PLATO'S THEORY OF UNDERSTANDING (KNOWLEDGE)
AN ARTICULATION OF HIS CONCEPTION OF VIRTUE

MA (Philosophy) Thesis

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DECLARATION

This work is my own creation, and it has appeared nowhere.

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Abstract

This study attempts to demonstrate that the entire philosophical edifice of Plato advances the principle that ignorance is detrimental to the well-being of individuals and society. The study contends that Plato's theories of human nature, knowledge, virtue, as well as political and social organization support his conviction that virtue is knowledge.

For Plato, the most superior element in human nature is reason. The faculty of reason is uniquely human and it distinguishes humans from the other creatures or inhabitants of this planet. Plato advocates that human beings must conduct their affairs in accordance with the most superior element in human nature. Moral conduct therefore should be rooted in reason and knowledge rather than feelings and emotions.

According to Plato, knowledge is absolute certainty, which can only be acquired through reason. The senses are limited to the phenomenon world of constantly changing objects. From the senses, we can only generate opinion and not knowledge. In addition, the true object of knowledge is steady and eternal (Forms). Thus moral values, which constitute moral knowledge, must also be eternal, otherwise, it is unthinkable to generate or derive certain knowledge from moral values that are constantly in a state of flux.

For Plato, virtue or moral rectitude is founded on reason and knowledge. Virtue is not a matter of personal opinion but involves objective moral values and critical thinking. Thus, a virtuous person is an individual who is learned and knowledgeable. For this reason, Plato insists that morality should be based on reason and knowledge, whereby moral values and the cardinal virtues of justice, courage, temperance, and wisdom constitute steady, unchanging knowledge.

The claim that virtue is knowledge implies that virtue can be taught or acquired through education. Secondly, virtue demands that people must be educated or trained in critical thinking. To meet this need, Plato outlines a system of education whose principal aim is to equip individuals with reasoning skills that would enable them differentiate knowledge from opinion. Furthermore, holding that virtue is knowledge implies that a virtuous individual must be born with a certain mental aptitude necessary for critical thinking. However, bearing in mind that people's intellectual abilities differ, hence, only those who are intellectually capable can attain knowledge and refined sense of morality/virtue. Consequently, only these individuals can or should teach others about virtue. Little wonder Plato suggests that society should be formed, organized and managed by individuals who have the knowledge and enlightened sense of virtue.

Certainly Plato erred by insisting that the essence of virtue is absolute. Moral values are not static for they change as cultures evolve; so does the knowledge that derives from them. Nevertheless, the flaws in Plato's philosophy i.e., the dualism implicit in his theory of Forms, do not totally undermine the conviction that ignorance is detrimental to human well-being. The Theory of Forms is a means and not an end to Plato's philosophical endeavors. As a means, it could easily be replaced by better and relevant means.

CONTENTS

1 Statement of the Problem

1.1 Aims of the Study

The aim of this study is to demonstrate that the entire philosophy of Plato rests on the principle that ignorance is dangerous and detrimental to the well being of individuals and society. Plato conceived this principle after experiencing the death of Socrates, which he attributed to the ignorance of the democratic leaders of Athens. For Plato, ignorance is simply lack of true knowledge, due to the dimness of the mind and lack of proper education.

With reference to the execution of Socrates, Plato identified ignorance of the ruling class as being responsible for the trial of one of Greece's best thinkers. Plato thought that because of total ignorance, the ancient Greek authorities understood the philosophical quest of Socrates as apparently being inspired by the devil to undermine Greek religion and Greek gods. Had the Greek authorities understood that Socrates was driven by a quest for knowledge and wisdom, an enterprise that would have benefited the Athenian society as a whole, they could have grasped the essential features of Socratic teaching, and therefore could have avoided sinning against philosophy and human wisdom.

Plato asserts that to be virtuous entails knowing the essential features that determine right from wrong in the behaviour of the individual. Thus, for Plato, **virtue is knowledge** and that without knowing what determines an action to be right or wrong; a claim to knowledge about wrong or right behaviour turns out to be empty rhetoric. So, when Plato proclaims that virtue is knowledge implies that virtue can be taught. And given that the Greeks believed that reason is the most superior element in human nature, Plato was of the opinion that without rational reasoning about morals, one is most unlikely to be virtuous.

In short, for Plato, morality is not relative and subjective, rooted in emotions or feelings. Mere emotional approval of an action is, to Plato, not a reliable basis of morality, of the moral uprightness of either an individual or that of society as a whole.

No wonder Plato views social immorality and injustice as essentially being products of ignorance, of being unable to rationally determine the essence of virtue.

In fact, with regard to technical skills, Plato considers them as being based not on rational reasoning other than common sense. This is why he caricatured plumbers as being bankrupt in critical thinking and therefore capable mainly in arriving at solutions to problems by trial and error and not through knowledge (*Rep.* 595-608).

Phrased differently, this study holds the point of view that Plato's philosophical system is grounded on his conviction that rational reasoning and knowledge are the only sure way to understanding the nature of reality, virtue, human nature and knowledge. So, when Plato argues that virtue is knowledge, what he actually means is that, unless one is initiated in critical thinking and put on the path to knowledge, it is utterly impossible to come to grips with the nature of virtue and know anything concrete about morality. To demonstrate this conviction, this study assumes the following structure: Chapter 2 will expose Plato's theory of knowledge in order to uncover the type of knowledge that Plato thinks can dispel ignorance. Chapter 3 is an analysis of Plato's moral theory where we demonstrate how Plato thinks knowledge and reason can liberate us from wickedness. Chapter 4 shows the major implications of Plato's assertion that virtue is knowledge. And chapter 5 is the critique of our problem. In our analysis of Plato's theories of knowledge and morality, we also take into account a variety of related issues, such as his theories of reality, government, social organization, and human nature.

As an attempt to clarify important concepts, we employ "virtue" in its original Greek context, with all its connotations. In Greek, the word "virtue" means "arete," or, "excellence" in English. In morality, excellence or "aretè" refers to excellence in human behaviour, human conduct, or human nature. Furthermore, concepts such as "recollection" and "reminiscence" are also used in their Greek context. These two concepts are derived from the Greek word "anamnesis," referring to "recall", while the word "form", is derived from the Greek word "*eidos*" which means "idea".

Plato uses the words "form" and "idea" interchangeably, referring to reality existing independently of reason or mind. Plato actually proclaims that "form" refers to what is eternally real, not what is transient. For Plato, "form" is the everlasting reality, the objects of true knowledge. In Greek, *episteme is* opposed to opinion, or to *doxa.* We also employ the Greek concept *techne* and *nous,* where by *techne* refers to technical skill or technical knowledge, *nous* refers to intellect, mind or intelligence.

Plato is an ancient Greek philosopher, consequently belongs to the history of philosophy[1]. Attempting to understand his views on virtue presupposes a definite stance on how the history of philosophy should be approached. It is therefore imperative that we spell out the approach or method employed in this study towards the history of philosophy, in general, and to Plato in particular.

The Anglo-American tradition is currently one of the dominant approaches to the history of philosophy. It puts great emphasis on the plausibility of the philosopher's views and doctrine, insisting on their truth and falsehood, by disregarding their historicity. Such an approach divorces philosophy from its milieu, as if philosophy is radically different from its history.The problematic or anti-historic approach scrutinises philosophical doctrines by disregarding the contextual source of the doctrines in question.

The anti-historic method is counter-productive and misleading for every philosophical problem is born out of a specific social and historical context. Following the anti-historic approach, we risk presenting Plato's philosophical ideas or views not necessarily as Plato's but rather what we believe Plato ought to have held. Additionally, the anti-historic method does not assist us to distinguish between what Plato actually intended and the mistaken interpretation imposed upon his views by anti-historic critics.

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1 Russell, Strawson and Mates are the major proponents of the anti- historic approach to philosophy. They promote a problematic approach to philosophy, which in our view is inadequate.

By these remarks, we do not suggest that Plato and other past philosophers should not be interpreted critically, but rather we intend to point out the dangers of mistaken as well as misleading interpretation, which renders past philosophy superficial and unintelligible. And hence, our insistence that Plato should be examined in his own terms. So, this study seeks to grasp as closely as possible what Plato actually meant, and evaluates his doctrines critically.

1.2 Plato's Background and his Philosophical Maturity

In an attempt to acquire a firmer grasp of Plato's philosophic views, it might be beneficial to initially establish his background, however briefly it may be. Plato (428-348 B.C), was born of an aristocratic family, at Athens, Greece, during the early years of the Peloponessian wars. He grew up during the most turbulent years of Athens. Thus, during his youth, Plato experienced social upheaval, changing Athenian values, came face to face with social injustice, and witnessed the defeat of Athens by the Peloponnesian League led by Sparta in 404 BC, a defeat Plato attributed to the political incompetence and short-sightedness of the rulers of democratic Athens. Little wonder then that when Athenians ventured into war with the Spartans, they were utterly trounced and humiliated.

In addition, Plato was deeply influenced by many prominent thinkers, men such as Pythagoras, Parmenides, Heraclitus and especially Socrates, who is generally regarded as his godfather. After digesting the views of these thinkers, Plato gained the best possible educational experience for which he could ever hope.

From Pythagoras, Plato derived not only the idea of the immortality of the soul, but also respect for rational reasoning and mathematics, as well as an understanding for the need to intermingle intellectual activity with mysticism. From Parmenides, Plato adopted the idea that reality is eternal and timeless, a view he discusses in the *Phaedo* and *The Republic*, which he clarifies as 'form'. And from Heraclitus, Plato inherited the idea that substance (the sensible physical part of the universe) is in perpetual flux and that therefore nothing in the world is permanently fixed and determinable. For Heraclitus everything in the world undergoes constant changes, and consequently no aspect of the reality of any existence remains unchanged. It is actually this

notion of perpetual flux that prompted Plato to conceive the concept of Form as the only everlasting reality. From Socrates, his mentor and thinker preoccupied with the analysis and determination of the essential features of human nature, and morality, Plato derived the idea that rules of conduct are not only decisive, but also of paramount importance in the organization of society. Henceforth, Plato suddenly became involved with moral issues and the political organization of a state, convinced that social rules for social morality and ethical theories act as checks and balances in the organization of society. Moreover, when he set to plan an education system, Plato ensures that moral guidelines form its foundation, for the simple reason that a morality not rooted in education and knowledge can only spell trouble for a state.

Actually, Plato found in Socrates not only intellectual guidance and friendship, but also lasting inspiration. He found in Socrates food for thought and inspiration for the development of critical thinking. Little wonder, Plato proclaims that he was grateful to God that he was born Greek and not barbarian, a freeman and not a slave, a man and not a woman and much more that he was born in the time of Socrates.

Plato was only twenty-eight years old, when the rulers and defenders of the then democratic Athens executed Socrates. This morally unjust execution disgusted Plato. It left him scornful of democracy, and gave him the wrong impression that apparently, all forms of democratic government are morally arid and empty. As we will explain later, Plato resolved to destroy democracy[2] at whatever juncture and with whatever means because for him it epitomizes ignorance.

After the execution of Socrates, Plato fled Athens and roamed about. He initially stayed for a while in North Africa, before proceeding to Sicily where he was arrested and sold into slavery. Upon his release and liberation, Plato revisited his Athenian experiences. He reassessed the Athenian political activities, eventually arriving at some important decisions about his future tasks. So, when he finally returned to Athens, Plato was not only philosophically mature but had also a clear vision about what to do next.

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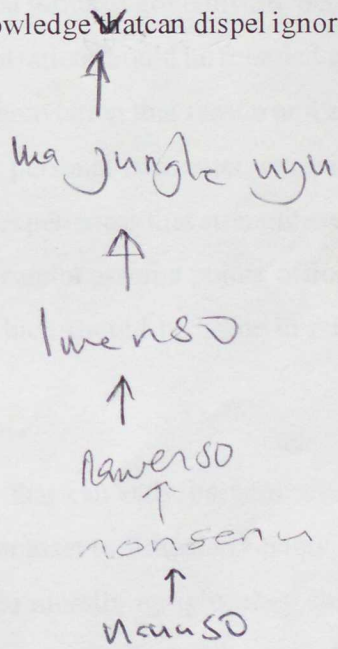
2. Democracy, according to Plato, being a government by the majority, does not allow for the

Most urgent for him was the pressing need to advance an alternative form of government, and if possible rule it. As his work, *The Republic* demonstrates, Plato was convinced that aristocracy could be a better form of government than democracy.

Assisted by his Academy, Plato worked at creating an aristocratic form of government. As a matter of fact, the Academy was his laboratory, as it were, in which he worked out the details about his envisaged aristocracy, a form government led by the elite of society. His principle motive was to create a city where knowledge and virtue rather than ignorance and immorality ruled. The proceeding chapter therefore offers a comprehensive analysis of Plato's theory of knowledge in order to identify and grasp the nature of knowledge that can dispel ignorance and install virtue.



knowledgeable to get into position of leadership and power.

2 Plato's Theory of Knowledge

2.1 General Remarks on Plato's Conception of Knowledge

In this section, this essay analyzes Plato's Theory of Knowledge, specifically in order to understand the nature of knowledge, which Plato claims can eliminate ignorance. Thus Plato is not writing his theory of knowledge and his philosophy in general, simply as an intellectual exercise but he actually has a serious task on his mind. He conceived his theory of knowledge firstly because he wanted to get rid of ignorant and immoral forms of government. Secondly, he intended to promote the idea that social and political organization should be founded on reason, knowledge and morality; thirdly he wants to promote the conviction that reason and education are a necessity for virtue. These ideas arose from Plato's personal encounter, experience and dissatisfaction with the democratic leadership of Athens, experiences that strengthened Plato's conviction that ignorance is disastrous; that the ignorant cannot assume public office without catastrophic consequences. These points are beacons, which should be borne in mind if any benefit is to be derived from any study of Plato.

