

The Formation of Plato's Theory of Ideas

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Abstract

The article examines the process of formation of the theory of ideas in Plato's philosophy. The author analyzes the intellectual origins of the concept associated with the teachings of Heraclitus, Parmenides and Socrates, as well as the main stages of the development of the doctrine in Plato's dialogues Philosophy.

Keywords: Plato, ideas, eidos, metaphysics, Socrates, Heraclitus, Parmenides, cognition, ancient philosophy.

Introduction

Plato (427–347 BC) was one of the greatest thinkers of antiquity, whose philosophical views had a fundamental influence on the development of Western philosophy. The central element of his teaching is the theory of ideas (or "eidos"), which became the basis for further metaphysical and epistemological research.

Origins and prerequisites of the theory of ideas. Plato's theory of ideas did not arise suddenly, it was formed under the influence of several philosophical trends:

1. **The teaching of Heraclitus** is the thesis of the universal changeability and fluidity of being. Plato, accepting this idea, came to the conclusion that true knowledge is impossible in the world of becoming.
2. **The doctrine of Parmenides** is the assertion of the immutability and unity of being. The influence of Parmenides prompted Plato to search for an immutable foundation of knowledge.
3. **Socrates** is Plato's mentor, who was the first to raise the problem of general concepts (universals) and definitions. Thus, Plato's theory of ideas is a synthesis of Heraclitean dynamism, Parmenides' ontology, and Socratic ethical-logical problems.

The essence of the theory of ideas. According to Plato, true being does not belong to sensuously perceived things, but to ideas—eternal, unchanging, immaterial entities. The things of the material world only partake of ideas and are their imperfect reflections.

Key points: The world of ideas exists independently of the material world. An idea is a perfect image, prototype, essence that makes the existence of concrete things possible. The world of things is only a shadow, a reflection of the world of ideas (allegory of the cave). True knowledge (episteme) is possible only about the world of ideas, while sensory experience gives only an opinion (doxa).

The process of concept formation. The theory of ideas took shape gradually and was reflected in Plato's dialogues:

1. In "Hippias the Greater" and "Protagoras" the problem of universals is touched upon for the first time.
2. In the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, theory acquires a complete form: the world of ideas and the world of things are contrasted, and the division of types of knowledge is introduced.
3. In *Parmenides*, Plato himself criticizes his concept, revealing difficulties (for example, the problem of the "third man").
4. In the *Timaeus*, the theory receives a cosmological substantiation: ideas become models from which the Demiurge creates the cosmos.

The importance of the theory of ideas. Plato's doctrine of the world of ideas became the basis for medieval scholasticism (realism in the dispute about universals); influenced Neoplatonism (Plotinus, Proclus); served as the foundation for the development of rationalism and idealism in the philosophy of the Modern Age (Descartes, Kant, Hegel).

The basic content of Plato's philosophy is expressed in his doctrine of **ideas (eidos)**. According to Plato, the idea is true being, while the sensuously perceived world in which we live and which we know is only its shadow, its reflection.

Knowledge of the laws of the world of ideas is accessible only to few, for they are revealed only to people with exceptional reason and philosophical intuition. Most people limit themselves to the perception of the "world of shadows". That is why Plato asserts the primacy of the world of ideas over the world of things, since ideas are eternal, unchanging, and ideal essences.

Man, according to Plato, occupies an intermediate position between these two spheres of being. His soul belongs to the world of ideas, while his body belongs to the world of shadows. From this follows the dualism of human nature: man is the unity of soul and body, connecting two ontological levels. The true essence of man is contained in the soul. What we call life is the sojourn of the soul in a corporeal shell.

Plato's epistemology is also based on his ontology of ideas. Cognition is understood as **anamnesis**, the soul's recollection of those *eidos* that it contemplated before incarnation.

In this context, ontology **acquires special significance** as a philosophical doctrine of being in its objectively universal essence. In other words, ontology investigates the nature of being and expresses the fundamental attitude of man to the world and to existence itself. [1].

According to Plato, **the idea** is the true essence of any object, its perfect and ideal state. The comprehension of an idea is possible not through sensory experience, but through the activity of **reason**, since the idea, being the form of a thing, is outside the sphere of sensory perception and has a transcendental character.

Plato's concept of idea is closely related to his **anthropology**, which is based on the doctrine of the soul. The soul, according to his concept, is threefold:

1. **rational principle** ("golden");
2. **affective-volitional principle** ("silver");
3. **the lustful principle** ("copper").

The proportions of these principles are different for different people, and it is they who determine social stratification. Plato argued that this division should become the basis for **an ideal state**, which includes three estates:

1. **philosophers-rulers;**
2. **Guardian Warriors;**
3. **producers** (farmers, craftsmen, traders).

At the same time, the first two estates must abandon the family and private property, since their main function is to serve the common good. In such a system, each individual performs only what he is predisposed to by nature.

The foundation of Plato's philosophy is also the doctrine of "**primordial being**," from which everything that exists derives. However, the question of "when" it arose and how it became the source of all that exists remains metaphysically insoluble.

Plato's epistemology is based on the distinction between sensory and intellectual cognition. The senses are capable of perceiving only single objects, while the essence of things is revealed only to the mind. True knowledge is not sensory perception, not correct opinion, and not even empirical understanding, but an introduction to the world of ideas.

Knowledge, according to Plato, is **anamnesis**, the soul's recollection of ideas contemplated by it before it unites with the body. Those who are able to "close their eyes and ears" to the external and turn to the inner memory discover the truth for themselves.

Thus, his **theory of knowledge** is based on the concept of memory and asserts that changes in the world occur on the basis of a **supersensible, transcendental principle** that stands outside the limits of empirical experience. This principle is **absolute being**, which determines all the variety of forms and phenomena of the world. 3].

Plato is rightly considered one of the most outstanding and progressive thinkers of his time. The prospects of modern philosophical science, as well as its historical continuity, are largely associated with his name.

Together with Aristotle, Plato laid the foundations of the doctrine of the soul, which throughout the Middle Ages remained the dominant doctrine both in the East and in the West. At the same time, Plato acts not only as a metaphysician and epistemologist, but also as a thinker who carried out a deep analysis of **the social foundations of society** and the diversity of its structural forms.

Plato's philosophical heritage remains relevant not only for the ancient context, but also for the present. His ideas about the nature of the soul, about the essence of being, and about the organization of society continue to influence philosophical reflection and remain a source of valuable theoretical guidelines. The study of Plato's life and work is of indisputable value for understanding both the historical path of philosophy and its future directions.

Conclusion:

The formation of Plato's theory of ideas is the result of a complex synthesis of philosophical traditions and personal philosophical search. It gave an answer to the problem of the correlation between the changeable sensual world and eternal true being, and also became the basis of European metaphysics. Despite criticism and internal contradictions, this theory continues to be one of the central concepts in the history of philosophy, which determined the direction of the development of thought for many centuries.

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