

Philosophy and Critical Thinking
Prof. Gyan Prakash
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
IIT (ISM), Dhanbad
Week-02
Lecture 08: Plato

Welcome in lecture 8. Today we are going to talk about Plato. So, today in this class we will be discussing Plato's basic philosophy about a theory of knowledge and then doctrine of ideas. Now, since this is a very basic course where I am trying to explain the different philosopher from the western world and the Indian world. So, before starting the Plato, I would like to explain a concept which is a very important not only in western philosophy, as well as the Indian philosophy. This concept is about knowledge. Knowledge is, it means that the kind of knowledge we have. So, there is a discussion about the knowledge and then idea. So, what is first? So, there is a discussion about the object and then idea. What comes first? The idea or object? Now, there are two ways. Let me explain you. It will be easy to understand. Then, we will start Plato.

So, let us understand this discussion. There are two kinds of views. First is, there is an argument that there is no object and we are experiencing this object. Now, we are getting an idea. For example, that there is a table. So, for example, this is in a table and first time what we did that we experienced this object. Now, after experiencing this object, we got an idea about the table. So, next time, whenever we are perceiving an object, we can name it, oh this is called table, this is table, this is chair, this is tree and so on. So, there is an one argument that first what we are doing, we are experiencing an object and then we are getting idea. There is another argument that we have an idea first. It is with us and then there is a table for us. But maybe you are like, it is not clear. Let me give you another example, very real example. So, once I was playing the Lawn Tennis and then in evening, I was looking for a ball, right? So, there is a big court and then and I was, since the ball was other side, so I was looking for a ball and then I saw there is a small snake. The snake is very unusual, small, right? Because in my experience, I have seen either long or small then very thin small. But that snake was, it seems, it was not that usual long but it is unusual small. So, for me, it is the snake was not moving. So, what I did that I made some sound or some movement, right? I tried my best to make this snake move. But the snake was not moving. Even I tried to move three more times. So, that snake was not moving. Now, I got an idea that maybe the snake is a toy, right? Someone has left this toy, right? Or some kid was came here to play and then left us this toy. Now, because whatever I had in my mind idea of snake, that is not there, right? Now, what I thought that, this thought that this snake is not a small snake. The snake is not a toy. So, I was about to pick up, right? I about to touch this snake. Then someone from behind told me, don't touch that. It's the real snake. And then he came with a stick and then the moment he touched, he started moving. Now, there is an argument that since they had an idea and just because of idea, for me, it was, it

became like a fake snake. Because I have never experienced this kind of snake. Now, question arises, what comes first act? The snake, the object and an idea. This example, you may say that obviously it was the object. Because that is why we had no idea about this particular snake. There are many examples where we have seen because of I have an idea. So, for example, there is a table. So, the moment I just saw any object, I say, look, this is a table. The question is all about the knowledge of table. The idea comes first or first is experience. So, this is a discussion in not only in the Western philosophy, even in Indian philosophy. So, there is an argument that idea is important or let us say, idea is the source of our knowledge, not the object. And there is an argument, not the object is the first source, we are experiencing and then we are getting idea. So, object is what there and then we are experiencing it. Now, we are getting some idea. So, we have abstracted this idea. Now, what we are saying is an idea we have is called abstract. For example, there is a lot of objects. In a classroom, in home. So, first time that a small kid is like always experiencing an object and we are naming it like this is a table, this is chair and so on. So, this kid is like asking why is table, why is chair and what is this and so on. So many questions. Now, we are trying to explain this kid that this is called table, table can do this, do that and so on. So, the kid is getting idea about the table because this kid is experiencing this table. Now, this kid has an idea of table that okay, the table at least can hold a couple of books and so on. So, next onwards or maybe next time, whenever he saw this an object, he is saying it is table. So, the one argument is that he is saying this because he had an experience. Now, he has idea of this object. So, since this idea is just a result of the experience, so we are experiencing it and then we are getting idea. This discussion is an all about the external object which is and it is later on even in the Indian philosophy, it becomes like whether external object is real or it is not real. So, that you have to keep in your mind about this discussion. So, we will be addressing this discussion again and again from the different perspective, from the Western, from the Indian, from the different philosophers and so on. So, I hope this is clear, that is about the knowledge, knowledge means about the idea and the object. So, one way is like first an experience, we are experiencing like we have seen cow. Now, I have an idea of cow. So, when we saw the cow, I say Oh look this is cow because I have experienced that. So, I have seen this object called pen, I have seen the object called mobile. So, I have an idea of mobile because I have seen I have experienced that mobile. So, I have an idea of mobile. Now, whenever I am like next time I saw an object, I can say I can name it. I say Oh look this is mobile because I have seen I have experienced. There is other way around is they are saying I am saying this is X, this is table and this is not table, this is chair and so on because I have an idea and this idea is not product of experience. In fact, this experience is a product of this idea. So, I mean later on this was our discussion but this discussion is a very important, you have to be keep this thing in mind.