For Plato, the execution of Socrates was a gross error that can only be committed out of ignorance for Socrates was the wisest man, and as such, an asset to Athenian society. So, if the Athenian leadership was educated, knowledgeable, hence morally upright, they should have realized that by killing Socrates, they were doing a great disservice to Athens, and at the same time, committing a heinous crime against philosophy. But due to ignorance, the leaders of Athens proceeded blindly and did the unthinkable- condemn Socrates to death. In other words, from a moral perspective, in Plato's opinion, a decision to get rid of a man of the caliber of Socrates, can only originate from a mind that is uncouth, intellectually dim, totally devoid of knowledge, hence morally bankrupt as well.

Additionally, Plato like Socrates is not content with the activities of the sophists[3] i.e., itinerant lecturers who are busy preaching relativistic doctrines to the youth of Athens. Plato's basic concern is that such activities lead to moral confusion and intellectual deformation of the youth. Hence, such activities should be censored and banned.

The future of any society or group of people is in the hands of the youth. And if the youth are badly initiated or educated, thus ill prepared for their future roles and tasks, certainly these spells doom for society.

A prospect of a bright future, in the hands of a dull, ignorant and morally bankrupt youth is impossible. So to dispel ignorance and ensure that virtue is grounded in knowledge, and to filter away the ignorant from getting into positions of authority, Plato proposes that our children should be given the best of education and knowledge. Therefore, Plato theories of Knowledge and Forms[4], which constitute the core of his philosophy, should be understood as deliberately conceived and tailored for a specific mission, which is to justify the type of knowledge and education that can dispel and eventually eliminate ignorance. On this note, let us turn and analyze Plato's theory of knowledge.

2.2 Knowledge, Beliefs and Forms

Plato holds that knowledge is objective and consists mainly in the apprehension of Forms. The Forms[5] are absolute, unchanging, eternal realities, and knowable only through reason. Opinion however, derives from the sensible physical objects, which Plato considers being in continuous flux[6] and as such, it is a world of illusions, subjectivity and uncertainty.

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3 Sophists were influential in Greece around 400 B C. They were experts in political art and communication by oratory and argument. The most eminent sophist was Protagoras of Abdera who was popular for his subjective thesis that "man is the measure of all things". Gorgias of Leontini, was another well known sophist who made important contributions to rhetorical and aesthetic theory.

4 Plato conceived of the Forms as having all the attributes of the being of Parmenides. Forms for Plato are subsistent realities, distinct both from the mind that knows them.

5 Knowledge is always of something. In Plato's view, Form is the object of knowledge.

Corresponding to the two worlds i.e., the world of Forms and the world of physical objects, there are two basic modes of cognition: sensitive and intellective cognition.[7] According to Plato, sensitive cognition is contingent, particular and subjective. Basically, sensitive cognition informs us of the presence of things. Rather, its primary function is to detect and locate the presence of physical objects in existence. Unfortunately, in Plato's opinion, sensitive cognition is incapable of investigating the nature or essence of things. Yet knowledge consists in grasping the essence of reality. Therefore, according to Plato, we cannot acquire knowledge through the senses.

The essence of things is the core of the characteristics of universality and necessity. So, opinion, since it is derived from the senses, is consequently devoid of the characteristics of universality and necessity. According to Plato, only the intellect, since it is capable of inquiring into the nature of things, can inform us about the nature or essence of what we know. Such knowledge has the characteristics of necessity and universality. In short, sensitive cognition, in Plato's opinion is contingent, particular and subjective, and as such can only furnish us with opinion. On the contrary, intellective cognition is of what is real; hence it yields knowledge, which is objective and universal.

Corresponding to sensitive and intellective modes of cognition, there are two levels of apprehension, which are also in two realms. First, there is the level of opinion, *doxa* in Greek, the realm of the senses[8]. Secondly, there is the level of knowledge, *episteme* in Greek, the intelligible realm (*The Republic* 509d-511e, simile of the line). Furthermore, the two levels of apprehension yield four subdivisions: the realm of the senses comprises the first level of apprehension whose first sub-division consists of images, shadows, reflection, for example, in water and polished surfaces, dreams, imagination and all sorts of illusions. Works of art, for example, poetry, music and painting belong to this level. The second subdivision consists in apprehension of sensible objects, for example, dogs, trees, which are the originals of images and reflections. This level is of clear patterns with identifiable objects and coherently organized

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6 Physical objects have all the characteristics of the flux of Heraclitus.

7 Sensitive cognition is the only mode of knowing for non philosophers, while philosophers can only acquire knowledge through the intellect.

8 As we are going to see below, philosophers are related to *episteme* which is only possible in the intelligible realm, while no philosophers are related *doxa* possible only in the sensible realm.

images. But in Plato's view, objects and their respective images and reflections apprehended in the sensible realm do not constitute knowledge. Sensible objects belong to the world of change and uncertainty and can at best generate only opinion.

The second level of apprehension is in the intelligible realm. Its first sub-division consists of mathematical reasoning, purely deductive and uncritical of its assumptions. Mathematical knowledge can be apprehended independently of any physical object. Plato's reasoning is that, since mathematics engages the faculty of reason at a very abstract level, and mathematical knowledge is clear and certain, therefore, mathematical reasoning is closer to the type of reasoning that can attain true and absolute knowledge.[10] So, the second subdivision of apprehension, which is the intelligible realm, consists in grasping of Platonic Forms, as absolute unconditional and eternal realities. Complete knowledge therefore, occurs when one knows the Form, in the sense of totally being aware of it in one's intellect and understanding its nature. Thus, knowledge is possible, when intelligence and full understanding culminates in the vision of ultimate truth. According to Plato, only philosophy or dialectics reaches such understanding. In brief, Plato's understanding is that apprehension of sensible objects does not constitute knowledge but only opinion. Knowledge belongs to the faculty of reason and not the faculty of the senses[11].

In *Theaetetus* (151e2-186), Plato examines the theory that knowledge is sense perception; that to know something is to be in receipt of perceptions from the sense organs (for example, the eyes, the nose, and the ears).[12] In this inquiry, Plato's main interest is not necessarily whether human knowledge requires the receipt of perception from the sense organs, but whether knowing just amounts to receipt of sense data. Certainly, knowing is not just a matter of getting sensations. Knowing involves the faculty of reason.

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9 Plato regarded art as a field that is not intellectually demanding.

10 In Plato's theory of education, studies in mathematics function as preparatory studies to philosophical studies.

11. This marks the major difference between the rationalists and empiricists who claim that knowledge derives from the senses.

For example, if we hear a noise of a car-crash, even when the hearing of the noise is over, we still can know there was a noise. In other words, knowing the truth about the noise is different from hearing it. The former continues to exist when the latter has ceased to be. In this case, knowing something is to retain what has been sensed and this is the function of the faculty of memory, which is a part of the faculty of reason. It follows that our knowledge even about what is visible, tangible or audible demands reason or intelligence and the senses. Therefore, both knowledge and opinion are products of thought in cooperation with sense perception. Once again, bare sensing does not amount to knowledge. Knowing then involves the element of thinking of thoughts, which is a work of reason.

With regard to perception, the sophist Protagoras of Abdera (c.490-c.420 BC) is well known for advocating relativism. He claims that "man is the best measure of things that are, that they are, of things that are not, that they are not," implying that there is no objective truth; the world is for each person as it appears to that person. In relation to morality, this implies that my perception of virtue is true for me, and then my knowledge also is infallible. Thus, if we judge Protagoras' doctrine false, according to Protagoras himself, we equally, are holding the truth. Yet we believe in knowledge and ignorance; that there are things we know and other things we do not know. And at times, we hold some things to be true which are in fact false. This of course calls for a profound analysis of the activities and objects of perception.

Take, for example, the possibility of a wolf in sheepskin, which suggests that immediate sense perception, cannot inform us of the objective existential nature of virtue. People at times pretend to be virtuous when in reality they are not. Actually, it is only through intellectual reflection that we can make sense of the nature and truth of a particular instance of virtue. Since we require the services of the intellect to make judgments, then knowledge consists of truth involving terms that are not objects of sense perception but of reason.

Another good example is mathematics whose arguments and conclusions are purely the concerns of the mind. We do not need the senses to know that four plus four is eight.

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12 Locke, Berkeley and Hume are the major proponent of the thesis that knowledge derives from the senses.

For Plato, this clearly demonstrates that raw sense perception, as such, is not knowledge. Knowledge involves truth, which cannot be attained by sense perception. Knowledge is a product of the faculty of reason. Truth is given only in reflection, in judgments and not in raw or unprocessed sensation.

To support his claim that knowledge originates from reason rather than the sense, in the *Meno* Plato proposes that knowledge is actually recollection. This implies that knowledge does not consist in seeing what is outside of us but in recalling what is already inside us. So if an individual is incapable of recollection, he/she cannot be knowledgeable. Thus according to Plato, only Philosophers, being experts in dialectics[13] can recollect the knowledge of the Forms, which is in us from birth (*Meno 81c-e*). And since to recall or to remember is to think, therefore the process of acquiring knowledge demands the use of the powers of reason.

Thinking, like memory, is the function of the faculty of reason. Reason, for Plato, offers us the means of escape from sense perception, which cannot generate knowledge. But we know from experience that reason is not immune to error. While knowledge requires thinking, yet thought can be false or true. In other words, although knowledge requires thinking, but not all thinking leads to correct knowledge. Reason is capable of producing errors, which indicate that there can be correct as well as mistaken thinking. I may see a mirage and think that it is water, or see an albino and mistake him/her for a ghost. Such misidentification of things is possible both in sight as well as in thought. Aware of this possibility, Plato suggests that firstly, reason must be self-critical i.e., it must safeguard against activities that could be unproductive, and secondly reason must be trained to identify the correct as well as false objects of knowledge. It must be trained to grasp the Forms, objects of knowledge. This is the objective of the studies in dialectics i.e., philosophical studies (*The Republic* 531d-535a).

Dialectics, according to Plato, is the only method by which an individual can grasp form. Dialectics is a method, which proceeds by question and answer until an individual reaches supreme knowledge of the essence of things.

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13 The training of philosophers is exposed and analyzed in the proceeding chapter.

Thus, for Plato, individuals who have been trained to grasp eternal unchanging things i.e., the Forms, can have knowledge, but those who perceive only sensible objects can only have opinion.[14]

The over all implication of Plato's theory of knowledge is that, a philosopher is a lover of knowledge and wisdom because s/he knows what is real; his/her faculty of reason isdeveloped to full capacity. And as such, only philosophers have knowledge of forms. Since only a philosopher knows the cardinal virtues i.e., wisdom, justice, courage, temperance, therefore only such an individual is qualified to educate others about morality. Furthermore, since morality is now linked to knowledge, hence only those with a mental aptitude for studies in dialectics can have knowledge and eventually be virtuous and have the capacity to organize and rule society. Otherwise, if these areas are left in the hands of the ignorant and morally bankrupt, trouble and chaos may eventually besiege society, making human life and existence precarious.

Certainly Plato's theory of knowledge has far reaching implications regarding morality, education, social and political organization. It suffices therefore at this juncture, to simply point out briefly, these major implications of Plato's theory of knowledge, as we have done above for a more detailed analysis of these implications will follow in chapter 3 where, this study will be concerned with Plato's Theory of Virtue. But the issue that needs immediate attention is Plato's claim that Form, which can only be investigated by the intellect, constitutes the object of knowledge. So, to have affirmed grasp of Plato's theory of knowledge, it is therefore imperative that we critically analyze Plato's theory of Form.

The theory of Form is the hub or core of Plato's philosophy. It is the view that Form is the original or the origin of things, the rationale, the reason for their existence, the essence of their being; the stable sustaining principle, the parent of things in flux, the objects of knowledge. Plato holds that forms are real, eternal, unchanging and they are not sensible but can only be known through reason. The sensible things are what Plato calls copies or images or reflections of the Forms. Since the sensible world consists of copies of the Forms, thus, it has a lower

14 Here again, Plato is differentiating between philosophers from non-philosophers. Philosophers have

ontological status and the same can be said of the knowledge that arises from it. Thus, Forms give us true knowledge while their corresponding copies furnish us with only mere opinion.

The Forms, as Plato believes, have a real existence independent of our mind. They are not ideas in our mind, nor dreams but real things. The Form is thesource of things in flux. But unlike changeable things in flux, Forms do not dwell in space and time. They exists outside space and outside time- in the world of eternal realities-so that Forms cannot be perceived by the senses as the ordinary changing things. As models of the things in flux, Forms must have been in contact with space at the beginning of time.

In the *Timeaus*, Plato develops the comparison between the Form of a class of things and the father of a family of children. In the beginning, there were Forms and space in which the sensible things moved. The space was empty but with the potential to be shaped into physical objects. The Forms impressed themselves upon pure space thereby giving the offspring their shapes. In this way, the Form acts like a parent. Hence particular sensible things, which originate from the same model, resemble not only their parent Form, but also each other like siblings. To each form therefore, belongs its offsprings, the sensible things bearing the name of their parent Form and resembling it. While the offsprings of the Form, are created, degenerate and decay in place, the Form, is eternal.

With reference to his theory of knowledge, Plato is of the opinion that if knowledge is to be steady and unchanging, such knowledge must derive from an object that is eternal. Obviously, the forms play a crucial role in Plato's understanding of the nature and constitution of things. There is a form for each set of particular things, to which we apply the same name (*The Republic* 507b, 596a). The Form is what gives particulars their common quality. The particulars are said to share or partake of the forms. For example, just acts are just because they share or partake in the Form of justice; likewise, dogs are such because they partake in the Form of dog (*The Republic* 514a-521b). However, one would certainly want to understand how the particulars participate in the Forms. In other words, how do the particulars partake or participate in the

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knowledge while non-philosophers have only opinion.

Forms? Unfortunately, Plato does not take this question into consideration.

Furthermore, Plato asserts that the Forms are in a hierarchy. Above the Forms of justice, courage, truthfulness, there is the highest Form of knowledge which he calls "Form of the Good". All the other Forms derive their existence and essence from the Form of the Good. All the other things, which are just, courageous and so on, derive their being, usefulness and value from the Form of the Good (*The Republic* 505a). This implies that knowledge also is of value only if it derives from the Good: "Is there any point in having all other Forms of knowledge without that of the Good, and so lacking knowledge about what is good and valuable?" (*The Republic* 505b).

