UNIT I NOTES: WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

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| **Guide** with *Examples* | Notes with ***Names*** and **Terms** |
| **Basics of Philosophy:** **Branches + Terms** *EXAMPLE: A Materialist Monist who embraces a Skepticial, Empirical Epistemology and Moral Relativism believes in a world made of atoms which we can understand through observation, but never fully; she thinks this means that we cannot impose moral absolutes, but should take multiple factors into account and make moral decisions together so as to draw on multiple perspectives and allow better outcomes for all.* **The Philosophical  Approach to Thought**        **Philosophy in Athens: Ontology and Ethics come together through Epistemology (which becomes main branch)**  **Socrates *“True wisdom is to know  you know nothing*.”   The Sophists  *“Man is the measure  of all things.”*          (Death of Socrates)      Plato *“Earthly knowledge is but a Shadow of the Truth”*** *EXAMPLE: The Great Gatsby:*  *Jay Gatsby: “Idealism” has spread beyond philosophy. The word is “idealist” is used to describe someone who, like Plato, believes in perfection and absolute principles. Fitzgerald writes that the identity of “Jay Gatsby sprang from [young James Gatz’s] Platonic conception of himself.”* *EXAMPLES OF PLATO’S FORMS:  Individual lovers inevitably separate or grow old and die. But the Form or Idea of “Love” lasts forever, and nothing can ever fully possess it in this world.* | Philosophy consists of three key branches: 🡪**Ontology**: Study of the Nature of Being  -**Monism = Reality is One World or Substance (e.g. energy)  -Dualism = Reality has Two Worlds or Substances (e.g. matter/spirit)  -Materialism = Reality is Matter (it is “material,” i.. made of atoms)  -Idealism = Reality is Spirit (it is “immaterial,” “spiritual” or “mental”)**   🡪**Epistemology:** Theory of Knowledge and Truth  -Rationalism: Knowledge through logical thought (not just senses)  -Empiricism: Knowledge comes from observation (senses 🡪 analysis)  -Skepticism: Knowledge is impossible, at least “total” knowledge is  -Fideism: Knowledge is a matter of faith or belief, not proof  🡪**Ethics**: Evaluation of Right and Wrong Actions  -Moral **Objectivism** Right and Wrong are facts; a.k.a. Moral Realism)  -Moral **Relativism** (No absolutes: Good depends on Culture, Context…)  -Moral **Subjectivism** (Extreme relativism: Morality is purely opnion)  A philosopher looks at some or all of these concerns and develops a set of concepts that explain what they think about them.   🡪First WESTERN Philosophers focus on Ontology:  ***Heraclitus*:** Monist – All is Change. ***Parmenides:*** Monist – Change is Illusion.  🡪First EASTERN Philosophers focus on Ethics:  ***Buddha***: Buddhism – Let go of attachments and relieve suffering ***Laozi:*** Taoism – “Flow” with nature’s perfect cycles of change  **🡪*SOCRATES*** could be said to combine these approaches through the use of epistemology to connect ontology to ethics through questioning.  **Socratic Method: Take an ethical concept (e.g. Justice) and inquire into what it really “is.” When it is revealed that no one can actually explain it without contradicting themselves, the ethical concept is open for reinterpretation. ThIs epistemology combines rationalism (logic) and skepticism (doubt).**  Socrates’s ideas are opposed by the sophists**,** led by **Protagoras: -**Sophist Epistemology: Subjective Skepticism (no Truth, just perspective) -Sophist Ethics: Moral Relativism (no Right/Wrong; morality is inter-subjective)  Ex: In Plato’s *Republic* Socrates argues “Justice” is an objective concept which means giving everyone what they “truly” deserve. The Sophist Thrasymachus instead says “Justice” is an idea invented by human rulers to make it seem like the government is fair to everyone, when it usually isn’t. So the concept of Justice is RELATIVE to each particular government’s needs: “Justice is whatever is in the interest of the stronger party” in a society. Socrates is horrified.   Socrates makes many enemies through his questioning and is brought up on charges of “corrupting the youth” and denying the Gods. He chooses a death sentence rather than retiring from philosophy. Why? -His Moral Objectivism: Wrong is Wrong, period, and he must do Right. -His Dualist Ontology: Believes in an immortal soul and eternal heaven **🡪 *Plato*** is Socrates’s student and intellectual heir  -Leaves Athens to travel after the traumatic loss of his mentor  -Returns to Athens and founds the Academy, a (free, members-only)   school of mathematics, citizenship, and of course *philosophia.*  -Begins to write and circulate “dialogues” featuring Socrates arguing  with sophists and others (this format allows him to avoid legal trouble)  Key Platonic Concept: World of **Ideal Forms** (Dualist, Idealist Ontology)  -There are two worlds: the material world of becoming where our   bodies live, and the spiritual world of Forms our souls can enter   through Reasoning alone. This is a development of Socrates’s ideas.   -**Ideal Forms**: These are the Ideas behind things. Plato’s ontology treats Ideas as   real, more real than things themselves. Ideas exist elsewhere as perfect   “Models” which give real objects their existence (thru “participation”).  The Forms can only “reflect” into our world through a particular thing,  which is a only a “Shadow” or “Copy” of the Ideal. These copies are  always temporary (they are “always becoming”) while the Forms are   eternal and unchanging. That is why they are perfect.     -**The Three-Part (“tripartite”) Soul:** Everything is Plato is vertical -   “It is the task of the enlightened to ascend to learning and see the Good.” This   means using the “highest” part of the soul, the mind (Reason) which can think   the Forms. The middle part, emotion (Spirit) must be kept in check by Reason.   The lowest part, physical desire (Appetite) must be reduced as much   as possible, because it is most bound to this material world and can   hold us back from pursuing the Truth that is in the Higher, Ideal one.   -**Allegory of the Cave:** Plato version of Socrates tells this story about a world   where people live their whole lives in a cave, chained up and facing the wall. If a   man escaped, the world outside would be overwhelmingly bizarre and painfully   bright. But he would know the Truth. This is like the philosopher’s journey. The   Cave is our world, the Sun outside is Truth. Our goal is to escape to the Forms. |