

Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind and Cognition

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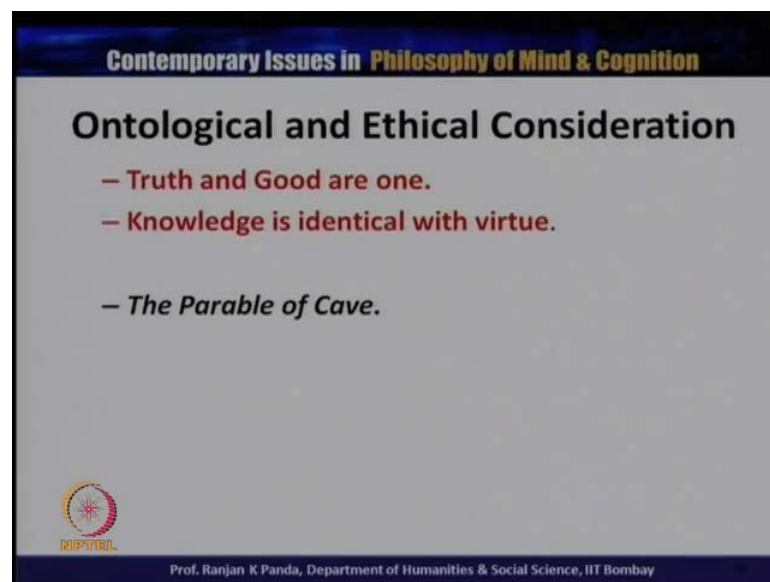
Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay

Lecture No. # 04

Plato's Concept of Mind: The Parable of Cave

Today, we are going to discuss Plato's famous parable, the parable of cave. As I have been discussing about the dichotomy that is there in Plato's philosophy of mind, the dichotomy between the forms and the particulars, particulars are there in the world and forms are there in an independent world. So, this dichotomy is something very significantly related to Plato's theory of mind and that can be little explicated through the help of this famous parable called the parable of cave. Now, let us see, what is this parable?

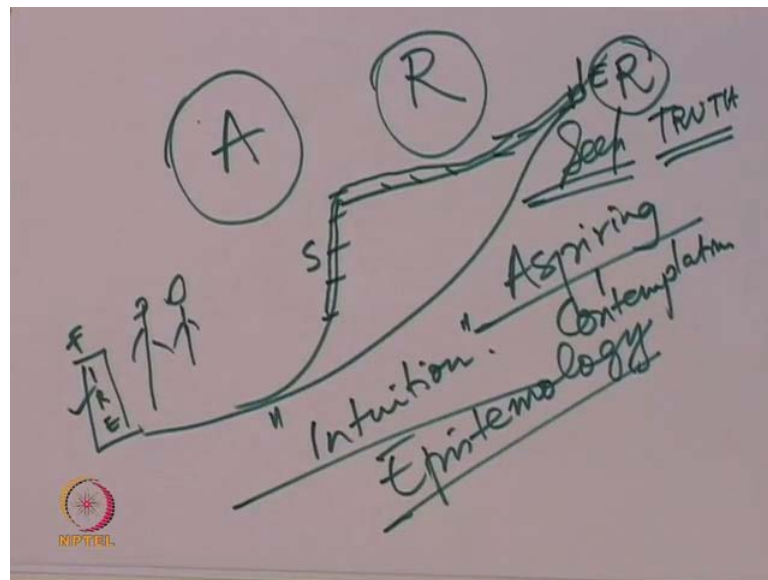
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Plato explains, that there is a cave and there are some prisoners kept inside the cave for a long time and these prisoners' hands and legs are tightly bound, so that they cannot even move, they cannot even turn and see things what is there behind them. So, what the prisoners used to do, they were together and they were looking at the wall.

Now, between the wall and the prisoner, the prisoners were dwelling inside the cave, behind them there was fire, there was a fire place where, you know, the fire was there and these prisoners used to see their shadows, that is reflected on the wall. The shadows were created by the fire.

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It is like this, suppose there is a cave and in the cave, now you have to come down, the cave has a small entrance, entrance here and the prisoners are, say for example, there are prisoners who are kept here and there is this fire place, there is this fire place. Now, because of this fire in the wall, of, in the wall, of the cave, there were some shadows. So, shadows were created by the existing fire.

