

Philosophy and Critical Thinking
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Lecture 05: Pre Socrates-Philosopher

Welcome in lecture 5. In this session, we are going to talk about the Presocratic philosophers. In the last class, we have discussed the history of Western philosophy. In brief, if you want to understand that in Western philosophy, if you see the ancient medieval and then modern philosophy, it is very interesting. Today, we are going to talk about ancient Western philosophy. In ancient philosophy, they started with mythology, later on they are talking about the reason and later on in the medieval period, they are talking about the theology and theology in the sense that they give theology, put the theology in a higher position and putting theology in higher positions only means that giving importance to faith, not the reason because they believed that through reason, we may not be able to know everything. Faith is the only way or let us say the revealed truth is the only way to understand this reality, this world. In ancient period, they started with the reason, they are giving a lot of importance to reason and they believe that reason is the only way, I mean we can apply the reason, through reasoning we can understand the world, the reality. Medieval period, what they are doing, they are putting this faith on the top, in the sense that they said that through reason it's not possible to know everything. What does it mean? It means that human capacity, they are doubting the human capacity and saying that no, it is not possible to do that.

Let us see the, and the next in the modern philosophy, they started having a lot of faith in the human capacity, and then again, this had a saying and arguing that through reasoning, we can understand, we can explain everything. So, this is what is I see, I personally believe that it is a reason and the faith, it was dominating in the medieval period where faith got on a higher post and an upper position. In modern philosophy, again reason got importance, it does not mean that they are like rejecting all the concept from the ancient and medieval period. And later on in the contemporary period, they started talking about a different methodology, for example, they started believing that or they started analyzing the concept through the logic and through analysis of the language. So, this is what we have discussed in the last class.

Now let us start our philosophy, I mean pre-Socratic philosophy. Pre-Socratic philosophy, it may like confuse you in the sense that there is a person called Socrates and all the philosophers which comes before the Socrates is called pre-Socratic. So this is, there is no one philosopher, there are many philosopher who was at the time of philosopher was before the Socrates. So that is why we call it a pre-Socratic philosopher. So today we are going to take an overview of all the philosophers who was before the Socrates and that is also is very important in the sense that through the pre-Socratic philosopher and their idea,

you will have an idea of the development of the thought. This all this started in Greece as a Greek philosophers and this is the best example to see the development of human thought. So, they started, as I said, they started with beginning was very mythology and then later on they started from the very complex and comprehensive system and giving a proper explanation of this world with proper reason. Now, initially, they had a focus or problem of, they had a focus on nature. They wanted to know the essence of the nature. So, the external world. Now later on from nature it shifted to a man, the concept of man. Now this shifting from nature to man also resulted in a very different kind of inquiry. For example, the concept of human mind, psychology, politics, poetics and so on. Later on, after this, again they started talking about the high ethics, the highest good, goal of the life and so on. And again, they also brought the idea of God and relation with the God. So, this is how the Greek philosophy starts with the mythology and then finally it ends with the again it giving an importance to the God. Let us understand their philosophy and we will try to give a kind of an overview of this pre-socratic philosopher. So, this is the philosophical problem of pre-Socratic philosopher. I mean if you see all the philosophers and their idea, they were mostly queries moving around the two problems. First is the problem of substance, and then the problem of change.

Now the problem of substance is not problem of only a Greek philosopher or let us say in the Western philosophers also in the Indian philosophers. Problem of substance it means that philosopher was interested to know the external world. External world means if there is in a world outside the mind then what is the nature of that world. This is a very obvious question that whenever like we are there is an object outside the mind then we will start looking at an object trying to understand the nature of the object, the nature of the essence of this object. Now similarly in Eastern and as well the Western philosophy they were very curious about the world. There is a world, now there are many questions later on we will be discussing this. There is a world, so first question arises that is then a world is real. This was not the problem of pre-Socratic philosophers but later on I am just explaining this problem of substance because this questions we will be addressing in this course again and again from the Western perspective and as well from the Indian perspective. Therefore, you have to understand what is this problem is and how there are many philosophers going to answer this question from different perspective. So, if problem is clear then it will be easy to understand their idea, their perspective. The idea is suppose, there is in a world or we see there is in a world, world which I believe exists outside of mine. Now, we are obviously we need to explain that what is this world is right. Now how to do that if I believe that there is a world and for me there is in a world right. If all to explain the world we have to talk about cause of this world. So, cause of the world if you able to explain if you can talk about the first cause.