So, let us start this philosopher, named Plato. The timing of Plato is 427-347 BC. Again, he was the student of Socrates. We have been in last few classes discussing the different

philosophers and these philosophers will realize that how they have they were aware of philosophy of their predecessors and they are developing, they are adding more philosophy or coming up the new idea. That is why I said this is a development of the thoughts. Now, Plato says the skepticism of the sophist regarding knowledge of sense experience and agrees with Socrates that genuine knowledge is always by concept. Now, here genuine knowledge is always by concept means that we have an idea of concept and that is a genuine knowledge. Now, I will be explaining how Plato has argued for this genuine knowledge is only by concept. So, he accepts Heraclitus' doctrine that the world is in constant change but restricts its application to the world of sense experience. He formulates a theory of Mathe-dialectic or logic in which he describes the art of forming and combining concepts. Now, Plato is arguing that sense perception does not reveal the true reality of the thing but gives a mere appearance. Now, Plato has an argument that whatever we are getting through our sense perception, there is no object. It is just an appearance. So, our sense argument giving just an appearance of an object but whether it is true or it is not true, we really have no idea. I mean in the sense that if you take in Indian philosophy, Buddhist philosophy will give an example of a flame. If you take your sense perception, sense perception, there is a single flame, but in reality, that is not a single flame. It is in a series of flame but through sense perception what we are getting, we are getting a single flame. So, similarly even Plato is arguing that sense perception does not reveal the true reality and again there are many times in our life we have proved that sense perception has given a wrong information. For example, dream, illusion, hallucination and so on. So, many times for us there is a real object but later on we realize that this object is not real. For example, suppose there is a dim light or there is no light and for you there is a snake, for you there is a pot, for you there is a ghost. And when you saw this object for example in your bedroom or in your house or in your garden, you brought some more light and then realize it was not a snake. I mean it is not a snake, it is a rope. Because of the dim light, because of no light there is a rope appearing as a snake. So, later on you realize that this is what the information was not real which is by the sense perception. Dream sometimes comes so real that even after dream we are difficult to accept whether it was real or not real. And many times, it happened with me that I am like dreaming and then it was so strong that after even I just once done with these things I woke up and then still I have a feeling oh it was a dream or not or just my experience of the past moment. So, it happens like even there are a kid in my house and first time she saw a very bad dream and then we took another one hour to convince her that that was dream. So, my claim is that the sense perception is not revealing always the true reality. What happens like for example if you have seen something right there is for example there is a person who is not telling the truth and you have seen that, you have realized that X gave you a wrong information. Next time even he is going to give you information you are not going to trust this person. Because you have proof, you know that this person has done this kind of action in the past and therefore you are not going to trust him. Similarly, the sense perception many times in our life we have an example, we

