Summary of the course C.6.6. Elements of Platonic Psychology.

This course deals with the Elements of Platonic Psychology and highlights the soul not as a purely scientific given, but as the essential core of human existence. Plato's vision inextricably links this soul with values, beauty, harmony, and the pursuit of the good and the divine.

The text describes the soul as a complex whole that falls into a large monster, a smaller lion, and a small human being, which correspond respectively to the drives, the assertiveness, and the spiritual/intellectual aspect. In addition, the methodology, reincarnation, the capacity to dream, and achieving a successful life -or eudaimonia -are discussed in detail.

Finally, the soul is presented as an immortal, immaterial principle of life that fundamentally differs from a purely biological or materialistic bodily structure.

1. Psychology as Dialogue and Existential Anthropology

The course *Elements of Platonic Psychology* does not place Plato (-427/-347) in the box of a dry or dogmatic system thinker, but presents his work as a lively, dialogue-oriented, and inductive search for the human soul. Where modern empirical psychology often limits itself to observable facts and measurable behavior, Plato practices a profound ‘psychology’ or philosophical anthropology. For Plato, the soul is the absolute essential core, the inner source of life (*archè*), and the dynamic principle of order in human beings. This way of thinking is far from outdated; in our contemporary, postmodern culture, the need for a rehabilitation of the soul is reviving, as illustrated by depth psychologists and philosophers such as C.G. Jung (*Wirklichkeit der Seele*), Charles Baudouin, Kl. Kremer, and D. Bombardier.

Plato’s method is characterized by an aporetic and dialogical nature. Just as in traditional African dilemma tales, many of his dialogues close without a ready-made dogmatic answer, in order to stimulate the reader or listener to independent reflection and conscientious insight. Plato guards against 'logocentrism'—the idea that one holds a monopoly on absolute truth.

Instead, via Socrates, he employs an inductive method in which, based on concrete behavioral observations, the deeper structures of the soul are hypothetically sought. Within this quest, the concept of ‘spirit’ (nous or logos) is central. Spirit in Plato is not a cold, Cartesian rationalism, but the anagogic,

upwardly directed capacity for value-insight that elevates human beings above the purely material.

2. The Noble Yoke: Values, Beauty, and the Ontological Soul

The cornerstone of Platonic psychology is the psychology of values. Plato introduces the concept of "the noble yoke": the unbreakable ontological bond between the subject that senses value and the object that is valuable. A human being defines himself by the values he pursues.

Following Eduard Spranger and Max Scheler, the course shows that one only truly understands the human personality when one grasps its system of values. Scheler distinguishes a hierarchy of values here: hedonic (pleasure/pain), vital (healthy/sick), cultural (aesthetic, legal, epistemological), and sacral values (holy/unholy).

In Plato's ontology, 'being' (reality) and 'the good' (value) coincide. What is real is valuable, and what is valuable has reality value. From this stems Plato's specific psychology of beauty. The Greek concept of beauty (kalon) is much broader than our aesthetic category; it stands for all that is truly valuable to an exceptional degree that commands deep admiration and wonder. A 'beautiful human being' is therefore someone with a noble soul (psuchè kalè) who aims for what is truly valuable. A beautiful body with an ugly, unconscionable soul remains ugly and ignoble in Plato's eyes.

This theory of values also determines Plato's view on art and artworks. Art is only truly valuable when it feeds the soul with objective truth and moral insight. Plato criticizes artists and sophists who, with illusions, deception (apatè), or rhetorical tricks, enchant the soul without conscience or content. Even regarding the great poet Homer, Plato takes a critical stance: no matter how divine his verses are, immoral or passionate passages that mislead youth must be excluded from education

3. The Tripartite Soul and the Ethos of Cosmic Harmony

When the soul embodies itself in the material world, it manifests—according to a famous Platonic metaphor—as a triptych:

1. *The large monster* (epithumia / alogiston): The desiring, instinctive aspect of the soul aimed at lower life needs such as nocturnal life (sleep/rest), nutrition, sex, and economic enrichment

2. *The smaller lion* (thumos): The courageous, fiery aspect of the soul aimed at honor, assertiveness, temperament, and perseverance.

3. *The small human being* (logistikon / nous): The spiritual, intellectual aspect of the soul that is eager to learn (philomathes) and oriented toward insight, truth, and the all-encompassing Idea of the Good.

To this tripartitism, Plato links a strict theory of virtue (aretè), in which virtue is understood as the proper functioning of the soul's aspects:

The large monster is ordered by moderation (sophrosyne), which teaches how to maintain proper measure in physical and material desires.
The lion is ordered by courageous virtue (andreia), which directs assertiveness and the sense of honor toward the noble.
The small human being possesses wisdom (sophia), which grasps the true meaning of reality.
The overarching virtue is justice or conscience (dikaiosyne), which, like an inner and cosmic harmony (harmonia), brings all parts of the soul into proper mutual rank.

