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THE CRADLE OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

BY

INIOBONG UMOTONG Ph.D

Department of Philosophy
Akwa Ibom State University
Obio Akpa Campus

Abstract

Beside God, every other thing in existence, be it in the physical form or as a spiritual entity, has a traceable origin in something or somewhere. Spiritual things are traced to God the origin of creation while physical and inanimate things are traced to inventors in their respective area and era. The inventors or forerunners of any object of consideration came forth with their groundbreaking innovation as a result of deep seated desire to solve peculiar problems of the time. This is also replicated in ideas and ideologies or schools of thought. The systematic and well articulated presentation of ideas can be traced to scholars in time and place. Though the bible admonishes that “the things that hath been, it is that which shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done and there is no new thing under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9) yet, philosophical enterprise is a product of social and natural perplexities of the time and the method applied and answers given to these perplexing problems become the focus of a given philosophical era. The history of philosophy is the study of philosophical ideas and concepts through time, era and ages. Some of the issues considered when tracing the developmental stages of philosophical pursuit

include the question on the perplexing problems of the people at the time in question that draws attention of scholars, thinkers, wise men of the time with keen interest. Philosophy therefore is traced to the Greek cities of Western Asia Minor called Ionia and Miletus with the articulated ideas of Thales and his contemporaries.

Introduction

Philosophy as a discipline has a history, foundation and origin. Western philosophy is believed to have begun with the deep concern of the thinkers to unravel the secret of natural phenomenon especially the cosmos and its explanation, with the natural contraries notwithstanding. This comes from the background of the belief that once the natural occurrences are understood in its proper perspectives it will be possible to predict events and put natural endowments to their proper use for humanity. Omoregbe sees it as a "human experience in search of answers to some fundamental questions (1990)..

Going through history and the development of philosophical thought, it is universally noticed that all cultures be it pre historic, ancient, medieval, modern or contemporary, eastern or western, religious or secular have their unique school of thought, pattern of reasoning and peculiarity in solving its problems which is shaped by inherited uniqueness and discovery through contact, exposure and observation.

Philosophy as the study of general and fundamental problems such as those connected with reality, existence, knowledge, value, reason, mind and language is not an exception in the natural flow of phenomenon, and these are distinguished from other disciplines by its critical and systematic approach based on rational arguments. Philosophy has a history of its development, it has stages of development and its attendant problems, it also evolve ways of moving ahead thus making progress shading off what is unnecessary and picking up new ways of handling peculiar problems.

In the development of philosophy as a systematic enterprise, four distinct era or developmental periods are identified, these ranges from its cradle with antecedent crude method through the most sophisticated approach of modern day society. The crude and unrefined ways of explaining event around us especially those adopted by the early Milesians and Ionians is called ancient philosophy. The central focus of the ancient philosophers was on giving rational explanation to phenomenon around us. In doing this, they tried to explain how all that is given in nature came about (the contraries and the contradictories in nature without disparity), for instance, we have hot and cold, day and night, solid, liquid and gaseous substances all living and coexisting in the universe without one exerting superiority over the others. None tries to edge out the others - they all work in agreement and consonant as mandated from creation for the advancement of the creative work of nature. The sun playing its very important role, respects its timing, it operates at opposite times, different from that of the moon. The rains plays another very important role without a clash of interest with the dry season, all appearing and disappearing at appropriate and appointed time and season.

History of philosophy is aimed at compartmentalizing or cataloguing and classifying the development patterns of the era. The purpose is to appreciate the development of philosophy through time and ages.

What is generally referred to as ancient philosophy, traces its root to the West considering the philosophical posits of scholars of the Greek cities of Western Asia Minor called Ionia and Miletus. Most scholars are of the opinion that systematic assemblage of knowledge on the possible explanation of the natural world began with the posit of Thales of Miletus the acclaimed father of ancient philosophy with his mono substance (water) as the ultimate stuff through which natural occurrence derives its existence. Other scholars considered along with Thales in this ancient era include Anaximander of Miletus who posited air as the ultimate stuff of the universe, Anaximanes, Pythagoras, Parmenides, Zeno, Thrasymachus, Heraclitus,

Democritus, Socrates, Democritus, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and Epicurus amongst numerous notable others. From their posits, the basic ultimate stuff from which the world is made up of ranges from mono visible substances to plural and also multiple substances of both visible and invisible components.