have a proof where he has not revealed the true reality has given a very wrong information. So, therefore we are not we should not trust out the sense perception. So, this is not like a philosophical discussion. So, I will tell you that how this Plato is claiming that sense perception is not or does not reveal the true reality. So, he said that the concept constitutes the essential object of thought not the sensation. I will give you an example. Suppose let take an example of table. So, I like maybe my drawing I am not doing good in drawing. So, suppose this looks like a table or let us say hut, house. Now, for you it is appearing in a hut why? Because you have an idea of house. Because you have this idea and therefore this object, this drawing, you feel that this is a house. House means I have drawn the house or table or pen. So, this idea of houseness, let us say the tableness is where is there in concept. So, you have a concept of tableness, houseness and therefore this is for you this is the table. Therefore, this is you this is for your house. So, the concept is a genuine knowledge. So, you have the concept of table and therefore whenever you saw there is an object you are saying oh look this is table. Plato is arguing that this concept is a genuine knowledge which constitute the essential object of thought. Like give an example of notion of justice. So, if you take any example of one justice that cannot constitute the idea of justice. Now, basically Plato is arguing that when you saw something there is one case of justice. So, this case of justice is not going to form the idea of justice. Basically, his argument is that this idea is not a result of the experience. So, we have a one experience and that experience cannot form the idea. So, we do not derive it by abstraction from particular case of justice that is not possible. So, what Plato is arguing that this idea, this concept which we have in our mind that is not product of experience. He argued the experience is not the source of our concept. For nothing in experience in world of sense exactly corresponds to the concept of truth, the beauty, the goodness and so on. He arguing that we have an idea of beauty or goodness that if you take any example of your experience, you realize that that is not God's because of this experience. Now, he given an example. Suppose you saw there is an X. X in a sense it can be anything person or let us say scenery, painting, or any beautiful thing. So, you are claiming first time you saw this painting and then you realize that Oh my god this is a wonderful painting. This is my first time I have seen such a beautiful thing. For example, in an object or like you have gone on vacation and then you saw there is another hill and then a lake and so on, and then the first time, you realize it is a beautiful place. Next day morning you saw another place, Y, and then you are going to claim Oh no Y is better than X. This is the most beautiful place or most beautiful thing, most wonderful painting, then object. You are saying this because this is close to this idea of beauty. So, you have the concept this is in a close I was going to say this oh Y is better than X. So, what Plato is arguing this idea of this beauty, the concept of beauty which you have. It is not just because you have experienced this in particular case or particular object, particular place. It is not product of your experience and then as I said he is arguing that the conceptual knowledge is the only genuine knowledge.