The prisoners, they were not aware of this fact, that the shadows are created by fire; they only have this impression, that whenever they used to move from here to there, the shadows were also moving. So, for them shadows were living beings like the prisoners were dwelling inside the cave. So, the movement of their bodies, the movement of the bodies of the shadows is quite similar. Hence, the prisoners started believing, that the shadows are real phenomena.

Now, if shadows are real, then Plato asked these questions, how does one make the distinction between reality and appearances, because for Plato, reality is something different from appearance. Now, how does the prisoners find, that there is something

called a reality and that is beyond the appearances? How does one encounter such a reality?

Now, this idea of experiencing such a reality has been explained in this parable. Imagine a situation where one of the prisoners tries to remove the circles and tries to turn and he turns in such a way, that you know he is able to free himself and then, started climbing up the steps. Now, once he goes on climbing of the steps, he reaches to a point, that is, the point at the entrance and then, he finds there is a dim light coming through the entrance. He comes out of the cave finally, and when he comes out of the cave, he is not able to see anything; he is not able to see anything. Why is it, that the prisoner is not able to see anything?

Now, Plato says, since the prisoner was kept inside the cave and the cave was a dark place, it is a dark chamber, hence the prisoner had no scope to see the light. And when the prisoner came out of the cave, he finds that there is tremendous light and the light is so much, he is unable to open his eyes and see things. And then, Plato says, slowly and slowly the prisoner starts opening his eyes and tries to see, what are there in the world. Plato's explanation here is very interesting, that is, the prisoner makes an attempt to go out of the cave and the prisoners are not able to see the cave and the 3rd is the prisoner sees the things as they are.

So, when the prisoners are start seeing things as they are, he has this impression about the reality that is different from the shadows, which are experienced by the prisoners who were dwelling inside the cave and he is one among them. Now, since he is out and able to see the things as they are, he is able to make this distinction that shadows were only appearances and there is a reality beyond these appearances.

Now, Plato's parable suggests, that reality is as it is independent of the basic particulars, the basic particulars, which are changing. So, there is something, there is an underlying principle and that can be seen or that can be known through what you called protocol intuition. Now, intuition gives us some kind of knowledge, knowledge about the reality. Plato says, one has to prepare himself that is, talking about preparation.

Now, what kind of preparation the prisoners are ought to be doing? Now, unless you prepare yourself, you will not be able to see your soul, you will not understand who are the soul is. So, soul has a goal; the goal is coming out of this darkness.

So, there is this epistemological exercise, there is an epistemological exercise in Plato, where the soul is aspiring; the soul is aspiring to know what is reality. Now, this aspiration demands some kind of preparation. Preparation is through, we can say, contemplation, reflection. The soul is a conscious being, must reflect on things there are experienced. So, these experienceable phenomena are real or not is, to be understood and that is, that is why, Plato talks about this parable.

So, the parable is a very suggestive one and it suggests that when the prisoner understands, that there is a reality and this reality is something different from the appearances, Plato talks about truth. So, it is the truth, which has been known and truth is universal. For Plato, the light of the sun is, is a kind of metaphor used in the parable to talk about truth because you are not able to see truth as it is, you are not able to see the reality as it is. Hence, what is necessary is, that the self, slowly and slowly comes to know what is been given to him and what is the reality. So, this parable has both, an epistemological and ethical concern. As I said, truth and good are one in Plato's metaphysics because the epistemological enterprise and the ethical enterprise in Plato go together.

Now, the prisoner who is aware of this fact, that the shadows are not real phenomena and reality is something different, then for Plato, he has this moral responsibility. In fact, the prisoner who is an enlightened one has this moral responsibility to go back and tell the other prisoners or free the other prisoners, who are in the dark, who still think, that the shadows are real.

Now, look at this idea of steps. Steps are nothing, but struggles, with a lot of hardship you need to climb up. So, climbing up, his talks about some upward movement is a movement who is, you know, signifies the freedom of the soul. Now, the soul cannot be bound by the behaviors that are caused by the body, body or bodily activities cannot bind the soul. The soul frees himself and he frees himself because he puts him in this struggle and so this realization is a kind of an upward movement.

Plato talks about the hierarchy of ideas. Now, goodness being the highest idea, the idea of good is one of the highest idea in Plato, talks about how does one understand (()) of them: kindness, justice, goodness, all these are nothing, but the ideas. Ideas, that represent virtues, good being the most abstract idea, is realized by realizing the other

ideas. So, one, when one realizes what is compassion, when one realizes what is justice and then, above all, he also realizes what is goodness all about.