Now what is the first cause? This world you find even in the Indian system there are philosophers will be discussing those philosophers. They believe that if you try to understand this world you will find that this world in chain of cause and effect. There is an

object and there is a cause of this object right. Again that object is not thoughtless. Again, there is another cause of this object right. So go on right. This world you will find in a chain of cause and effect. Now the question is, is there any stop somewhere right. Because if there is a chain and we are not going to stop it then obviously we may not be able to explain the reality. First question is, is there any cause which is a beginningless or let's say causeless or starting point of this world. If we know this particular primary cause then we will be able to explain the world. Why? Because if you know the first cause, the first object or and the nature of the object, the essence of that first cause then you will be able to explain this one right. For example, in Indian system there is a philosopher or school of thought who said that the first cause of this world is purusa and there is another word called prakriti. It's a mixture of like satva, rajas and tamas guna, right. And this world is made of this guna. Now this is how they are explaining the world. They can explain the nature of the world. They can explain the function right, why this object is acting like this and so on. Western philosophy, they are like looking for a first cause. If you can explain the first cause of the world then it will be easy to understand the world. Problem of pre-Socratic philosophers moving around this problem right, problem of substance, what is the substance? This is called the substance that if there is an object or there is a thing which you believe that this is a first cause or this is the cause of everything then this is what they are saying. This is called substance right. So, they are accepting x and y and z will be going through the philosopher one by one right and this is very interesting to see their development of the idea.

Another problem was the problem of change right. If things are changing then they are like interested in this change right. So, there are two things. Again, I would like to give you an example of suppose you like everything right. For example, you love anything. For example, I have given this example in my first class that suppose there is a character and you like this person a lot right. Obviously, your obvious question is to know this person in a real sense. I mean in a sense this person is playing a different role in a different movie right. For example, an actor right is playing a different role in a different movie. So now you want to know his real personality because this person is playing in always a different character in different movies. You are interested in to know what is his real personality right. We can like understand this not exactly but in a way that if there is a world then we want to know the world of reality. What is real is there anything which is the cause of this everything? And if you can know that if it is possible to know that, right it will be easy to explain the world and how it is safe. Let's take the three subject philosophers and then we will understand how they have done that.

The first philosopher was Thales and he is the timing the 6th philosopher BC by 48 BC. Obviously, we have no idea about Thales direct work. I mean whether he has written at least we have no idea about his any of the book and whether he has written or not. So, our knowledge of this philosopher is limited to the secondary sources only. So whatever we have got we have got from secondary sources. Now this philosopher was more interested

in the fundamental I said that fundamental thing. So, what he believed that the water is the primary substance. Now, why he said that because first is if you ask me the methodology. The methodology was for them they were thinking right using the reason and then coming to the conclusion. There is an idea and they are trying to understand this idea through different reasoning or giving a reason and then finally concluding no this is X this is Y and so on. This person started thinking of there what is the cause of everything. Then this person realized that this water is a very important substance because water can change in any form right. So, if you hit it and then it will become on a gas and then again if you want it can be in solid and if you allow him to go naturally then it is putting on steam flowing steam. So, water is an element who can turn into all the different substance and all the different form. Only water can take a different form right. So, what he said that water is the primary substance and a fundamental substance which is the source of all living earthy. Even tells goes on saying that earth is a disc floating on the water right. He was the first person I will tell you that he was the person who discovered that how to measure the height of tree and pyramids they saved.

Next philosopher was Anaximander and Anaximander was a student of Thales. Now from Thales the Anaximander got an idea of the all kind of problems or question he addressed. Now the Anaximander was not satisfied with the idea of this right. And I believe this is the beauty of the philosophy because even a student can use their argument and come up with a new idea. That is what I have been like saying that of what how the philosophy is. Now so this person is and was not satisfied that water is in a single element because he believed that everything in the world is made of a different kind or opposite character. So, for example water, fire, air right and so on, and earth. The water has a different character an opposite character and then air has a different character. Fire is a different kind of element. Fire can burn, water can dampen. If you allow them to work unflatter then this world will be either dry or watery. And in both way the world, this universe will be ceased too weak, right. The idea is that he believed that out of something as a primary substance which is a boundless. And boundless in the sense that it is an infinite. And however, he never talked about the nature of the primary substance. But he said that everything in this world got its quality from the primary substance. Now Anaximander has an idea that whatever this world has an equality. Its quality is getting from the primary substance. And then primary substance he said that this is a god, he is boundless and the primary substance of this world. Anaximander also gave an idea of this world and he said that initially everywhere there is no water and later on this water dried up all the creatures, water came landed in the dry land because of dried up and then there were all the water creatures was on land. So, this is what his idea of Anaximander.