Thales posited that water is the major component the universe is made up of, this is a mono visible substance whereas to Anaximenes air is the basic stuff the world is composed of. Air as we know is a mono element yet an invisible substance only felt and its presence recognized but not open to the sense of sight. Positing air can be seen as a contrast of Anaximander's indeterminate boundless which is a multiple entity that can be explained from both visible and invisible elements. The boundless is "that from which all the heavens and all the worlds in them came into being, earth, air, fire and water are somehow generated from the indefinite substance" Collinson (1988). With Anaximander's observation, one seems to draw a conclusion that some kind of ultimate balance or state of justice is maintained between all things, probably through interactions between the cosmic opposite of hot and cold, dry and wet. It is this ultimate balance that evokes wonder in man on how this is possible. Take the issue of change for instance, how is it possible for a change to occur in a thing yet the real substances subsist for recognition, a child at birth looks different from the same child at adolescence and at old age. An accident car looks different from when it was in a perfect functional state yet one can still recognize an accident vehicle to be Mr. X's Toyota car or whatever model and make it was before being disfigured through an accident. The question is how is it possible to be the same James who was two feet tall, crawling, crying and clinging twenty years ago the same man six feet tall driving a car yet he remains the same James even at age eighty when he is on a wheel chair. From these stages one can rightly noticed that a lot of metamorphoses have taken place physiologically yet one can still point to that physique as the James they knew while crawling. Since he shares in the universal nature of man and he was given an identification mark "James" irrespective of the changes, the

universal nature subsist, therefore, all the changes that occurs does not in any way mutilate the essence beyond recognition.

Volkswagen beetle cars have their engine at the rear while Peugeot (504, 404, 505, 307, etc.) have their engines at the front, their shapes and sizes, performance and capacity differs yet they are called cars. Despite these differences between them, their point of confluence remains the universal nature which consists in its components and usage a faster means to move from one point to the other. This is a pointer to the fact that, there is a uniting factor that lies beyond the physical components of each of these brands and models that enable them to belong to the same class in terms of performance. It is reflections such as these, when considered from natural perspectives that moved ancient thinkers to brood over the occurrence in nature that beats human imagination and explanation from this perplexities Thales offered a rational explanation to natural occurrences.

Thales : Records have it that Thales did not leave written records of himself but all that is available about him are fragmentary references made by later writers who recorded memorable incidents in his career. The years of Thales's life are set around 624 and 546 BC. Stumpf (1977). Thales city of origin is traced to "Miletus, a city in Ionia" Omoregbe (1990). He lived in that great city which was at that time a great port and a commercial centre in Ionia. Thales was a very curious man; his curiosity impelled him to seek rational explanation to natural phenomenon and the cosmos.

The ancient philosophers having observed the world with these interesting features thought it wise to seek an explanation on how it was possible for these contraries to be, yet harmonious in operations. It is on record that Thales of Miletus is given the pride of place of being the first western philosopher who attempted a systematic explanation of the things we find in nature. According to available Western historical records, to features of every existing thing, therefore Thales concluded that the world is primarily made up of this great scholar, water was the one and only substance that is

capable of displaying the water.

Thales having been influenced by the Homeric tradition, the mathematics of Egypt and Babylon and also the oriental information that flows along the trade route of Ionia maintained that everything comes into being from water and that the earth floats on water like a log. Thales as a renowned Ancient Philosopher is credited to have recorded many discoveries. For instance, it is attributed to Thales to have been the first to have worked out an acceptable and reliable method of measuring pyramid or mountains, using a simple procedure of measuring the shadow of the pyramid or mountain whose height is to be determined, the method is applied to the object to be measured at the time of the day when a man's shadow is equal to his height, same is applied to mountains or pyramids, at such times when human shadow is equivalent of his actual height the mountain or pyramid will also cast a shadow equal to its actual height if measured.

Thales is also given the credit of predicting an eclipse of the sun which is believed to have actually occurred in 585 B.C. Thales is also attributed to have, during a military campaign against Persia, solved the difficult logistic problem of enabling the Lydian Kings army to cross the wide Halys river by digging a channel that diverted part of the flow, thereby making two narrow rivers over which bridges could be built for easy passage of the soldiers. While in Miletus he constructed an instrument for measuring the distance of ships sighted at sea. And as an aid to navigation he urged sailors to use the constellation Little Bear as the surest guide for determining the direction of the north when sailing.