So, one transcends these layers, these hierarchies and finally, he is able to know what they are. All ideas are united, they are not a discreet phenomenon, they are united because it is the soul, which is working as a kind of a uniting principle, as a unifying principle, connecting these all experiences and understanding the content of these experiences.

So, Plato's notion of soul, which is akin to the forms, is something very significantly analyzed by Robert in this paper and one must look at the famous parable and try to see, that how the parable of cave has got an epistemological aspect and also an ethical aspect. They are part of the whole story to talk about what is the reality, what is appearance and how the reality is different from the appearances.

The knowledge about the reality can be known only through the forms. Forms are the pure ideas; therefore, Plato is talking about dialectics. So, the dialectical mode of analyzing, reflecting, questioning, suspending, gives us knowledge and this dialectical mode of knowing is nothing, but an intuitive mode of knowing. So, Plato gives importance to intuition or reason as a source of knowledge. So, there is sense experiential knowledge and there is intuitive knowledge or rational knowledge, dialectical knowledge, knowledge, that involves dialectics.

Now, these two sources of knowledge are different, in the sense that the knowledge about the particulars, the knowledge about the world is directly given to us, like for the prisoners, the shadows were directly given and for the prisoners, the things in the world as he goes out, things are directly given. Now, how these two givens are representing two different kinds of realities and that can be discerned and analyzed with the help of reason.

So, reason plays an important role constituting Plato's epistemology and ethics. So, therefore, we need to look at what is the locus of the reason? Does reason reside in the function of sense, sense organs or does reason reside in the in the soul for Plato? The soul is a rational entity; it is not only a conscious entity, but also a rational entity.

I am just using this term entity little differently, just make sure, that there are physical entity and there are mental or spiritual entity, know this idea of entity, is always referred to the physical entities, but this notion of the spirit in Plato or the soul in Plato is something spiritual, in the sense, that it is the locus of the reason. So, therefore, the knowledge and the knowledge about the virtues, the intuitive knowledge the rational knowledge and the knowledge of virtues are one; they are identical for Plato.

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Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

Soul

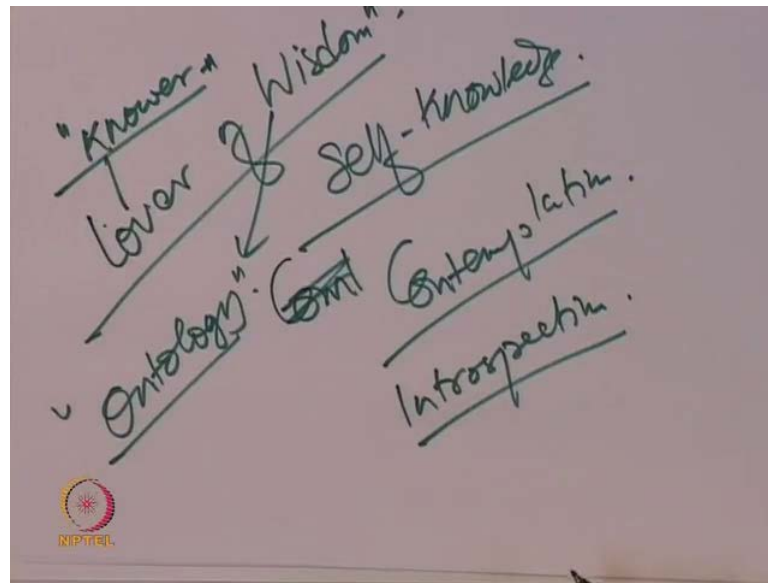
- The cognitive activity of soul is to contemplate on Ideas/ forms.
- Knowledge about the good/ truth is dialectical
 - It is purely conceptual knowledge.
- Soul is neither divisible substance nor concrete

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Plato also shows, that this consciousness activities in which the soul is engaged in differentiating the appearances and the reality, whether it is a cognitive activity or a psychological activity. For Plato, it is not nearly a psychological activity; it is purely a cognitive activity because the soul is contemplating on the forms, what is the nature of, of the form.

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Now, this idea of contemplation is something very significant and that can be associated with **Ducats** idea of introspection, self-reflection. Soul contemplates (()) to have this self-knowledge, to know what is this identity all about, is there a self? So, the idea of a self or self-identity can be derived with this contemplative attitude of the soul, does not associate with the physical activities.

