sophists as well as Isocrates regarded it as a way to social success. The Sophists continued their private coaching to the young children of the Athenian aristocrats, while Isocrates founded the first school of the Greek world to teach rhetoric and oratory. A few years later, Plato founded his Academy; and about fifty years later, Aristotal opened Lyceum. Because of these and two other great schools, Epicurean and Stoic, Athens retained the position of the school of Hellas even after her political influence was reduced and this continued far down into the medieval period.

In Plato's system, education occupied far more important place. Plato wanted to provide the positive and negative conditions for the good citizenship. The communism of property and women eliminates the special hindrance to the good citizenship; through the device of eugenic system, he gets the best talents, and train them to bring the best out of them. In the whole plan of the Ideal State he places his main reliance on education. He devotes quite large part of his book to it and studies the problem in details. He himself called it "one great thing".

Its theory is designed to bring about the rule of the philosopher-king and the adjustment of the individuals to the society. But for Plato these alone were not the ends of his educational system. It has a moral purpose, which is more important than other purposes. He did not believe like a Sophist and Isocrates that education is a way to social success but regarded it as a way to social righteousness. He introduced a metaphysical element to it, that is, the end of education is the knowledge of the Idea of the Good.

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However, the significance of the educational system as a remedy to the moral deterioration and political decline cannot be underestimated. Plato resolutely takes it as the most genuine instrument to build up human character and to bring about political stability.

In his educational system Plato synthesized the training usually given to the son of an Athenian gentleman with the state-controlled training given to a Spartan young man and revised them pretty drastically. One of the Solon's regulations provided private education to the Athenian citizens. Primary education included the reading, writing, religion, ethics, gymnastic, and music; but the secondary education could be had on payment from the Sophists or from the school of Isocrates. A citizen was entitled to the civil rights after two years' training at the end of secondary education. It was only this stage where the state seemed to have some interest in education.

In Sparta, the state completely controlled education. At the age of seven children were admitted to the 'house' under the prefects appointed by the state, in which military training was given along with Athletics. The thorough rigorous educational system was intended to keep up the force of the customary law, as Sparta had no system of written law.

Plato was critical of the system of both Athens and Sparta. He knew that Athenian system produced only inefficient statesmen, rebels and revolutionaries because it was left in the private hands. But in the heat of the argument Plato exceeded the normal limit and abolished the family altogether, so that children are taken by state right at the time of their birth. This was a step forward to the Spartan system of state-controlled education which admitted children to the state houses at the age of seven. But, Plato's criticism of Spartan system of education was primarily based on the end that it pursued. This system was planned exclusively to bring up a marshal race. Its contents completely ignored the moral purpose of life.

The theory of state-controlled education is the most important contribution of Plato to the theory of education. Not till today, a more convincing argument than that of Plato is advanced in its favour. Education, being the most adequate instrument for the realization of the purposes of the state, cannot be left to the private hands, and, hence, must be controlled by the state. But to what extent must this control be exercised? As for Plato there could be but a simple answer: the purposes of an individual are not different from the purposes of the state which is merely a prototype of the individual and hence, there must be a complete control of education by the state. The individual which is the starting point of Plato completely merges himself in the state and loses his independent existence. Individual penetrated into Plato's philosophy because it was the spirit of the time. Pericles hailed

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that "the freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life".<sup>21</sup> But ultimately Plato sacrificed the individual at the altar of state by drawing an unhappy analogy between state and individual. The same argument is the basis of the authoritarian theory of education in modern times.

Such a theory cannot deliver the good, unless we assume a homogeneous society, which at least the fifth century B.C. Greece never was. In a heterogeneous society modern man will concede the complete responsibility of the state and not the complete control. Plato himself realized the mischief of the plan when he tried to implement it in Syracuse. He revised the plan of the Ideal State and the theory of education also. The theory in "the Law" is really the theory of educational institutions. In it the organization is paid greater attention. It is a system of publicly regulated schools with paid teachers to provide a fully outlined course of instruction for the elementary and secondary grades. A magistrate in charge of the schools is appointed who is the chief among all the magistrates. This is much more near to the modern practice.

*Stages of Education.*

Education in Plato's state begins from childhood. The children are shown wars and gymnastic performances. In this way they are prepared for the training in the young age. The youths and their characters are trained through emotions to produce a temper of 'spirit' in the interest of the community. This is intended for the preparation of a class of citizens for the discharge of the military functions. Its curriculum includes music and gymnastic. The imports of both the terms is far more extensive than what we understand from them today.

