Course Summary 1.1. History of Philosophy

This course approaches the development of human thought from the perspective of the history of metaphysics, interwoven with a cultural-historical and religious approach.

Metaphysics lies at the heart of philosophy; it addresses the question of the fundamental order and Origin of reality. The course emphasises that philosophising should not be confused with a passing 'fashion' or a rigid fixation into ideology, but should be practised as a considered philosophical method.

To study the history of thought, the course adopts the classical conception of history as a genealogy of truth (as developed by Otto Willmann and C.S. Peirce): truth is not an accidental collection of isolated facts, but an organically developed family tree of insights. From this genealogical perspective, the course is organised around four major cultural-historical periods:

1. The primitive point of departure
2. The ancient foundation
3. The medieval elaboration
4. The modern task

Part I: The Primitive Point of Departure

The study of the earliest human civilizations (primitivology) shows that so-called 'savage thought' (la pensée sauvage) is not illogical superstition, but a coherent, implicit or enthymematic metaphysics. The thought structure of primitive humanity possesses a fully developed pragmatic sequence (belief – testing – result – explanation) that is formally analogous to modern scientific and abductive reasoning.

Within primitive tribal religions, comparative religion distinguishes four major morphological types:

Totemism: Belief in the hidden, sacred connection (participation) between human beings, the clan, and an animal, plant or ancestor serving as a symbol and archetype.

Animism: The awareness that human beings and nature are animated by a soul (the principle of life and consciousness), and that spirits are active throughout the universe.

Dynamism/Magism: Belief in a special sacred force or power (mana, orenda), manifested in striking natural phenomena or prominent leaders.

***Primal Monotheism*:** As demonstrated by Andrew Lang and Wilhelm Schmidt, even the oldest hunter-gatherer peoples already believed in a supreme Being or Sky God — the creator and guardian of the moral order. This challenges the evolutionist idea that monotheism was a late invention.

Through eidetic phenomenology, the course analyses religious consciousness in three reductions:

***Objective Reduction*:** The experience of the Sacred takes place through the miraculous (the experience of power or kratofany), the mantic/oracular (divine speech, the voice of conscience), and the telestic (initiation, rites of passage and the expansion of consciousness).

This rests on fundamental relationships such as human being–universe (microcosm/macrocosm and the regularity of sowing and harvest), phenomenal–occult, and sacred–profane (Rudolf Otto's *tremendum et fascinans*, the absolute seriousness of being).

Subjective Reduction: Examines internal attitudes of faith. Alongside mysticism (inward turning towards the order of the world, with shamanism as a technique of ecstasy) and magic (imitative and contagious methods), ethics forms the core of consciousness. Historically and culturally, ethics moves through a process of subjectivation from stain (impurity), through sin (disruption of order), to guilt (personal responsibility), regulated by what is permitted (*noa*) or taboo/sacred (*moa*).

Semiotic Reduction: Religious consciousness expresses itself in symbolic forms: prayer (based on proportional analogy), material representation (sacramental symbolism of *mimesis* and *methexis*), sacrifice (the symbolic return to the Origin of the life-force received), the dema cult (the annual repetition of primordial time), art (symmetry and harmony as reflections of the cosmos), and gnomic (proverbial) and mythical wisdom.

Part II: The Ancient Foundation

With the transition from tribal communities to the city-state (*polis*) and empire (*imperium*), ancient and classical culture emerges, placing both the individual and universal humanity at the center. Around 800–200 BCE, the Axial Age (*Achsenzeit*, as described by Karl Jaspers) unfolds: a simultaneous spiritual transformation across the great world cultures.

The course characterizes the major ancient cultural centers:

The Far East:

India: From the Vedas and Upanishads emerge the cosmic order (*Dharma*), the mystical identity between the absolute Universe (*Brahman*) and the deeper self (*Atman*), the interaction of karma and reincarnation (*samsara*), and the pursuit of liberation (*moksha*). This gives rise to orthodox philosophical schools (such as Samkhya, Yoga and Vedanta) and reform movements such as Jainism and Buddhism (with the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path).

China: Rooted in Universalism (the harmony between heaven, earth and humanity) and the dynamic interplay of Yin and Yang. Laozi describes the Tao (the primordial ground that orders things) and the way of life of *Wu Wei* (non-attachment), while Confucius develops an ethical and social morality based on filial piety and state order.

The Near East:

Egypt: Offers a serene conception of creation, the pharaoh as a living divine symbol, and the Osiris mysteries.

Mesopotamia: The *Enuma Elish* epic presents a primordial, chaotic and aggressive theogony in which evil is already present at the origin, leading to a tragic view of being.