There are physical activities when Plato compares the activities of the person with movement of the chariot. Now, there is a chariot, which is analogous to the notion of body, the chariot represents the body. The body has some movement and this movement is caused by the charioteer. So, in this connection, one can find, that the soul is the charioteer whose soul is the mover. It is the soul who is causing intentional voluntary actions. So, soul of a charioteer is the source of movement, his movements are self-movement.

The soul desires to move like the prisoner. The prisoner desired to move out from the cave; the prisoner could turn. Now, this idea of turning is something very significant. It is significant because the reality sometimes is constructed; it is constructed by different sources.

So, for example, in today's world the reality is largely constructed by the media. So, most of the time you are accepting whatever is told to you, whatever is informed to you, But Plato's appeal is, you must examine these information, you must examine these

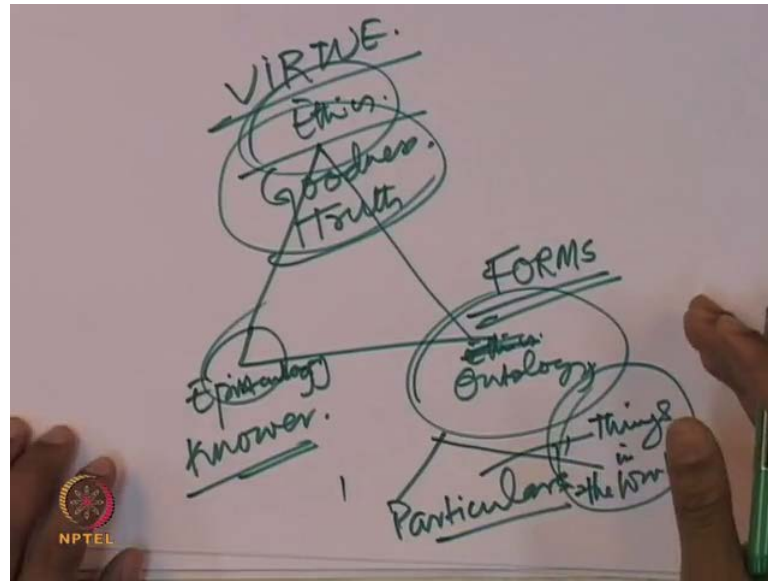
opinions, which are created by the mass media and then only you will have the possibility to know, whether the information is correct or incorrect, whether the information is well justified or ill justified.

So, this idea of justification, justifying the opinions or what Plato called **Doxtures**, is an important element of Plato's discuss of epistemology. So, therefore, there must be desire of the self or the person. The self must intend to do, intend to reflect, intend to contemplate, so that he or she comes to know what is knowledge, what is truth. Unless the desire is ignited, Plato says, the knowledge about truth is impossible unless there one is prepared. The knowledge about truth is impossible. So, you have to put the soul in, in such a condition in which this desire is strengthened, the desire is accumulated, it is broaden enough to realize what is truth.

So, this idea of knowing as a kind of a cognitive activity and not a psychological activity is something very significant because the notion of good, the notion of the ethical is purely a conceptual knowledge. It is not a knowledge, which will be derived by seeing 10 good acts; no, the lover who is witnessing suppose, 10 cases where the justice is given. By then, he does not really have the knowledge of what just justice is all about. No, unless and until he contemplates, unless and until he puts himself in this dialectical process of the journey, the journey of knowing, knowing the truth, he would not enlighten himself. Hence, knowing is a cognitive activity; it is not mere psychological activity for Plato.

Now, as a cognitive activity, Plato says, that the one who knows, the one who aspires to know and knows he is a lover of wisdom; philosophy, as we know, is the love of wisdom. Now, this idea of wisdom or truth is something very significant. It is significant because it is not only an epistemological discourse, but this discourse also talks about the ontology of truth. It is not nearly an epistemology, but it is also an ontology that talks about, that yes, there is truth and there is also a lover, there is also a knower who knows, that truth; who enlightens himself is a lover because he is akin to this virtue of knowing. He cultivates this spirit of knowing and enlightening and that is why, Plato's epistemology is very much linked with the ontology and ethics.

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So, these three, in fact, constitute some kind of a triangle, where you have epistemology. This will be ontology and ethics because knowledge about the truth or goodness is a kind of a highest, highest virtue according to Plato. So, this is a kind of a knower or the lovers. The lover talks about what? Unless there is a reality, unless there is something there, what the knower would know? So, ontology is also part of epistemology.