Now, he has talked about there are many different segments of the knowledge. So, first and let us say the lower level of knowledge is conjectural knowledge. This kind of knowledge is like illusion and it can be a hallucination, your dream. So, you have seen, for example, you saw there is a snake, and later on, you realize that there was a rope. I was sparing a snake. So, that is called conjectural knowledge. Next segment is a belief. Belief is more our sensible object, the day-to-day life we experience. Now, the third segment is discursive intellect, which is a mathematical, arithmetical idea, the plane, the triangle, and so on, which is hypothetical knowledge. And the final one is the form. Form is the highest knowledge. This idea is the highest knowledge and this is the genuine knowledge. So, the lowest segment, the conjectural knowledge, is less reliable, and belief is more than the conjectural knowledge. Discursive intellect is more than belief and then finally forms is just in the top segment and which is only genuine knowledge. Now, let us see the Plato idea of idea and there is a so-called form, it is an idea. Now, he is arguing that this is an eternal and transient archetype of things. So, this idea, the concept is eternal. So, the particular which we perceive in imperfect copies of reflection of eternal pattern. Now, the question is supposed there is an argument, Plato is arguing that idea which we have, it is not product of experience first and this is what is eternal. Now, the question is then what is this world is all about? Then the answer is this world, the table. This is an imperfect copy or reflection of the eternal pattern. Particular may come and go right but the idea or forms goes for forever. So, you have for example then idea of table. The idea of table is eternal. Maybe there is in a table and this is like after some time you may not be there. But the idea of table is not, is going to die. So, idea is not going to finish. So, you will have an idea of table. So, argument is Plato arguing that the idea is eternal. Now, again he argued that there are many objects or copies but is the only one idea of class or theme. For example, there is a cow. Now, we have the Cowness. Cowness is there is an object and then idea of an object. So, since we have an idea of an object, the cowness is there in our mind and, therefore, for us, and there are many imperfect copies of this idea. So, there are many cows. It can be a different color, different shape, different size and so on. But idea because of this cowness idea that is a one. Now, this idea is arranged in logical order and substance under the highest idea, the idea of good, which is a source of all rest. It goes like this. For example, we have an idea of horse. So, we have a horseness. We have idea of cowness. For example, let us say this way. So, this is a horse. Let us say horseness, idea of horse, idea of cow, let us say goat, let us say tiger, let us say elephant and so on. So, there are so many different animals and we have the idea. But if you see, we also have an idea of animalness. So, if you see this will go like this here. So, the idea is, this is in top, this is how it goes and at top this is an idea of good. And this is the source of all the rest. So, this is the top. So, this is what the idea is. Now, the universe is conceived by Plato as a logical system of ideas and organic unity governed by a universal purpose. The idea of good and it is therefore a rational and significant whole.

Now, let us talk about how to summarize this notion of idea. So, forms or idea defined as the objects corresponding to abstract concept are real entities. Second, there is a great variety of forms including the form of classes, of things, house, dog, man, etc. The qualities over whiteness, roundness, of relation, equality, resemblance, etc., of values, goodness, beauty, etc. The forms belong to realm of abstract entities and separable from concrete particular in space and time. The form is superior to the particular in degree of reality and value. So, in the sense that form, the idea is as an upper hand or the superior place than the particular. Particular in the sense that an object. So, there is a table. So, table is an idea, and then the table is particular. So, the forms are non-mental and subsist independently of any knowing mind. They are not ideas residing in the minds of men or even the God's mind. He argued Plato that ideas are eternally and immutable. The forms are logically interrelated to constitute a hierarchy in which the higher form communicate with lower and subordinate forms. This is what I gave an example of. So, the forms are apprehended by reason not by sense. So, this is what he argued that it is difficult to if you will try to understand the form, the idea, it is not been possible through the senses. Only through reason we can understand the form. Now, Plato has argued that the two kinds of knowledge, first is opinion is dependent on sense perception, like what we are perceiving and second one is genuine knowledge that is form. So, genuine knowledge is only form in Plato. So, all the conceptual knowledge which we have is arguing that that is the genuine knowledge. So, in sensation and opinion, the soul is dependent on the body but soul in so far as it beholds the world of idea is pure reason. This is a higher and then lower soul where he talks about that the soul has in pure reason in a sense an idea, like the world of ideas. So, Plato teaches that the soul has viewed such ideas before and has forgotten them. The imperfect copies of idea in the world and sense suggests to the soul in its past, remind it of what it has seen before. In the last class while discussing the Socrates, there was an argument which is again accepted by the Plato. He says that the soul has gone through many lives. You can recall the Socrates idea how accepted the immortality of soul and then birth and after birth and rebirth. Similarly, Plato also believes that soul is immortal, again has gone through many lives. So, whatever we have an idea, I mean, it is already there and when we are experiencing an object, basically this imperfect of copies of ideas world is reminding the soul of this knowledge. For example, I gave an example of the snake or where I argued that the experience first and because I had no idea, I had no experience of this kind of unusual small snake. So, that is why it was difficult for me to understand. Plato will argue that no idea is there but because of this particular object is going to remind that and therefore, sometime we feel that we are experiencing and we are getting idea but that is not true. So, all the idea which is there in soul and this object, this particular object which we believe that is we are experiencing and getting an idea, basically these particulars are reminding the soul of this object, this idea. So, it always reminding that okay, if you believe that imperfect copies of idea in the world of sense are just the soul of its past and remind it that what has seen before. So, Socrates says that whenever we are arguing that okay, no,

