



## PLS1501- Assignment 1

Western Philosophy (University of South Africa)



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(1.) Western Philosophy includes several sub-branches, such as epistemology, ethics, social and political philosophy to name a few.

- **Epistemology** as a western philosophy branch concerns the theory of knowledge. The main divisions within this branch are between *Rationalism*, which states that our reality is known through the use of reasoning alone and not through the senses. Whereby, *Empiricism* claims that our reality is known through our senses and *Skepticism*, which claims that we really cannot know anything. At large, epistemology is concerned with the question of truth.
- **Ethics** is a branch that concerns moral values. Its main divisions include Absolutism and Relativism. Absolutism is a view which states that there is one correct ethical system of moral values for all people and Relativism is the view that moral values are simply relative to different cultures in different times and places, or perhaps even relative to different individuals.
- **Social and Political** philosophy is a western philosophy sub branch which focuses on practical social and political questions. These are questions such as what is the ideal society or form of government, and whether the idea of government must be rationally justified.

(2.) Metaphysics is one of the branches in philosophy concerned with the nature of existence, beings and the world in general. Metaphysics, according to Aristotle, is arguably the foundation of philosophy. Aristotle calls it “first philosophy” as well as the subject that deals with “first causes and the principles of things”. Originally, Aristotle split his metaphysics into three main sections and these are known as the main branches of metaphysics. This includes :

- **Ontology**: which is the study of being and existence, including the classification and definition of entities, mental and physical, as well as the nature of their properties and changes.
- **Natural theology**: this is the study of God, the nature of religion and the world as a whole. It is also the study of divine existence questions about the creation and various other spiritual or religious issues.

David Hume, Immanuel Kant and A.T. Ayer have attacked metaphysics, at different times in history, as being futile and overly vague. It may appear more useful to say that a metaphysical statement usually implies an idea about the world or the universe, which may seem reasonable but is ultimately not empirically verifiable, testable or provable.

(3.) Logic involves the study of reasoning, as well as the study of the principles and criteria of values inference and demonstration. It attempts to distinguish good reasoning from bad reasoning. It also investigates and classifies the structure of arguments and statements by means of studying formal systems of interference as well as through the study of arguments in natural language. It only deals with propositions that have the capability to be true and false. Aristotle, being one of the major figures in philosophy, defined logic as “new and necessary

reasoning” because it allows us to learn what we do not know, and “necessary” because its conclusions are inescapable. Logical systems should include the following three things:

- **Consistency:** this indicates that none of the theorems of the system contradict one another.
- **Soundness:** which indicates that the systems that rules of proof will never allow a false inference from a true premise.
- **Completeness:** this indicates that there are no true sentences in the system that cannot, at least in principle, be proved in the system.

## References:

Aristotle. 1953. *The works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, edited and translated by WD Ross. Oxford: University Press.

Stumpf, SE. 1966. *Socrates to Sartre: a history of philosophy*. New York: McGraw Hill.