In other words, for Plato, the Good functions like the sun (*The Republic* 507a-509b). The sun being source of light and growth gives visibility to objects of the senses and power of seeing to the eyes. Similarly, the Good is the source of reality and truth. It provides intelligibility to objects of thought and power of knowing to the mind. Expressed differently, Plato is saying that the mind on its own does not have the power of cognition. Its power derives from the Form of the Good,[15] Otherwise without the illumination from the Good, the mind cannot grasp objects. Thus when the mind focuses on objects illuminated by the Good, the mind understands and knows them. But when the mind focuses on the world of appearance, all it can form is opinion.

The Form of the Good has several key functions: it gives the objects of knowledge their truth and the knower's mind the power of knowing them; it is also the cause of knowledge and truth, source of intelligibility of objects of knowledge, source of their being and reality. Yet Plato claims the Good itself is not reality; it is beyond reality and much more superior to reality. The Form of the Good is the unmoved mover, who created the Forms but it is not created, who can account for reality but itself is not explainable through concepts (*The Republic* 509b).

Of course one would want to understand how a being that has no beginning is capable of generating other beings that have a beginning. But to complicate matters, Plato resorts to

15 This is similar to St.Augustine's doctrine of illumination, which states that, minus God illumination, the

explaining such intricate issues using allegories and myths, which are dependent on interpretation, which can be wrong or right. These problems are challenges to novices as well as to seasoned scholars in Greek philosophy and Plato in particular.

Plato explains the process of getting to know the Forms through the allegory of the cave (*The Republic* 514a-521b). Imagine human beings living in a cave with their legs and necks chained from childhood in such a position whereby they can face only the inside wall of the cave with their backs to the mouth of the cave. Such people have never seen the light of day. Allthey can see on the wall of the cave are shadows of objects passing in between the mouth of the cave and the fire lit in front of the cave. Those who remain in the cave will never see reality; thus they will forever mistake the images for reality. Such unfortunate people will never have knowledge but only opinion, and this happens to be the fate of the majority in society (*TheRepublic* 514a-521b). In brief, for Plato the cave is the world of illusions and ignorance while the world of Forms constitutes enlightenment and knowledge.

The process of knowledge therefore, consists in getting out of the cave and ascending to the world of reality where objects of knowledge (the Forms) exist. Of course not everybody can get out of the cave of ignorance using personal initiative. The ascent requires special aptitude and training, realized only in the elite of society qualified to be philosopher-rulers. The goal of the training of philosopher rulers, the ascent to the world of Forms, is what Plato calls Recollection (*Meno* 80e). The doctrine of recollection provides that both learning and teaching are nothing but recollection, and rest on the Greek myth that: (1) the soul is immortal, (2) the soul is the rational element in man as the following quotation confirms:

> They say that the human soul is immortal; at times it comes to an end, which they call dying, at times it is reborn, but it is never destroyed. As the soul is immortal, has been born often, and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing, which it has not learned; so it is no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. The soul has learned

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human mind cannot acquire knowledge.

> everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing to discover everything else for himself, if he is brave and does not tire of the search for searching and learning are a whole, recollection (*Meno 81b-d)*.

There is need to clarify two points regarding the doctrine of recollection. Firstly, this doctrine is not a theory of innate ideas or innate knowledge. Plato does not state that we are supposed to bring any actual knowledge into the world ready-made with us but that we are said to have learnt truth but accidentally have lost it again, and now we have to recover it. Secondly, learning implies that the soul at a certain point had to acquire knowledge and not that the soul from the beginning had innate knowledge. Learning precedes recollection; or, rather, recollection is dependent on learning. And therefore, without learning there cannot be knowledge" and eventually no recollection. Thirdly, the doctrine of recollection is a response to the crucial question of methodology on how we can acquire knowledge of virtue. Plato's solution that such knowledge can be acquired through recollection highlights the importance of reason in his philosophy; that virtue and knowledge are matters of reason; that ignorance cannot be dispelled through any other means than through the use of the powers of reason. So education should be concerned with sharpening the mind and not the senses since they are not the source of knowledge.

To have knowledge, it is therefore necessary to escape the jail of the cave, i.e. the sensible world, and turn upward to the world of intelligible knowledge, to find the Forms, and to grow accustomed to contemplating them. Those who genuinely desire knowledge must be trained to discover the Forms and recollect the knowledge that is already in them (*Meno 81e*). So, in seeking knowledge and wisdom, our philosopher candidate must use reason rather than the senses.

By insisting that Form is distinct from its copies, Plato has divided the world into two: the world of Form, which corresponds to knowledge, and the world of sensible physical objects, which corresponds to opinion. As pointed out above, Plato's critics (Aristotle) pointed out this dualism in order to discredit his philosophy. Nevertheless, these issues will be examined in depth in

chapter 4 where our main task will be to establish if these critics indeed succeed to undermine the thesis that ignorance is dangerous to individuals and society.

Furthermore, Plato by claiming that virtue is knowledge, and that only the elite i.e., philosophers, can acquire knowledge implies that only the elite can be virtuous. But, a society where the majority is ignorant and consequently immoral and a constant threat to virtue can certainly not be harmonious society. To this query, Plato suggests that the majority who cannot acquire knowledge can still be moral based on right belief, which is based on right opinion. This implies that right beliefs can function as well as knowledge. The main difference between the two being that knowledge is infallible while belief, being rooted in opinion, is fallible. Thus, there can be right or wrong opinion, while knowledge is always right. So, to ensure that right belief is passed on to the masses, Plato suggests that society should be ruled and governed by the forces of reason and knowledge for only these can distinguish right from wrong belief. To avoid confusion and chaos that may arise due to ignorance, society should be ruled and organized by philosopher rulers, individuals with a sharpened sense of virtue and knowledge. By these sentiments, we know Plato is advocating aristocracy.

Furthermore, holding that Form is what is real has serious implications for aesthetics. Regarding aesthetics, Plato's basic conviction is that as the subject matter of art is not Form but particular copies of Form, art therefore, is not a serious intellectual endeavour. It is merely a non-rational activity devoid of knowledge. By implication therefore, artists have no wisdom and virtue. As pointed out earlier, Form exists in nature, and originates from the Good (*The Republic* 597b). Particulars are resemblance of the Forms. Thus works of art, i.e., paintings, pictures, carvings or sculpture, drama, poems, songs, clothing, cookery and house economics expertise are not representations of Forms but of sensible particulars.

A craftsman like a carpenter, in Plato's opinion, cannot produce a form of a bed but only a particular bed. He cannot make what exists outside the sensible world. His product can only be something that resembles a particular bed, which in turn is simply a copy of a form of bed. Similarly, artists who paint pictures cannot make a particular bed but only paint a mere

representation of a particular bed. So a painter basically does not present the thing in itself, as it is in nature, but the thing the craftsman makes. In his dismissal of art, Plato relegates it to a third position from reality (*The Republic* 597e). Art of representation is removed from the truth and it can't produce everything because it has a weak grasp of anything- a mere phenomenon. A painter can paint a picture of a shoemaker but without any understanding and knowledge of shoe making. For Plato, art is concerned with representation of appearance and not reality. Little wonder, Plato considers artists devoid of knowledge.

Plato realized that music and poetry have great influence in moulding character but when he thought of the cognitive intent of art, he found the artists ignorant, and when he thought of its emotive powers, he found the artist a social menace. For Plato, poetry and art manufacture copies at third level from reality, far away from being and truth about human excellence. Worse still artists are incapable of judging what kind of conduct will make the individual or state better or worse (*The Republic* 599d). Necessarily, Plato strongly advises that artists should not take charge of education in the state for individuals without knowledge cannot teach and guide others. Therefore, poets from Homer downwards have no grasp of truth but merely produce a superficial likeness of any subject they treat, including virtue.

The sum of the foregoing is that Forms furnish us with knowledge, the realm of ordinary experience furnish us with opinion, and the works of art stand at the third position as mere copies and images or ghosts made by the artist. Art deals with a low element in the mind; consequently, works of art have a low degree of truth. For Plato, painters and poets are not qualified to run the state and to take charge of education in society because if they did, they would promote the lower and inferior elements in the mind. Secondly, they should not even have a say in management of society because arts are basically ignorant and irrational. And since artists due to their ignorance cannot participate in establishing a just state, hence only the powers of reason and knowledge should educate and govern the state; reason and knowledge should guide people on the road to virtue and justice.

By holding that art is not based on knowledge, Plato differentiated knowledge from technical skills. Since technical skill deal with the sensible and physical objects, therefore, technical skills are also founded on opinion and not knowledge. Consequently, technical skills cannot be equated to virtue.

The implications of Plato's theory of knowledge pointed out above have a serious bearing on his conception of morality i.e., virtue. Chapter 3 therefore offers a detailed analysis of these implications regarding virtue. In summary, our analysis of Plato's theory of knowledge has identified that, for Plato, knowledge is a matter of reason and not the senses and the object of knowledge is Form, which is eternal and unchangeable. This is the type of knowledge that can dispel ignorance and save us from error. So, when Plato asserts that virtue is knowledge, briefly, he simply means that morality should be founded onreason and knowledge. For an in-depth treatment of this topic, let us turn to chapter 3.

3 Plato's Theory of Virtue

In this chapter, we aim at achieving two objectives namely: (1) trace the evolution of Plato's idea and conviction that virtue is knowledge; and (ii) demonstrate how the knowledge referred to can dispel ignorance and redeem us from immorality. This idea has its roots in Socrates who championed the belief that goodness involves knowledge, and attempted to reduce all excellence to some kind of knowledge. Hence his profound conviction that armed with knowledge, no individual can deliberately do wrong, which implies that no person is willingly ignorant and evil. Furthermore, this could mean that whoever has knowledge could only will good and not evil. This position has some element of determinism, i.e., the belief that armed with knowledge, and one loses freedom to will either good or evil. But due to the scope of this paper, the problem of free will and determinism implied in Plato's conviction that **virtue is knowledge** will not take a central stage.

As mentioned above, the idea that **virtue is knowledge** originated with Socrates who profoundly influenced Plato. It is not surprising therefore that Plato maintains this apparent paradox and asserts it almost in every one of his dialogues (*Laws* 862ff, *Protagoras* 345, *The Republic* 351a&c). He learnt from Socrates that Goodness is knowledge and that no man sins on purpose. And equally allied with these claims is the inscription of the Oracle at Delphi " Man know thyself". So the exercise of tracing the evolution of the relationship between virtue and knowledge, in Plato's dialogues, is to facilitate a firm grasp of the relationship between virtue and knowledge. Our basic inspiration is Plato's reflection that knowledge and goodness are related, that education is crucial for the world, and could save us from social chaos and self-destruction all due to ignorance. According to Plato, knowledge coupled up with a sharpened intellect (*Nous)* has the power to liberate us from error.

3.1 Plato's Conception of Knowledge and Virtue

In *Lysis,* Plato introduces the relation between knowledge and Goodness. Lysis, the youth in the dialogue admits to Socrates that although his guardians love him, they restrict or limit what he

can do. They allow him exercise his autonomy only in matters where he possesses the required knowledge, but do not let him act alone in ignorance (*Lysis* 2106). Below is an example that elucidates this problem.

When people are sick they consult doctors because medical experts have the knowledge and ability to handle and remedy sicknesses. Thus, doctors are useful because of their expertise in medicine. So, Plato's insight is that knowledge is essential for doing and making things. An individual who has knowledge can do or make what s/he knows based on knowledge. So, the *arete* of a craftsman consists in just being good at his craft; and in this sense, we speak of a good carpenter, cook, etc. This understanding of *arête* is certainly in accord with Socrates' insight for; to be good at something involves knowledge. And at the moral level this came to mean: "to be good is a matter of knowledge." In other words, there is a shift in meaning from skill to goodness of character. Thus, goodness becomes an object of knowledge. Otherwise, how can we become good without knowledge of goodness?

In his attempt to work out the implication of the Socratic formula, Plato considers how far particular virtues can be reduced to knowledge. And hence those dialogues which attempt to define one or more of the four cardinal virtues: *Laches* on courage, *Charmides* on Temperance, *The Republic* on justice. The virtue of wisdom is not treated separately or rather there is no dialogue specifically dedicated to the virtue of wisdom but it is treated together with the other virtues. And below we examine each of the above dialogues separately. Our goal is to establish and grasp how Plato relates each of the four cardinal virtues to knowledge.

The discussion in *Laches* is on courage. The principal characters in the dialogue are Socrates and two army generals: Nicias and Laches. Plato's assumption is that knowledge of any field can be acquired from the experts in that particular field. So, if we need to acquaint ourselves with shoe making, a cobbler is the right person to consult. And since our immediate interest is the virtue of courage, the right people to consult are military experts; hence Plato's choice of army generals.

Laches offers the following two definitions of courage: firstly that courage consists in standing one's ground in battle, secondly that courage is a kind of steadfastness of soul. Unfortunately, these definitions are both deficient. Firstly, defining courage as standing one's ground in battle is too simplistic, because the fit of being brave on the battlefield is simply a particular instance of courage. Instances of courage do not in any way constitute the nature of courage.

In other words, mentioning particular instances of courage does not constitute knowledge.[16] A definition of courage should articulate or inform us about the nature of courage. Simply enumerating particular instances of courage does not constitute knowledge of virtue. The second definition is equally ambiguous for an individual can be steadfast in doing good as well as in executing evil. For example, a robber needs lots of courage to break into somebody's house and steal goods. And for one to rescue people trapped in a house on fire equally demands steadfastness of soul. Hence, steadfastness of soul as Plato correctly points out is not adequate unless accompanied by knowledge of good and evil. Minus knowledge of good and evil, we certainly risk being steadfast in wrong things.

To this criticism, Nicias suggests that possibly the answer lies in Socrates' claim that we are good in so far as we are wise; which implies that wisdom is knowledge which enables us to lead a good life. In this sense, courage consists of wisdom and knowledge of a certain sort, inclusive of what is and what is not to be feared.

