Summary of Course 3.7: Introduction to Modern Contemporary Thought

General:

This course outlines a comprehensive cultural-historical and philosophical-scientific evolution of Western thought, grounded in the reductive model of observation, hypothesis formulation (abduction), prediction (deduction), and testing (peirastic reduction). The text uniquely highlights not only rational systems, but also the subtle, mantical, and depth-psychological dimensions of philosophy. The historical trajectory leads from ancient natural philosophy (Milesians, Pythagoreans, Eleatics, and Heraclitus) and the ancient decline via atomism, sophistry, and Euripides' tragic view of humanity, to the classical Attic synthesis of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Subsequently, it is shown how late ancient theosophies and Christian patristics and scholasticism shaped the Western mind, ultimately culminating in the foundational crisis of the Enlightenment (Kant) and modern movements such as German Idealism, phenomenology, existentialism, semiotics, and socio-critical thought.

Summary

1: The Methodological Framework – The Reductive Method

The course starts from a clear philosophy-of-science premise: the reductive method. Every philosophical or scientific inquiry passes through four consecutive phases:

- *Observation:* collecting immediate factual material from the lived world (*commonsense*).
- *Abduction* (regressive reduction): formulating an explanatory hypothesis or 'lemma' to make the astonishing multiplicity of facts intelligible.
- *Deduction* (progressive reduction): deriving logical and testable predictions from the hypothesis.
- *Full or peirastic reduction*: testing predictions against new facts through verification or falsification.

In addition to this core reductive model, the course employs supplementary methods of thought, such as phenomenology (describing facts of consciousness), hermeneutics (interpreting texts and experiences), dialectics (thinking in terms of tensions and syntheses), and *stoicheiosis* (analyzing and reordering basic elements).

2: Ancient Natural Philosophy – Origin and First Foundational Crisis

Western philosophy originates in Greece with the investigation of *physis* (nature). Within this, we distinguish four major early schools of thought:

- *The Milesians* (Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes): They introduce hylian abstraction by searching for the *archè* (first principle) and primal matter of all things (such as water or the boundless *apeiron*).

- *The Palaeo-Pythagoreans:* They develop mathematical-theoretical abstraction. The cosmos consists of number forms and mathematical harmony. This merges with Orphic theosophy, in which a hierarchy of souls and subtle forces plays a central role.

- *The Eleatics* (Parmenides, Zeno): They establish noetic-ontological abstraction and the doctrine of unity (henology). For Parmenides, 'Being' is one, immutable, and eternal; change and multiplicity are merely appearance (*doxa*). Zeno defends this with famous paradoxes and the eristic art of refutation (*reductio ad absurdum*).

- *Heraclitus of Ephesus:* He conceives a hermeneutic-dialectical vision. World-stuff is the 'ever-living fire'. Everything moves (*panta rhei*) through an inner harmony of opposites and an overarching *logos* (world-reason). Heraclitus also lays the groundwork for an early depth psychology by contrasting the human unconscious ('sleeping') with conscious insight ('waking').

3: The Decline of Natural Inquiry – Mechanism, Sophistry, and Tragedy

Around -450, a crisis occurs when reason and sensory experience clash. This leads to new reconciliation attempts and reactions:

- *Mechanism and Atomism*: Empedocles proposes four elemental roots (fire, air, water, earth) set in motion by Love and Strife. Anaxagoras establishes pre-Galilean scientism by asserting that all qualities are present as infinitely divisible particles (homoeomeries), ordered by the *Nous* (world-reason).

- *Leucippus and Democritus* introduce pure mechanism: reality consists of indivisible particles (*atoma*) moving in empty vacuum.

- *Euripidean Hermeneutics*: The tragic poet Euripides brings a depth-psychological and socio-critical turn. He unmasks societal illusions, sheds light on the unconscious drive life (*thumos*), and shows how human fate is governed by enigmatic cosmic forces. Opposed to debasement by intellect, he places *eukleia* (noble self-sacrifice).

- *Protosophistry:* Sophists such as Protagoras and Gorgias shift attention to humanity and society (humanism). Protagoras asserts that man is the measure of all things (*homo mensura*). This leads to a practical relativism, in which rhetoric (the art of persuasion) and the distinction between nature (*physis*) and human law (*nomos*) become central.