

# **Moral Thinking: An Introduction To Values And Ethics**

**Prof. Vineet Sahu**

**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur**

**Week - 01**

**Lecture -02**

**Introduction to Philosophy - 2**

So, coming to Art and Craft. That is an example, that I would like to use, to explain the difference between, Technia and Epistemia. So, we have heard these two words, together, almost taken, almost always together. Art and Craft. But, there is a difference between the two. Craft is governed by techniques.

There is a way of doing it. There are techniques of doing a piece of art, of craft. But, art on the other hand, has intuitive leaps. So, you are particularly, or one must particularly be aware, or heard of artists, breaking moulds, breaking techniques, and doing something new.

So, art is not bound by techniques. Because, techniques that give us simplicity and clarity, can also be techniques, that bind us, that do not allow us to push the envelope. So, when we want to do out of the box thinking, or we want to do something unusual, somebody who is very technique driven, will find it difficult to push the envelope, or go beyond techniques. So, art typically, art and craft together is of course, always a subject in schools and colleges. But, they are two distinct methods of doing things.

Art is about following a technique, and art is about not being limited by the technique, and letting the intuitive process take its own way. So now, summing up, let me read out, what Philosophy is. Well, one, Philosophy deals with the most fundamental questions. It is questioning the obvious. And what makes the obvious, obvious.

So, Philosophy is dealing with the most fundamental questions. So, there can be Philosophy of Mathematics, Philosophy of Life, when we look at, especially let me take a lived experience example, that perhaps many of us have had. In conversations, when somebody has lost something, or is in a state of despair and defeat, one tends to be Philosophical. What does it mean there, to be Philosophical? So, to be Philosophical about life. So, to be Philosophical about life, is to look at, what is the point of life.

Is success the point of life? Is victory the point of life? What is the point of playing the game? So, whenever we ask such existential questions, that are fundamental questions in human life. So, being Philosophical about life, is asking existential questions of life. What is the point of life? What is the point of fighting, not fighting, winning, losing, cheating, not cheating, point of sticking to the rules. So, when we ask these questions, we are also asking fundamental questions, and this is in the domain of the human life. The same questions, or the same fundamental questions, can be asked in various domains.

So, in Social Sciences, in Physics, in Language, we all have, when Philosophy of Language looks into the Philosophical underpinnings of Language, Language as a life form. Second, Philosophy is a study of foundations of knowledge, and various knowledge endeavours. Hence, Philosophy is a second order study. That is, Philosophy is a study of foundations of knowledge. So, what is peculiar, or when you want to look at, is this Philosophical, or is this not Philosophical.

The first filter that should come to your mind is, whether this is asking a foundational question or not. So, asking a foundational question, is very often a Philosophical question. Then, what is not a Philosophical question. That might again be well, if this seems too widespread and exhaustive, what kind of questions are not Philosophical questions. And here, Philosophical questions are questions, that are not Empirically Resolvable questions.

Although they help, and are helped by Empirical enquiries. But they are not Empirically Resolvable questions. So, if you look at, and here you can see the commonality between theory and philosophy, is when we look, say going back to the example of the Archaeologist, who has dug up certain artefacts. Well, those are Empirical content. But those Empirical content, do not tell the story of the way people were living their lives then.

That requires a theoretical leap. That requires a story. That requires an interpretation, to connect these Empirical artefacts, to what kind of life people were living then. Philosophy attempts at articulating assumptions, making the implicit, explicit. Now, what does that mean.

Well, as a Philosopher, when you wear the Philosopher's cap. I am wearing a cap today. But this is not a Philosopher's cap. Just a cap. So, when you are a Philosopher, you are articulating assumptions.

You are able to look at the assumptions of a position. Right. So, when somebody does

something, or when there is a policy, or when there is a decision made, you should be able to, or analyse, what is the value position, or what is the position from which this decision is being made. Say a Welfare state, where there is an increase in taxes. So, you need to understand that well, where is this coming from.

Perhaps, the Parliament has debated, and the Parliament, which echoes the Philosophy of the nation, is more inclined to being a Welfare state, and therefore justifies increasing taxes, or if a real politic explanation that comes to be. If you look at newspaper editorials, they are classical cases of Philosophical pieces, connected to day to day life. Sometimes, they unearth the assumptions of decisions made, and policies given. So, making the implicit explicit. That means, everything that is understood, that we know implicitly, we articulate it, and make it explicit.

And, in this process of making it explicit, we understand it much better. So, if those of you perhaps, who are used to writing a Life Journal, or a Life Diary, your day to day reflecting, and writing on your experiences in life, would understand the value of making this implicit explicit. We all go through life. Right. But then, when you think over your experiences of the day, and write it down, or make it explicit, there is a newer understanding to yourself, that emerges.

That is when, you make the implicit explicit, and some knowledge is created. That is more of an introspective knowledge for your own self. Philosophy is also the spirit, as a core motto of any project. It articulates the fundamental values of the project. So, when you say a philosophy of a company, or a philosophy of an organisation, or a philosophy of a nation, is what it means, that it is the abstract, it is the core or the motto of any project, or any say a school has a motto.