Of course, relating courage to knowledge and wisdom certainly has serious implications. For example, if courage is a kind of wisdom i.e., a kind of virtue, and Plato has already equated virtue with knowledge, and then only individuals endowed with reason can acquire it. Thus children plus creatures without reason are excluded as possible subjects of courage, knowledge, and wisdom. In this sense courage must be distinguished from mere recklessness. So, instances of a lion killing a buffalo or a child fondling a snake do not qualify as feats of courage for both a lion and a child are not subjects of reason and knowledge. In Plato's view, the fundamental difference is that, firstly, the brave individual knows the object of fear. Such a person can risk

16 Knowledge consists in grasping the essence of reality. As mentioned above, particular instances can

death aware that there are other things more frightful than death. Secondly, a brave person, unlike a child or lion, should be able to differentiate acts of courage from acts related to other virtues.

Certainly courage partly consists in knowing what is to be feared. But to know what is to be feared ultimately implies knowledge of good and evil, which in turn implies all the other virtues, i.e. temperance, justice, wisdom. Thus, courage is closely related to the other virtues. And acts of courage are distinguished from acts related to other virtues. Therefore, full understanding of courage must not exclude the other virtues. Hence, Plato's respective dialogues on justice, in *The Republic*, and on Temperance in the *Charmides*--the subject of the subsequent sections.

The subject of discussion in the *Charmides* is finding the definition of the virtue of temperance (moderation or self-control). The word temperance derives from a Greek concept *Sophrosyne*,[17] which means beautiful characteristic, i.e., and the possession of a sane, wholesome mind. It covers a wide range of human characteristics including what we call humility, humanity, and mercy. It is also a characteristic of a person in control of his appetite, i.e. the desires for food, drink and the passion for sex.

Charmides offers the following three definitions of temperance: (a) minding our own business, (b) gentle quietude, (c) knowing oneself (*Charmides* 164d). In Plato's opinion, the first two definitions are certainly shallow and superficial because they fail to capture and articulate the nature of temperance. Plato argues that both minding one's own business and gentle quietude are outward indications of the soul[18]. These outward indications do not necessarily arise from being 'Master of one's soul." There are of course wolves in sheepskin, which implies that human beings are capable of pretending to be what they are not. Thus acting a temperate man and being temperate are literally two different modes of being. Looks can be deceptive. So to know if an individual is temperate or not, we need to get behind such mere trappings, get to the interior

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only generate opinion and not knowledge.

17 Sophresyne played an important role in ancient thought, from Homer to Roman literature, to its transformation into a Christian's virtue. Helen North's book Sophrosyne in Greek Literature 1966: NewYork, Cornell University, offers an in depth exposition of the evolution of the concept of sophrosyne.

18 The Greeks believed the soul as the source of human activity including morality.

condition of the soul, the spring and source of human behaviour. Hence the urgency of the third definition that temperance consists in knowledge of oneself.

The implication of this definition is that temperance being some special kind of knowledge is a skill requiring special knowledge, i.e., knowledge of oneself. Moreover, this understanding considers human beings not simply as subjects of knowledge of virtue but also as objects of knowledge of virtue. In this regard, a human being has two significant roles to play: firstly as subject of virtue, secondly as an object of virtue. The knowing subject becomes an object of his/her own knowledge. And this makes it possible for an individual to identify knowledge both in himself/herself and in others.

So one who possesses knowledge of oneself is capable of identifying one's own ignorance. Knowledge of one self consists in grasping the nature of the "self" and how it functions. It also consists in the assessment of oneself so as to establish what one knows or does not know. So if one has to seek knowledge, then s/he should be clear on what type of knowledge s/he is lacking. The endeavour of attempting to understand oneself is certainly in accord with the old Delphi advice "Man know thyself" and the famous Socratic dictum that "An unexamined life is not worth living," (*Apology* 38) which implies that the self is both a subject and an object of philosophical enquiry.

The element of self-knowledge prevalent in the virtue of temperance is equally present in Plato's conception of justice. Justice is discussed in detail in *The Republic* It is a crucial virtue for an individual as well as society. For Plato, justice is neither in the interest of the stronger as Thrasymachus thinks (*The Republic* 338-344) nor does it consists in paying one's debt, for paying ones debts, under certain circumstances, may constitute injustice.

According to Plato, justice is neither corrective nor distributive[19] but deserts, consisting in each part of the whole sticking to its function, a role for which it is naturally best fitted. So, each person should attend to the function for which s/he is by nature capable of performing.

19 Distributive justice concerned with who ought to get what goods, corrective justice is concerned with

Such understanding of justice demands that each individual know what his/her abilities are. Certainly, this requires knowledge of other virtues so that an individual is properly informed and can distinguish between his abilities and disabilities. Justice is desert demands that individuals to be just, they should be rooted in the virtue of temperance/self control so that individuals are capable of controlling the desire to get involved in areas that thing are not naturally fitted for. Once again, like courage and temperance, the virtue of justice is identified with knowledge. Additionally, proper exercise of a particular virtue requires clear and distinct knowledge of the other virtues. Thus, justice is dependent on other virtues. This implies that virtues are linked and not isolated that they form a network, a unity in plurality. Furthermore, this implies that, a comprehensive understanding of a particular virtue involves knowledge of all the other virtues.

In brief, Plato is very insistent that each virtue constitutes knowledge. By claiming that virtue is knowledge and at the same time, like Socrates, hold the belief that an individual who possesses knowledge cannot deliberately do wrong, Plato implies that knowledge that is virtue can liberate a person from error. Yet we know from everyday experience that knowledge can be abused. For instance, whoever lies is also concealing the truth. So, there is need to clarify the difference between knowledge that is virtue and knowledge that can be abused. The following section below offers a detailed analysis of this problem.

3.2 Technical Skills and Virtue

Plato claims that knowledge that is virtue is *epistemе* i.e., knowledge of Forms that is opposed to *doxa* (opinion). As established in chapter 2, section 2.2 *doxa* constitutes the foundation of arts, which includes technical skills.

One basic characteristic of knowledge is that it can be abused. It is obvious that the knowledge, which enables us to do something well also enables us most surely to do it badly. Thus, the best liar in every case is the person who knows the truth. Otherwise, how can one tell a lie while ignorant of the truth? This is certainly true in the domain of ordinary arts and crafts.

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punishment for offences committed.

The abuse of technical skill however, does not affect the quality of the knowledge involved. The right or wrong application of knowledge does not in anyway contaminate the knowledge itself. Moral actions originate from the will of the agent. By this comment we do not suggest that knowledge cannot influence moral activities but that knowledge*per se* is not morally culpable. Causing harm or good is a matter of morality and character, the consideration of virtue. Thus the abuse of technical knowledge affects the moral status and character of theagent. But it does not in a way taint the knowledge involved.

Plato holds the view that virtue can be taught; hence virtue is knowledge. Secondly, he asserts that "no man does evil on purpose" implying that knowledge of what is right is enough to ensure right action. This certainly can only be true if virtue is not knowledge in the same sense as other kinds, that ethics or the knowledge of good and evil is not a science in the same category as technical skills i.e., carpentry and engineering. So maintaining that virtue is knowledge, and that no one sins on purpose, as Plato does, implies that the knowledge involved must be different from the other types i.e., technical skills, since it is quite clear that such knowledge cannot be used for evil purposes.

Plato claims that the knowledge that is virtue is *episteme* i.e., knowledge of Forms. This knowledge is opposed to *doxa* (opinion), which is the foundation of technical skills. So, while technical skills since they are founded on opinion, which is subjective, relatively unstable, can easily be abused, knowledge of Forms being objective, steady, unchanging and rooted in reason, cannot be abused. Additionally, since the major difference between virtue and ordinary skill is that, while the former can liberate us from error, the latter cannot.

Furthermore, Plato claims that right belief also functions as well as knowledge. Consequently, a person can be virtuous based not only on knowledge but also based on right belief. One individual can be virtuous based on knowledge while another one can be virtuous based on belief. Of course both are virtuous but the difference is that virtue rooted in knowledge is infallible while virtue rooted in belief is fallible since it is founded on opinion.

In addition, relating virtue to knowledge and belief consequently isolates the virtue of wisdom from the unity of virtues. The implication of this distinction is that a person can be morally upright based on right belief, and another based on virtue, i.e., knowledge. The individual acting on right belief can be good (virtuous) i.e., be courageous, temperate, just but without necessarily being wise. Therefore virtue founded on belief is limited since it excludes the virtue of wisdom. On the contrary, since wisdom as a virtue consists of knowledge, it is therefore impossible for an individual to be wise without being virtuous. So, we find in *The Republic* that virtues of courage, temperance, and justice can exist without wisdom. Of the three classes in the state, rulers, auxiliaries, and producers, only the rulers i.e., individuals who have knowledge, possess wisdom. The others must possess only right belief.

In the state, the guardians whose duty is to protect and defend the state from foreign aggression must certainly possess courage. Courage, in this case, is no longer defined as the knowledge of what is the proper thing to fear, but as the right belief to what should be feared (*The Republic* 429). And according to Plato, the duty of identifying right belief and teaching it to others is the responsibility of philosopher rulers' i.e., individuals in possession of knowledge and a sharpened mind (*Nous*).

Nevertheless, it is not immediately obvious why knowledge of the Forms ensures virtue. Since education presupposes knowledge, certainly Plato's ideas on education should offer us a clue to what Plato means by claiming, "if you know you cannot err." Plato's system of education, apart from other objectives, is meant to transmit beliefs to guardians and knowledge to philosophers.

3.3 Plato's Theory of Education in Virtue

This section analyses Plato's education system in order to establish how knowledge that is virtue (*episteme*) can liberate us from wrongdoing. Our opinion is that the moral liberation Plato is talking about firstly requires knowledge for only knowledge can liberate us from ignorance. Secondly, since knowledge, according to Plato can only be acquired through reason, therefore, such knowledge can only be attained by a mind that is wide and deep in its scope, a mind that

can look at issues from broad horizons. Such a mind must therefore be liberated from prejudices and all the other pathologies that can enslave and frustrate its operations and eventually prevent it from attaining knowledge. Therefore, our opinion is that, moral liberation is founded on *nous* (intellect or mind) because only *nous* or mind can acquire knowledge that can dispel ignorance and immorality. To achieve this, we will analyse Plato's ideas on education, which include the role of education, the importance of teaching methods, i.e., the entire system of education whose principle concern is nothing else but virtue.

As established in chapter 2, knowledge in Plato's view is crucial for virtue. Knowledge leads to virtue, and ignorance to evil. For Plato, the principal objective of education and knowledge is to cure moral evils, so that when an individual is educated and thus armed with knowledge ceases to be a subject of moral blunders. And according to Plato, there are two kinds of virtue: one based on right belief for the ordinary person, and that of the philosopher based on knowledge. Both are of course morally upright and have control in the soul, but the principal difference is that the former has also knowledge and wisdom. Additionally, the twokinds of virtue have their corresponding vices (*Sophists 227e*). In the *Timeaus* (86e), all vice is called disease of the soul and all evil lack of wisdom. The vice corresponding to virtue based on right belief is like a physical disease, whose symptoms are discord between opinion and desires, causing disorder in the soul. And the virtue based on knowledge corresponds to the evil of ignorance. So Plato proposes that knowledge and education offers us the only effective remedy against ignorance and moral decay.

Plato's conviction is that ignorance, which is a serious lack of knowledge of good and evil, is more sinister and dangerous. In his view, ignorance is the root of all social and moral degeneration. Thus a society that is ignorant is consequently morally bankrupt. In brief Plato argues that an individual who lacks knowledge of the good cannot be morally upright. So the following section is an analysis of Plato's method of education, which is aimed at eliminating ignorance and liberating us from evil.

3.3.1 Method of Education in Virtue

Regarding method in education, Plato claims that a method of education that should eliminate or prevent ignorance and moral decay should firstly involve ***episteme*** *(*true knowledge which is of Forms) and not ***doxa*** (opinion*)*. Secondly, such a method should focus at developing the mind or (*Nous*) because knowledge (*episteme)* can only be obtained through reason and not through the senses. Thus education should assist individuals learn to contemplate reality and not mere shadows of reality. In short, Plato insists that the method of education should focus at assisting individuals attain ***Nous***, i.e., a profound and comprehensive understanding of reality since the final goal of education is mental and moral liberation.

The idea that virtue is the aim of education was quite familiar in Athens where Sophists (contemporaries of Socrates), who were itinerant lecturers, played a prominent role as educators *(Protagoras* 325). But Plato in the early Socratic dialogues wonders whether theso-called educators, have any idea of what they teach, and more crucially, are they the right teachers? When he asks; "Can virtue be taught" (*Meno* 87c; *Protagoras* 3296), Plato is basically emphasizing that if it could be taught, then it must be knowledgeof some sort.

Obviously, Plato's first criticism is on the sophists teaching method which consisted mainly of lecturers and association. The sophists claim that they are teachers of virtue (e.g. *Protagoras*) and they make a lot of money from teaching. But upon examination regarding the nature of his knowledge, it transpires that no sophist is confidently certain of accounting for the nature of virtue[20]. Little wonder Plato holds them in disdain. Plato's conclusion therefore is that sophists claim to be teachers yet they are devoid of knowledge; therefore they are teachers of falsehood. In brief, sophists teach nothing else but personal opinion, rhetorical techniques, oratory and the prejudices of society.

Certainly, the methodology of education practicedby the sophists leaves a lot to be desired. As Protagoras admits, he teaches through association and lectures. Thus through lectures and association, according to the great sophist, the youth of Athens are expected to become good.

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20 This is evident in Plato's dialogue of *Gorgias, Protagoras and Euthyphro.* Through these discourses, Socrates

Plato dismisses this methodology as mediocre and unproductive, pointing out the fact that there are upright parents whose children are morally bankrupt which implies that teaching through association does not guarantee that our children will turn out virtuous. Consequently, parent, pastors, priests, poets, sophists, and ordinary citizens who can only instill opinion and not knowledge are not qualified teachers. In short, according to Plato, teaching through lectures and association cannot eventually liberate us from moral wickedness.