For all that Thales has contributed to knowledge acquisition, his posit of water as the ultimate stuff the world is made up of, becomes the mile stone of his philosophical posits, how he came to this conclusion that water is the basic stuff or component of every existence, is believed by scholars and analyst after him, to have stemmed from seeing that nurturing ingredient of existence is moist. Heat is generated by moist and the heat is sustained by the same moist, beside the observation of the operation of moist in existence, it

is believed also that the seeds of all things have a moist nature, and water is the origin of the nature of moist things. Other operations of water that may also have moved Thales observation to conclude that water is the basic stuff that the world is composed of is the phenomenon such as evaporation or freezing. These changes in water form from liquid to solid and to gas also is attributed to have encouraged Thales to draw his conclusion that the world is composed of these forms of existence.

Modern day philosophers may raise objections on the authenticity of the solid and gaseous as well as liquid form water is capable of exhibiting as having nothing to do with the existence of entities in the universe. They may query the relationship between the existence of trees and water and that of the galaxies and water and thus conclude that Thales posits were not scientifically proven. It is worth noting here that at the time of Thales around 600 BC systematic explanation was not too common so it was a great feat for one to have reasoned far enough to proffer rational explanation on how things derive their existence in nature. In other words, at the time of Thales such posits were no mean feat. You can compare the modern day phones with the ancient analogue phones and draw a conclusion that without the initial discovery of the analogue the improved cell phones and their varieties would not have been possible so at the time of Thales irrespective of modern day scientific explanation in understanding the universe his posits were held in high esteem.

Anaximander (610 546 BC)

Anaximander was one of the contemporaries of Thales and also the second most prominent of the Milesians philosophers of the Ancient era. The trend of thought of any philosopher is the product of the era in which such scholar operates. It was a common phenomenon for scholars to seek proper explanation of the universe; this was believed to be the only step toward solving human problem. Ancient philosophers believed that if nature can be properly comprehended then its purpose can be attained therefore the need to understand the ultimate stuff from which the universe came into existence. Collinson

maintained that Anaximander was a mixture of astrologer, geologist, mathematician and physicist as well as a philosopher; these attributes are exhibited in his numerous works in these areas. It is believed that Anaximander introduced the gnomon the shadow casting rod of the sundial into Greece, he was the first to draw the inhabited world on tablet, in his book *Concerning Nature* which is reported to have been a very voluminous work, he offered a cosmogony accounts of the heavenly bodies and the development of living organism, study of natural history, biology, meteorology and astronomy, geography and map of the world and dissertations upon every aspect of human and animal life. Anaximander was an icon of intellectual prowess for the many brilliant thinkers who succeeded him. For Anaximander who was a pupil of Thales and his contemporary too, the ultimate stuff was '*indeterminate boundless*'. To Anaximander, the ultimate component of the universe is not water or any specific element or substance. According to him 'water' and any other specific elements are merely specific substances that cannot account for its contraries. He reasoned that water or moisture is found in various forms everywhere, but water is only one specific thing among many other elements, and all these specific things require that there be some more elementary stuff to account for their origin. To Anaximander the primary substance out of which all these specific things derive their existence is an indefinite or boundless substance he calls '*Apeiron*' that cannot be any of these single substances or things but all of them put together.

Anaximander described *Apeiron* as surrounding everything boundlessly and as being that from which all the heavens and all the worlds in them come into being: earth, air, fire and water are somehow generated from the indefinite substance. Things are constantly in motion and what has its birth from the infinite returns to it at death. This is a pointer to the fact that there is some kind of ultimate balance or state of justice between all existence through interactions between the cosmic opposites of hot and cold, dry and wet and other contraries but all co-existing each playing a complimentary role to the other, none existing in isolation therefore

there is everything in everything.