The ontology of the forms, because knowledge is a conceptual knowledge, it is through forms you have the knowledge about the basic particulars. So, in the things, in the world, the things in the world (()) of forms. So, this epistemic concern of the knower is something very significant when we talk about Plato's notion of truth and the knowledge of forms.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:50)

Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

Soul as source of Cognition

- Power of performing cognitive act
- Source of intentional action
- Soul is not absolutely merged with the world.
The kinship is not predictable if there is no differentiation.

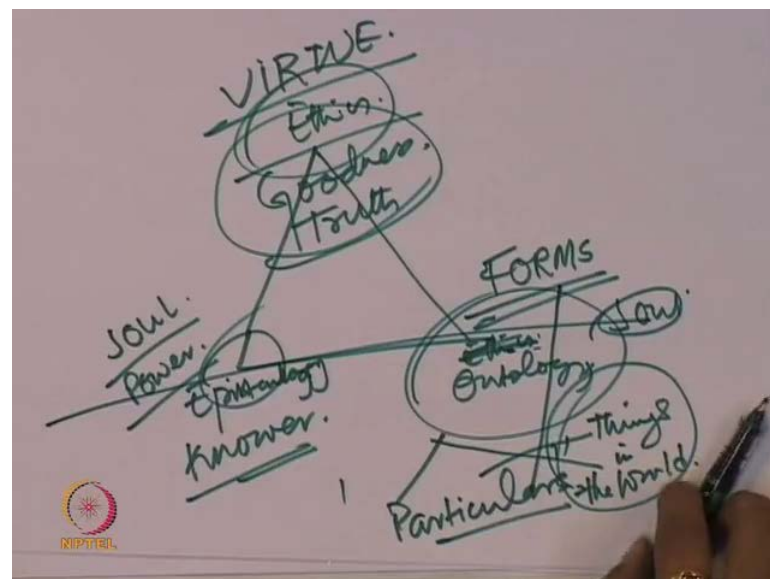
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This idea of a cognitive action, that knowing is a cognitive activity source, that there is a kind of a power of performing cognitive act. Soul has some kind of a power, soul has some kind of a power and this power is intrinsic to the soul. It is the power, which causes voluntary action. So, the source of intentional action is due to the existence of the soul.

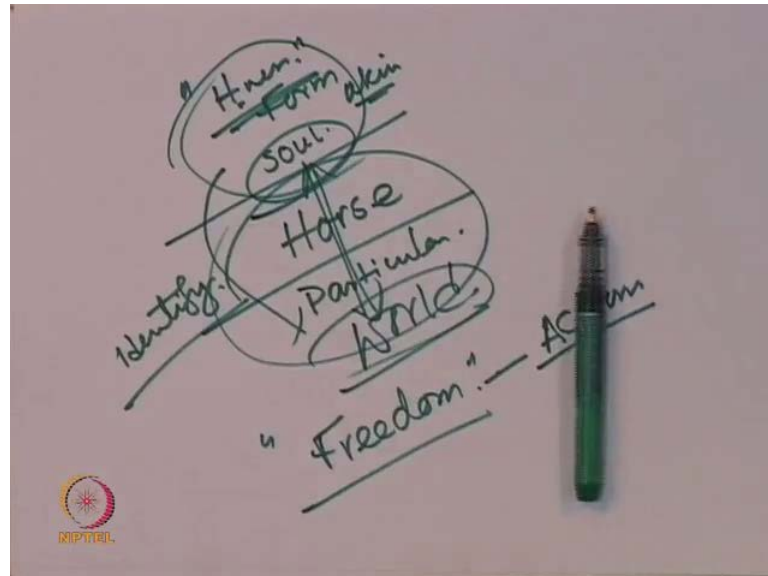
Soul is not absolutely merged with the world.

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Now, the kind of relationship, say, for example the forms and the particulars are having or the soul is in between, this soul is akin to the forms and it is through the forms I know the particulars.

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So, for example, when you talk about the form of horse, horse is a basic particular, a particular horse can have this horse nest, which is the form of the particular horse. So, to identify the horse, that horse is different from cow, tigers, elephants, giraffes, zebra, etcetera is due to the very fact, that I have this idea about **the horseness**.

So, who has this idea? The soul has this idea. Soul is akin, akin is some kind of a, it is not a predicate of the soul. The Soul is, by virtue of this relationship with the form, the soul is able to identify, the soul is able to identify a particular as it is.