Plato's basic message is that, we should be on guard against individuals who promise to deliver what in fact they do not possess. Such individuals are a danger to society. Sophists promise virtue and excellence but cannot even tell us what virtueand excellence consist of. Here Plato is expressing a conviction inherited from Socrates that the first responsibility of a citizen is to be a good person; that goodness and happiness cannot be got in any other way but within a person's own mind and soul. Therefore, the first duty of an individual is to know oneself, be autonomous, acquire independence of mind, think critically, and not function like a sponge, absorbing uncritically the prejudices of his/her social milieu as the sophists expected of theirstudents. This understanding of how life should be lived is in line with Socrates conviction that "unexamined life is not worth living"(*Apology* 38a).

The tendency of the soul, a personal effort to become good originates from Socrates who interprets it as an inquiry for the truth in moral matters, by persons motivated by love of wisdom. And to cultivate and nurture this love is for Plato the principle aim of education. Thus Plato's doctrine of reminiscence or recollection supports and emphasizes that a person possesses a unique ability for this search after truth, that the human mind possesses the potential to see or attain the truth if only oriented or turned in the right direction. This is demonstrated in the *Meno*, where Meno's slave, although totally ignorant of geometry exhibits knowledge of geometry through answering the questions of Socrates. The boy discovers that, to construct a square double the area of a given square, one must build the second on the diagonal of the first *(Meno* 82b). Contrary to the sophist methodology of education, Plato's reminiscence, which is based on reason, engages the student actively in the search for Knowledge.

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wounded the ego of many prominent personalities of Athens.

Reminiscence is thinking, hence the mind is active in the process of knowledge acquisition. Additionally, recollection as a method of learning and teaching i.e., of acquiring knowledge, implies that one of the primary objectives of education is to cultivate the mind. Thus, Plato's claims that we need a method of education that will assist people arise from thedarkness of the world of phenomena and uncertainty of belief into the land of knowledge.

In other words, for Plato, the aim of education is not putting into the soul knowledge that was not formerly there, like restoring sight to a blind person.[21] In Plato's view, such a facility is already present in human nature. But education aims at simply leading individuals from the world of change and becoming, assist them learn to contemplate reality (i.e. forms). So the art of Plato's education is then concerned with how the individuals should completely be turned around from the world of change to the world of forms. It is not a matter of giving individuals the ability to acquire knowledge for that ability is inherent in human nature.

But the individuals are facing in the wrong direction and they are not looking where they ought to look; that is the problem (*The Republic* 418d).

For Plato, education aims at developing the intellect, to promote virtue and love for learning, and stimulate and cultivate love for the search for the truth. And this is done in three main stages: infant education, training for guardians and lastly, education for philosopher rulers. Since infants are below the age of reason, Plato's education focuses on formation of character through habituation i.e., training in good habits. Education for the guardians basically comprises in training in physical culture and the arts leading them to attain self-control. The third stage is the higher and superior education of the philosopher-rulers, leading them to an understanding of the eternal entities-forms, the objects of *Nous*.

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21 Note the difference between Plato's understanding of the nature of a human mind and Aristotle who agrees with John Locke that at birth, a human mind is like a blank sheet of paper, which has to be filled with experiences.

3.3.2 Virtue in Infants

Plato puts great emphasis on the supreme importance of training in the earliest years. His basic argument is simple. Since infants are not intellectually mature, virtue at such a tender age consists of right moral dispositions and habits and not knowledge. So infant education is concerned with formation of character, by assisting the child acquires right habits prescribed by the laws of the state (*Laws* 643b).[22] This stage is crucial because it is the foundation on which the whole edifice of the individuals life and the state stands. Hence, this foundation must be solid and firm.

Children acquire habits through practice. So, a child by practicing good habits gradually gets his/her character formed. Education, being concerned with moral excellence, fills a child with desire and passion to become a perfect citizen who knows how to be a just ruler and a just subject. So young souls should be tendered with maximum care for Plato believes that "Man though gentle and capable of being the most divine of all animals if rightly trained, becomes if brought up badly the wildest of all creatures that live upon the earth" (*Laws* 766a). Since virtue in children consists of right habits and not knowledge, therefore, children's activities should be geared at assisting them practice good habits to strengthen good character.

3.3.3 Virtue in Guardians

In addition, to cultivate in the young right habits and good character, the primary objective of Plato's education for the guardians class is to instill in the youth right belief for their virtue consists of their ability to hold on to right belief so attain simplicity, self-control, self mastery. Their curriculum consists mainly of physical culture and arts. The objective of physical training is to strengthen the body and make it fit, hence easy to discipline and enabling the soul do its part without hindrance. The soul being superior to the body, through its excellencebrings about the excellence of the body, not vice versa. Thus the guardians must certainly keep fit so that they can endure hardship and deprivation.

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22 Plato emphasizes that education should not be in private hands but should be full responsibility of the

The guardians should not train like professional athletes because that will make them too delicate, requiring special care and diet. Yet soldiers must be ready to face deprivation and endure hardships. Thus training in sports and music assists an individual acquire simplicity of character. For Plato, music strengthens self-control, and physical fitness makes one's health less dependent on doctors. Certainly, a person brought up on such a program will be autonomous, self-reliant, judge of oneself, an independent character. S/he will be his/her own master, as well as his/her own physician.

Although music and gymnastics are crucial in education for the guardians, specifically because both are for the welfare of the soul, nevertheless, one alone is not effective. In Plato's opinion, sports makes a person rough and quick-tempered while music alone makes a person too soft. Hence, there arises a need for striking a proper balance between these two elements: temper and love of wisdom.

Training in physical culture and arts is appropriate for all guardians who must be trained in good habits and right beliefs. But those who possess good memory, intelligence, humanity, grace, love for truth, and learning (*The Republic* 87a) qualify for training as philosopher rulers. These undergo training in dialectics, which lead them to apprehend the Forms, and eventually attain knowledge, a sharpness of mind, and a deep comprehensive understanding of reality(***Nous).***

3.3.4 Virtue in Philosophers

The preparatory education for studies in dialectics consists of mathematics, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and harmonics. The rationale for choosing mathematics as a preparatory study for dialectics or philosophical studies is simple. Mathematics is purely a rational exercise since it deals with numbers and abstract concepts. As such, mathematics demands concentration and the use of reason more than the senses. Therefore, mathematics being a rational exercise functions as a solid foundation for philosophical studies.

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state.

Actions and thinking are both based on one's ability to distinguish between unity from multiplicity. As we have shown in chapter 2, Plato argues that thinking and actions cannot be based on perceptions because they often mislead us. When we attempt to get beyond simple perceptions such as "this is a cup" and try to consider size, weight, width, we find ourselves tied by a number of contradictions. Qualities of particular things are relative. An object could have several aspects to it. It may feel soft and hard, smooth and rough, therefore confusing us in the process. It is in such situations that the science of numbers comes to our rescue by educating us on the meaning of unity and plurality. Mathematics, therefore, teaches us how all these qualities, though a plurality in so far as they appear in many phenomena, is yet in a sense one and thus helps us reach the truth. Thus, the importance of mathematics is that it leads us to understand the truth.

So, instead of looking at phenomena, Plato advises that philosophy students must learn to deal with abstract concepts by solving Arithmetic problems in the head. Instead of looking at shadows, they must look inward at ideas and learn to deal only with thoughts and meaning rather than with visible objects. Through this exercise, our student will eventually be liberated from the sensible world.[23]

The next stage will be training in geometry, the science of two-dimensional things. The subject matter of geometry is not bodies but hypothetical perfect planes. So, studies in geometry lead one to the discovery of the necessary truth about forms or universals such as lines, squares, triangles and circles. Plato is of the opinion that when one discovers geometrical truths, not from looking at pictures or diagrams, but solely from ideas, then one will have acquired knowledge which can be demonstrated, and which is unchangeable.[24]

In geometry, while the diagrams may change, but the geometrical truths, depending on the form will not change. So, the fundamental objective of the studies of geometry is to assist the philosopher student come closer to the abstract forms by proceeding from a study of two

23 According to Plato, the sensible world being a world of opinion should not preoccupy our philosopher student.

24 The knowledge of geometry has the same characteristics as the knowledge of forms. Both are steady and

dimensional figures to a study of those of three dimensions. So, studies in geometry are followed by studies in solid geometry. This is not a science of material bodies but of perfect hypothetical things in three dimensions. And this is followed by astronomy, a study of the movements of solid bodies, the heavenly bodies, the laws of motion, how perfect mathematical bodies would move in space. Plato insists that these studies must basically be undertaken by the intellect rather than by the senses, leading our philosopher candidate towards the unchanging eternal truths.

After studies of harmonics, whose objective is not the study of sounds, but specifically the relationship between sounds, the mathematical proportions and ratios that produce harmony, our philosopher candidate is ready for studies in dialectics. In Plato's view, dialectics is the power to think and express oneself logically. It proceeds with question and answer in search for the first principles and truth, which consist in apprehending forms. This is the last but most important step. So, complete liberation from the shadows of the cave is achieved through the study of dialectics; by which one gets to know and understand the forms. Thus, through dialectics, one examines one's hypotheses, assumptions and concepts, until one arrives at full and complete understanding of their nature.

Plato is of the opinions that since dialectical thinkers grasp Forms, it becomes possible for them to classify things in accordance with those Forms, and will eventually possess and discuss perfect truth. In this sense, only the person who knows the forms will also be able to see truth as a whole. Consequently, only individuals who complete this study qualify to be philosophers and rulers, men and women of knowledge and wisdom.

In summary, Plato's education system has three main stages and the objective of each stage is best understood in the light of his understanding of human nature; that the human soul is divided into three parts: desires, will and intellect. Infant education equips the child with good habits, helping the child master the inner chaos and adjusts himself and gain masterly over his immediate physical desires such as hunger and thirst. The second stage aims at the healthy development of body and soul. The child's feelings must be trained through the influence of the

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unchangeable.

arts and by the inculcation of sound beliefs as to which pleasures are to be sought, which to avoid. And this is done through music and gymnastics. The part of the soul concerned is the spirit, which includes feelings. The third stage is the high education of the philosopher-king and it is mainly concerned with developing the intellect/reason, the superior part of the soul. This is crucial because it aims at, knowledge, wisdom since the organization of the state must be based on it. So, the object of this knowledge is Form, apprehended only through dialectics. The real virtue means concord between character and reason that the success of the state depends on the rulers possessing the same wisdom of the philosopher trained in *TheRepublic*.

The philosophers, being dialecticians, have knowledge of Forms. And since virtue is knowledge, therefore, philosophers are virtuous and qualify to instruct others in virtue. Additionally, having knowledge and virtue, means that philosophers are the right individuals to fight ignorance and be leaders in society. Since Plato claims that those who have knowledge cannot err, therefore philosophers have already achieved moral and intellectual liberation since they have an enlightened sense of morality plus knowledge that can dispel ignorance. Nevertheless, the analysis of the training of philosophers has not captured or articulated explicitly how moral and intellectual liberation takes place. This is the task of the succeeding section.

3.4 Virtue as a Force for Intellectual and Moral Liberation

Throughout our exposition and analysis of Plato's understanding of virtue, it has become clear that the conviction that virtue is knowledge and that one errs for lack of knowledge remain with Plato to the end. And this section endeavours to elucidate how moral liberation is rooted in knowledge and in the power of rational reasoning (*Nous)*. *Nous* therefore, has the following three basic aspects: metaphysical, logical and psychological.

The type of knowledge, which Plato thinks will liberate us from wickedness, is founded in*Nous*, which is a Greek term meaning mind, intellect or the faculty of reason. It is also considered to be the most superior type of thinking the kind attributed to God. It also means the faculty of intellectual intuition, realized when someone comprehends definitions, concepts and anything else that is grasped at once.

And as shown in chapter 2, Plato insists that the object of *Nous* is Form. So to successfully unveil Plato's understanding of *Nous*, let us first isolate the elements of Plato's philosophy, which do not constitute *Nous*.

In chapter 2 we have already unveiled that *Nous* is not technical knowledge. The principle differences being that technical knowledge can be abused while *Nous*, i.e., virtue in Plato's view must deliver us from wrong doing. Thus in *Laches*, we are told that a good general must possess both the techniques of warfare and the virtues of courage. A person, of course, may be able to overcome fear if s/he possesses "right belief". But this in turn depends on the knowledge of the real philosopher rulers who have the expertise to identify right belief, and later on transmit it to the other classes.

The *Republic* (475d) makes it clear that *Nous* is not wisdom in the sense of an indiscriminate desire to know things, which only lead to acquiring a large uncoordinated list of information. Additionally, for Plato, wisdom does not consist in knowing particular things, nor is it cleverness divorced from a standard of ultimate ethical values. Mere cleverness, in Plato's opinion, is a state of ignorance due to the dimness of the mind, failing in its role of controlling the passions or the passions rejecting orders from reason. Therefore, *Nous* is a great deal more than intelligence.

Plato is insistent on the importance of harmony in the soul. Without harmony in the soul, no brains can yield the wisdom that is virtue. Hence, those who use their brains for private profit are therefore not wise men but crooks. In brief, *Nous* that is wisdom is not technical knowledge, nor indiscriminate desire to know, nor mere cleverness. A firm comprehension of *Nous* consists of being aware of the following three principal aspects: (a) the metaphysical, (b) the logical aspect (c) and the psychological (Grube, 1926: p254)). The metaphysical offers the object or contents of *Nous*; the logical is the method, which reason uses in seeking knowledge and truth. The psychological is *Nous*' psychic process, which is concerned with processes and phenomena that seems to be outside physical or natural law and normally take place in moments of relaxation. Such processes are what we call insight and intuition (Lonergan, 1992: p29).