Next philosopher is an Anaximenes. Again, he was the student of Anaximander and he has a different idea. Now this is what I wanted to tell you that this philosophers has the idea from their teacher or from the previous philosophers and now they are always giving in a

proper reason and applying their reason and coming up with a new idea. He said that it is true that you can think of some mass as Anaximander says that some mass is on our first primary cause. Remember one thing that when Anaximander said that the boundless thing is God so he never used this God in mythological sense but he used a God as a matter. So, Anaximenes this person says that there is a primary cause, which is an infinite but not indeterminate. So, he talked about the ultimate stuff must be an empirical substance and he said that air is the better than water. In the sense that he said that air can be drunk. This is the one argument I mean their idea is there when they are arguing for any substance. You need to understand that particular substance if suppose one philosopher is talking about the air or water it only means that water can turn in a different form and take a different form. So, similarly even Anaximenes believed that air also can take a different form. Therefore, he believed that air is the primary substance.

Now there was a next philosopher is Pythagoras. I think all of you are aware of this person. He is an originator of the number theory and again this person is very interesting in the sense that he was interested in deeply interested in the quantitative relation and he believed that the ultimate step of stuff is not material element like water and earth. He started thinking of the number. Number in the sense that he said he was explaining everything in terms of number and he argued that without number we cannot understand this world the relation not be any uniformity and no law. So, for Pythagoras number was everything through number he can explain this world this uniformity. So that is what he said that whatever is true for number is true for this reality. For him number is on everything. Now the idea of it is taken odd and even. One can be divided by two and one cannot. So, one is limited and unlimited right then finite, infinite. So, this is how Pythagoras has explained this world.

Now, next philosopher was Heraclitus and Heraclitus again he rejected water, air, earth as an element stuff and as a primary substance. He was more interested to explain the change right. What is this change he said. Now what he said that the fire is a single original element and he starts talking about that this reality what for us there is in a real is not a permanent right in the sense that it is continuously changing right. He gave an example of river, no one can step into the same river twice. For when a man enters into a river then he meets on stream of water and next moment the first stream passes away yielding on newest stream of water. So even he was saying that this is a river but this river is what continuously is changing right and this is how if you aware of the Buddhist philosophy in the Indian system they also have talked about the same thing. Everything is momentary they are saying that everything is momentary. For example. take the example of fire. If you see the flame there is a candle there is a flame right. So, if you see the flame for us it appears as a single flame but it does not mean that is in a single flame. There is a series of flame. So, one moment of fire is appearing with the help of wax and this week but immediately he is dying and before he is dying, he is producing another moment of fire. So, this is how this is a series of fire

but for us it appears as a single flame. Similarly, Heraclitus also talks about the things is changing in every moment right. So, this is not things is changing right. It is not fixed in the sense that it is not permanent. He has argued that it gave an example of river and then said that if you want to internet the river twice you may not be able to do that. I mean in the sense that the river is not a constant one thing right. It is continuously changing the flowing stream and then the moment you will internet the first time it is an obviously a different stream and then next time first stream is not passed away and then next time is a new stream. So, Heraclitus is another claim which is very important. He says that since knowledge is inferior to reason. Reason is this because what is an appearing it is we are not able to perceive the reality. Even in a Buddhist philosophy in Indian system if you say they have given a same reason that our sense organs cannot perceive the reality. For us it appearing something else but reality is something else. So, sense that is what Heraclitus has argued, sense knowledge is inferior to reason. So, eye and ears are bad witness. Witness is in the sense that whatever we believe that is in the correct rule is real is not real. So, perception without reflection does not reveal to us hidden truth which can be found only by reason. He argued Heraclitus that the argument the reason is an important. So, what you are perceiving something you have some reflection is a very important part and applying through this reasoning we able to get some reality or some hidden truth. That is what through reasoning only we will be able to understand the reality.