Anaximander's underlying metaphysical principle is that the changes and conflicts observed in nature are part of a process of exploration which, in the long run, maintains an equilibrium in the whole universe. Anaximander's *Apeiron* was a remarkable separation from the theories in vogue during his era in history; it was a departure from the mythical account of Homer and Hesiod giving account of the activities of the gods and their influence on natural events. Critics have argued that the context in which Anaximander applies *Apeiron* as both the law governing things and also things in themselves, are logically faulty as the boundless cannot be the law as well as the things it binds, according to him it is this indeterminate boundless that gives meaning to existence accounting for all the contraries in nature. He was also criticized for the intangibility of the *Apeiron* as he calls it or the indeterminate boundless as was interpreted, that if we are explaining natural phenomenon it should be from the observable perspective, a feature that is lacking in the indeterminate boundless as it does not represent any tangible thing.

Anaximenes (585 528 BC)

This was another Milesian philosopher whose posit was a milestone in the epistemic quest to unravel the secret behind the ultimate substance the world is made up of in the build up to the development of knowledge of the universe. Like Anaximander, Anaximenes maintained that the first principle of all things was infinite, but unlike Anaximander, he was prepared to specify what that first principle was, namely *Air*. For him other substances were derived from air through the process of rarefaction and densification. Anaximenes maintained that air is capable of becoming fire and if made thicker it can become wind and then cloud then if the thickening is intensified it can become water, then earth, then stones and the rest of the other things found in nature, he also maintained that motion is eternal and that change comes about through motion. Anaximenes is quoted to have posited that 'as our soul, being air, holds us together and controls us so does wind or breath and air enclose the whole

world'. Kirk, Raven and Schofield (1983).

Though the Milesians achievement in philosophy was great the advent of scientific and rational thought, the move from myth to reason was not sudden. Myth and reason interacted, influencing each other, so that traditional beliefs about elements such as air and water were gradually transformed by increasingly rational reflection and awareness of the natural world. The shift in attitude was from explaining the world by reference to gods or strange powers to explaining it by reference to natural order of causes and regularities. The Milesians were scientists in that they observed the world and developed theories from their observations. But they were philosophers as well because their main concern was not just to say what the world is but how it came into existence; they wanted not only to describe phenomena but to discover their ultimate source.

Pythagoras (571 496 BC)

Pythagoras was born at Samos Island off Ionia in 571BC and died in 496 BC. He lived most of his life in Croton, Southern Italy, where he founded a religious sect called "The Pythagorean Community".

There is no comprehensive record of what Pythagoras taught his disciples. This is as a result of the secrecy the community conducted its activities. Available records; as contained in the account of Dicaearchus who is believed to provide the most reliable report of Pythagoras teaching, it is believed that, among other things, Pythagoras taught his disciples that nothing is absolutely new. That after certain period what has happened will repeat itself. This can be seen to be the case even in occurrences in our society today, this is observed in our fashion cultural renaissance and even in medication: return to the traditional method - the herbs and roots, it can also be noticed in our political culture- brutish natural man, very insensitive to the plight of common citizens only focusing on amassing wealth for self. The architecture is not left out, the old fashion design of houses especially the roof pattern are resurfacing. No area is left out in the reoccurrence of the things of old emerging as if it were new.

Pythagoras was greatly preoccupied with intellectual mysticism and mathematics. He pondered on religion and the human soul. To him, number is the ultimate substance the world is made up of. This can be traced to his religious and mathematical background. Pythagoras believed that the underlying principle of nature is expressible in numbers. Number is both the matter and the meaning of the cosmos. He also maintained that, unity is a product of opposites, in other words; the coming together of odd and even, or unity in diversity and the unrivalry of the opposites. To Pythagoras, every number has its representation, for instance, the number, five stands for marriage but it is the sum of three and two. Three is the first masculine number while two represent the first feminine number. Pythagoras went further to posit that shapes of things can also be determined by numbers. In determining shapes, one is a point, two a line and three a surface while four represents solid. These numbers were represented by appropriate number of dots carefully arranged to convey the desired meaning.

Thinking of points, lines and surfaces as units from which everything in nature is formed and each of these units as representing a number, one can see how Pythagoras concluded that everything is number and that all things can be explained in numbers.

The Pythagoreans devoted themselves to mathematics; they were the first to advance mathematical study. Because of this orientation they believed that the principles of mathematics could account for everything in nature. To them, things consist of numbers. This sounds strange. One may wonder how number can account for everything. Pythagoreans conviction of the sacredness of number has a purely religious background. It is mathematics that can purify the soul. It is worthy of note that Pythagoras did not only found a religious sect known as the Pythagorean community but he also established a mathematical school.