Regarding the metaphysical aspects on *Nous*, obviously it is the object of knowledge which Plato has named Form.[25] Such knowledge, according to Plato, includes not only an understanding of truth, of the nature of the world, but also of the moral realities in it, i.e., of moral norms, values, and customs, which people live by in society. *Nous* includes a sense of true moral and intellectual values, knowledge of good and evil. While technical knowledge tells us only how to do something, a person with *Nous* also knows why and when it should be done. Hence, in Plato's view, this is the domain of the philosopher due to her/his knowledge of the eternal Forms, which includes knowledge of the laws of nature, of the way the eternal realities function. In brief, the object of *Nous* is Form, which is real, changeless, eternal, and knowable only through reason.

From the logical perspective, *Nous* as a method is scientific which includes both induction and deduction. In seeking knowledge and understanding through logic, one can begin from the particular to the universal, or from the universal to the particular, then investigate the evidence, make a hypothesis and examine its consequences; in the process ensuring that no assumption clashes with facts. Then one examines the new hypothesis, itself and seeks to account for it along with others by more fundamental hypothesis of more universal application. Any hypothesis that does not fit the facts, on the one hand, and the higher truth, on the other, must certainly be discarded (Grube, 1928: p256). So, the argument that establishes knowledge, which is *Nous*, must be consistent, sound and valid.

Dialectics[26] is a philosophical method and it operates differently from scientific methods. While science starts from one or more axioms, and is not concerned to go behind them, on the contrary, Philosophy must go beyond these fundamental axioms. It tests the axioms in the light of further understanding of higher truths and never pause until it reaches one supreme truth, which can relate to and eventually explain everything. For example, a definition of a boat should not only fit one particular boat, but also cover all boats in the world.

Plato's dialectics is basically synthetic for it gathers all particulars under one Form. It comprehends the relations between Forms, classifies them accordingly by putting them in

25 This has been exposed and discussed in chapter 2

categories. The success of such an exercise lies in identifying some common quality, some Form which justifies its members being put together. Hence, the Forms being to Plato, reality, the Forms are fundamental to the success of the method and *Nous*.

The scientific and philosophical methods are two sides of the same coin i.e., they complement each one. So a comprehensive grasp of reality consists of both scientific and philosophical truths. For truths of science is simply a part of the whole truth. It could be naïve for a scientist to claim that philosophical truths are sheer nonsense for philosophical discourse must take into account the truths of science. Thus, the final truth is a combination of the findings of science and philosophy. Briefly, scientific methods and philosophical methods are complementary.

The psychological process[27], though vague and metaphorical, offers us a certain perspective of *Nous*. We may call it intuition, the immediate grasp of issues resulting from culmination of intellectual research or a flash of insight[28] that is experienced after a thorough study of a particular subject (Lonergan, 1992: p28).

A universal concept serves as a good example of a product of insight. However, theperception and abstraction of the universal does not necessarily follow from the amount of evidence collected. We can for example, gather all the elephants in the world into one park but such an exercise will not in itself yield a definition of an elephant. To derive a universal concept, we must study the elephants, identify and abstract their common properties. In this case, there is a leap of the mind from the particular to the universal, to the essence of things under investigation. This is the moment of insight, when an individual conceives and perceives an idea i.e., the moment an individual acquires an understanding of the nature of things in a flash (Lonergan, 1992: p29).

Intuition, therefore according to Plato, comes only to those who have been trained in dialectics. It is the grasping of the mind of the Forms (universal and with it a knowledge of ultimate moral

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26 See above on training of philosophers

27 In *The Republic* Plato employs metaphors like 'light' and 'sun'.

28 Bernard Lonergan, a Canadian philosopher, in his book ***Insight*** explains very well the nature of insight

values). It is the power to think clearly and logically and establish universal relations in the phenomenal world. Understood in thissense, *Nous* is the faculty of leaping to right conclusions based on knowledge of the facts available.

If a mind can leap to a right conclusion, what then can stop it from leaping to undesirable conclusion due to oversight? Thus, the mind is capable of insight as well as oversight. Due to oversight, the mind is capable of leaping to wrong conclusions. For example, the cases of racism, apartheid, nepotism, tribalism, are consequences of certain pathologies of the spirit/mind, which deprive the mind of the freedom necessary to look at issues from the right and holistic perspectives. Such disabilities of the mind result in horrible social, political and economic consequences.

Take, for instance, the case of Rwanda where Tutsis and Hutus are both incapable of transcending their own being and conceive and perceive that despite their physical and cultural differences, they all actually partake in the form of humanity. As such, they have more similarities than differences. Being all of them human, Hutus and Tutsis are called to treat and accord each other human respect and dignity.

The Rwanda case clearly suggests that the psychic process is vulnerable to blind spots that can prevent it achieve the desirable results. Prejudices and biases constitute the main blind spots that can obstruct insight and intuition from occurring. The same Prejudices and biases constitute some of the pathologies and blind spots that interfere with the proper functioning of the mind, and thus obstructing insight and intuition from occurring (Lonergan, 1992: p244260).

While a prejudiced mind can only look at issues from a narrow perspective, on the contrary, a liberated mind is flexible, hence capable of viewing issues from a broader perspective. Thus, a free mind is able to take into consideration all the questions that arise in the process of investigation. Therefore, for successful and productive endeavours of the psychic process, the mind must be rid of all the prejudice, biases and pathologies that obstruct its proper functioning.

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and how it occurs, that the final insight is an accumulation of various insights.

Only then can it attain conversion, a deep understanding of reality. In summary, *Nous* i.e., intellect and knowledge, has Form as its content, logic and dialectics as its scientific and philosophical methods, and insight and intuition as its psychic processes.

The big question, which we may now pose, is whether such knowledge prevents an individual from doing wrong? Plato's answer to this question is in his conception of education as studied above. Moral liberation is possible only if our emotions are properly trained, our passions and intellect redirected and dedicated in pursuit of the truth; and if we have knowledge of real values, of what constitute the good and truth, the purpose of the world. This is possible only to individuals trained in dialectics, hence living above petty interests in perpetual adoration of supreme truth. Otherwise we never have in us the required motivation and force to do right. Plato's education should be understood as a process of conversion and transformation of the mind leading to a total liberation of the individual and society.

In summary, a deep comprehension of reality that lead to moral and intellectual liberation has form as its content, dialectics as its method of investigation, insight and intuition as its psychic process. And this is what Plato means by the assertion that virtue is knowledge and that an individual who is armed with knowledge is liberated from sin.

The claim that knowledge can liberate individuals from wrong doing, implied by Plato's claim that virtue is knowledge, raises issues related to the metaphysical problem of freewill and determinism. If moral activity originates from the reason/knowledge, hence the will in such a case is not free to will and do the contrary or in accordance with reason. But if moral activity originates from the will then knowledge does not guarantee virtue, the fact that if you know you cannot err, the reality that knowledge liberates us from wrong doing.

Taking into consideration Plato's program for infant education where children are being drilled in good dispositions and habits, together with training in dialectics suggest that Plato holds that free will is compatible with determinism. Otherwise, the philosopher candidates who had also received Plato's training in good habits would not attain intellectual liberation through the study of

dialectics. While infant education leads to conditioning of the child's behaviour and conduct, philosophical studies open up the individuals to critical thinking. Hence, in this case, determinism and free will, both implied in Plato's education and philosophy, are compatible.

However, the question of determinism, though interesting and appealing, it falls slightly outside the scope of this paper. So, we will reserve it as a possible topic of future research. Of course Plato's idea of *Nous* though plausible, unfortunately, is dogged by two other major problems. The first problem is that the content or object of knowledge is problematic since one wonders how knowledge of eternal and unchanging Forms can be translated and benefit dynamic societies. Secondly, holding the view that virtue is knowledge has implications regarding both individuals and society. While the first problem will be examined in chapter 4, the ~~third~~ 2nd one will be exposed at length immediately in the proceeding section.

3.5 Virtue is Knowledge-Implications

The evolution of Plato's conviction that virtue is knowledge has been traced and exposed in chapter 3 where we have also analysed Plato's education system and eventually demonstrated that virtue is founded on reason and knowledge. In chapter 2, we have identified that Form is the object of knowledge, which is virtue. But claiming that virtue is knowledge has serious implications regarding how individuals should manage their moral activities and how best society should be organized, later on, managed. The principal challenge is that not everyone has the mental aptitude for knowledge, wisdom and philosophy; therefore not everyone is a subject of virtue. Furthermore, one wonders how harmony can be achieved in society where others citizens are subjects of virtue while others are not. The following paragraphs analyze the above problem in detail in order to establish how Plato responds to these implications.

3.5. 1 Virtue in the Individual

In his theory of virtue, Plato insistently argues that the basic moral elements resist change, and consequently, that they establish harmony as well. In his conception of justice, Plato holds the conviction that when parts of the whole operate according to design or *telos*, conflicts and clashes cannot arise. When everyone and everything performs their naturally designed tasks, no

conflict can arise. Since Plato's analysis of virtue is closely linked with his understanding of human nature, it is a matter of necessity therefore to expose his interpretation of the basic elements of human nature.

It is Plato's conviction that a person is essentially composed of body and soul, or matter and spirit. The body as a whole is made up of the head, chest and abdomen; the soul consists of reason, will and appetites.[29] The soul as a non-material entity shows its characteristic mainly in its ability to reason, to determine the results of human actions, and, above all, to guide all the operations of the body. In other words, Plato maintains that the activities of the body are guided by reason, which is a cardinal aspect of the soul.

Further, Plato asserts that for every part of the body, there is a naturally designed correspondent faculty of the soul: reason resides in the head; the will resides in the chest or heart, and appetite in the abdomen or loins. For instance, the heart, which largely deals with the emotional aspect of human nature, is thought to accommodate all emotions, the will, and all types of aspirations or ambitions with courage. In the abdomen, Plato accommodates all human appetites, desires, impulses and instincts, and indeed the seat of abdomen is nothing but the loins, sensationally the reservoir of sexual energy (*The Republic* 435-439d). Since reason is situated in the head, Plato thinks that the head caters for reason, understanding, imagination and memory. Therefore, the principal duty of reason is to facilitate the operations of mental faculties, that is, to facilitate decision-making, thinking, grasping realities, and to guide physical activities. Realizing the importance of reason, Plato is convinced that, with the aid of thinking and understanding, it is possible to explain how perpetual change can be arrested, and eventually identify the stable base that supports the ever-changing realities. And since reason can grasp the essence of things, then ultimately the faculty of reason and understanding, must be seat of knowledge, wisdom and morality.

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29 The three elements of the soul correspond to the classes in the state, which also necessitates the three

For Plato, the virtues of man are justice, courage, temperance, and wisdom, and that morality itself is not simply a matter of emotions and desires,[30] but of rational knowledge. To establish enduring moral values and moral norms, a person must engage in rational and critical thinking, an intellectual endeavour which leads to the acquisition of knowledge, the essence of things or, better still, the forms.

According to Plato, virtue in an individual consists of relationships and functions of the three basic elements of the soul: reason, will and appetite. Each element has its own specific function, and the duty of the faculty of reason is to direct and control the activities of the will and appetite, so that the emotions and desires of a person operate in accordance with the dictates of reason. In virtuous person, who is a morally good character, the elements of the soul are in their right places, each playing its natural allotted function. Such a good person is said to possess virtue or "arete," perfectly fulfilling one's function as a rational being,

In explaining the soul[31] Plato uses an analogy of the driver of a chariot drawn by two horses (*Phaedrus* 264). The charioteer is likened to reason, whose function is to direct the soul, and the two horses are likened to the will and the appetite. The will does what the charioteer directs, but the appetite often pulls in the opposite direction, and so it is the duty of reason to restrain and curb appetite. In a disordered person, the elements of the soul are in wrong places, the appetites are out of control and they drag the whole person in unwanted directions. The result is the inevitable chaos and moral decay, sickness of the whole person. However, the person who has been trained, in Plato's education system, is directed by reason and knowledge, the appetites are curbed. Such a person focuses on the Good, the source of knowledge, Being and Existence; evil is never his/her object. For Plato, the mastery over the appetite and the will consequently is the origin of the virtues of wisdom, justice, courage and temperance. So armed with knowledge, a person is liberated from error.

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stages in Plato's education program.

30 Contrary to Plato, Hume claims that morality is founded on feelings, emotions and not reason.

31 The term soul derives from a Greek word "psyche" which means the principle of life i.e., what makes living things alive, a basic element that constitutes human life. The Greeks believed that a human being is made of body and soul.

Of course, we can challenge Plato that not all intelligent and educated people are virtuous characters. Some individuals have the education but they are not morally upright. This suggests that education and knowledge does not necessary guarantee virtue. To this problem, Plato would certainly point out that such individuals did not receive the right education and moral orientation as infants and adolescents.

By insisting that knowledge liberate us from wrong doing, Plato implies that source of morally good action is the intellect and not passions, feelings nor emotions and that refined morality is for those who possess refined knowledge. In other words for Plato, the seat of morality is the intellect and not the will. And since reason is not present in individual persons in equal proportions, consequently virtue also cannot be present to all people in the same degree. And additionally, since knowledge can only be acquired through reason, thus those with more reason will have a more refined sense of virtue than those who possess less reason. This is apparent in Plato's state where people fall in three classes depending on their capacity to reason, where the quality of the intellect and character are decisive. So reason and virtue are crucial because they determine the class and roles of individuals in society

3.5.2 Virtues and Society

According to Plato, political state is structured like a human soul. Virtue in an individual is linked to social virtue and morality since the soul is a miniature state or a model of state organization. Just as the correct functioning of the elements of the soul ensures the correct functioning of the person, the correct functioning of the organs of the state ensures an ordered or harmonious state. This analogy is further explicated immediately below.

In other words, the three elements that constitute a human soul correspond to the three elements that make up a state. The state consists of three classes of citizens: rulers, auxiliaries, and producers. Rulers guide the state; producers (or ordinary citizens) are engaged in manufacturing and commerce, and auxiliaries (police and army) maintain peace, calm and order in the state. In the analogy with the soul, the rulers correspond to reason; auxiliaries to the will; and the producers to the appetite.