Music includes arts in general as applied to education, that is to say the interpretation of life in any of the three media-speech, sound or form. In modern times we find its substitute in the word 'culture' or as Bertrand Russel suggests "everything that is in the province of muse."<sup>22</sup> Its purpose is the improvement of mind. The rhythm and diction of poetry, the sounds of musical instruments, and the shape and colour of the plastic art appeal to the youth directly.

But the art has a moral purpose also. This is why Plato suggests almost a religious reformation both in its forms and contents. Through the censorship of art and literature and music, he wanted to regulate belief. The art of the Periclean Age, that is considered imperishable contribution of Athens to art and literature, is to be seriously censured by Plato. Homer and Hesoid are subjected to censorship, because firstly, they have made the gods behave badly on occasion and secondly, they are calculated to make

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their readers fear death. Plato is critical to drama, because the dramatist as well as the actor are endowed with more than the ordinary capacity of losing their personality in that of the others. But the criticism is cracked back on his own head when we observe that he himself utilized the technique of dialogue. Who can say that Plato's mouthpiece was the real Socrates and that Plato did not lose his personality in Glaucon and Thrasymachus? Plato directed his criticism against music also. He had a distaste for Lydian and losing their personality in that of the others. But the criticism is cracked relaxed. He likes Dorian harmony for it induces courage and Phrygian harmony for it teaches temperance. In Republic only those rhythms are permissible that are simple and are expressive of courageous and harmonious life.

This shows how far the state is to exercise its control over education in Platonic system. The purpose of education is reduced to the realization of the will of the States. In modern world we use a newly coined phrase: "the regimentation of thought". Nazis and the Fascists regarded thought-control as the soul guarantee of the existence of their State. It is said that in the Soviet Union, the Communist Party has attempted thought-regimentation. Even Morarji's prohibition plans can be traced back from Plato's moral censorship. However, much may be we are critical to regimentation of thought, we shall have to concede one point, that every government must have and does have an educational policy. It teaches its sons and daughters a particular philosophy, that is the prevailing mode of thinking and the men at the helm consider, will be helpful in the realization of the end of the state. Such policies are not necessarily regimentation. May be it is scientific teaching which people in general accept to be true. People agree that the earth is round. That there ever was a theory conceiving world as a flat object need not be included in the syllabus. And it will not be regimentation of thought. The test, is, of course, its effectiveness. The Gandhian doctrine that class collaboration is possible can be classed under science and will be effective only if the son of a labourer finds that the practice inside the factory confirms it. Otherwise, it will turn out to be mere regimentation.

Nettleship<sup>23</sup> has discussed the problem at length. He argued that a national mythology can provide the guarantee of the effectiveness of regimentation. The difference between ancient Greek theory and modern practice in England lies precisely in it. But this is not an argument which can stand for long. For the very fact of regimentation, myth is required, which is bound to fail one day or the other because it does not conform to fact. Nazis in Germany developed the myth of Aryan-superiority which was falsified to every German soldier who faced the reality of international politics. And again Nettleship is mistaken in conceding that modern England has no myth

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except "the partial myth" of the Bible. Its myth is not the Bible but the postulates of liberal doctrine, which shall not fail unless the 'uneasy marriage between capitalism and democracy' is dissolved due to the collapse of imperialist order. Hence the Platonic doctrine of moral censorship is a good science in the context of his conception of a city-state. With the break up of the civic community and the decline of its values, the censorship shall be of little success. It had no sound basis and also because it discarded those things that are now regarded as the most important contribution of the Greek world to civilization.

Gymnastic which includes what a modern man understands from athletics and diatetics, is the other part of the syllabus. It is the training of body for the sake of mind. Diet and medicine are included in it with a view to banish the doctors altogether. Apart from the military drills, it includes a number of taboos. For example, Plato prescribes that no one is to eat fish or meat cooked otherwise than roasted and there must be no sauces and confectionary, (these probably he got from the practices of the Orphic sect). Up to a certain age, youths are to see no ugliness or vice. But at a suitable moment, they must be exposed to the enchantment both in the shape of terror that must not terrify and of bad pleasure, that must not deduce their will. Unless passed through these tests successfully, they are not worthy of the Guardianship.

