Summary of course C.7-6: Elements of Contemporary Philosophy (1995–1996).

General

This course offers a critical and systematic examination of contemporary philosophical currents by assessing them against a rigorous classical-ontological framework.

Starting from the major twentieth-century schools of thought - including empiricism and materialism, idealism, the philosophy of life, phenomenology, existentialism, Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy of language, Critical Theory and postmodern deconstructionism - the course shows how the diversity of contemporary viewpoints can be organized and evaluated through the fundamental dimensions of the theory of being.

Through seven thematic case studies, the course successively examines ontology as metaphysics, harmology (the theory of order based on similarity and coherence), hermeneutics (the theory of interpretation), logic (deduction and reduction), epistemology (truth as alētheia), and finally the analysis of modernity. In this way, it explores the tension between the modern Enlightenment belief in progress and the postmodern crisis of foundations, ultimately advocating a conscientious, dialectical re-establishment of philosophical thought in direct contact with reality.

1: Contextualization and Overview of Contemporary Philosophical Currents

Whereas the first year of the course was devoted to ontology (the study of being) and the second to the philosophy of religion (the sacred and the numinous), the third year focuses on contemporary philosophical currents. The course does not describe these currents merely historically or descriptively; rather, it tests their validity with regard to reality against the age-old ontological framework.

In twentieth-century European philosophy, I.M. Bochenski distinguishes six major currents of thought:

- *Empiricism or materialism* (philosophy of matter, neopositivism and Marxism).
- *Idealism* (philosophy of ideas, building on Kant and Hegel).
- *The philosophy of life* (vitalism and pragmatism).
- *The philosophy of essence* (the phenomenology of Brentano and Husserl).
- *The philosophy of existence* (the existentialism of Heidegger, Jaspers and Sartre).
- *The new metaphysics.*

Methodologically, contemporary thought is dominated by two major approaches: logistic or analytical philosophy of language (focused on formalization, logic and semiotics) and phenomenology (focused on consciousness and the direct perception of phenomena).

In later twentieth-century debates, these approaches crystallized into four dominant domains: Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy; subject-oriented Continental philosophy (phenomenology, existentialism and hermeneutics); social criticism (Neo-Marxism and the Frankfurt School associated with Habermas and Apel); and French structuralism and post-structuralism (Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard and Levinas).

2: Ontology and Metaphysics: The Foundation of Reality

The first two thematic case studies address the relationship between ontology and metaphysics. Ontology is the science of beings insofar as they are beings: the study of everything that is "not nothing", insofar as it possesses reality. Metaphysics employs transcendental concepts such as being, unity, truth (intelligibility) and goodness (value), which transcend all individual categories and apply to reality as a whole.

The course nevertheless warns against a merely "empty" or free-floating metaphysics. When philosophers use transcendental concepts without filling them with categorical data (concrete insights from specialized sciences, history and everyday experience), thought degenerates into a vain construction of words.

Conversely, specialized researchers who refuse to reflect on the whole lapse into "professional narrow-mindedness". A fully developed ontology functions as a "guiding light": it provides the universal framework of thought within which specific facts acquire their proper place and meaning.

3: Ontology as Harmology (Theory of Order) and Hermeneutics (Theory of Interpretation)

As a theory of order, or harmology, ontology studies the relationships and structures among a multiplicity of data. The classical example is Aristotle's table of categories, organised into *syzygies* or pairs of opposites (such as substance and relation, quality and quantity). Our ordering intellect uses two fundamental patterns:

- *Similarity* (metaphor): bringing separate instances together on the basis of shared characteristics to form a set.

- *Coherence* (metonymy): incorporating parts into a single ordered whole or system.

As hermeneutics, or the theory of interpretation, ontology investigates how human beings confer meaning on reality. Since human beings are naturally creators of meaning, their interpretation oscillates between grasping meaning (objectively understanding what is given as it is in itself) and creating meaning (attributing value on the basis of personal prejudices and presuppositions).

Using the ABC theory, the course demonstrates how an objective stimulus or fact (A) is filtered through the B factor (the observer's inner presuppositions or "lens") to produce an eventual interpretation or response (C). Whereas postmodern thinkers tend towards a purely "deconstructive" or unmasking interpretation, ontology reminds us that genuine hermeneutics begins with respect for objective reality itself.

4: Ontology as Logic (Theory of Reasoning) and Epistemology (Evidentness)

Logic is ontology insofar as it confines itself to conditional "if–then" statements. All valid reasoning rests on the principle of identity and the principle of sufficient reason. The course distinguishes two main forms of reasoning:

- *Deduction*: necessary, forward reasoning that moves from a general rule to a specific case.
- *Reduction and induction*: possible, backward reasoning that seeks an explanatory hypothesis from established effects, or infers a general rule from samples.

Through Charles S. Peirce's well-known example of the beans, the course shows how these forms of reasoning can be transformed into one another.

As epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, ontology investigates truth as *alētheia*: reality emerging from concealment. Knowledge is not a closed mental fabrication but the discovery of what is evidently given. Following Peirce, the course formulates the pragmatic maxim: the truth and meaning of a thought or model become apparent through its practical, observable effects in reality—entirely in keeping with the Gospel maxim, "By their fruits you shall know them".

5: Modernity, Postmodernity and Dialectical Re-establishment

The course's final case study addresses the phenomenon of modernity. The word "modern" derives from the Latin *modernus* or *hodiernus* (current or contemporary). Modern culture - which developed from Ockham's nominalism, Descartes' Enlightenment rationalism and the Industrial Revolution - rests on an unwavering belief in progress, the malleability of the world and autonomous human reason.

When this autonomous reason detaches itself from moral values and transcendence, however, it leads to a profound crisis of foundations. Postmodernity, represented by deconstructionists and thinkers of difference such as Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard and Rorty, responds by radically dismantling and exposing the "grand narrative" of progress and classical metaphysics.

The course warns that deconstruction taken to extremes risks descending into bottomless nihilism, relativism and cynicism. In opposition to this decline, it proposes the path of a renewed Hegelian dialectic.

True philosophy does not flee from its time but enters into dialogue with historical and social reality. By situating the fleeting present within the total, dynamic process of all that was, is and will be, thought can transcend postmodern fragmentation and contribute to a conscientious, broadened and humane re-establishment of culture.