Summary of Course 3.1: Introduction to Philosophy

General Overview

This course addresses epistemology and the theory of knowledge as fundamental branches of philosophy. They examine how human cognition manifests itself in everyday consciousness, art, and the specialized sciences. In addition, the structure of the experimental sciences is analyzed through observations, operational definitions, and hypotheses. Critical approaches such as the critique of ideology and the social role of propaganda are also discussed in detail. Finally, the texts situate the relationship between philosophy and theology within a historical and planetary context.

Summary

1: Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge

Epistemology, or gnoseology, is known as the theory of knowledge, in which science and knowledge in the broad sense are the central subjects. Human cognition always has an objective dimension, consisting of the world and inner life, and a subjective dimension, consisting of the consciousness of that object. Knowledge is described as awareness or consciousness approached reflectively through introspection. Within the sociology of knowledge, a distinction is made between superficial or externalist forms of knowledge and in-depth or internalist forms of knowledge.

Externalist forms include tradition and fashion, as well as fleeting opinion, in contrast to ideology and dogmatism. Ideologies, such as liberalism or Marxism, often present themselves with an appearance of scientific legitimacy in order to justify particular interests.

Internalist forms of knowledge, namely specialized scientific research and philosophy, rely instead on methodical investigation aimed at objective truth. A distinction is made between the amateur, the specialist, and the informed person.

2: Philosophy and Other Forms of Interpreting Reality

Philosophy is defined as the interpretation of oneself and the world, or, in other words, a view of life and the world. However, this definition alone is insufficient, because human existence, art, and specialized science also interpret reality. Human existence functions as a prereflective philosophy. It is based on common sense, which encompasses a priori truths, empirical a posteriori insights, and fundamental contingent truths. These fundamental

insights include perception, memory, personal identity, and the existence of other people.

Maine de Biran added sensitive or divinatory truths, such as inspirations and intuitions. Art interprets reality through concrete, individual images, whereas philosophy uses abstract concepts and technical language that makes an explicit claim to describe reality. Specialized science is also conceptual and linguistic, but is distinguished by its fragmentary character.

The specialist scientist confines their work to a specific part of reality, whereas philosophy is characterized by a comprehensive awareness of the whole. Its object of study is Being, understood as the absolute system of everything that exists.

3: Characteristics and Development of the Specialized Sciences

The philosophy of science, or epistemology in the stricter sense, examines the coherence, methods, and development of specialized sciences. Historically, the first specialized sciences, such as astronomy, mathematics, and medicine, emerged partly from early forms of divination and the observation of nature. Modern exact science developed through the Greek natural philosophers and Galileo's mathematical-experimental turn. A positive specialized science is abstract in character and defines its material and formal objects of study. Its descriptions, explanations, and tests are conducted intersubjectively within a scientific community and adopt a secular orientation.

According to Thomas Kuhn, scientific development is not purely cumulative but also involves scientific revolutions. Periods of normal science are governed by a disciplinary matrix and paradigms consisting of cognitive beliefs, evaluative judgments, and exemplary solutions to problems. Within the scientific system, a distinction is made between formal sciences, natural sciences, and human sciences.

4: Explaining versus Understanding in the Human Sciences

Within epistemology, the opposition between explanation and understanding plays a central role. Inspired by Dilthey, the humanities maintain that human action and history cannot be captured by general laws of nature. The humanities are idiographic and aim to understand what is unique, whereas the natural sciences are nomothetic and seek explanatory laws and regularities.

Historically, this distinction goes back to Descartes, who divided reality into extension and thought, and to Vico, who argued that human beings truly understand history only because they create it themselves. In the human sciences, the divide persists between hard, behaviorist approaches and soft, phenomenological approaches. Several epistemologists seek to bridge this gap. Barraclough, for example, demonstrates that historical writing can identify regular patterns after describing events. Karl-Otto Apel uses human conversation as a model in which other people are approached alternately as partners and as objects of research. This leads to a dialectical mediation between explanation and understanding through the critique of ideology.

5: The Experimental Method and Social Reflection

The structure of experimental science comprises four phases.

- The first phase is the repeatable observation of sensory data, excluding one-off historical or introspective facts.
- The second phase involves precise description, which, according to Bridgman, must be translated into physical or operational definitions.
- The third phase is the formulation of hypotheses, in which the necessary and sufficient conditions for a phenomenon are established.
- The fourth phase is testing through an experiment. Here, the researcher intervenes actively by systematically manipulating the independent variable in order to measure its effect on the dependent variable.

In addition to this internal practice, epistemology requires an externalist perspective on the social and ethical consequences of science and technology.

Around 1900, a crisis in science emerged, prompting investigations into its foundations and criticism of scientism.

6: Critique of Ideology, Utopia, and the Abuse of Language

A contemporary theory of knowledge cannot ignore the critique of ideology. Since Destutt de Tracy introduced the term, the concept of ideology has undergone a complex evolution.

In Marxism, ideology is understood as a distorted consciousness that serves as the ideal superstructure justifying a socioeconomic base.

Although Marx criticized ideology, his own economic determinism is also subject to ideological critique.

The critique of ideology also addresses improper fetishism, which involves assigning excessive value to things or ideas without scientific justification.

Opposed to ideology is utopia, revalued by Ernst Bloch as the not-yet-conscious and as hope for the future. Within the Frankfurt School, critical theory was developed to promote social emancipation. This is connected to the concept of alienation, in which consciousness becomes estranged from its own possibilities.

Furthermore, thinkers such as Ricoeur and IJsseling reveal that human speech often contains concealed rhetoric. The critique of propaganda analyzes how communication is abused through simplification, emotionally charged words, repetition, and the fusion of symbols with ideological objectives.

7: The Structural Organization and Methods of Philosophy

The word philosophy derives from the Greek *philosophia*, described by Pythagoras as a modest striving for wisdom. Etymologically, the words 'wise' and 'wisdom' are related to knowing, pointing, and interpreting. Although a unified science has become unattainable because of the explosion of knowledge, philosophy retains its distinctive nature because it is non-abstracting and possesses a comprehensive awareness of the whole.

The basic structure of philosophy comprises four components. The informative component consists of the theory of knowledge, the theory of thought, and the theory of method.

The metaphysical component is divided into the pre-constitutive, which concerns the origin of everything that exists, and the constitutive, which investigates the essence of existing things. The normative or axiological component encompasses ethics, politics, aesthetics, and technology. All of this is framed by ontology, or the theory of reality, which studies Being in its entirety.

In the twentieth century, approaches such as positivism, language criticism, and hermeneutics became prominent. These can be reconciled through an inclusive mode of thinking.

Finally, philosophy has a historical relationship with theology. In the classical and medieval educational framework, the seven liberal arts provided the preparatory education, philosophy served as the human search for truth, and theology crowned the pursuit of knowledge as the doctrine of revealed divine truth.