As gymnastic is included in the curriculum to banish the doctors, the inclusion of music is intended to banish the law from the state. They together will develop a spirit among all the citizens. Then the state shall carry on itself with that spirit. This is the natural course of a state.

After passing through this stage successfully, the citizens can pursue their studies still further. Since the mind has matured by now, education takes a more 'scientific' and 'philosophic' tempo for the guidance of reasoning power and comprehension of the relations between all the previous studies. This is only a higher stage of the previous one and not at all disconnected with it. In the earlier period, Arithmetic, Geometry and general science was presented as a sort of amusement to find their natural bent. But in the later period, its end was higher, Metaphysics, Dialectics and Arts were also included in the syllabus. Arts, according to Plato are the reflection of the world to the eye of faith and prepare a way for Arithmetic and Geometry to suggest and Metaphysics and Dialectics to reveal it to the Pure Intelligence. Mathematics is a bridge to cross from sense-perception to thought and Dialectics is knowledge of thought and the Idea of the Good.

The period of study extends to ten years at the end of two-year period of military training. The subject in this period will be studied separately so that they may be linked together in the last. Those who pass the tests and

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trials are entrusted with the state-work a period of fifteen years, during which their training and trial shall continue to give them credit or discredit. They can spend a part of their time in pure philosophy and contemplation.

Finally, comes the stage when education does not remain the plasticity of the soul, but becomes the way of illumination, the slow-turning of the eye towards Pure Light. Now, the philosopher shall only contemplate in a cave far away from the noise of life. Sometimes or other he will come down from the cave to guide the governors of the state.

*The Critique*

The critical evaluation of Plato's education theory can be attempted at least from two angles. In the first place, we can point out its inner contradiction and logical inconsistencies. In the second place, we can examine the theory in its historical perspective and give an estimate of it.

In the very beginning, we come across to a paradox in Plato's argument. A cursory glance over the plan of education will make it clear that it has been designed to discover the philosopher-king. At the same time, Plato argues that it is the philosopher king who shall translate the scheme into practice. An educational system cannot be implemented unless we have the philosopher-king and he cannot be discovered without having himself come through an educational system. Hence, Plato was confronted with an irresolvable vicious circle. He tried to realize his Ideal State in his Syracusean adventure but could not find the philosopher-king in the person of Dionysius, because he was not adequately educated.

This shows that inspite of all the difficulties Plato has a genuine desire to discover the philosopher-king. He tries to mobilise the talents from all possible quarters. This is evidenced in two instances. Firstly, he made a provision for the change of class. If a man from a lower class shows a real talent in him, he can be raised to a higher level. Secondly, he advocates the emancipation of women. The two-fold argument which he advances in support of his stand is perhaps unparalleled by this time. In the first place, Plato concedes no difference in kind between the native capacities of boys and girls. Modern psychology confirms it. In the second place he warns that without the emancipation of women, the state would be deprived of the talents of half of the population. This argument is upheld even by the modern feminists.

A more significant contradiction of Plato's Philosophy is to be found in his weavering between the Idea of the Good and human betterment. To avoid the dirty politics, he advises the philosopher to turn to asceticism and,

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at the same time, considers that the service of the state is the duty of the philosopher. He is convinced that the betterment of the state depends upon the philosopher, and also knows that state alone can provide him facilities to contemplate. Philosopher must come down from the world of vision to the practical life of the community, so that it becomes possible for him to return to the life of contemplation again which is necessary if he wants to have the knowledge of the Idea of the Good.

Plato has tried to resolve the dilemma by the division of labour, which is based on the doctrine of the tripartite division of soul. The state is an aggregate of the individuals bound by the principle of reciprocal duties. Individuals, being the part of the state, serve according to their station in life. The place of the philosopher is of course, higher than that of the others, who are engaged in manual labour or economic activities. Hence, it is the responsibility of the state to provide him such facilities, so that he may devote his life to the pursuit of Truth. This renunciation of society is for the sake of society itself. Plato really believed in the action of the philosopher, which is no less than the renunciation of the ascetic life.

From it follows an inconsistency in the theory of knowledge. Plato did not regard observation and experiment as the genuine method of knowledge. It is through contemplation that the philosopher can grasp the Idea of the Good. But the proposition that virtue is knowledge implies that it can be grasped through rational investigation which means that practice is the only test of the authenticity of our knowledge. Here Plato's plan collapses.

