Metaphysics Notes

Metaphysics: the study of existence (What's out there?)

Essential Questions:
"What is the nature of reality?"
"How does the world exist, and what is its origin or source of creation?"
"Does the world exist outside the mind?"
"How can the incorporeal mind affect the physical body?"
"If things exist, what is their objective nature?"
"Is there a God (or many gods, or no god at all)?"

Aristotle originally split his metaphysics into **three main sections** and these remain the main branches of metaphysics:

1. **Ontology** (the study of **being** and **existence**, including the definition and classification of **entities**, physical or mental, the nature of their properties, and the nature of **change**)
2. **Natural Theology** (the study of **God**, including the nature of **religion** and the **world**, existence of the **divine**, questions about the **creation**, and the various other religious or spiritual issues)
3. **Universal Science** (the study of **first principles** of logic and reasoning, such as the **law of noncontradiction**)

Existence (the fact or state of **continued being**) is **axiomatic** (meaning that it does not rest upon anything in order to be **valid**, and it cannot be proven by any **"more basic"** premises) because it is **necessary** for all **knowledge** and it cannot be denied without conceding its truth (a denial of something is only possible if existence exists). "Existence exists" is therefore an **axiom** which states that there is **something**, as opposed to **nothing**.

Consciousness is the faculty which **perceives** and **identifies** things that exist. In his famous formulation **"Cogito ergo sum"**("I think therefore I am"), René Descartes argued that consciousness is **axiomatic**, because you cannot logically deny your mind's existence at the same time as using your mind to do the denying.

Metaphysics Notes

- What Descartes did not make clear is that consciousness is the faculty that perceives that which exists, so it requires something outside of itself in order to function: it requires, and is dependent upon, existence.
- The primacy of existence states that existence is primary and consciousness is secondary, because there can be no consciousness without something existing to perceive.
- Existence is independent of, makes possible, and is a prerequisite of consciousness.
- Consciousness is not responsible for creating reality: it is completely dependent upon reality.

Mind and Matter

Early debates on the nature of matter centered on identifying a single underlying principle: Monism (the idea that everything is made of a single ingredient).

The nature of the mind and its relation to the body has also exercised the best brains for millennia. There is a large overlap here with Philosophy of Mind, which is the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of the mind, mental events, mental functions, mental properties and consciousness, and their relationship to the physical body.

In the 17th Century, Descartes proposed a Dualist solution called **Substance Dualism** (or **Cartesian Dualism**) whereby the mind and body are totally separate and different: the mental does not have extension in space, and the material cannot think.

Idealists, like Bishop George Berkeley and the German Idealist school, claim that material objects do not exist unless perceived.

Baruch Spinoza and Bertrand Russell both adopted, in different ways, a dual-aspect theory called **Neutral Monism**, which claims that existence consists of a single substance which in itself is neither mental nor physical, but is capable of mental and physical aspects or attributes.