first time I have experienced or there is an object, first time saw this object in my life, but Plato is arguing that it is not true. In reality, this particular object is going to remind your soul about your knowledge. So, whenever you believe that you are learning and you argue that we are learning, basically it is not learning, it is kind of reawakening. So, you know something and then you are again learning the same thing. It is called reawakening. So, this is what Plato has argued that when you are arguing that ideas are product of experience because, can give an example that is in a first object, first time I am experienced object and I have no idea of this object. So, they will argue that it is because if they have idea and this particular is going to remind. So, you believe, you are thinking that this is in a learning, but basically it is not learning, it is in a reawakening of the thing. About soul, Plato argued that this is in a rational faculties primarily in intellectual one and the spirited faculty is an executive faculty somewhat resembling the will, but it is misleading to equate it and with the will as the faculty of decision and free choice. Basically, the soul has two kinds, the higher and the lower. So, lower is about the body when it comes in contact with the body and their desires and so on. So, they had divided into first in the spirited faculty and this is an operative faculty. So, this is how they have Plato has divided into two.

Now, in the last, this is an allegory of cave and this again is an important example. First is, let us see, let us understand these are the prisoners and I am just going to, this is in a cave, this is in a prisoner and here, this is in a big wall, this side. This is another big wall and this is in a roadway and here is what there are people as like for example going from here and there and so on. Here is a fire. So, all the objects are moving from this side, it is casting the shadow of we are hidden in this wall. So, for example, there is a book here. So, it will cast the shadow here in the book. These prisoners, they are chained and such a way that they even they cannot move their head. So, they have no idea of the outside world. So, they can only see the shadow. So, whenever this object is moving from this side, for example, on the book, for example, table, for example, chair and so on. So, the shadow is here, this casting always here and for them, this is book. So, for them, the shadow is a real object. So, when you will say the book, I have seen the book, they will be always referring to this shadow. So, for example, there is a bird here, there is a shadow of bird this side. So, for them, there is a bird. So, whenever they are like discussing about any object, they are always referring to this shadow, book. So, there is a person is moving this side with hat or different kind of object. So, if it is there, they are going to talk about, they are going to always refer to this shadow. So, for them, they haven't seen this any real object in their life. So, for them, all the shadow is real. So, when they are like naming a book, pen and pencil, they are always referring to this object, the shadow. So, this is what their world is. Now, for example, let one set free this one prisoner. And first time in his life, he has moved his head. It will be a very, obviously, it will be a very painful for this prisoner. Then, looking again at this fire, again, it will be very painful. First time he is like seeing the fire. But after some time, if suppose you are like dragging this person out of the cave, again this person will have a lot of pain in eyes. He cannot see things. So, he will take time. And after some

time, he'll start looking at this object in the world, but he'll start with the shadow first. And then see the real object. And then realize that look how I was in a different world, the reality is something else. Then the last one will be the last thing to see for him. So, once he has come back, for example, after this knowledge, again if he is coming back to inform the prisoner side, fellow prisoners, it will be for him again, it will be very difficult to see things, to adjust his eye. It will be very painful that he cannot see things. And if he is going to inform all of them that reality is something else, this is not reality. Now them is going to accept that this and maybe sometime they are not going to leave him. I mean, they may hurt him because they are comfortable in this world. And what this person is saying, it is not, they are not accepted as a real. So, this is what the allegory of cave and we will continue this idea in the next class from the Aristotle point of view where Aristotle again the next philosopher who rejected the idea of, preparing idea of idea.

References, this lecture was based on these two books. Thank you. Thank you very much for your attention. Thank you.