**Course C.2.3: Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy**

The text provides a comprehensive overview of the history of Western philosophy, emphasizing the evolution of thought from the early Church Fathers to the Scientific Revolution of the Renaissance.

It begins with *Patristics*, during which Christianity developed its own philosophical foundation by merging ancient philosophy with religious revelation.

Next, *Scholasticism* is examined, a period in which thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas sought to achieve a synthesis between reason and faith through the rediscovered philosophy of Aristotle.

The transition to the *modern era* is then outlined, characterized by humanism, religious reform, and profound cultural transformation.

Finally, the rise of the *natural sciences* is highlighted, with figures such as Galileo replacing the qualitative conception of the cosmos with a mathematical and mechanistic worldview.

***Patristics and Scholasticism***

The starting point lies in *Patristics* (33-800 CE), the philosophical world of thought of the Church Fathers, such as Augustine of Hippo. Within Patristics, Judeo-Christian monotheism was fused with elements of Greek philosophy, including Stoicism, Platonism, and Neoplatonism.

Central to this synthesis was the concept of the *Logos* (divine wisdom), which gave rise to a distinctive triadosophy (wisdom of the Trinity) and a liturgical-mystical outlook in which history and revelation were intimately connected. Augustine formulated a theory of ideas according to which objective, immaterial truth (*veritas*) transcends both Manichaean materialism and Academic skepticism.

With medieval *Scholasticism*, a gradual shift occurred from Patristic idealism to an Aristotelian conceptual realism. Thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas argued that intelligible essences are embedded within sensory reality (*sensibilia intellecta*). The medieval worldview was characterized by the idea of an organic cosmos in which the natural order (*ordo naturalis*) and the moral order (*ordo moralis*) were harmoniously united under divine governance.

During the later Middle Ages, the dispute over universals gradually dismantled the synthesis between faith and reason. Philosophical positions evolved from the ultra-realism of William of Champeaux to the conceptualist

nominalism of William of Ockham. This nominalism paved the way for a greater focus on individual, empirically observable nature.

***Renaissance, Humanism, and the Scientific Revolution***

The Renaissance and Humanism marked the breakthrough of secular culture, worldly orientation, and secularization. A new social class of intellectuals (*intelligentsia*) emerged, alongside a self-conscious bourgeoisie within the rising nation-states.

The study of nature underwent a profound transformation during this period, often described as the epistemological break that gave birth to modern science. Whereas Renaissance natural philosophy was still permeated by magical-mystical analogies, microcosm-macrocosm correspondences, and occult frameworks of thought, the pioneers of the Scientific Revolution introduced a strictly quantitative approach.

*Galileo Galilei* geometrized space and formulated an exact mathematical physics. He maintained that the book of nature is written in the language of mathematics and established a fundamental distinction between primary properties (measurable) and secondary properties (qualitative and subjective) of matter.

*Francis Bacon* developed the empirical-inductive method in his *Novum Organum*. He combined experimental investigation with an early critique of ideology, identifying the prejudices or *idola* (*idola tribus*, *specus*, *fori*, and *theatri*) that distort human understanding.

In political and legal philosophy, *Niccolò Machiavelli* approached political action autonomously from the perspective of power politics (*Realpolitik*), while *Hugo Grotius* developed theories of universal natural law and popular sovereignty on a rational foundation.

***Modern Rationalism, Empiricism, and the Human Sciences***

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries constitute the age of modern philosophy, driven by the rise of rationalism and the philosophy of immanence (*conscièntialism*).

The epistemological point of departure for this era was established by *René Descartes*. Through his method of systematic doubt, Descartes arrived at the fundamental intuition of *cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"). He reduced reality to a radical Cartesian dualism:

1. Thinking substance (res cogitans): the introspective and immaterial consciousness.

*2. Extended substance (res extensa):* the material and spatial world, governed entirely by mechanical interaction through impact and pressure.

Within Cartesian physics, both inorganic and organic nature, including human and animal bodies, were conceived as mechanical automata. This dualism inspired the great seventeenth-century system builders to formulate new syntheses.

*Baruch Spinoza* replaced dualism with a pantheistic monism. According to him, there exists only one infinite substance, God or Nature (*Deus sive Natura*), which manifests itself through the attributes of thought and extension and their modifications (*natura naturans* versus *natura naturata*).

*Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz* developed a dynamic theory of monads and the doctrine of pre-established harmony (*harmonia praestabilita*).

*The Occasionalists***,** including Arnold Geulincx and Nicolas Malebranche, regarded created beings merely as occasional causes for the truly causal activity of God alone.

Against continental rationalist innatism, English empiricism and materialism emerged.

*Thomas Hobbes* constructed a dogmatic sensationalist materialism. He reduced all knowledge to mechanical motions in the brain and heart and, in his *Leviathan*, formulated an absolutist theory of the state designed to restrain the anarchic war of all against all (*bellum omnium contra omnes*).