Now, this identity relationship is kind of knowledge. So, and that is possible through the soul; the akin is not predictable. If there is no differentiation now, if there is no differentiation, then how do we talk about the knowledge, about the particulars and the knowledge about the forms?

The conceptual knowledge is knowledge, where the soul is or associated with the soul, cannot be part of the world. Soul cannot be identified with the world, no, unless and until it has some specific features. So, Soul has some specific features, otherwise it would

have been identifiable. It is this differentiable; differentiation is possible because the soul is associated with the forms.

(Refer Slide Time: 31:01)

Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

Relationship between forms and particulars

- **Contemplation**/ apprehension as such is self-moving or spontaneous.
- **Soul is an intermediary between two realm of existence**
- **Eternal IDEAS/ Forms & Mundane PARTICULARS**

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So, the relationship between the forms and particulars is apprehended through the soul, which has certain spontaneous movement. Now, this idea of movement will be discussed in later philosophy talks about freedom; the self is free to act. So, it is the freedom of will, as (()) would call it, which talks about, which is the source of action.

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IDEAS
Human Form

Soul

Particulars
Horse

Things in the World

Freedom

Action

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So, the spontaneous movement of the soul implies, that the soul is free, soul is the creator of the movement, soul is an intermediary between the two realms of existence. As I said, it is in between this, it is here you have ideas and here you have particulars. So, there particulars, there are things in the world, there are things in the world and soul is in between this. It tries to relate to ideas and relate to the things in the world.


So, hence, soul is an intermediary between the two realms of existence, the eternal ideas; ideas, which are universal; ideas, which are universal and different from this mundane particulars, particulars that are there in the world.

(Refer Slide Time: 32:27)

Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

Theory of soul

- **Unexamined** presupposition for living an examined life.
- **An unexamined life is not worth living.**
- The ethical aspect of ontology speaks about living a **virtuous life.**
- **Soul is a metaphysical reality**

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Let us summarize, what is the metaphysical position of the Plato's notion of Soul. So, the theory of Soul says, that every living actions are to be examined. The Socrates famous slogan, an unexamined life is not worth living.

As I mentioned earlier, that in Plato's philosophy we will find, that epistemology, ontology and ethics, they are, they are the three foundation of the entire philosophy and they are related. There is a kind of a triangular relationship; they constitute a kind of a structure in which they revolve. Socrates famous slogan, that an unexamined life is not worth living, is very clearly maintained and discussed by Plato's theory of soul.

So, the soul has this desire, the soul has the higher aspiration to know what it is to talk about its own self-knowledge and self-identity. Hence, it needs to contemplate on its

activities and this contemplation is a kind of an examination, we need to examine it. So, so, there is a kind of presuppositions in the theory of soul. There is an unexamined position of living for an examined life. So, an unexamined life is not worth living.

The ethical aspect of ontology speaks about the living of virtuous life. So, the ontology not only tells us, that there are forms, forms like goodness, justice, compassion, courage, etcetera, but how does an individual live through these virtues. How does one inculcate these virtues? The individual inculcates them, put them in their action and try to see the meaning through the cultivation of these virtues.

Now, unless one cultivates the virtues, one would not be able to examine what they are, what has been given to them and what is his responsibility. So, there is some kind of a responsibility and this is what we call the moral responsibility. It is the responsibility of every individual to know what he or she is.


Now, for Plato, that is the metaphysical principal of the soul. The soul has the desire of knowing, know the truth. So, soul is a metaphysical reality for Plato.

(Refer Slide Time: 35:44)

Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

Transcendence

- “The ideas by degrees vacate their position of transcendence and are seen to be dependent upon soul.”
(Roberts 1995: 376)
- Soul is the centre of gravity in Platonic system
- *However, it does not eliminate Plato's Dualism.*

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Now, as a metaphysical reality, the soul, as Plato tries to show us, transcends its engagement with the empirical world. We are all engaged with the empirical world because we are all performing actions here and now, our actions have history, our

existence has a history; it is history because it is happening in time. It is, we are here now because our existence has got some special temporal location.

Now, what is important is that we need to transcend this engagement, this interaction with the world. You do not have to know what is the reality, like the prisoners had to transcend the engagement, that they were having with his fellow prisoners thinking that the shadows are only real.

