

8 Influence of Socrates on Plato

It has been rightly maintained that the image of his teacher Socrates never faded from the mind of Plato. It is more so since we know the ideas of Socrates generally through to the dialogues of Plato. However Socratic influence upon Platonic thinking is more exclusive in the following spheres:

(1) Virtue is knowledge

Socrates considered virtue and knowledge as synonymous. Knowledge, according to him, was for virtue. It was not merely a collection of information but a basis of character formation. A knowledge which has no impact on conduct is meaningless. Knowledge gives birth to the virtues of courage, temperance and justice etc. It was on the basis of this idea of Socrates that Plato developed his concept of the Philosopher King in the Republic.

"Friends are not made. They're recognized." - Clare MacPherran

(2) Theory of Reality

According to Socrates the virtue of a thing is not its existence but in its fulfillment. It aims at virtue. It was no doubt of the basis of it. Plato maintained that the world of ideas is more real than the world of things.

(3) Theory of Knowledge

Knowledge, according to Socrates and later on Plato, is of two types - Casual and the true knowledge. The latter knowledge is the self-knowledge. Knowledge is concerned with conduct and character. It influences the total personality. All the virtues depend upon knowledge.

(4) Philosophical Method

Socrates invented the question-answer method of philosophical discussion. Plato has followed this method in his dialogues. In this method, the inquirer analyses the thoughts of various thinkers upon a problem and arrives at the truth by their constructive criticism.

"Have no friends not equal to yourself." - Confucius

11 (5) Art of Government

Socrates has considered the ruler as a physician. The public is the patient and the state has to cure the disease. It was on the basis of this idea that Plato considered the philosopher king as an efficient physician of the diseases of the state. Governing was considered as an art. In an ideal state, according to Plato, the philosopher king should have elaborate knowledge of the art of government.

The above influences on Plato of his teacher Socrates can be visualized in all the works of the great philosopher. Besides Socrates the characteristics of the life in Athens and Sparta influenced Plato. His thinking was also influenced by Pythagoras and other Greek thinkers.

"Chance makes our parents, but choice makes our friends." - Piyali Diller

Influence of Plato on Aristotle

Aristotle's keen intellect did not allow him to be a blind follower of Plato. However, he made the master's teachings the basis of his own thinking. He remained the chief disciple of Plato for 20 years at the Plato's Academy. The following similarities may be seen in Plato and Aristotle:

(1) Political idea

Aristotle's Political idea was quite at one with Plato's idea. It was setting up an ethical purpose as the chief end of the state. The real purpose of the state was the moral improvement of its citizens because the state was an association of men living together to achieve the best possible life. This was the meaning of a state.

(2) Conservatism

Aristotle, like Plato was conservative. He also confined his ideal to the city state as the basis of his political thought.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed." - Proverb

13 (3) Early Education

Both were of the view that education should begin when a child is conceived.

(4) Control over population

Both laid stress on check of population by birth control and destruction of unhealthy children.

(5) Metaphysical

Both were metaphysical in so far as they said that nature has made some men of gold, others of silver and copper.

(6) State as moral and spiritual entity

Both regarded the state as a moral and spiritual entity as they believed that Good is the ultimate end of the state. In the case of Plato, it is absolute and in the case of Aristotle it is relative.

"He, who hath many friends, hath none." - Aristotle

(7) Ethics and Politics

Both held that ethics and politics constitute a single and indivisible science. Both believed that the only life which is worthy of man was a life of virtue. It is made possible for an individual in and through membership of the state. Aristotle agreed with Plato against the Sophists that the state comes into being for the sake of life and continues for the sake of good life.

(8) Political Ideals

Plato was firm to his ideal to the end. Aristotle borrowed ideals from Plato but modified as and when tested according to practical experience.

"One loyal friend is worth ten thousand relatives." - Euripides