Now next philosopher was Parmenides and again he rejected the idea of the Heraclitus okay what you are saying is not correct. What Heraclitus said that everything is changing. So, suppose there is one substance or one object it is quality it can turn into something else. So, fire can be having a different quality. So, this is what the Parmenides what he did he argued against the Heraclitus and this is what his argument is if being has become it must either have come from not being or from being. If from not being, it has come from nothing, which is impossible. What he given an argument that if there is a being right anything then being is the cause of the being is something being right. It is not possible that it is coming from not being. So, if, let us suppose, for example, there is an X, we cannot say that the cause of X is nothing. We cannot argue that that X is coming out of nothing. If you are doing that, I mean, then he said Parmenides is arguing that it is impossible to do that. If there is something is being it means it has come from some being. So, we cannot argue that it is impossible that it is coming out of nothing or it is coming from not being or cause of this being is not being. If from being then it has come from itself which is equivalent to saying that it is identical with itself on or always was. What he argued that this is not a being and it is coming from where? It is coming from a being. Now if this is coming from a being it means what is an identical. It is not going to change that. What he said that being and thought are one. One person cannot be thought and what cannot be thought cannot be. What cannot be a non-being cannot be thought. So, if there is something it means that we can think of and we cannot like think of then there is no being. So being and thought are also one in the sense that reality is in or with mind. So, Parmenides again he argued that

all reality is changeless. So, if you see the philosopher and their idea before this philosopher. This philosopher what he did he is arguing against the Heraclitus and then he said that all the reality is changeless. There is no change. So, if you are saying that everything is changing it is not true. The universe is one, and change and motion is an illusion. So, for us suppose there is a change. So the change is impossible or the change is illusion. Now he gave an example. One is a corporeal right and a spherical being with filling space or plenum. If plenum is being then empty space alone is non-being or unreal. For example, if you believe that there is an A and B and there is a distance between the A and B it means the between the A and B is in a space. So, a space is again in other space and another space and so on. Now so he argued that space is a non-being or unreal. Now, how is it possible? So, suppose for example if you are going to say that space is thin right. For example there is an A object and there is an B object. In between, there is a non-being, which is unreal for this philosopher. So, if you are going to accept it as a being, then what does it mean that this space is in another space, right? I mean, there is a space, and then this is in where it is within another space, and so on. So, this is what this argument is. We will not be able to come to any conclusion. So, he argued that non-being is unreal.

Now, next philosopher Zeno and in the pre-Socratic philosopher we have not taken all the philosopher and so what we have what I have done is I have taken of important philosophers just to give an idea the development of the thought. The Zeno was a disciple of this Parmenides and what he did that he wrote series of famous paradox proving that motion is impossible. So as said that the motion is whatever is there is an illusion. Now the Zeno, what he is doing is arguing, look that the motion is impossible. Now he gives all are think in one; thus, motion and change are simply illusions, right? Now let us understand his argument through this example. For example, there is an A and B. A is like for example an agent or me. B is a point where is in a grocery shop. Now I want to go to this grocery shop and there is a distance between me and A and B right in a grocery shop. For example, there is some distance. Now what Zeno is arguing that this distance can be divided in the infinite parts. Now, if these infinite parts are so infinite parts to travel to the infinite parts, it needs an infinite time, and nobody can travel to infinite time. Therefore, it is not possible to complete this distance and therefore motion is not possible.

Suppose take another example suppose you fire an arrow on the Zeno from point A to point B. Zeno argued that the arrow cannot travel from A to B. The reason is that this distance is what is again divided it can be divided in the infinite parts right. Now infinite parts to travel the in these parts need infinite time and therefore one arrow cannot travel from A to B. Therefore, he argued that motion is not possible or motion is illusion. So this paradox I am not saying that is later on it was solved and by the other philosopher but if you see the time of Zeno at that time Zeno has even a proper argument and proper reason. Now if you see the conclusion of this pre-Socratic philosopher, I mean conclusion in the sense that that our observation first of all they have made an obvious dichotomy between

the reason and sense. So, if you see their philosophy what you will find that they have talked about that information we are getting from the senses and the reason. They have had this discussion about the reason and the senses. Now their illustration of this reality was without the reference of this religion. So what they did that they explain this world this reality with the help of reason right. They applying a reason and try to explain the world and they explain this world. And again, they attempted to explain the problem of one and the many. So, this was I believe this is my achievement of the pre-Socratic philosopher. And this lesson was if you want to read and more in detail in Y. Masih and Frank Thilly's books are important. Thank you so much for your kind attention.