Summary of Course 5.3: Philosophy of the Life Course

General: *The texts provided offer an overview of the philosophy of the life course and examine how different thinkers have defined the concept of "life" and the evolution of reality. Central to this is the thought of the Russian Orthodox philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, who transcends Western reason and Romantic thought by connecting the human life course with a religious and divine dimension. The views of historical movements such as Platonism, Romanticism, existentialism and Marxism are also highlighted, each interpreting the relationship between the individual, the cosmos and history in its own way. The sources also discuss the theory of evolution, the role of forms of being and the value of common sense as a foundation for both scientific and philosophical knowledge.*

1. Introduction and the Philosophical Foundations of the Life Course

The course Philosophy of the Life Course places human and cosmic "life" at the centre of philosophical study. Choosing life as the starting point is consistent with the approaches of various thinkers from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Marxism, for example, places social praxis at the center, while existentialism (including in the work of Søren Kierkegaard) emphasizes human involvement and the condition of being thrown into a particular situation. Charles Sanders Peirce's pragmatism, meanwhile, is based on experimentation and the testing of ideas through action.

In addition, Henri Bergson's vitalism — in which life is understood as dynamic change (*élan vital*) and creative evolution, comprehended through intuition — and Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutics of life shape the view of the human being as a historical being whose spirit can be known by understanding (*Verstehen*) its expressions of life.

2. Defining Life and Solovyov's Hierarchy

To delineate the concept of "life", the course distinguishes between several levels of definition:

- *Biological definition:* Phenomenologically, life manifests itself in observable stages such as birth, growth, reproduction and death, based on metabolism and exchange with the environment. It constitutes a self-active totality that distinguishes itself from lifeless matter.

- *General / Philosophical definition:* Philosophically, life is defined as a totality situated in time and space, characterized by independence

(*hupostasis*) and durability (*telos*), in which deviations from its essential purpose are corrected through a restorative mechanism.

- *Evolutionary definition:* Within evolutionism (in thinkers such as Herbert Spencer, Henri Bergson, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Max Scheler), evolution is understood as a continuous process of change and the sublimation of drive into spirit. Maurice Blin adds that evolution consists primarily in the introduction of irreducible forms of being (*morphè*).

- *Biblical-theological definition of Vladimir Solovyov: The Russian* thinker Vladimir Solovyov establishes a hierarchy of increasing degrees of fulfilment in five stages:

- Inorganic matter: Characterized solely by unchanging existence.
- The plant kingdom: Exhibits unconscious life and an orientation towards light, heat and moisture.
- The animal kingdom: Possesses sensory consciousness, freedom of movement and a rudimentary sense of time through memory and anticipation of the future.
- Natural humanity: Distinguished by the human spirit (*logos*) and language, through which it gains insight into universal truth and builds social and scientific structures.
- Pneumatic humanity: The absolute culmination, in which humanity, through the God-man Jesus Christ, is called to "deification" (*theosis*) through the Spirit of God.

3. Common Sense and Platonic Dialectics

The course assigns an important place to "common sense", which must be distinguished from merely "good sense". Whereas good sense refers to correct logical reasoning, common sense denotes the totality of presuppositions and the primordial logic that is potentially shared by all human beings. Thinkers such as Thomas Reid, G. E. Moore and Andrei Amalrik defend common sense against scepticism detached from life and elitist intellectualism.

In Platonic philosophy, philosophizing is directed towards the formation of the soul (*psychagogia*) within a community of like-minded thinkers (*hetairoi*). Platonic dialectics comprises two main methods:

- *Dieretic and synoptic method:* The systematic classification and summarization of concepts.

- *Hypothetical method:* This consists of *synthesis* (forward deduction) and *analysis* (reductive investigation of foundations, in which one searches for the *archai*, or presuppositions, that make a statement meaningful).

This gives rise to a continuous tension between the thesis (the abstract ideal) and the hypothesis (the concrete, situation-dependent factual reality). Plato warns against oppositionalism: the absolutisation of one pole at the expense of the other.

4. Stoicheiosis and Platonic Psychology of the Soul

Stoicheiosis, or factor analysis, breaks down a totality (a system) into its constituent elements (*stoicheia*) and presuppositions. A central role is played by the *systechy* (*sustoichia*) — the pairing of concepts in opposition, such as higher/lower or good/evil. This method makes it possible to analyse existential situations, as in the work of Franz Kafka, where guilt and divine judgement (*gesera*) are used as explanatory factors for an absurd existence.

In Platonic psychology, the immortal soul (*psuchè*) is central as the human being's true essence and principle of life. Plato formulates a threefold division of the soul, illustrated in two ways:

- *The great monster* (*epithumetikon*): The vegetative, appetitive part of the soul, directed towards satisfying biological and material needs (such as sleep, food, sexuality and possessions).
- *The lesser lion* (*thumoeides*): The animalistic, proud part, driven by the desire for recognition, ambition, courage in life and emotions.
- *The little human being* (*logistikon / nous*): The humane, rational part, which strives for insight, truth and contemplation of the Forms.

The balanced development of these three parts of the soul is expressed in the four cardinal virtues: wisdom (*sofia*), courage (*andreia*), moderation prudence (*sofrosune*) and the overarching comprehensive virtue of justice (*dikaiosune* / harmony). Through *anamnesis* (recollection of the Forms contemplated by the soul before embodiment) and *catharsis* (spiritual purification from the sensory towards the ideal), human beings can ascend to the contemplation of the Supreme Good.

5. Sociology, Culturology and the Philosophy of History

Plato's sociology and political philosophy follow directly from his psychology of the soul. Following the existential shock of his teacher Socrates' death sentence, Plato investigates the essential structure of the *polis*. A just society rests on a functional division of labor in which every citizen fulfils a

role suited to their individual nature (*kata fusin*). The decline of the ideal state proceeds through a fixed typology of forms of government (from aristocracy through timocracy, oligarchy and democracy to tyranny), with a lower part of the soul gaining the upper hand at each stage.

In the field of culturology, *paideia* (education and formation) is central. The curriculum for rulers includes physical exercise (gymnastics), the arts and humanities (music and literature), mathematics and dialectics.

Finally, Platonic philosophy of history has a cybernetic dimension. History and the cosmos move according to the cyclical model of *cybernetics*: from an ordered primordial state, through a deviation (transgression or decline), towards eventual punishment and restoration. Within this framework, divine providence (divine combinatorics) and human freedom interact.