Heraclitus of Ephesus (504-501 BC)

Like most philosophers, Heraclitus was haughty and supercilious this character eventually made him a misanthrope who lived in the mountains and fed on grasses and plants. Heraclitus was of an Aristocratic family, he spent most of his life in Ephesus, because of his character disposition most of his contemporaries were not at home with his way of life and philosophy.

Heraclitus posits maintained that the world was not created but had always existed. Towing the line of his philosophical predecessors he showed concern in explaining the natural phenomenon, to Heraclitus what captured his interest was the fact that change is frequent and is a universal phenomenon. He observed that the universe is in a state of constant change what he called state of 'Flux'. He sees this state of Flux in nature, the operation of Fire and cosmic unity as his main theme and he is quoted to have posited that 'This world order ... always was and is and shall be: an ever living fire, kindling in measures and going out in measures'. In other words, Heraclitus believed that what sustained the world or the universe is constant change, which has always been its common characteristic from creation and shall remain so till the end of the world, as such change is the common stuff through which natural phenomenon finds its expression. To Heraclitus, coherence and stability in nature persist within and indeed because of the process of continual change. Knowledge of the universe according to him consists in recognition of this underlying coherence and unity of all things. Things taken together are whole and not the negation of it (not whole), something that is brought together and also separated, which is in tune and out of tune, these are the process of existence. At a point, things in the course of change will disintegrate and in the process of change will also assemble thus making the whole and also its part which is the hallmark of all natural phenomena.

To further press home his observations, Heraclitus calls this underlying structural coherence 'the Logos', which he sees as one, a unifying factor. The perception of the fundamental unity is wise in that it sees beyond the conflict of the world of appearance. It

recognizes that it is disease that makes health good and weariness that reveals the benefits of rest. He maintained that opposites or contraries may be related in a variety of ways, night may be good for humans to take a rest after working for a whole day, while day may be boring for some animals that use the night most in its operation. Therefore opposites are not undesirable but both are part of the unifying factor in the universe brought about by change. If we recognize that all opposites and changes are generated by the logos then we will see that all things ultimately are divine.

Heraclitus believed that fire is the archetypal form of matter and that the world is an ever-living fire part of which are continually being extinguished and then rekindled in the process of change. Even water becomes fire and fire changes to earth and water: all things are an equal exchange for fire and fire for all things, as goods are for gold and gold for goods. For Heraclitus fire was not only the prime matter of the universe but its form as well, it was the logos incarnate, the material enactment of the principle of change and flux. Heraclitus sees this constant state of flux as the only factor that sustains the universe; if change refuses to occur then the world will cease to be. He further maintained that souls are fire, and that human life is as much part of the eternal flux as anything else is. It is a common knowledge that we think of souls as light, eternal, incorporeal and as the principle of life, therefore life itself is fire.

Parmenides (501 492 BC)

Parmenides was a citizen of Elea, a Greek colony in Southern Italy. For linking the source of his knowledge to the goddess guarded by justice, his posits is most often given a mythical coloration. Having observed the somewhat advanced posits of earlier philosophers from the mythology of Homer and Hesiod going back to myth was a setback to philosophy but then there was something unique about Parmenides.

Parmenides philosophical contributions are laced in his poem titled '*On Nature*'. This work is divided into two parts: 'Way of Truth' and 'Way of Opinion'. The way of truth is focused on reason and the

way of opinion is focused on knowledge acquired through the senses. He maintained that it is through reason that we can attain truth while the senses can only lead us to have an opinion concerning nature. From his distinction of knowledge through the senses and that through reason he drew a conclusion that change is merely an illusion of the senses, that being, whatever is in existence is one and unchanging. There is no becoming, that is, nothing becomes or changed into something else that it had never been. There is no becoming, nothing comes into being and nothing goes out of being, being simply is and does not change. There is no change in reality, whatever is, is and cannot become anything else, whatever is not is not. What we think are changes are simply illusion of the senses. To Parmenides, being is one, eternal, unchanging and infinite, therefore the reality of change and the plurality of being are mere illusion of the senses. Critics of Parmenides unchanging reality have queried the denial of an obvious phenomenon as motion, since nothing changes how then can motion be explained.