Virtue in the state consists in well-ordered relationships amongst the three classes; each one sticking to his/her nature's allotted function; producers shouldproduce and not rule, auxiliaries should protect but not rule and guardian should rule because they have knowledge of the Good. Virtue means good coordination among the classes, and no stepping on one another's feet. The rulers should guide the appetites and the will of the other classes to have a perfectly run state. But Evil comes in when there is conflict among the classes, causing moral decay, as when auxiliaries use force and take over the organs of the state, say in a*coup d'etat*.

Likewise, social justice arises from the relation of the elements of the soul, and analogically also from the relation of the three classes in the state. Justice means each element dedicating itself to a function for which it is naturally best fitted. Such a conception of justice therefore can be studied both on a micro-scale, in the individual, and on a macro-scale in a state (*The Republic* 368e).

In this sense, the characteristics of cities derive from the human nature that constitutes them. The three parts of the soul correspond to three classes in the state. Desires, restlessness and inquisitiveness are the characteristics of some people who are preoccupied with material quests. For Plato, such characters are producers and they dominate industry. The second category of people comprises individuals who are generally temples of feelings and courage, and they care little about what they fight for. They get their satisfaction in victory on the battle front; their source of pride is power rather than knowledge. Such characters constitute the armies and navies of the world. The last group of people takes delight in contemplation, understanding knowledge, and truth. Their pursuit is not power but knowledge and truth; these are the men of wisdom qualified for state leadership. As Plato correctly observes, wo/men of wisdom and knowledge most often are made to stand aside, unemployed, in the contemporary world. Wasted talent!

Plato advises that a perfect state should be organized systematically that, in the perfect state, the industrial forces should confine their activities to production and commerce and never ever assume positions of leadership. The military should confine itself to external defense of the state but never assume or aspire for positions in public office; only thoseendowed with knowledge,

reason, wisdom, and particularly philosophy should be entrusted with the craft of ruling. "Unguided by knowledge, the people are a multitude without order, like desires in disarray. The people need the guidance of philosophers as desires need the enlightenment of knowledge" (Durant, 1928:p30).

The most important virtue, in Plato's state is the virtue of justice. Justice is natural and consists in attending to the business for which one is naturally and specifically gifted. So,justice is not in the interest of the stronger as Thrasymachus thinks (*TheRepublic* 338-44): "Justice is the having and doing what is one's own"(*The Republic* 433). Each man shall get what is due to him, and shall perform the function for which he is by nature capable of performing. Thus a just man is a man in the right place, doing the best he can, and giving the full measure of what he receives. Such people would certainly form a harmonious society where there is no conflict due to individuals assuming, byforce, positions they are not by nature fitted for. So, in a society where justice reigns, every element is in its proper place, like the pieces in a perfect orchestra, harmoniously excelling at what they are fit to do. But, such co-ordination of components can be destroyed when individuals abandon their natural places, i.e., when soldiers become rulers, and businessmen statesmen. As a result, anarchy or disharmony sets in; joints of society decay; society disintegrates.

A society of just individuals would certainly be a highly harmonious and effective group, every part performing its function perfectly. But for individuals to perform their functions they need special training, first in self-control, otherwise they will be stepping on other person's toes; secondly, it is necessary that each individuals should know their role and rightful place in society, otherwise, the just person will rarely exist. Therefore, men must be trained in justice, and when they are just, they together form various organs of the state. Justice is when the organs of the state do their respective function. The duty of forming the just state and educating its members on justice is the sole responsibility of the philosopher-king. This individual has knowledge and *Nous*. He does not only know how to rule but he also knows why, where and when to do things (*The Republic* 473).

As pointed out in the introduction, Plato was antidemocratic because the democrats in Athens executed his mentor Socrates, a misfortune Plato attributes to theignorance of the executioners. Plato realizes that Democracy is incapable of ensuring that the wisest and the best rule the state. Democracy, whose leadership is open to all in society, paves way for clever but ignorant characters to assume public office. Understandably, Plato laments the contradiction. In simple matters, such as tailoring, we think that only a specially trained tailor will sew the best clothes. In the same way, when we are sick, for example, we seek the medical expertise of a well-trained physician. Yet, on contrary, when the whole nation is "sick and bed-ridden", the state does not seek the statesmanship of the wisest and the best of its citizenry but is content with the vicious and intellectually dim as its leaders. Plato's insight is that the goal of political philosophy is to devise a method for filtering away vicious individuals from assuming public office, preparing and selecting the best to statesmanship.

In this case, statesmanship is not for vendors in the streets and fishmongers in the market or for cobblers on shop verandas and roadsides. Rather, statesmanship is an advanced skill requiring rare talent and knowledge. It demands long preparation and experience. The producer should be content to work in trade and commerce; the soldier at the battlefront; if any ignorant individual makes the mistake of ruling then a terrible political disaster will befall the state. Hence, Plato insists that only a philosopher-king be qualified to govern a city-state:
Until philosophers are kings or kings and princes of this World have the spirit and power of philosophy, and wisdom and political leadership meet in the same man, cities will never cease from ill or the human race cease from becoming sick (The Republic 473).

In other words, for Plato, a philosopher is a person who has gone through special training in dialectics to acquaint him/herself with the forms. Since s/he alone has the requisite qualification and education, s/he alone has knowledge and genuinely founded moral and political viewsSuch a person should shoulder the responsibility of founding a city and govern it, ideally a city where people can learn to be just and virtuous. If the city is to be stable then it must be a true copy of the divine form of the state where there is no swapping positions and functions, everyone concentrating on what s/he is best fitted to do.

In summary, in this chapter, we have traced the evolution of Plato's conviction that virtue is knowledge and also demonstrated how knowledge can liberate us from immorality. So the knowledge that is virtue is of Forms. Additionally, this is the type of knowledge that is meant to dispel ignorance and install enlightenment specifically because it is founded on reason. And the cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance and justice constitute such knowledge.

To dispel ignorance and install virtue in individuals and society, education is necessary and should be compulsory. Hence Plato's three phases of education: infant education, training of guardians, and studies in dialectics. Those who study dialectics can acquire knowledge hence be virtuous based on reason and knowledge. The rest can only be virtuous based on belief. In this sense, wisdom is exclusively a virtue for dialecticians' (philosophers) since it can only be acquired through knowledge and not belief. Additionally, intellectual enlightenment and moral liberation is also exclusively for dialecticians since only them have knowledge. Virtue in the individual consists in reason controlling the will and appetites. In a virtuous person therefore, the three elements that constitutes human nature are in their right places. And in society, virtue consists in each person sticking and doing what s/he is naturally good at. A person whose principle natural talent is reason should form and govern or rule society and take charge of education. This is the only effective method of combating ignorance.

As a matter of fact, knowledge of the Forms puts the rulers in a position to govern society effectively. Governance and morality are practical matters. Since it is quite evident that for Plato, knowledge is crucial for virtue, morality and governance, it follows therefore that knowledge of Forms must be practical. This, as we are going to show in the following chapter, is actually not the case with Plato's conception of knowledge. While we agree with Plato that ignorance is a menace to society, and hence it should be fought at all costs, it should be pointed out, however that the means employed in an endeavour of this nature should be appropriate.

Of course we concur with Plato that education and knowledge is crucial for human existence i.e., for virtue, social and political organization, and that ignorance and its correspondent evils should be conquered and eliminated from the earth. Nevertheless, our opinion is that Plato's conception

of reality, with its dualistic characteristics is certainly problematic since it also affects the type of knowledge that can dispel ignorance. So, our criticism will center on Plato's ideas of reason and the Theory of Forms since these constitutes the foundation of Plato's theory of knowledge and morality.

4. Critical Analysis of Plato's Conception of virtue

This study set out to demonstrate that the entire philosophy of Plato is rooted in his conviction that ignorance (the absence of true knowledge due to the dimness of the mind and lack of proper education) endangers human existence; hence it is detrimental to individuals and society. And as such, ignorance must be fought and eliminated from our society. For Plato, virtue is knowledge, which is of eternal realities, Forms. And since the Forms are unchangeable, hence its knowledge is also stable and unchanging. This, according to Plato's opinion, is the knowledge that can liberate us from ignorance and immorality. Briefly, for Plato, knowledge belongs to the faculty of reason. It is of absolute unchangeable reality i.e., forms, known only through reason.

Of course, Plato's philosophical views have been heavily appraised and criticized over the centuries. Paul Friedlander (1882-1968)[32] argues that Plato's written works and his active participation in politics indicates or confirms that politics was indeed Plato's main preoccupation. Fiedlander tenders the *Laws* and *The Republic* as evidence to support his claim that Plato was from the beginning preoccupied with politics (Fiedlander, 1959: p10). Our view is that Fiedlander's interpretation is erroneous.

While it is true that Plato was destined for a political career, nevertheless, his political ambition and interest were thwarted by the immoral manner in which the Athens leaders disposed of Socrates on false charges, an experience which marked the turning point of Plato's interest from active politics. From the death of Socrates, Plato realized that politics without moral considerations is a dirty game for it endangers humanity. From then onwards, he dedicated his philosophical endeavours to put morality at the heart of the social and political organization, hence *The Republic* and the *Laws*. The Republic demonstrates how society through education and knowledge can become morally upright. So moral excellence is the main preoccupation of Plato and not politics.

32 Paul Friedland was born in Berlin and received his doctorate in classics from the University of Berlin. He researched and wrote extensively on Plato.

The main critique of Plato is Aristotle[33] (384-322 B.C). He regards the theory of Forms as far-fetched, impractical and useless for it fails to explain the nature of things. Although Aristotle's reservations of Plato metaphysical ideas are justified in many ways as we are going to show in the following paragraphs, nevertheless, we are of the view that Aristotle's objections are not addressed to Plato's principle conviction that ignorance is detrimental to humanity. In fact, as we are going to show in the following paragraphs, Aristotle's queries are addressed to the meansand not the end of Plato's philosophical endeavours. Plato conceived the theories of Forms, knowledge, justice not simply as an intellectual exercise, but for a purpose which was to justify the type of education, knowledge, social and political organization that can liberate us from immorality.

Of course the theory of Forms constitute the core of Plato's philosophy. He needs it to explain the nature of virtue, justice, knowledge, the nature of things, and the structure of the state. He employs it to support and justify his claim that only the force of reason and knowledge should form and rule the perfect state; that only men of knowledge should take charge of education on virtue and justice in the state. More importantly, that Form is the object of knowledge of virtue or *Nous*. Thus knowledge is crucial because it is necessary both for virtue and justice. Our critique, therefore, will dwell firstly on Plato's method of education, precisely the idea that the function of reason consists in recollection of the forms. Secondly we will critique Plato's theory of Forms in detail, mainly the view that form is the object and content of virtue. Thirdly, we will examine Plato's assertion that knowledge of the unchangeable realities is genuine and can guide us in practical matters.

4.1 Recollection

According to Plato's doctrine of recollection, knowledge of virtue and justice is innate. The soul acquired it in its previous existence, where it was in contact with the forms *(Meno*80e, *Phaedo* 77e-77d). The basis of the doctrine of recollection is the belief in the rebirth of the soul (*Meno* 81a-e). And the validity of the doctrine of recollection rests on the belief that the soul pre-exists

33 Aristotle was a Greek philosopher, born in Stagira, the son of court physician to the king of Macedonia. At the age of 17,he entered Plato's Academy in Athens where he remained, first as a student, then as a teacher, for over 20 years.

the body (*Phaedo* 91e-92). But, even if the soul pre-exists the body, there is no guarantee that the soul learned everything in its pre-existence. Furthermore, how does one assess the amount of knowledge one's soul acquired in its previous life? Strangely, Plato does not take these questions into considerations. Moreover, Plato employs myth and metaphor to express his philosophical views and this poses problems of interpretation. Nevertheless, by the doctrine of recollection, Plato draws a very important point regarding methodology: how is knowledge acquired.

Recollection involves the faculty of reason. To recall or to remember is thinking. Thinking is not a passive process for it requires a lot of effort. Thus the acquisition of knowledge through reason is not just a matter of absorbing information like a passive sponge. Since accordng to Plato, virtue is knowledge, virtue therefore cannot impose itself on people. Individuals who would like to be virtuous must use personal initiative and intelligence to acquire a good character. In this sense, Plato is right in his criticism of the sophist method of education in general, and particularly of Protagoras of Abdera himself.

Protagoras, a self-professed teacher of virtue, claims that the youth associated with and taught by him automatically became better men (*Protagoras*318d). Through association and lectures, the youth of Athens could and did become better men in the eyes of the sophist sage. Yet, teaching by association does not necessarily make our youth virtuous, Plato contends. Actually, there are cases of the most righteous upright parents whose children are morally bankrupt. Preaching to them moral truths is not satisfactory. The preacher must appeal to reason so that gradually his/her audience may begin to understand and develop a personal rationale for virtue rather than behaving in conformity with culture and traditional dictates uncritically like robots. Autonomy presupposes a developed or educated mind and therefore moral education should also stimulate critical thinking in students. Thus "A person is not made a thinker by merely imparting of information but by stimulating in him the power and ambition to think for himself." (A.E. Taylor, 1963: p136).

Morality and leading a moral life involves values, rules, habits and many other dispositions. And these constitute the normative content of moral education, meaning that education is responsible

for the transmission of moral values and beliefs. By implication therefore, a morally educated person will both in thought and action behave in normative terms. But behaving in normative terms does not reduce such a person to a robot, living on dogmas uncritically. Others will certainly appraise the actions of an educated person as right or wrong, good or bad, but much more, an educated individual should be willing and prepared to appraise his/her own actions as well as those of others.

The dangers of moral education which emphasizes on living by following rules or habits will not guarantee that students of moral education are both virtuous and aware, in a reflective sense that moral judgements and decisions are products of serious rational enquiry. Thus, a morally educated person is an individual who is capable of distinguishing between situations where acting out of conformity with established rules, customs and habits is indeed appropriate, and those where more reflective and constructive deliberation is required. Therefore, Plato is right in suggesting that moral education should empower students to think critically about moral issues, and steer them to moral practice, which is reflective, reasonable and self-corrective rather than dogmatic (Philip.C: 1999: p169).

