

Plato's Theory of Forms

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Qu.1. A] Explain Plato's concept of the Forms.

B] Evaluate carefully Forms as a way of understanding the world.

Plato, Socrates' famous pupil, created the Theory of Forms. This essay will explore the ideas of Plato's theory, the strengths and weaknesses of his thoughts, and how they affect our understanding of the world.

The Theory of Forms states that everything has a Form- whether it is a chair, a bed, an animal etc; absolutely everything has a Form. Plato also states that 'Forms are perfection'.

Plato says there are four Forms for ethical values; these are Truth, Justice, Beauty, and Goodness. Plato believes there is a hierarchy of Forms, with the Form of Goodness being at the top.

Plato believes that True Knowledge comes from knowing the four values, and using them to achieve Ultimate Reality. The way to achieve True Knowledge is 'Only through the mind' according to Plato. You have to separate body and soul, and concentrate on mind, to accomplish Ultimate Reality.

Plato says we are born with the knowledge of Form, and through education, we recollect this knowledge. For example, we say 'that is a beautiful flower', but what is beauty? As we grow up, we are told what objects are beautiful; Plato states that we learn of Forms through experience and learning.

Plato uses the 'Analogy of the Cave' to explain his Theory. The sun in the analogy represents the Form of Goodness; it gives life to everything, and is the source of all. In Christianity, the Form of Goodness is God, as He is the creator and leader. Plato believes to become a true philosopher you must attain knowledge of Forms, and to accomplish true enlightenment you must have true awareness of the Form of Goodness.

Plato's 'Analogy of the Cave' also shows that Forms are in a world beyond shadows and beyond appearance, they are the truth within our souls. Saint- Exupery agrees with this by saying 'What is essential is invisible to the eye'. Plato suggests there is another reality, a reality that is invisible and beyond our senses.

Plato says that facts (sight, touch, smell etc) assist in Forms, for example, we look at things to see if they are good. However, Plato says senses are unreliable and relative, and do not give an absolute view on anything.

Plato's 'Analogy of the Cave' also explains that although everyone knows the Forms, many refuse to accept them as it can take away the security of illusions, and the world as you know it. Plato believes Forms cannot be taught, only valued, and utilized.

Plato's Theory of Forms has had many criticisms, one being that it is not really a theory. It relies on the 'Analogy of the Cave' to support and explain its' details. This suggests that Plato is unsure of Forms himself, or at least how to explain them.

It is suggested that the Theory is unsure of the extent of the Forms, for example, is there a Form for humanity or each individual? This is important as the answer could change the concept of Form, and alter how the concept is used to understand the world.

Another criticism is that Plato states that each Form is unique, but does not explain why this is. Plato also tells us about the Forms but does not say what they actually are. This suggests he has little evidence behind his assumptions, and perhaps does not fully understand Forms himself.

Plato's Theory also has many strong points. It is true that we know Forms- such as beauty etc, and learn about them throughout our lives. This suggests that we are born with knowledge of Forms within our minds, and understand the world using these Forms.

It is also true that our senses are unreliable and ever-changing, for example we say something is 'big' but compared to something else it may be 'small'. The way we believe things are true, is by using our senses. This suggests that the way we understand the world is untrustworthy and false, as it is based on unreliable sources. Another strong point is how many of us are secure in our world, and do not want to believe another world exists. We are comfortable in believing what surrounds us is true, and do not want our reality to be shattered.

Overall, Plato's theory is complicated and based on the fact that everything has a Form, and we all have an innate knowledge of Forms. Plato's theory is criticised because it is unclear and imprecise, with little evidence to back it up. Nevertheless, it offers us a different way of thinking and a new light to see things. We have no idea whether it is true- how can we really know anything?

Plato's Theory of Forms is comprehensible and definitely possible and allows us to broaden our mind and consider another reality.