Despite the criticism leveled against this theory of unchanging reality, his distinction between reason and the senses has been and still is a fundamental one in philosophical circles from the ancient era of his day to the contemporary minds. From this theory he is seen by many as the father of idealism in that the reality of truth can be seen as a non-material reality. Parmenides is believed to have set the stage for a new focus in philosophical enterprise as evidenced in the change of focus by the succeeding generation of philosophers after him.

Empedocles (490 430 BC)

A native of Argentums who lived between 490 and 430 BC, Empedocles' contribution to knowledge spanned through philosophy, politics, medicine and religion among numerous other interests. As great as he was, he ended up in suicide by jumping into the volcano of Mount Etna in the bid to hide his human identity of being mortal. His suicidal act was aimed at creating an impression of immortality of returning to eternity thereby portraying himself as God. Empedocles'

philosophy was written in the form of poetry. He was not interested in positing something new but in reconciling the warring opinions of his predecessors. Examples are the notion of multiplicity in nature, the possibility or impossibility of motion and the nature of change as posited by the early thinkers among others.

Since his focus was on selecting the truth from the warring camps to generate a clearer approach or focus to the study of nature, it was therefore imperative for him to agree with his predecessors to some extent and disagree also on certain issues. Empedocles, like Parmenides, believed that being is uncreated and indestructible, that being "is". The existence of being does not depend on other existence in nature. On the other hand, he disagreed with Parmenides on motion. To Parmenides, the notion of motion is too glaring to deny. Though being is uncreated and indestructible, it is not one but many. Empedocles believed that there is change, motion and multiplicity in nature. What is changeless, motionless and single are the ultimate particles that nature is composed of. In change there must be some elements in them that remain and thus takes other forms. These new form according to Empedocles, can also change, thus taking yet other forms. It is not the various objects in nature that are motionless and changeless but the constituent articles. These particles that make up material objects in nature are eternal materials that can only change form but not destroyed. To Empedocles there are four basic elements that are changeless in nature. These are: water, air, fire, and earth. These elements cannot be transformed into something but can transform something else into another substance. Empedocles maintained that everything in nature can be accounted for by the intermingling of these four elements. These mingling without changing form, forms the erroneous notion of change being experienced in nature. He concluded by positing that all things consist of various arrangements of atoms.

At this point philosophical analyst and critics may ask; how and what brings these four elements together to intermingle to account for change and physical existence in nature. To this

Empedocles further expatiates by positing that there are positive forces in nature: love and hate, harmony and discord. These elements are the caused agents for the intermingling of fire, water, earth and air to produce every observable effect in the world. Empedocles explained that those two elements (love and hate) are the cause of opposites in nature. While the force of love brings together the natural particles, the force of hate helps in its disintegration. When this disintegrating force (hate) sets in, every particle of the initial composition takes its exit, falling off in particles until there is the force of love to further bring them together either in another form or material or in the same form. This process is endless and this is the common observation in nature.

The Sophist

To have good understanding of the cradle of philosophy, it is pertinent to note that most ancient philosophers especially those before the emergence of the sophist were greatly interested in cosmology (the systematic study of the universe as a whole) while ignoring or devoting little time and energy to the problem of man as the central figure in the universe which they seek to study with everything in them.

The sophist came as redeemers to the enslaved minds, they started asking relevant questions on the problem bothering the human existence, and they formulated philosophy of civilization and ethics. This new focus on man and the social problems were magnified and made prominent by the teachings of Socrates. Socrates saw the problem of man as the paramount problem of the universe. The universe as it is cannot pose a problem, the problem of understanding the component of the universe is a product of man (the human person) as such with a proper knowledge of human problems, understanding the universe and its components becomes easy and meaningful. This was a great break from the prevailing trend of philosophical thought at that time in history.

The sophist were a group of itinerant scholars who taught for money, they introduced fee into educational system, their focus was

on social issues and rhetoric and oratory, they were like lawyers of this era, teaching people how to defend themselves, how to engage in sound logic generally taking up issues in vogue for analysis.

