Summary of course C.6-13: Elements of Cultural Philosophy (1992–1993).

General

The course Elements of Cultural Philosophy offers an in-depth and integrated exploration of the phenomenon of culture from a classical Platonic and epistemological perspective. Starting from the intentionality of the human mind - represented as the "noble yoke" connecting consciousness with reality - - the course analyses culture through the three classical modes of thought: ontology (existence, essence and the transcendentals being, unity, truth and goodness), harmology (factor analysis, Socratic induction and the interaction between collection and system), and logic (the principle of sufficient reason).

Through the ABC theory of interpretation, the course shows how cultural assumptions and value systems determine what a society perceives as "normal", "ethical" or "rational". It also examines how Modern Reason, when it loses sight of its own limits, can turn into its opposite or lead to alienation.

By engaging with both the social criticism of Kafka and Goya and contemporary schools of thought—from critical rationalism and critical theory to deconstructionism—the course ultimately advocates an anagogical cultural renewal: the upward nourishment of the human mind through dialogue and a committed orientation towards values.

1: Philosophical Foundations, Intentionality and Threefold Harmony

Cultural philosophy begins with the anthropological premise that the human soul is simultaneously situated in its own body, the *polis* (the community or city-state), and the *cosmos* (the ordered universe).

A healthy culture strives for a harmonious integration of these three levels. When the human mind goes astray or becomes possessed by disorder, this harmony is broken, giving rise to a state of psychological or social alienation.

To know and influence reality, human beings possess intentionality: the conscious orientation of the mind towards "being". Plato represents this epistemological alignment as the "noble yoke" (*kalon zugon*), a team of two in which the act of knowing and the object known are inseparably connected.

This orientation manifests itself in three fundamental approaches:

- *Ontology* (the study of reality): the investigation of the actual existence (*existentia*) and essential nature (*essentia*) of realities, guided by the

transcendental values of being, unity (collection/system), truth (intelligibility) and goodness (value).

- *Harmology* (the study of order): the analysis of relationships and structures through factor analysis (*stoicheiosis*). Socratic induction is used to identify constitutive characteristics, with thought moving between the set-theoretical model (all individual instances) and the system-theoretical model (the ordered whole).

- *Logic* (the study of reasoning): the study of the conditions under which reasoning is valid, including both hypothetical and reductive explanations.

2: The Concept of Culture, the ABC Theory and Ethics

A central question in the course is how "culture" should be defined precisely. The course uses the ABC model of interpretation for this purpose. In this model, "A" stands for the objective fact or stimulus from reality, "B" for the assumptions, prejudices and value frameworks of the thinking subject, and "C" for the resulting judgement or response. Every cultural judgement oscillates between understanding meaning (objectively understanding what is given) and creating meaning (assigning meaning and value from within one's own framework).

A strict distinction is made between two types of definitions of culture:

- *Descriptive (neutral) definition*: culture as the collection of means, techniques and social institutions through which human beings maintain themselves in nature, also referred to as the "life-supporting apparatus".
- *Axiological (value-theoretical) definition*: culture as an integrated system of values, norms, ideals and expectations that guide and elevate human behavior. In the tradition of Greek *paideia*, the aim is to educate and form human beings towards a higher intellectual and moral level.

In this context, the course emphasizes the inseparable connection between culture and ethics. Expertise or professional knowledge alone is not enough to constitute culture. According to the Socratic differential, a genuine cultural level is reached only when professional competence is accompanied by conscience. Without conscience, social or technical expertise degenerates into cold manipulation or destructive exploitation. This also explains why cultures differ considerably in their views of what is "normal", "deviant" or "ill", as can be seen in ethnopsychiatry and in the differing biomedical assumptions found in Western countries.

3: The Principle of Sufficient Reason, Foundationalism and the Analysis of Fate

Rational thought and action rest on the principle of sufficient reason or ground ("If A, then B"): the assumption that every statement, event or social measure has a necessary and sufficient basis that makes it understandable and justifiable. The desire to establish all beliefs on an absolutely unquestionable foundation is known as foundationalism.