These inconsistencies were due to his Idealistic approach to nature. He believed in the primacy of ideas, which did not regard genuine any method of acquisition of knowledge other than contemplation. But on the other hand, he was faced with the reality of the problem. It is here that we come to scientific evaluation of Plato's theory of education.

Behind the Idealist Theory is the institution of slavery. As Gordon Childe points out: "Slavery made a real Science and a scientific history impossible".<sup>24</sup> Lord Acton has to make still a more terrible remark about the classical society, in his essay on freedom: "The issue of the ancient politics was an absolute state planted on slavery." Being the representative of the slave-owning class, as he was, Plato believed in the superiority of the leisurely life. He had what Zeller calls "an aristocratic contempt for the worker."<sup>25</sup> This explains the omission of technical education from his scheme. In his view, even the real inventors of the things do not have their knowledge. They at the most can have "the correct opinion" about them, which is imported from the philosopher.

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The importance of the contemplation, and moral censorship of arts and literature made Plato as the Christian Fathers used to say "almost a Christian".<sup>26</sup> Then there is a difference between philosopher and worker, which is, philosophically, based on the sharp contrast between mind and body, elaborately discussed in *Phaedo*. The philosopher may have to descend from the life of contemplation to take part in the affairs of man. The rule of the philosopher combined with communism and educational system is the rule of the 'saints'. Sabine draws a beautiful analogy between Plato's Ideal State and "a monastic order".<sup>27</sup>

Plato propounded a false theory because he did not closely observe the directions and tendencies of his period. Being divorced from the labour process, he had to start from certain preconceived notions. He attributed wrong causes to the decline of the city-States. So the Republic could not produce a science but remained an idealized state of an Athenian aristocrat.

- <sup>1</sup> Brunet and Meili : "*History of Science : Antiquity.*" p. 114.
- <sup>2</sup> Zeller : "*Plato and The Older Academy.*"
- <sup>3</sup> Burnet : "*Early Greek Philosophy.*"
- <sup>4</sup> Taylor : "*Plato : Man and His Work.*" p. 265.
- <sup>5</sup> Farrington : "*Head and Hand in Ancient Greece.*"
- <sup>6</sup> Quoted in Farrington, "*Greek Science.*" p. 23.
- <sup>7</sup> Rostovtzeff : "*Hellenistic Athens.*" p. 199.
- <sup>8</sup> Quoted in Farr : op. cit. p. 136.
- <sup>9</sup> Quoted in Sabine, "*History of Political Theory.*" p. 538.
- <sup>10</sup> Grube : "*Plato's Thought.*" p. 217.
- <sup>11</sup> Zeller : op. cit.
- <sup>12</sup> Natorp's theory is discussed and rejected by Stenzel, "*Plato's Method of Dialectic.*"
- <sup>13</sup> Lutoslawski : "*Origin and Growth of Plato's Logic.*"
- <sup>14</sup> Stenzel : op. cit.
- <sup>15</sup> Barker : "*Plato and His Predecessor.*" p. 188.
- <sup>16</sup> Popper : "*Open Society and its Enemies.*"
- <sup>17</sup> Field : "*Plato and his contemporaries.*" p. 91.
- <sup>18</sup> Popper : op. cit., p. 16.
- <sup>19</sup> Quoted in Barker, op. cit., p. 181.
- <sup>20</sup> Sabine : op. cit., p. 37.
- <sup>21</sup> Thucydides : "*Complete Works*" (Grawley's translation), has quoted funeral speech of pericles, p. 104.
- <sup>22</sup> Russel : "*History of Western Philosophy.*" p. 130.
- <sup>23</sup> Nettleship : "*Theory of Education in Plato's Republic.*" pp. 32-52.
- <sup>24</sup> Gordon Childe : "*What Happened in History,*" p. 224.
- <sup>25</sup> Zeller : op. cit.,
- <sup>26</sup> Sabine has ascribed it to some Christian Father, but did not mention the name, p. 50.
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid*, p. 64.
- <sup>28</sup> Herzen, a materialist thinker of pre-revolutionary Russia has made an observation about the limitation of the thinker in general, including himself : "*We are not the doctors, we are the disease.*" The observation has been quoted by Christopher Caudwell in his "*Studies in Dying Culture.*"