

Philosophy and Critical Thinking
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Lecture 01: Introduction

Namaskar to all. Welcome to NPTEL course on Philosophy and Critical Thinking. I am Gyan Prakash, working as an associate professor at Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT ISM, Dhanbad. I will be discussing different philosophical concepts from western world as well the Indian world. This course is very important for all of you because this course is all about your world, it's about you. Now one may think that why philosophy because these things we can discuss in our different subject, a different discipline. For example, science, social sciences like psychology, sociology but, philosophy is going to give you a very different aspect, very different view about your view and about your world. Therefore, I believe philosophy is a very important course for everyone.

Now, in this course, we are going to discuss many different concepts from the western world as well the Indian world. So, first of all we will start from the pre-Socratic philosopher Socrates because in the western world as well they are very important philosopher we supposed to discuss in the sense that their idea, their concept is a very important concept.

So, we will be discussing the pre-Socratic philosophers, the Socrates, the Plato idea of idea and Aristotle. Again, we will be discussing René Descartes and Spinoza from the western world, Locke and Hume. We will be also discussing the ethics and the different principle of ethics. For example, Hedonism, Theory of utility, Kant and duty, and, from the Indian philosophical system we will be discussing Sankhya, Vedanta, Buddhism and Jainism. I have designed this course in such a way that you will have an idea of many different concept from the western philosophy as well the Indian philosophy.

However, this course is in very introductory level, so we are going to just understand all the philosophical concept in very basic level. Now, let's start that what is philosophy? So, this is an etymology that's word Philo plus Sophia, it means love of wisdom. Philo is love, Sophia is wisdom. Now, the question is if the philosophy is love of wisdom that doesn't mean that this is love of wisdom is like love of any other thing? For example, I love Pizza. But I believe the philosophy is much more serious discussion right where we discuss a different concept from the philosophical world. So, this philosophy is a kind of academic enquiry where we do a lot of enquiry about a different concept.

Now the question is what is wisdom?

So practically there are two ways to understand the wisdom. First is a practical way to understand and then theoretical. So practically the knowledge of how to live the best possible life. The question is why I am saying the best possible life? Why not only possible life, right? So, in philosophy we cannot fix that there is only way to live the possible life for everyone. That is why we are saying that this is the best possible life. So maybe this X is the best way to live my life and not for you and Y is the best possible way to live the life for Y. Therefore, we use this word the best possible word. Now let's understand with an example. For example, there

is two person called X and Y in the classroom or in a meeting and both of have some waste material in hand. For example, wrapper or waste paper and what they did that they waited for the class. Once the class got over then what they did they went out both of them X and Y. What X did? X threw this wrapper or piece of paper on the street and Y is looking for dustbin. Here, in this example X and Y both of them are intelligent because they knew that were not supposed to threw these things in the classroom or the meeting hall.

So, what they did they came out and then they did that. It means both of them are very intelligent but Y in the case who the person who is looking for the dustbin he is what he is doing he is looking for a best possible way. So that is why what we do is a person is wise it means that he is living his life a best possible way. Now, theoretically is knowledge of ultimate cause of things. I mean basically when I am saying the ultimate cause we are talking about in terms of the reality.

So, if you are aware of the reality then it will be very easy to perform set of action, right? Now what is the ultimate cause of things those things we will be discussing in this class. But here is important is the practical wisdom require theoretical wisdom because without theoretical wisdom the practical wisdom is useless right and without practical wisdom theoretical wisdom is useless. So, if we have a theoretical wisdom you apply in your life.

