Course C.6-2: Elements of Harmology (1990–1991)

General:

This course examines harmology as a fundamental theory of the ordering of reality. The term 'harmology' is derived from the Ancient Greek harmonia (joining together, fitting together) and literally means the theory of order or ordering.

It is the human mind that introduces order into reality and structures it through ontological principles, logical relations and semiotic sign structures. The course combines insights from classical ontology, logic, semiotics, psychology, dialectics, and modern systems and disorder sciences.

The first part examines the metaphysical foundations of thought, the logistic calculus of relations such as reflexivity and implication, and their application to complex issues such as theodicy: the question of how God can justify the existence of evil.

The course then explores in greater depth the structure of sets and systems, focusing on the distinction between distributive and collective structures. The role of signs, models and symbols within semantics and pragmatics is also analyzed extensively, drawing on theorists such as Peirce and de Saussure.

Finally, it illustrates how these similarities, connections and oppositions manifest themselves in the human psyche, including through psychoanalysis and psychodramatic therapies.

The content is summarized step by step below in five clearly structured parts.

1: Foundations of harmology and the human need for order

Harmology has its roots in ontology, or the study of being: the philosophical study of 'being' or reality. Great philosophers such as Aristotle, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas emphasized that bringing order is the central task of philosophical thought ("Sapiëntis est ordinare"). Because reality is extraordinarily complex, human beings acquire basic concepts through sampling, generalization (inferring the existence of a set) and totalization (forming a view of the whole).

Ordering, however, is more than an intellectual activity; it is a prerequisite for psychological health (sofrosunè). The human brain functions as a self-ordering system that continually creates order out of the disorder of perceptions, as is evident, among other things, in the ordering activity that takes place during REM sleep. When social tensions cause someone to lose their grip on the existing order (as in schizophrenia or psychosis), the mind sometimes attempts to construct its own order, detached from reality.

Harmology provides the conceptual framework for rationally understanding these ordered relationships.

2: Relations, structures, sets and systems

Ontologically grounded harmology is essentially a theory of relations: data are compared with one another in order to reveal connections and relationships. Several types of relations are distinguished:

- *Reflexive*: The complete identity of something with itself (a loop-shaped relation).
- *Non-reflexive*: Symmetrical or reciprocal relations (such as a human encounter or a marriage), transitive relations, and relations of interpretability (univocal or multivocal).
- *Logical connectives* (connectives): Determine how propositions are related, including implication ("if p, then q"), the logical product (conjunction: "and") and the logical sum (disjunction: "or/and").

When relations extend into a network, we speak of a structure. Harmology makes a fundamental distinction between two types of structure:

- *The set* (distributive structure): Connects separate elements that share at least one common, identical property (a metaphorical structure oriented towards "all").
- *The system* (collective structure): Brings together mutually different components which, through their shared interrelationships, form an organised, goal-directed whole (a metonymic structure oriented towards the "whole").

3: Sign theory, models and the human psyche

An important component of harmology is semiotics (the study of signs). A sign is something that refers to something else. Sign theory encompasses three aspects:

- *Syntactic*: The internal and external relations between signs.
- *Semantic*: The relationship between the sign and what it denotes in reality.
- *Pragmatic*: The speaker's intention and the effect of the sign on its user or recipient.

Within linguistic structuralism (de Saussure), a sign connects an acoustic image (*signifiant*) with a concept (*signifié*). Signs also function as models: a metaphorical or iconic model is based on similarity (such as a map), whereas a metonymic or indexical model is based on connection (such as a signpost).

Similarity and connection also shape our inner psyche. Through emotional transference (*transfert*), the drive to imitate (Girard's *mimétisme*) and identification, people associate feelings, desires and fears with particular individuals, objects or symbols.

4: Oppositions, tensions, quantity and quality

Ordering does not simply mean recognizing similarities; it also means identifying differences and divisions. The course examines several forms of opposition:

- *Transcendental* (contradictory): Absolute incompatibility without an intermediate term (such as white versus non-white).
- *Categorical*: Including contrary opposition (different qualities that can coexist, such as colors), correlative opposition (mutually dependent concepts, such as father and son), and privative opposition (the deprivation of something that ought to be present, such as blindness).

In taseology (the study of tension), tension arises when at least two parties have conflicting interests concerning the same stake. When the rules of the game disappear and violence takes over, tension turns into conflict.

When analyzing totalities, harmology uses the theory of division into two complementary parts (complementation), such as the distinction between foreground (figure) and background, internal and external comparison, and descriptions of behavior (*prosopopoeia*) versus descriptions of inner character (*ethopoeia*). Values are often arranged along a differential—a polarized scale or spectrum running from + to −.

Furthermore, dialectics shows that gradual quantitative changes can, at a critical point, lead to a qualitative leap or a reversal into the opposite. This phenomenon is illustrated through classical paradoxes (such as the heap of grain) and physical experiments involving compressive forces.

5: Chaology, crises and the three methods of comparison

The final section addresses chaology (the study of disorder). Modern natural science shows that the universe consists largely of open, non-equilibrium systems. In far-from-equilibrium situations, small fluctuations (the butterfly effect) can lead to a bifurcation. Through self-organization (*auto-organization*), a new and higher order may then emerge from disorder. Economic, psychological or social crises are interpreted as such critical transition and bifurcation phases.

Finally, comparison is the fundamental method of all science. Through analysis (breaking a whole down into its elements) and synthesis (reconstructing the whole), thought unravels reality.

Within the comparative method, three attitudes of thought are distinguished:

- *Assimilationism / Concordism*: Seeks unity, common characteristics and consensus (as in Habermas).
- *Identivism*: Strives for a neutral balance between similarity and difference.
- *Differentialism / Discordism*: Emphasizes unbridgeable differences, gaps, disputes and fragmentation, which are characteristic of Postmodernism (Lyotard) and Nominalism.