Course Summary C.8–10: The Human Being as an Immortal Soul,

General Overview

The course The Human Being as an Immortal Soul examines human nature as a threefold being consisting of an immaterial spirit, a subtle-material soul and a biological body, with the soul functioning as the formative and creative link.

In opposition to the one-sided Enlightenment rationalism of Descartes and Locke, the course highlights Romantic philosophy of life and the ideational psychology of Carl Gustav Carus, who demonstrates that our conscious knowledge and abilities are deeply rooted in an unconscious process guided by purpose and entheistic principles.

The question of immortality is then approached through modern empirical research into near-death experiences (NDEs) by Karlis Osis, Erlunder Haraldsson and Phyllis Atwater, in which both heavenly and hellish death experiences are analyzed. Such experiences raise fundamental questions about the nature of reality and the possibility of an afterlife, often leading to discussions about the limits of traditional science.

Finally, the course addresses classical cultural-historical, ontological and ethical arguments concerning the complexity of the human mind, the dying process, the survival of the soul, the tension between parapsychology and scientistic materialism, and the need for critical vigilance regarding memory distortion in retrospective testimonies.

1: Human Nature and the Reaction Against Rationalism

The course begins with the idea that human beings possess a threefold structure: an immaterial and immortal spirit, a biological body, and a subtle-material soul that serves as a link between the physical being and the spirit. While biological life begins with plants and animals, human life transcends purely organic nature through the presence of reason and language.

The philosophical approach explicitly distances itself from the Enlightenment rationalism of thinkers such as René Descartes and John Locke, who placed human consciousness and rational thought at the center and reduced nature to a mechanical system. In reaction to this one-sidedness, pre-Romantic and Romantic irrationalism emerged in the late eighteenth century-more accurately described as a comprehensive philosophy of life.

Thinkers such as Hamann, Herder, Rousseau, Goethe and Schelling emphasized that life is full of mysteries and cannot be fully understood in rational-mechanical terms. Within Romanticism, organicism developed: the

insight that the cosmos, nature and humanity form a single living, interconnected organism. From this perspective, the unconscious plays a key role as the vital, creative source of our existence, an idea that would later lay the foundations for depth psychology.

2: Carus's Ideational Psychology: The Unconscious and the Soul as a Formative Force

Central to the course is the nineteenth-century physician and philosopher Carl Gustav Carus, who thoroughly studied unconscious psychic life through his ideational psychology, long before Sigmund Freud. Carus employs a Platonizing method: he starts from observable facts in organisms and seeks the guiding, purposeful idea underlying them. In the gradual development of a biological organism—from fertilized cell to tissues and organs—an unconscious, purposeful principle is at work, bearing witness to inner wisdom, beauty and "something divine".

Carus argues that the human intellect ("art") is incapable of creating a living organism by itself; the power of creation lies entirely in unconsciously active nature and the soul. Because this divine idea operates in all living things, both human and animal life deserve fundamental reverence. This view is neither pantheistic nor atheistic, but entheistic.

Within the human soul, Carus distinguishes a dynamic interaction between the conscious and the unconscious:

- *The involuntary becoming temporarily voluntary*: movements such as breathing occur automatically and unconsciously, but we can consciously speed them up, slow them down or pause them.

- *The voluntary becoming involuntary:* acquiring skills, such as playing the piano or walking, begins with deliberate and intentional movements, but through practice these pass into the unconscious, which represents the highest degree of human perfection.

- *Conscious knowledge rooted in the unconscious*: our knowledge springs from an unconscious depth. This is consistent with Plato's doctrine of anamnesis (the recollection of elements of knowledge from a pre-existence) and Socratic maieutics. Innate talents and hereditary characteristics are likewise already present unconsciously in the soul of the embryo, which organizes the entire body.

In this respect, Carus follows the eighteenth-century physician Georg Ernst Stahl and his animism, in which the soul is regarded as the creative and formative force behind all physiological and psychological processes.

3: Near-Death Experiences and Paranormal Research

An important part of the course addresses the question of the immortality of the soul through modern near-death experiences (NDEs). NDEs are characterized by recurring elements: the feeling of dying, entering a dark tunnel, leaving the physical body, encountering deceased people or beings of light, reviewing one's life panoramically, experiencing profound inner peace, and losing the fear of death. Tolstoy described this phenomenon perceptively in his book The Death of Ivan Ilyich.

Researchers Karlis Osis and Erlunder Haraldsson conducted large-scale empirical research among thousands of doctors and nurses in the United States and India, collecting data on tens of thousands of deathbed experiences. Their research contrasts two explanatory models:

- *The affirmative model:* NDEs are genuine extrasensory perceptions of a surviving soul that, through an expansion of consciousness, enters another, paradisiacal world, often accompanied by deceased relatives.
- *The refutational model* (medical materialism): NDEs are dismissed as hallucinations, brain disorders, oxygen deprivation or schizoid escape reactions of the dying brain, which clings to illusory representations.

Although cultural backgrounds influence the outward appearance of the apparitions - such as the Hindu god Yama and his assistants (yamdoots) in India, as opposed to angels or Christ in the West - the core features of positive NDEs display strikingly universal characteristics.

In addition to positive experiences, researcher Phyllis Atwater also brings negative or hellish NDEs to light. Patients who had been declared clinically dead reported eerie visions of desolate landscapes and shadowy, zombie-like beings. These images are associated with unresolved guilt, the repression of wrongdoing and the biblical depiction of the Rephaim (souls deprived of divine life force).

4: Philosophical Arguments for the Immortality of the Soul

In addition to paranormal observations, the course discusses classical philosophical and ontological arguments for the continued existence of the soul:

- *The cultural-historical argument:* The remarkable agreement among diverse peoples and cultures throughout the centuries, who independently bear witness to belief in an immortal soul and an afterlife.

- *The ontological/psychological argument:* Because the human soul is immaterial and oriented towards being as a whole, it cannot dissolve or disintegrate in the way material organisms do upon bodily death.

- *The argument from dissatisfaction:*
  - *Teleological:* Human beings possess a drive towards unlimited intellectual and spiritual development, a goal that can never be fully attained within the short limits of earthly existence.
  - *Ethical:* In earthly life, just retribution is often absent; unscrupulous people sometimes prosper, while honest people suffer. Justice demands an afterlife in which a conscientious life receives its due.

5: Parapsychology, Visualization and the Critical Role of Memory

Finally, the course examines the scientific status of parapsychology. Whereas scientistic and materialistic journals reject paranormal claims because they do not fit within physical measurement models, Hans Bender argued that paranormal phenomena possess their own ontological reality and must not be reduced to mere physics or conventional psychology.

For those who do not themselves possess paranormal abilities, the principle of visualization applies: extrasensory experiences must be translated into vivid analogies drawn from everyday life, comparable to the way theoretical physicists make complex quantum phenomena comprehensible through models.

Here, the course urges critical caution through Elizabeth Loftus's research into memory distortion. Through hypnosis, strong suggestion, false information or imagination, people can be led to form extremely vivid but entirely unreal memories. This affects the reliability of retrospective testimonies and requires scientists to carefully distinguish between episodic, semantic and repetitive memory when evaluating accounts of pre-existence or past lives.