The main objective of education is to prepare individuals for their future roles and also to assist them attain independence of mind. And if we have to be consistent, the goal of Plato's education in *The Republic* is to train thinkers, i.e., philosophers, individuals, capable of recollection. But recollection implies that an individual would have to think for and by himself so that two individuals are discouraged from comparing notes (or knowledge) acquired through recollection. And this certainly contradicts the spirit of philosophy; the spirit of openness to one's and other people's views.

Furthermore, the concept of recollection contradicts Plato's other assertion that philosophy is dialectic i.e., that philosophy concerns itself with discovering and testing truth through discussions and logical arguments. Philosophical thinking is not and should not be a closed and solitary exercise. It is a fact that individuals should think for themselves but never by themselves. They should think with others and thus get their ideas tested in the process. And this criticism

can equally be leveled at the relativism propagated by Protagoras who contradicts himself by claiming that he is a teacher, and simultaneously that in nature 'man is the measure of all things'. If a man is the measure of everything, knowledge and truth become only matters of personal opinion then truth becomes relative, subjective; consequently, everyone becomes his own teacher and judge. The contradiction pre-empts the role of Protagoras who sets himself up to teach others virtue when each one is an already omniscient and self-sufficient.

In short, Plato is certainly right that the sophist way of teachingmoral knowledge is ineffective for it simply breeds passive sponges, non-critical and deadly conservative minds. Preaching and teaching by association without stimulating thought is a poor method of education mainly because it leaves reason undeveloped. Thus we need a method of inquiry by which we can impart knowledge of virtue and justice to our students and at the same time teach them to think for themselves by getting their views tested through constructive criticism. At this juncture, let us now examine Plato's theory of Forms, the objects of both recollection and knowledge.

4.2 Relationship of Forms and Particulars

According to Plato's Theory of Forms, each virtue, i.e. courage, justice, and wisdom, has two aspects to it: there is a Form and its particular copy. The Form is real and exists independently of mind while particulars are images or copies of forms. The particulars belong to the sensible world and Forms to the intelligible world, which can only be grasped by reason.

Take, for instance, the virtue of justice; each particular case of justice, Plato claims, is simply a copy of the Form of justice. The particulars participate in the Forms implying that the particulars are not the forms. There is a problem here regarding the relationship between the world of Forms and the world of sensible particulars. By claiming that sensible things participate in the Forms, Plato divides the world into two: the sensible and the intelligible. There are consequently also two types of objects corresponding to theseworlds: objects of sense and of intellect.

Plato claims that objects of sense are never stable but always changing, are not real but mere copies of the Forms. Actually, Plato's other works offer more evidence regarding the dualism

implicit in his theory of Forms. In the *Phaedo*, Plato teaches that the soul, before its union with the body, existed in a transcendental realm where it acquired knowledge of the Forms (*Phaedo* 102). In *Meno*, he claims there is no teaching but recollection, implying that the process of knowledge in this world consists in remembering the Forms. In*The Republic (*596a 6-7ef 507ab) he claims that each class of visible things, for instance; cats, dogs, has a corresponding Form. The Forms are models of particulars, which are imperfect copies, or representations of the Forms. As models, the Forms cannot exist in the particulars and this also implies that the Forms exist independently from the sensible particulars. Definitely, Plato has to explain the relationship between the two worlds: how the sensible participate in the Forms, and how the Forms relate to each other. So far, the fact is that Plato has created a chasm between the particulars and the universals.

Parmenides (510 B.C) who denied change and asserted that reality in one influenced Plato. And the *Parmenides*(126a-135c) shows that Plato is aware of the problem triggered by his claim that the sensible things partake of the Forms, and so have a kind of secondary reality. But any argument that attempts to affirm or negate the hypothesis that things are a unity, implied by the theory of Forms violates the principle of contradiction. The theory of Forms suggests that sensible things owe their attributes to their participation in their parent Form. And the *Parmenides* shows that holding that particulars participate in forms leads to logically absurd conclusions.

For instance, if attributes of a parent Form are present in several things, either the whole of the Form is present in each thing or only a fraction of the Form is present in each thing. But if the form is present in each thing, then the parent form is outside itself, contrary to the thesis that the Form is a unity. Furthermore, if only a fraction of the parent Form is present in each thing, then the parent Form is divisible (*Parmenides* 131a-e). Thus, we have an apparent *reductio ad absurdum*[34] of the hypothesis of participation. Consequently, the hypothesis that Form constitutes a unity is self-refuting.

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34 Zeno of Elea(born 490 B.C) used such paradoxes to refute the Pythagorean hypotheses of plurality and

The theory of Forms creates more problems than it solves. By insisting that he content of virtue is Form, which is unchangeable, implies that moral values and norms that we live by must be static. Additionally, it also implies that society and culture in which these values are lived must also be static. Otherwise, it is inconceivable to maintain static values in a society and culture that is dynamic. Therefore we expect that moral values and norms should certainly be changing as society and culture evolve. In short, fossilized values are obsolete in a dynamic social context. The knowledge deriving from them is remote, far fetched, and impractical.

Actually, the Forms are supposed to offer an explanation for the particulars, multiplicity and variety in existence. Yet, Plato simply posits another multitude of things (Forms) in another world. As such, the Theory of Forms, unfortunately, fails to explain the reality of this world, which is ever changing; worse still; the terms "participation" and "sharing" do not reveal much about the essential and exact relation between the particulars and the Forms. Furthermore, the Forms are inaccessible to social man since the essence of virtue is posited outside human society.

Plato indeed errs by claiming that the Forms are the cause of the essence of things, while Plato separates the Forms from the particular things of which they are the essence (*Metaphysics*, Book 4). In fact, the forms do not help us in anyway nor are they of use when it comes to explaining the movements of things. How do the Forms, for example, explain the phenomena of birthand death? Since the Forms are themselves eternal, and unchangeable, they cannot cause change and motion in sensible things? (*Aristotle Metaphysics* 991a).

Socrates, Plato's mentor concerned himself with ethics: the science of man. He sought knowledge of virtue and universal definitions. For example, he could ask what "piety" is and insist that a definition of "piety" should be universally applicable to all particular cases of piety (*Euthyphro* 5b-d). The universal definition, in Plato also must be a definition of what he calls Forms. But Socrates did not in any way make the universals or definitions exist apart. He sought universal definitions and inductive arguments for a specific purpose: he was seeking syllogism (*Aristotle Metaphysics* 1078b).

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motion.

In the early Platonic dialogues, Plato makes Socrates construct inductive arguments, which infer universal definitions from observed particulars. Any "Universal" is a common noun, a name applicable to all members of a class of things. For example: animal, man, books, tree, are all universals, subjective notions and not tangibly objective entities. They are *nomina* (names). All that exists outside us is a world of individual and specific objects, not of genuine and universal things. Men truly exist but man in general or universal man does not exist except in thought. A universal, therefore, is a mental abstraction, not an external presence or reality. Thus, Plato's Forms are universals, mental abstraction and not physical entities.

Plato was overwhelmed and shocked by moral decay in Athens, which he attributed to changing values, lack of knowledge and proper political leadership. Plato's shock explains his impulse and determination to arrest change and prevent social and moral decay by positing unchanging objects of knowledge into the world of eternal realities, known only through reason. But such knowledge is useless and unrelated to real practical moral problems. It is too remote, static and sterile to dynamic cultures whose values are constantly changing.

Socrates' insight was that virtue is knowledge in the sense that critical thinking and knowledge are crucial in moral activity. It is only true knowledge that can guide us to distinguish the right from the wrong. While this study is in total agreement with Platothat ignorance is detrimental to individuals and society, and that moral education and knowledge are crucial for virtue. But we do not live in static society, regulated by fossilized norms and values in order to be virtuous. Moral education and knowledge must be practical and relevant, appropriate for a changing culture and society.

Morality presupposes concrete social reality, culture, tradition, and values, which are all dynamic. The fact that moral values and beliefs are subject to change, implies that moral knowledge is changeable hence can be out dated. Running a society on out dated knowledge means that such a society is retrogressive and marching out of step with reality on the ground. So, to be effective and practical, operating in dynamic and changing society demands a constant

review of values, beliefs and knowledge. And this calls for an on going search and reflection of the beliefs and values, getting rid of outdated ones and adopting new ones in the process. Such an exercise can only be accomplished by a mind that is trained in critical thinking, hence capable of asking relevant questions and making bold decision.

Plato is right that philosophy can make a significant contribution towards improving our world, regarding peace, and harmony in the world, education, culture and morality for philosophy deals with enduring human concerns. Thus, a philosophical discourse is a deeply serious business and should never be personalized or pursued simply as an intellectual game.

One of the most crucial facts about morality, as pointed out above, is its concrete society reality. A moral agent does not emerge from a vacuum but from a given milieu i.e., from a specific social and traditional background. Furthermore every society lives guided by beliefs andvalues. And values and beliefs are actually embodied in society and tradition. But society, tradition and cultures evolve together with the moral values they embody. In other words, moral values are neither eternal nor static. Certain values, which proveuseful at a given time in history, may with the passing of time and changing circumstances, be out dated. And while traditions, values, cultures and knowledge are subject to change, what we are left with are the reasoning skills or philosophical resources necessary for identifying new values and transmitting them through education. While filling the mind with knowledge is important, but the reality is that knowledge goes stale, so that only the thinking skills of a trained mind retain life long usefulness Therefore, in addition to imparting knowledge of contemporary moral values and belief, it is imperative that education should provide tools with which our children can learn to think for themselves about moral issues. Therefore, Plato is indeed right that morality should be founded in critical thinking.

In summary, the preoccupation of western philosophy has been the search for an unquestionable foundation to validate claims to knowledge. And for Plato the Forms serve as such a foundation. But as demonstrated above such a search has proved illusory, unrealistic and contradictory to reality on the ground. In short, it is far from the case that there exists a single reality that can

account for everything else in the world. What we actually have are simply a multitude of knowledge-claims and beliefs. And this again calls for serious dialogue and critical investigation to establish which values and beliefs and knowledge claims are sensible, constructive, realistic and practical. And this exercise is only possible to a mind trained in critical enquiry. So, Plato is right that education, apart from imparting and transmitting moral knowledge, should train and arm students with reasoning skills, which they can employ in dealing with moral problems[35].

35 This has been exposed in details in chapter 3, section 3.5

5 Conclusion

This paper set out to demonstrate that the basic principle of Plato's philosophy is that ignorance is catastrophic to individuals and society as a whole. And as such ignorance should be fought at all fronts otherwise we risk living in an immoral world, with chaotic social and political organization. Plato's assertion that virtue is knowledge emphasizes the importance of reason and knowledge in morality, politics and social organization.

So, our analysis has successfully established that Plato, in his dialogues, maintains that the cardinal virtues of temperance, courage, justice, and wisdom constitute knowledge, which can liberate us from wickedness. Thus, virtue in infants consists in right habits and not knowledge, for the youth, it consists in right habits and in their ability to hold on to right belief and not knowledge. Only in philosophers does virtue consists in knowledge and wisdom. And since knowledge and wisdom can only be acquired through reason, the implication is that virtue in individuals consists in reason controlling the activities of the will and appetite. In the state, virtue consists in the powers of reason (i.e. philosopher-kings) governing the producers and auxiliaries. Harmony then is a result of the effective coordination of reason, will and appetite in an individual as well as in rulers, auxiliaries and producers in the state.

Harmony in the state depends on the virtue of justice which is defined as desert where every element in the individual as well as in the state should stick to the function for which it is best fitted; each element must dedicate itself to a function, which it is naturally talented to execute. Producers should do business, but not aspire to rule; soldiers should defend the state but not rule; philosopher-kings should rule because they have knowledge of virtue, i.e. justice, temperance, wisdom, courage. Defining justice as desert implies that leaders in society are not made but born. In other words, the qualities of leadership are in-born. Thus society should be organized in such away that individuals should realize their talents and potentials and intum, this demands education and knowledge.

For Plato, knowledge is of unchangeable entities i.e., Forms apprehended only by reason; implying that only philosophers, because they are endowed with reason, can acquire knowledge

thus qualify to rule or govern society and educate others on virtue. The rationale for Plato's prescription is that a blind person cannot lead others. Emphatically, reason is the only redemptive tool from immorality and its evil consequences. Unfortunately, this is not adequately supported by Plato's conception of reality due to its dualistic and static aspects, which posit the essence of virtue and knowledge in another world, outside its social context. This renders knowledge sterile and useless. Yet this apparent weakness in Plato's metaphysics does not undermine or discredit Plato's basic philosophical insight about the dangers of ignorance. The metaphysical theory should be understood as a means, which Plato conceived to solve the problem of ignorance. Of course Plato erred. He erred on the means and not the end. And the means can easily be rehabilitated as we have done towards the end of chapter 4.

Of course belief, values and knowledge are no absolute. We are living in dynamic societies with changing culture and values. And in such a situation, the best survival kit should consist of good reasoning skills to assist individuals exercise their autonomy in making critical moral judgement and avoid floating along with the tide of change without a solid moral base. Our children should therefore be well equipped with all the philosophical resources necessary to lead a virtuous life.

.Due to the limited scope of our study whose main focus is to identify and demonstrate that entire philosophy of Plato was aimed at combating ignorance in morality, social and political organization, the dissertation has, unavoidably, merely touched on Plato's conception of justice as desert i.e., every person sticking to the work they are best fitted for. In addition, on the crucial question of political leadership and organization; the problem of free will and determinism implied in Plato's conception of virtue, which are equally fertile areas of serious scholarly research, have not been given the full attention they deserve. These and many others will be the theses in our more advanced studies in the immediate near future.

Nevertheless, this study has achieved its primary objective, which is to show that Plato's philosophy is preoccupied with fighting ignorance, immorality and its concomitant social and political evils. At its best, the study has firmly established that for Plato, human beings should live in the light of virtue for "unexamined life is not worthy living".

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