Before the emergence of the sophist in the fifth century BC philosophers deployed *Deductive* reasoning to arrive at their ultimate stuff the world is composed of but the sophist deployed *Inductive* method. They draw their conclusion from particular instances observed around them to generate a covering principle of phenomenon, whereas the trend before their arrival was observation of general principles of event to draw a conclusion. Here it is noticed that the basic departure from the cosmos to the social events may have contributed to the change in method and style of philosophizing

Socrates (469 399 BC)

Socrates the son of a sculptor named Sophroniscus was a Greek philosopher of Athens, he married Xanthippe. He was famous for his view of philosophy as a pursuit necessary to all intelligent men. There was an example of one who lived by his principles even to the point of death. Socrates was convinced that his mission on earth was to search for wisdom about right conduct by which he might guide the intellectual and moral development of the Athenians. To achieve this he spent much of his time eliciting knowledge from the people on subject matters such as virtue, justice, and piety. The emergence of Socrates on the philosophical landscape of the ancient Greek marked a turning point in philosophical focus and approach, his method was unique, his approach different, his achievement marvelous. Even at death he exhibited astuteness by not giving in to the pressure to take the short cut, but illegal way out of the death sentence passed on him by the Athenian jury.

His unique method of dialectics stemmed from his believes that he and his interlocutors are ignorant of any given concept till led to the consciousness inherent in them through questions and answers from the known concepts to the extrapolated concepts. He maintained that in his dialectics everyone involved is in search of knowledge as such he did not lay claim to having the knowledge of

all. This stand made him the wisest man in Greece by the judgment of the oracle of Delphy, during his era.

Socrates philosophy was a great departure from the prevailing philosophy of his time, he moved from the cosmos to man and virtue. To him the basic components of the world as water, air, fire and the rest of the mono, dual and multiple substances may not solve our problem until man rediscovers self, thus his dictum; '*man know thyself*'. This philosophy refocuses attention on man, his social and spiritual well being, this new direction was like a rebirth for philosophy, reason held sway as it should be, myth was again pushed to the background, a new course was introduced as exemplified in the scholars that emerged after him.

Amongst the many ancient philosophers of the Western culture, Socrates seems to be the most popular and the most talked about, his fame is not a product of volumes of his writing but that as popularized by his pupils especially Plato who wrote volumes from dialogues with his mentor. The unique method or formula adopted by this great ancient philosopher was his eliciting method of question and answer called *dialectics*.

Socrates philosophy marked a turning point in the central focus of ancient philosophy, having followed keenly the posits of earlier philosophers with their mono substance as the ultimate stuff of the universe, the dual and the multiple substances as explaining things in nature and their limitation in giving a comprehensive and foul proof or faultless explanation of natural phenomenon, he then changed the focus from the cosmos to human the key factor in the study of nature. To him the central focus of philosophical enterprise should be the understanding of human beings as they are the one to interpret or give meaning to every other thing in the universe.

For Socrates Philosophy was not just an academic exercise but a way of life based on knowledge. He believed it was his mission and a sacred duty as a philosopher to seek the truth and to help others also to seek the truth in order to live a good life which according to him is the essence of life and the focus of philosophy. The quest for knowledge of good moral life becomes the central focus for Socrates.

This was a departure from the early concern of philosophers on the cosmos and cosmological speculations. He was not interested in cosmological speculation rather his mission was to persuade everyone to look inward, to seek virtue and wisdom, to understand self before going into the environment and the cosmos.

With this departure from the cosmic to human, Socrates adopted a method known as '*Dialectics*'. This method seeks to acquire knowledge through questions and answers. He adopted inductive reasoning; beginning with particular cases that are familiar and progressively advancing to the unknown. Socrates was convinced that humans do have innate knowledge, but this knowledge needed to be elicited from them through a method of question and answer, he maintained that the duty of a philosopher is to act as a midwife of knowledge. Socrates was convinced that there is an objective and universal knowledge attainable by man, and his aim was to lead men to this knowledge so that in the light of it they could live a good life, this was yet another departure from the skepticism and relativity of the sophist - a school of thought that held sway in his era.