But the shadows were not really real, he had the responsibility he could turn his psyche in such a way, that he could go out and could contemplate on these two experiences, the experiences, that he had when he was really inside the cave and the experiences, that he can count when he moved out of the cave, and with that reflection on reflective mind, the platonic notion of soul gives us this impression, that it is a kind of a transcendental principal.

The ideas by degrees vacate their position of transcendence and are seen to be dependent upon the soul. So, it is the activity of soul, that transcends various knowledge claims, various engagements and tries to realize what is the ultimate truth. So, soul is, is the center of gravity in platonic systems.

So, when we talk about epistemology, when we talk about Plato's ontology, when we talk about Plato's ethics or the theory of values, where we locate soul? The soul is center of gravity, it is there in the center and these three are revolving around the soul. So, in a platonic system of morals, ontology and epistemology, the soul constitutes the center of the gravity. However, it does not eliminate Plato's dualism, even if Plato is thinking, that soul is the center of all this engagement.

So, engagement with the morals, engagement with the mundane existing particulars and engagement with the forms, this notion of a soul as, as a center of gravity does not deny Plato's dualism, that there is a world in the world of particulars and there are forms independent of this world. So, this ontological dualism is not denied, it is not eliminated because the soul is only akin to the forms, they cannot be part of the particulars. Soul, through forms tries to know the particulars, tries to identify the particulars, but yes this is this is what it is.


(Refer Slide Time: 40:06)

Contemporary Issues in **Philosophy of Mind & Cognition**

Dualism Reconstructed

- Soul as the subjective factor of knowledge
- And **antithetically** related to the object.

- IDEAS (Forms)
- World (PARTICULARS)

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So, this notion of dualism is very much part of Plato's philosophy. Now, one can reconstruct Plato's Dualism, Robert tried to reconstruct Plato's Dualism. Now, what kind of reconstruction Robert does? He says, the soul, which is of the center of all this activities could be a subjective factor of knowledge and it is antithetically related to the object. So, that kind of dualism between the subject and object, the knower and the known, are very much there in (()) in (()). So, there is a kind of a dualism, which probably Plato could be a source of it.

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– “In some what similar fashion (referring to Kant) Plato, having postulated soul as that in which mind and wisdom are contained, argues from the soul which acts as organizing principle in the individual to a supreme soul in the universe, from which the souls of individuals derive their being.”

• (Roberts 1995: 380)

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Now, let us read in what way Robert tries to see, tries to interpret Plato's Dualism, try to reconstruct Plato's Dualism. He writes, I quote, in somewhat similar fashion, referring to Kant, Plato having postulated soul as that which mind and wisdom are contained, argues from the soul, which acts as organizing principle in the individual to a supreme soul in the universe, from which souls of individuals derive their being.

So, it is with this we would like to conclude, that soul is, is an organizing principle, soul is a unifying principle. Hence, it is a metaphysical principle, principle, which connects to ideas, connects to the particulars and tries to realize, what is the supreme virtue?

(Refer Slide Time: 41:56)

Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

Motion of the soul

- Motion of the soul is rational
- Knowledge → movement
- **Soul's affinity with the body**
- Mortal soul → trunk of the body
- **Immortal soul → Reason, spirit and appetite**
- **Three forms of activity (chariot)**


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So, it is that where you find Plato is talking about, how soul is the source of all kinds of motion. The platonic notion of motion or movement as, as talking about freedom is some kind of a rational movement. It is (()) rational movement, the movement, which is articulated by region and even it is expressed; it is expressed through physical action. Hence, one can also notice its affinity with the body.

Soul is independent of the body and soul is related to the body. Soul is independent because it, it is the cause of its own motion. So, the mortal soul is as Plato's says, the trunk of the body and the immortal soul, as the soul has the reason, the spirit and also can be divided into these three categories: region, spirit and the appetites.

There are three forms of activities where activity of the chariot and the activity, which of these horses were pulling the chariot. So, the charioteer, the soul has the power to control the movement of the horse. At the same time, the chariot in itself represents a kind of a composed organic system like the body is, and the soul, who is there in the body, controls its movement. That is the, that is how charioteer controls the movement and directs this horses towards a kind of a destiny. So, there is, is a notion of destiny in Plato's philosophy.

Destiny is to realize truth. So, truth is an ultimate end and we need to realize following a dialectical process. It is a process, which is cultivated through contemplation and reflection. It is knowledge, which is conceptual not censoring. So, this will conclude Plato's discussion on the notion of soul.

Thank you.