Now, let us understand this idea of philosophy from the Indian perspective. In India or Indian system, Indian knowledge system, philosophy we use a word for philosophy is “Darsana”. “Darsana” means to see to looking at a vision. Now it also means that we are like we have an own view about an object. So, we are looking at an object situation and the world and trying to understand an object and the world and what I am doing we are like forming my own view, right. So, the idea is when you have some view for example I have some idea about my world, so, I have philosophy. So, having philosophy but the moment I started thinking why I believe and why I think there is X now it's called doing philosophy. So, there is a difference having philosophy and doing philosophy. So, philosophy what we will do that philosophy will teach you, will train you how to think, not what to think, right. So, what I will be doing I will be discussing many different philosopher from the western as well the Indian world who going to give you a different explanation of the same concept. So, you will have an idea that there is one concept and we are going to explain the same concept from different aspect. Then, you will realize that okay oh my god this is even we can think in this way, right. So, this is how I am saying here you will learn how to think. Again, one more point I would like to mention here that Indian philosophy is more about the practical wisdom. Indian system they believe that our main goal of life is to achieve the liberation or happiness or final happiness.

Therefore, they are discussing many things as in a western world but these all the concept are just on a stepping stone for them. The final goal for them is to achieve the ultimate reality. Now, what is the ultimate reality and what does it mean when I am saying that Indian philosophy, for Indian philosophy this small concept and all the concept is a stepping stone we will be discussing when we start Indian philosophy. Now, question is why philosophy? Why philosophy is important? That is very important right. I mean one may ask that okay fine I got the idea that okay in philosophy we discuss these things but why philosophy is important and why philosophy is a different from other subjects.

So, let's understand from one example. So, all of you is aware of the traffic signal, so, at

least we know that what is traffic signal and the light meaning is right. So there is in a red color so we say that "stop." There is a green is called "go." So, whenever we are like driving our car or motorcycle so when we saw a red stop right asking to stop on the road and then if there is a green light traffic signal then we are like going. Now, so this is very simple right but let's understand this example in very different way. Suppose there is a kid and there is some problem with him and this red color is appearing as a green. I mean what does it mean right? So let's understand the same example or kind of example from I will give you another example to understand this idea why what it is. So I am staying in the IIT campus where other faculty also in our neighbor and there is one kid who is playing with my kid when they were two year old right and both of them were completely fine but when they after few years when were like four and five years they started going to school. The other kid, the parents. and the teachers realize that this kid needs a thick glass.

Now you think of this kid life before the glass and life after the glass. His world is very different right? However, this kid was behaving very normally, right? So his world was completely different from our world right. And even if you see a kid or parents and how do we teach a kid how do we train a kid? So we always say that beta always say this is red color right. I have no idea that this color is appearing as a red or green or maybe I may say that I don't have any way to access his subjective world. So, I always say this is red this is red. Even the kid is saying it's green I will say no it's not green it's red say it red. So even there is a red color appearing as a green but I have trained this kid to say it's red. The same way green color is appearing as a red but I have trained my kid to say this is green. Now for this kid is normal this kid day to day life is completely normal but his subjective world is entirely different right. Now, therefore the philosophy is very important because philosophy is going to talk about the subject not the object. Now what does it mean? In other discipline what we do like suppose there are 100 students in the class and 99% students are saying that there is an X right? But one student may raise in hand and say no there is a Y or there is a not X, right. What does it mean? I mean to say that it is all about your world. What you can do is just you need to think and form a very strong argument. So here in philosophy we will discuss that is how to argue and it is this argument and claim is not about others opinion. It is not going to base on other opinion, right. So you are the person and you have the reality you have your own way of a different way of thinking so you can come up with the set of argument and say that no I don't think this is X I think there is X there is not X there is a Y and so on and that is why philosophy is very different from a different discipline or other discipline. Now what kind of question we can raise in the philosophy or you can say what kind of problem we can discuss in the philosophy. So let's take one example. Do I have a free will? What is free will means? Then if you are like clear about the free will then we can answer this question. So let's understand what is free will means?

So, there is a person called X there is an agent and, in any situation suppose he has a four different choices, right. Like for example, he needs money and what to do then he has four choices. For example, make some false promises and ask money or sell some property or maybe tell the truth about money maybe go for the bank robbery right. Any choices in any situation suppose you have four choices right? Now this person is what he is doing he is thinking what to do right? So he thinking very seriously and decided that I will not go for the

choice one. Again, part of like choice two and decided okay I will not go for the choice two. Third choice I will say and then he decided that I will go for the choice four. Here it does not mean that he can't perform choice one, choice two and choice three.

