Early Greek Philosophical Ideas About Nature: Plato Versus Aristotle

Nature can be defined as the natural occurrence of things, or according to Aristotle's definition, it is the inner principle of change and being at rest. The understanding of nature is one of the most studied concepts in philosophy that goes back to ancient Greek times. Early Greek philosophers did great work in exploring nature, and the ideas from Greek philosophers remain relevant or rather has contributed to ideologies that are essential in contemporary philosophy studies. This paper attempts to answer numerous questions regarding nature and uses numerous insights from Plato and Aristotle to expound developments of early Greek philosophical ideas about nature and how we can know about it.

How did Plato attempt to resolve some of the major pre-Socratic ideas about the possibility of change in nature?

Change refers to a continuous process of alteration of things, it is one of the common aspect of nature. When change occurs, one thing might be replaced by another or its original form altered to a different identity form. The possibility of change in nature was one of the widely studied or rather area of interest by pre-Socratic thinkers. They were interested to unveil and pursue the complexity of the world, especially in regards to its permanency despite being surrounded by many changing aspects. Pre-Socratic thinkers believed that everything had an explanation, most of which human mind had unlimited potential to reach an explanation. However, despite accepting the complexity and challenges in understanding nature, they developed numerous views or principles that they believed as basics in explaining change in nature in the universe. Pre-Socratic ideas about the possibilities of change in nature were based on the framework of cosmology, which distances itself from the existence of supernatural or spiritual forces in determining change. The pre-Socratic ideas are mostly attributed to Aristotle as his work mainly attempted to expand their views.

Plato attempted to resolve some of the major pre-Socratic ideas about the possibility of change in nature through depicting their arguments in his dialogues. Plato provided new knowledge that helped in contemplating the pre-Socratic ideas. In an attempt to resolve and persuade and rebel the pre-Socratic ideas, Plato's teachings attempted to develop new knowledge and thinking through reconstructing the original ideas by the pre-Socratic thinkers. The pre-Socratic idea of the possibility of change in nature majorly faced issues in one and many, change and constancy, and relativism. In response to such Heraclitus teaching, Plato perceived the followers of such pre-Socratic ideas as those who "degenerated into pretentious would-be gurus." (Annas 229).

What role does 'reason' play in Plato's theory of knowledge?

Plato's theory of knowledge is based on the ideas of recollection and immortality. Plato believed that since the soul is immortal, it has all the knowledge required, and individuals experience situations that help them in life and requires the use of one's reasoning. Plato discussed the theory of knowledge in his epistemological view of the universe, which is

commonly referred as the metaphor of the divided line in The Republic (Plato). Reason in the theory plays an important role in emphasizing the efforts and requirements needed for individuals to understand and interpret nature. Reason as discussed in The Republic by Plato emphasizes or rather encourages the idea of pursuing life desires as a way of satisfying the human souls. Reason in Plato's theory of knowledge tends to play a significant role as the aspect that creates or gives the souls a plan of life.

Moreover, reason in Plato's theory is contemplated as "what every natural being naturally pursues as good" from The Republic. Plato depicts this in the psychology dialogue where he depicted reason as a major controller of the soul, and reason has a purpose, and for it to function it requires collaboration with spirits. Additionally, reason according to Plato plays the role of looking for larger good of the soul, and thus it is basic for ensuring that humans accomplish the satisfaction of various desires. In other words, reason according to Plato tends to suggest that knowledge is possible, and it is through the reasoning that human are able to discover the truths. Therefore, theory of knowledge by Plato, as explained by the concept of the divided line through the allegory of the cave implies that truth does not exist but knowledge exists through reasoning. Based on Plato's reasoning, nature is complex and can only be understood if humans transcend from the world of illusions where they are blinded by materialistic aspects to a the world of reason.

How did Aristotle differ from Plato about knowledge?

Aristotle's idea of knowledge were described in his metaphysics ideologies. Aristotle emphasized that knowledge was best explained through studying things that are beyond physical objects. Aristotle's perception rejected or rather opposed the concepts of forms that had been given by Plato explaining material things as changeable and not permanent. According to Aristotle, facts and causes were key principles that must be pursued, and through such desired knowledge and wisdom were built. Unlike Plato, Aristotle believed that knowledge must be pursued from an abstract starting point, and despite acknowledging the idea of supernatural beings as developed by pre-Socratic thinkers, Aristotle maintained that they remained completely detached from most things in the world.

Aristotle differed from Plato on the idea of knowledge states, particularly on changing form (Annas 234). Aristotle arguments suggested on individuals knowing what they were doing, where Socrates argued that it was possible for people to do things and act in manners that they cannot explain. As a result, Aristotle distinguished material and mind, and suggested that knowledge and material things were completely separate and performed different role as opposed to the idea of Plato where knowledge was a result of coordination of different forms (Aristotle (c.384-322 BCE). To demonstrate this, Aristotle used the ideas of Thales to explain his perception on knowledge, where he showed water as an example of a materialistic object that could exist in different forms, and thus defending his thought that it was possible for all things to have originated from a primary thing. (Charles 1-17).

In summary, this essay has explored the Greek philosophical ideas about nature and how we can know about it. Nature is complex and despite the studies from ancient philosophers to modern scholars, many questions remain unanswered in explaining how nature works. However, the contributions made by Plato and Aristotle has served as a great foundation towards understanding and interpreting nature. Aristotle's idea about the knowledge was that it

exists on its own and does not require matter whereas Plato perceived knowledge as innate that require guidance of the soul. They both agreed or rather had similar ideologies that knowledge is what is true and it must be justified to be true.