When reason detaches itself from reality or elevates itself into an absolute idol, however, things go astray. Goya's artwork vividly illustrates this: "the sleep of reason produces monsters". During the French Revolution, the glorification of autonomous reason led not to the hoped-for utopia, but to terror and the guillotine.

In literary and philosophical terms, the work of Franz Kafka exposes the same cultural dark side. Kafka's characters move through an absurd world in which they face an inevitable judgement or punishment, while the actual grounds or guilt remain unknown. Through reductive reasoning involving an unknown parameter ("If x, then punishment"), Kafka expresses the alienated existential experience of modern human beings who have lost their connection with the higher moral law and divine origin.

History also shows that human action is often subject to a reversal into its opposite (the heterogony of ends).

As the historian Karl Löwith observed, historical processes almost always produce results different from those envisaged by their original initiators. Figures such as William of Ockham, Martin Luther and René Descartes introduce innovative ideas intended to reform or clarify, but their assumptions unintentionally set in motion developments that led to secularization, fragmentation and materialism.

4: Criticism of Reason, "The Other of Reason" and Modern Philosophical Schools

In contemporary debates in cultural philosophy, the scope of human rationality is central. Various thinkers investigate what lies at the boundaries of reason, or "the other of reason".

Thinkers such as Michel Foucault point out that rational language has often been misused as an instrument of power to categorize and confine those considered deviant, insane or vulnerable.

Other schools of thought seek answers in vitalism (such as that of D. H. Lawrence), in which biological vitality, feeling and instinct are regarded as a deeper form of wisdom than cold intellect.

The course categorizes the main modern philosophical responses to the problem of rationality:

- *Critical Rationalism* (Karl Popper, Hans Albert, W. W. Bartley): rejects the idea that everything can be definitively proven. Rationality lies not in providing definitive justification (justificationism), but in a continual willingness to subject propositions to criticism and falsification.

- *Critical Theory and Language Pragmatics* (Jürgen Habermas, Karl-Otto Apel): situates reason in communicative action. Rationality is embedded in the structure of our language: anyone who makes a statement inevitably claims truth and mutual understanding in relation to others.

- *Deconstructionism* (Jacques Derrida): subjects the Western tradition of logocentrism to thorough deconstruction or dismantling. Derrida shows that the principle of sufficient reason itself cannot be rationally grounded, meaning that every philosophical foundation ultimately encounters an abyss.

- *The Lemmatic-Analytical Method*: returns to Plato and Charles S. Peirce. Since the ultimate foundation of our thinking cannot be proven *a priori*, it is introduced as a working model or lemma. This lemma is then tested against its practical consequences. As the Gospel precept states: “By their fruits you shall know them”—the value of a rational starting point is revealed by its usefulness and constructive effects in practice.

5: Platonic Theory of Ideas, Images and Cultural Renewal (Anagogy)

In its concluding section, the course examines the relationship between everyday reality and the Platonic theory of ideas. The question of whether Plato supposedly “lied” by presenting the world as an image of an ideal world is based on a misunderstanding. Plato never claimed that the actual, sensory world was a flawless reflection. In the actual world, alongside the mind (*nous*), necessity (*anankē*) also operates—the fault line of matter, fallibility and fate.

For Plato, an idea is not an abstract invention of the mind, but the objective ontological condition of possibility and the perfect guiding principle for universality, coherence and value. What we encounter in everyday society are, at best, imperfect images or even caricatures of that ideal.

Against the contemporary tendency towards nihilism, dismantling and decline (*katagogy*), the course sets the Platonic path of anagogy: the upward formation and education of the human soul. Although the rational part of the soul is small compared with lower drives and emotions, cultural philosophy remains tasked with nurturing this tiny, flaming point of the mind. Through open dialogue, social engagement and a continual striving for justice and truth, a society can resist decline and work towards a more humane elevation of culture.