He can go for the first three choices, but right now he is not free, right now he is not want to perform the action mentioned in the four choice one, choice two and choice three. So right now he is interested in the choice number four. For example, after the class you had a long day right? After the class you have free time for an hour and then you have what to do because after an hour you have some other classes or maybe other plan. Now this one hour you want to do something right. So you have many different choices for example take a nap, go for a walk or go for the chatting and so on.

So finally what you did you decide I will go for a walk. So let's go and take a walk and then come back right? It does not mean that other three action which you are thinking you can't perform. It only means that in terms of choice one, choice two and choice three you have a will but that will is weak right? You can perform the action but right now you are not interested right in this particular action but in terms of like choice number four your will is very strong you want to perform this action right? Now here the question is, is this will is free? Which we have in this example we are discussing the weak will and the strong will. In this given situation I will not go for choice one, I will not go for choice two. Now the question is that is will is free or not free? Now what does it mean when I am saying is will is free or not free right? So suppose you are in train in such a way that you are always have been asked to in whenever you are getting time you should go for a walk. I mean because of your family, your family have asked you, your teacher, your friends, right. So you believe that whenever you are getting time go for a walk at least in the evening you should go for walk or some game. Now this is a situation and what you are doing you are performing this action. So here your will is already determined by x, y and z set of values or training. So your thought is already determined by something and whenever you will have the situation you will be performing accordingly right? So there is one way of saying oh even you are going for the choice four your will is not free right. Because you are train in this way that whenever you are getting chance you will be always performing X right. So there is one argument that okay look our will is not free.

So there is no free will. So we are performing an action because if you think before any action you will realize that whenever I am like trying to think we are using a lot of our many different kind of values. For example, tomorrow morning we will have a test. Now someone approached you saying that okay I have downloaded one very beautiful very good movie so let us say after dinner we will watch. Now it does not mean that you can't go for the movie you can but you believe that you are in the campus or you are studying because you believe that the degree is the priority.

You are here for that first. So what you need to do is you need to concentrate on your studies. Since tomorrow morning I have a test so after dinner you need to go and revise things. Thinking, a thought process and then we decided no not today maybe tomorrow. So tomorrow morning I have test so therefore today I am at least not interested. So can we do it tomorrow right. So there is one argument that look your will is not free right.

It is already decided by set of values, set of training which you have received from your

family for society and so on. Now let us understand the same thing from the different aspect, right. So I think all of you are aware of the karma theory. You know that if I mean whatever you are going to perform and performing a set of actions you have to face the reaction of the action. This is what we call karma theory. But this karma theory is not that simple. It is little complicated, right. So this is what we call karma matrix. So this is you or isn't and roughly I am not going to use any Sanskrit word. This is because this is in a very elementary level.

So you take it in this way that suppose there is you and there are three different tank. Tank number one, tank number two and tank number three. Tank number two is full. Full of what? Full of your impression of your past karma. Tank number three also is full. Full means. This is just an impression for your past action. Now whatever you getting now in present time you are getting from tank number three. So you are facing your past action from tank number three. But the moment you are facing your impression of your past action the same time you are also performing some action. So the impression of this set of action is accumulating where? Tank number one. So when once like tank number three is exhausted it will stop, right. And then it will be formed here. Another tank will start here. So in this way everything is like determined. So whatever you have done in the past is supposed to face the impression of that action. So whatever you are doing I mean this is one of the aspects, one way to argue right. So our life is determined by our action, set of action which we have performed. In this matrix suppose you realized oh how I now understand how it works. So what you did? You started performing a good action all the time. But it is not going to stop because according to this matrix, this rule you have to face impression of a good actions.