*John Locke* rejected innate ideas and argued that the human mind at birth is a *tabula rasa*. Knowledge arises exclusively from external sensory experience (*sensation*) and internal self-observation (*reflection*). Locke also laid the foundations of deism and political liberalism.

*David Hume* pushed empiricism toward radical skepticism. He criticized the notion of necessary causation, arguing that causality is merely a subjective psychological habit or association of ideas.

*Giambattista Vico* adopted a unique position toward mathematical and physical conceptions of nature. In his *Scienza Nuova*, he founded the human sciences through the *verum-factum* principle: human beings can truly and internally know only what they themselves have created, namely history, culture, language, and institutions. Vico developed a philosophy of history based on the cyclical movement of *corso* and *ricorso*, through which societies successively pass the divine, heroic, and human ages.

***Enlightenment, German Idealism, and the Critical Materialists***

The *Enlightenment* (*Aufklärung*) of the eighteenth century placed autonomous human reason, utility (*utilitarianism*), and belief in progress (*meliorism*) at the center of intellectual life, while criticizing tradition, authority, and ecclesiastical dogma.

Philosophically, the Enlightenment reached its culmination in the critical philosophy of *Immanuel Kant.* Kant sought to reconcile dogmatic rationalism with skeptical empiricism. He argued that human knowledge arises through the interaction between sensory experience (*a posteriori*) and the inherent structures of the human mind (*a priori*). Scientific knowledge is limited to phenomena, that is, facts and appearances situated within space and time. Metaphysical objects such as God, the soul, and the cosmos, however, remain beyond the reach of pure reason as objects of genuine knowledge.

Within *German Idealism, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel* transformed Kantian criticism into a comprehensive dialectical system centered on the Absolute Spirit. Hegel's philosophy of history was governed by a dialectical movement commonly expressed as thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (*Aufhebung*). One of its most influential illustrations is the master-slave dialectic (*Herr und Knecht*), in which the struggle for recognition and the labor of the bondsman ultimately contribute to the development of human self-consciousness.

During the nineteenth century, however, the notion of the conscious and autonomous subject was profoundly challenged by the three great "masters of suspicion" or critical materialists.

*Karl Marx* inverted Hegelian dialectics and argued that the material socio-economic base and class struggle determine human consciousness as well as the cultural and ideological superstructure. Consciousness, according to Marx, is fundamentally an ideological reflection of material conditions.

*Friedrich Nietzsche* exposed Western reason, metaphysics, and Christian morality as disguised expressions of the vital will to power. Through his genealogical method, he sought to uncover the historical origins and hidden motivations underlying moral and philosophical systems.

*Sigmund Freud,* through psychoanalysis, demonstrated that the conscious ego is not master in its own house. Human behavior is largely governed by unconscious drives, including Eros and Thanatos, as well as by various mechanisms of repression.

***Twentieth-Century Philosophical Movements***

In the twentieth century, philosophical reflection diversified into a wide range of competing schools and traditions.

*Structuralism* was developed by thinkers such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, and Jacques Derrida. These thinkers rejected the notion of an autonomous human subject, sometimes referred to as the "death of man." They analyzed culture, language, and society as autonomous systems composed of underlying structures, rules, signs, and unconscious mechanisms that shape human thought and behavior.

*Analytic Philosophy and Neo-Positivism*, inspired by figures such as Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the members of the Vienna Circle, including Rudolf Carnap, sought to reduce philosophy to the rigorous analysis of language, logic, and scientific discourse.

For these philosophers, many traditional metaphysical questions were regarded as meaningless because they could not be empirically verified or logically analyzed. Philosophy's primary task became the clarification of concepts and the logical structure of scientific statements.

*Phenomenology and Existentialism*

*Edmund Husserl* founded Phenomenology with the ambition of returning "to the things themselves" (zu den Sachen selbst).

By means of phenomenological reduction, he aimed to investigate how phenomena present themselves directly to consciousness, independent of theoretical assumptions.

Building upon Husserl's work, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus developed various forms of Existentialism, focusing on the concrete reality of human existence.

These thinkers emphasized: Facticity (Geworfenheit), the condition of being "thrown" into a world not of one's own choosing. Radical human freedom, according to which individuals are responsible for giving meaning to their own existence.

**Conclusion**

The history of Western philosophy reveals a continuous transformation in the understanding of reality, knowledge, humanity, and society. Beginning with the synthesis of Christian theology and Greek philosophy in Patristics and Scholasticism, philosophical thought evolved through the scientific revolution, rationalism, empiricism, Enlightenment criticism, German Idealism, and the materialist critiques of the nineteenth century.

In the twentieth century, this development diversified into multiple traditions, including Structuralism, Analytic Philosophy, Phenomenology, and Existentialism. Despite their differences, these movements all address a central philosophical concern: understanding the human condition and humanity's place within the world.