Plato (427 347 BC)

Plato is given an exalted place in the philosophical space of ancient Greek philosophy, he was taught by Socrates and Aristotle was his pupil. Most of the records available about Socrates were documented by Plato, much of his philosophy is an extension of Socratic thoughts and teachings. Plato extended some of the concepts touched by Socrates into theory, such concepts as justice, courage and pity were developed into full blown theories about the nature of reality. This forms the crux of his theory of ideas, or forms in which he posits the existence of a realm of perfect forms that are eternal, unchanging and able to be known by the intellect, of which the ever changing world of material objects is an imitation. In other words, Plato is popular with his theory of the existence of the world of Forms which is unchanging and incorruptible, comprehensible only by reason not senses. Sensual perceptions are mere imitation of

the real which exist in Form.

In his most famous works the *Republic*, Plato projected his master Socrates in discussing the concept of justice, its importance in the ideal state and the qualities required in the rulers and citizens of an ideal state.

Plato was born into an aristocratic family in the city state of Athens at a time of great ferment and change. Plato's writings are backed with both literary as well as philosophical brilliance on a wide range of topic in metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, politics, psychology, mathematics, education theology and the arts. His writings are placed into three main groups. The first consists of the early dialogues having largely to do with the pursuit of moral excellence and with the definitions of virtues and qualities such as courage and piety. The middle group, which includes the *Republic*, shows the development of important Platonic doctrines: the Theory of Forms, the theory of knowledge that is linked to it and Plato's account of the human soul and its destiny. The third group of writings has a somewhat different character, several of these dialogues show a concern with logical issues and a method of dialectic called collection and division which shows how the relationship between the ideas or form may be elucidated by analyzing a form of wide generality, such as virtue, into its different subdivisions, to this group of dialogue belong the *Law*, the *Stateman* and the *Philebus*, works of a more technical kind and written in a more austere style.

Our basic concern in this work will be his theory of form. The theory of form is not presented in any systematic way in his writings, its exposition, developments and critical examination occur in a number of dialogues. In his discussion Plato sometimes uses the Greek word 'idea', though it did not mean something seen mentally as it does in modern day grammar, the word 'eidos' meaning 'form'. Both words relate to the verb 'idein' meaning to see. Scholars have observed that both idea and eidos may be translated as shape. The belief in a world of perfect or ideal form grew from the recognition of the ever-changing and imperfect nature of sensible objects and the realization that it is possible to formulate perfect conceptions of at

least something and particularly of geometrical figure such as circles, triangle, etc. These considerations, scholars maintained, may have led Plato to conceive the world of Form as a perfect existence, non-corporeal, eternal and wholly real, of which the world of material objects appraised by the senses was an imitation.

From the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible worlds, Plato derived a complex theory of knowledge which is unfolded by means of a series of analogies or illustrations in the later books of the *Republic*. He argued that the just ruler is the one with the knowledge of the Good. Plato maintained that until philosophers become kings of states or those who are now called kings and rulers become real or adequately tutored in philosophy there can be no respite from evil either for state or for the human race.

Conclusion

Young minds of the 21st century may query the much ado about the posits of these ancient scholars. The untutored mind may think positing water, air, fire, apeiron or whatever as was the case were merely speculations of lazy, crazy and idly self acclaimed wise men without cogent thing to offer humanity. It is to this set of critics that we may need to remind how ingenious it is to even conceive an explanation to phenomenon way beyond the conventional reasoning. It was the foundation of these great thinkers that drew human attention to the physical world. The universe must have been a product of thought of a supernatural being as such must have been designed for a purpose which they sought to unravel. From the Foundation of Thales water and the explanation of how it can account for the natural world, scientific consciousness were evoked and brought alive thus giving birth to most of the scientific discoveries. The departure from the cosmic explanation of the universe by the forerunners of Western philosophy to the understanding of the human person, by the sophist, Socrates and their followers, acted as a pathway to social engineering. These mental exercise were not in vain, neither were they crude at the time they were propounded rather they were the real pace setters, the pathfinders and the foundation for

whatever knowledge humans are capable of. Knowledge acquisition in whatever area of human endeavours, ranging from ancient speculations to contemporary inventions, scientific discoveries to social theories, all came about as a result of the pondering of philosophers over such perplexing issues. Without mincing words, it is the support and the foundation laid by these early thinkers that gives the biting teeth to all manner of developments in knowledge attainment in the sciences and all endeavours with marvelous discoveries.

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