Israel: Develops prophetic monotheism. The Adam myth states that creation is fundamentally good and that evil arises from human freedom. Prophets such as Jeremiah internalise religion in the form of a 'new covenant' written on the heart.

Persia: Zarathustra proclaims a cosmic and ethical dualism between Ahura Mazda (Light and Truth) and Ahriman (Falsehood), echoed in later Mithraism and Manichaeism.

Hellas:

Pre-Socratic philosophy: The Ionian *physikoi* seek the *archē* (the primordial matter or Origin: Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes); Pythagoras sees number (*arithmos*) and cosmic harmony as the essence of things; Parmenides establishes a strict logic of being (*to on*); Heraclitus emphasises permanent change and the ordering Logos; Democritus formulates atomistic mechanism.

Sophistic: Shifts attention towards sceptical relativism ('Man is the measure of all things', Protagoras).

Classical Athenian Philosophy: Socrates restores virtue through dialectic and the formation of concepts. Plato develops substantial idealism: the perceptible world is a shadow of the pre-existent World of Ideas (*eidos*), ordered under the Supreme Good. Aristotle completes this with his hylomorphism (matter and form), the four causes (material, formal, efficient and final), and the onto-theology of God as the unmoved mover.

Neoplatonism: After Stoicism and Epicureanism, ancient metaphysics culminates in Plotinus's emanationist monism: everything flows from the divine One (*To Hen*), through Intellect (*Nous*) and the World Soul, to matter. The human being subsequently returns to the Origin through purification and ecstasy.

Part III: The Medieval Elaboration

Medieval philosophy is not a dark interlude, but an original and sophisticated synthesis of the ancient classical heritage and Christian revelation (*philosophia ancilla theologiae*).

In *Patristics* (including Augustine), the idea of creation was interwoven with Platonic insights: God created the world *ex nihilo*, and the human mind gains insight through divine illumination.

Scholasticism (800–1450) developed its *paideia* through the trivium and quadrivium (*septem artes liberales*) as a foundation for theology.

A central intellectual debate concerned the status of universals and general concepts:

Nominalism (Roscelin, later Ockham): General concepts are merely names (*nomina*); only individual things truly exist.

Ultrarealism (William of Champeaux): Concepts possess an independent, real existence outside and prior to things (*universale ante rem*).

Scholastic Realism (Peter Abelard, Thomas Aquinas): Reconciles these positions through the threefold presence of form: *ante rem* (in the mind of God), *in re* (as essence in things) and *post rem* (as an abstract concept in the human mind).

In *High Scholasticism* (13th century), this synthesis reached its height through the rediscovery of Aristotle. Thomas Aquinas (Thomism) formulated a profound realism of creation: nature is knowable and intelligible because its

inner structure has been ordered by the Divine Mind. Through the *analogia entis* (analogy of being), creation is connected with the Creator without being identical to Him.

In *Late Scholasticism* (14th–15th centuries), this synthesis declined due to the rise of William of Ockham's nominalism. By severing the bond between the divine Origin and the essential forms in nature, Ockham separated faith and reason, paving the way for later secularism.

Part IV: The Modern Task

The modern age is characterised by a crisis in ancient metaphysics and a radical process of human autonomy:

Renaissance (1450–1640): Introduces individualism and rediscovers ancient *humanitas*. Galileo establishes modern natural science: nature is no longer approached through Aristotelian substantial forms, but through experimental and mathematical-mechanical analysis. Descartes formulates the dualism between *res cogitans* (mind) and *res extensa* (matter), to which Spinoza responds with monism and Leibniz with the theory of monads.

Enlightenment (18th century): Autonomous, exact reason casts off the authority of tradition and the Church. The natural-scientific method degenerates into an ideology of technocracy: the world is desacralised and reduced to a purely instrumental means within a means–ends strategy. In reaction to this cold rationalism, the Pre-Romantic movement (Rousseau, Herder) rediscovers feeling, folk culture, mysticism and sublime nature.

19th and 20th centuries: These are characterised by an oscillation between German Idealism (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel), scientism/positivism/Marxism, vitalist irrationalism (Nietzsche, Bergson), phenomenology/existential ontology (Husserl, Heidegger, Jaspers), and contemporary linguistic analysis and hermeneutics.

Conclusion: The Philosophical Task

The discrediting of the transcendent Origin leads to the threat of nihilism in Western culture ('God is dead'). According to the course, the 'modern task' of philosophy is not to reject modern science, but to transcend superficial secularism. Through re-historicisation (*Rehistorisierung*), thought must reconnect with the living family tree of the *philosophia perennis* — the ancient, universal metaphysical tradition that united nature, human values and the divine Origin into one coherent whole.