The motto determines the philosophy of the school. So, philosophy articulates the fundamental values of the project, no matter what the project be. Philosophy as an ever self-correcting endeavour, and that is the property of knowledge too. Not looking for an eternal absolute answer, but rather the best possible answer, under the current situation. It accepts the fallibility of knowledge.

So, philosophy as a self-correcting endeavour. That is true also for knowledge, that knowledge has to be falsifiable, it has to be revisable. That means, we are not looking at eternal knowledge claims, but we are looking at knowledge claims that fit the bill now. And if you look at the history of knowledge, knowledge claims have always been revised, in various disciplines that you look at. Say, at one time, the world was supposed to be Geocentric, then Heliocentric.

Look at Biology, once we looked at milk as the most nutritious food available. Now, we look at, the tendency is to understand milk as not a very suitable food for nutrition source for human. So, that knowledge is revisable, is epitomised in philosophy, that we are open to revision. That is an ever correcting endeavour. And then, the question, why philosophise? Now, the question to why philosophise is, let me counter question, why climb the Everest? Now, those people who are climbing the Everest, or any mountain peak, or any adventure, there is always an easier way to reach there.

You can take a helicopter ride to that place, or you can watch a film, the details of that place. Why is it that, powers this sense of adventure, in people who undertake these tasks, for which there is a very safe, comfortable alternative path to reach. Well, curiosity and the experience. So, philosophising, like many Greek philosophers would have it, is something which is being, which we are embedded with, just by virtue of being human. Curiosity, making sense of the world, and oneself, as an individual, a community and species.

So curiosity, yes, that is a fundamental drive for philosophy. At the existential level, it is to make sense of the world, and to make sense of one's own self, both independently and within the world. But if that is not enough, and we should pay heed to, how it affects the world out there, lest this sounds too esoteric, and unconnected to the world we inhabit. To philosophise is to reach, and articulate the axioms of any knowledge endeavour, and having a better understanding of the foundations, one can know better. So, the whole point of articulating, what is foundational.

This process leads to, more accurate description of knowledge, and lays the foundations for a revision, whenever that is required. Fallibility of knowledge, what we talked about is, a philosophical outlook, that strongly resists Dogmatism. Dogmatism is unquestioned belief. And what we just talked about is, knowledge being fallible, being revisable. It is ever open to revision, when presented with better, and more compelling evidence.

This is fallibility of knowledge, that is a crux of philosophical method. Conflicts often occur, when dogma prevails. With fallibility of knowledge as a background, conflicts lessen, and knowledge enhances. So, this is, if we are looking for a practical takeaway from doing philosophy, is societies, which are less philosophical, or companies, or organisations, or families, which are less philosophical, tend to have more dissatisfaction. Because, dogma prevails, and one fights for one's dogma, without being open to understand, or the other's position, or to revise one's position, in light of new knowledge.

So, conflicts often occur, when dogma prevails. With the fallibility of knowledge as a

background, conflicts lessen, and knowledge enhances. Knowledge has a seesaw history, seesawing between paradigms, or what many of you may have heard of as, paradigm shifts. It results from a perpetual conceptual examination. So, there are paradigm shifts in the story of knowledge, in history that we see, that where at one point, one paradigm was held as extreme, and there was a paradigm that we change.

So, when one, and this is why history is important to make sense of the world, is when one looks at the way, ideas have seesawed all through the history. Once gaining enormous prominence, and at one other time, being condemned. And then again, coming back into vogue. So, to look at this seesawing nature of knowledge, is also promotes a perpetual conceptual examination, that philosophy as a discipline moves to. Now, as a student of philosophy, what should you be doing, or as a budding philosopher, not just as an academic philosopher, but a philosopher in spirit.

You should be able to, and this will also be hopefully, the takeaway, the learning outcomes from this course. You should be able, one, to identify foundational philosophical positions, in the most empirical of all questions. So, to identify assumptions, that is going to be your fundamental question. Then, unearth the foundational assumptions of any claim, and become aware of the limitations, owing to the assumptions, connected to the previous claim, that once we arrive at the foundational assumptions, then we can be aware of the limitations, owing from these assumptions. And what does this ultimately do? Three, finally is, debate better, and more importantly, gain from debate.

So, now before I end, I would share the wisdom of philosophy. Wisdom is a word used in philosophy. Wisdom studies is a part of philosophy. To look at debate, not as a platform to only advocate for the views one holds, but also as a learning platform. And till there is debate, and I can understand, there will be a lot of disappointment, and impatience with debate, because debate delays processes very often, or sometimes does not get resolved, and leads to a standstill.

But if you look at the alternative to debate, it is coercion, it is force. So, that is where debate sounds better. And that is where debate is a better method of engaging with differing opinions. And to be philosophical, is to be able to debate. And debate, not just in arguing for what one is convinced of, but being open to revise what one has earlier held as convincing.

So, with this, I invite you all into a journey of philosophy, and hope it is useful, and self-revealing to you, to make sense of the positions that you hold, and to understand

others, and to exercise your intellect, and spirit, to make sense of the world of values that we inhabit. Thank you. .