True happiness (eudaimonia) is the result of an integration of these values. Plato describes the best human life as a balanced mixture of the honey of pleasure and the pure, clear water of intellectual insight. Whoever surrenders purely to the desires of the monster or the thirst for power of the lion walks a downward, catagogic path leading to inner disruption and mortality. Whoever, on the other hand, cultivates the small human being and trains in immortal values follows an upward, anagogic path of deification and achieves a successful life

4. Immortality, Imagination, and Divine Enthusiasm

Plato is the first Western philosopher to formulate the human soul as a strictly immaterial, simple, and immortal entity. The soul is not a secondary result or mechanical structure ('harmony') of the physical body—as Simmias suggested in the Phaedo—but an independent life principle that precedes the body and moves and governs it from within.

Made vivid in myths such as the Myth of ‘Er’, the soul traverses a cycle of (re)incarnations. Because the soul resided in the divine world of Ideas prior to its embodiment, human knowing is essentially a process of recollection (anamnesis): contact with sensory phenomena reawakens the dormant knowledge of eternal ideas.

In daily consciousness, the capacity for imagination (eikasia) plays a complex role. Imagination moves in the realm of becoming and changeable things (ta gignomena). Between the pure ideational world and sensory things sits the imaginal world—a sphere of visions, dream images, and archetypal myths that gives access to deeper soul dimensions through the 'inner eye'.

In addition, Plato recognizes the power of divine frenzy (mania) or expansion of consciousness. Besides pathological madness, he distinguishes four forms of god-given, positive mania:

1. The mantric or prophetic mania (inspired by Apollo, aimed at clairvoyance and oracles).
2. The telestic or ritual-therapeutic mania (inspired by Dionysus, aimed at healing soul sins and divine wrath through cathartic dance and music).
3. The poetic mania (inspired by the Muses, where rational craft yields to true, inspired poetry).
4. The erotic mania (inspired by Eros and Aphrodite, where seeing earthly Beauty awakens the recollection of Eternal Beauty).

This expanded view of the soul also comes forward in the dialogue Charmides, where Plato formulates a holistic medicine. One cannot heal the eye without the head, the head without the body, and the body without the soul (psuchèn therapein). This healing of the soul occurs through the 'incantation' (epoidè): beautiful, philosophical statements that awaken mental power and suggestive trust in the soul, thereby allowing the physical remedy (pharmakon) to truly heal.

5. The Incarnated Soul in Practice: Night, Sex, Economy, and Culture

In the second part of the course, Platonic psychology is applied to concrete, societal, and existential phenomena:

1. *Soul and Night*: In the state of sleep, reason rests, and the small human being enters a pilot-light state. As a result, the unconscionable desires of the large monster can gain free reign in night dreams (such as incestuous or violent fantasies). Plato outlines here the seed of a depth psychology. The soul of the tyrant or criminal is the terrifying example of someone who continues to act at full waking consciousness during the day as an ordinary person only dreams in nightmares. To tame these dark forces, Plato advises evening rituals of composure and mental calm before sleeping.

2. *Soul and Nutrition* (diaita): Nutrition and dietetics go much further in Plato than kitchen prescriptions; they concern total lifestyle. The human being is a microcosm in the macrocosm. An immoderate lifestyle disrupts inner harmony. Using the tragic case study of the Ik (a starved tribe in Uganda), the course shows how extreme starvation can destroy the small human being and all cultural morality, leaving only a raw survival mechanism of the large monster.

3. *Soul and Sexual Life*: Plato places raw sexuality in the large monster, but opposes both degradation (such as the shameless anti-culture of the Cynics) and puritanical world-flight. In the dialogues Symposium and Phaedrus, he offers a path of refinement. Physical attraction and the perception of human Beauty are transformed, through close soul communities (synousia), into philosophical enthusiasm (mania dialektikè), leading to collective cultural transmission and the contemplation of the Ideas.

4. *Soul and Economy*: Social cooperation arises because the human nature (physis) of each individual differs; one is suited for agriculture, another for craftsmanship. However, as soon as a society degenerates into one-sided greed for enrichment and luxury needs, the healthy state turns into an "inflated state" full of artificial needs, leading to exploitation and war drives. Plato criticizes unrestrained capitalism and the 'petty-profit complex', because obsession with money blinds the soul to science, beauty, and the Good.

5. *Soul and Honor*: The 'smaller lion' represents courage and drive to act. In Plato's own life, this is expressed in his political commitment to Sicily. For Plato, philosophy is not casual academic chatter from an armchair, but requires existential engagement and vigor. True philosophy demands that one act courageously and dare to realize one's ideas in practice, faithful to conscience and friendship.

Conclusion

The course Elements of Platonic Psychology demonstrates that Plato was by no means an otherworldly or mystical escape-artist. His psychology is an extremely sharp, comprehensive, and holistic knowledge of humanity.

By analyzing human action from the interplay between the large monster of drives, the smaller lion of courage, and the small human being of reason, Plato provides a timeless compass to purify human life (catharsis) and align it with what is truly valuable, beautiful, and good.