So does it mean that there is no responsibility because if everything is determined then obviously I am not responsible for my action. What does it mean? Let's suppose someone asked me to perform some action. For example, on gun point like someone asked me oh go and hit him. So this action since I am not free so therefore I am not responsible for my action right. So if we are going to accept this the determinism then obviously we will not be responsible right. There are huge problem. But this is one way to explain these rules and one way to explain this reality. There are many other way they are saying no, no we have free will. We can perform a free will. In the last example among four we are going for one because I am just not interested. It does not mean that I am like forced by someone or my values. Next time I will go for maybe choice number three. So there is many different way to understand and explain same concept and that is what I am saying that the philosophy is a very interesting subject. Now what other kind of questions we may raise in this philosophy. So for example does God exist right, so is there any God? Or if there is a God then what is the nature of God? That is very interesting. I will tell you this. For example, suppose you have an idea of God and then you say I ask what do you mean by God? So you said a God is a person who is very powerful and he is omnipresent, he is omniscience and all. So what does it mean? He knows everything. Then there is one problem. If God knows that what I am going to do in the next moment what does it mean? It means that even my action is already decided, it is already determined. It means that I am not responsible for my action because my all actions are determined by God, my karma then I am not responsible.

And if I am responsible for my action it means that even God does not have any idea that what I am going to do in next moment. So this is how we can like accept, this is how we can reject. So here what our main point is what kind of how to use an argument. There are other questions like example am I dreaming right now? This is also very interesting and we will be discussing when we will start a Rene Descartes in Western world. So the question is am I dreaming right now or not dreaming, it is real. And even I am saying I am claiming that this is not dream, it is real then question is what evidence do you have any evidence or do you have any at least mark, distinguished mark which so that you can say oh no this is dream, this is dream, no this is real. So how to decide because even when we are dreaming what we do after dream we thought ah it was dream. So it is very difficult to know whether I am dreaming or not dreaming right.

What is death? Is death is the final end, is biological death is a final end of your life or it is just a break? What is life? So if you have an idea of life then yes obviously you will be using the time purposefully right or significantly. What is soul? We have talked a lot about the body and soul. What is that soul is? What is the nature of soul? What is the source of this soul? What is the starting point of? There are so many questions right and do I really know anything? So I have a lot of knowledge for example I know this is table, I know I am Gyan Prakash, I know I am discussing on this topic and I know this is fan and so on. So I have a lot of knowledge but is really there is knowledge or not? This world is real or whatever is appearing this world, this appearance is real or it is just an appearance.

And the one of the another very important question is who am I? So if you look at this it does not mean that they are the only questions which we can ask in philosophy. There are many set of questions we will be discussing even in this class. But if you see this all the questions you will realize that there are many questions which you cannot answer from the different discipline. So philosophy what is doing is trying to answer unanswered questions. So sometime we cannot live our life with unanswered question and therefore we are always looking for answer of the question. For example why I am like this right? Why I got this particular family? Why I got this society? Why I got this kind of height and physical attributes? Why I am Indian? Why not I am American? Why not I am European and so on. There are so many questions in my mind. Why I can't sing like any other singer right? So philosophy what is trying to do especially even in the Indian philosophy is trying to answer all the questions. And there is not only one way to answer this question but if we can answer all the questions from a different different aspects and we are going to understand or discuss in this class same thing right. We are going to take a concept and see a different type of explanation of the same concept. So philosophy is then the question is what is a philosophy right? So there are many different opinion about the philosophy.

If you want to summarize this today class. So philosophy is a set of views or belief about the life. But remember that not only having philosophy you also have to doing philosophy. So what we are doing we have a views and belief about our life and then what we are doing we are thinking. We are trying to analyze. There is another way to define a philosophy says that it is a process of reflecting and criticizing our most deeply held concepts and beliefs.

The philosophy is a rational attempt to look the world as a whole right. As you remember that there is one question about the world is real or not real. Philosophy is someone there is

another opinion that philosophy is a logical analysis of language. So what is supposed to do is we supposed to just explain the concept and the words and so on. Some of the philosopher believes that philosophy places it inquiry into the deepest problem of human existence. So these are the philosophy different opinion about the philosophy. So welcome to you all of you again in new journey of inquiry. About this class you can consult you can read these two books. These two books are important. However, in this class I have only discussed just in a basic level what is philosophy. So, thank you so much. I will see you in the next class. Thank you.