

METAPOLITICS

AN INTRODUCTION



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Abstract

The times are metapolitical. The paper traces the concept of metapolitics throughout the history of ideas to contemplate the close interconnection of politics, political philosophy and political science.

We trace metapolitics back to the art of governing in ancient Greece, cybernetics, while we present the rationale of modern day metapolitics.

We define metapolitics as consisting of 1) metaphysics, 2) ideology, 3) science and 4) poetics.

We furthermore reflect upon the implications of the metapolitical worldview for the conceptualization and practice of political science as an instance of a metascientific power-practice.

In the end, we note the importance of the existentials for guiding political philosophy.

We propose that the political discourse be enhanced by a poetics – a metapolitics of the heart.

Author's note on historical and ideological references

This essay examines the concept of metapolitics as a philosophical, epistemological, and cultural category within the Western tradition. All references to historical ideologies, including National Socialism or other political movements, are made solely for the purpose of theoretical analysis and intellectual history. No endorsement, justification, or political advocacy regarding any historical regime, policy, or action is intended or implied.

The purpose of this work is to recover and clarify the original, timeless meaning of metapolitics as the meeting point of metaphysics, ideology, science, and poetics — not to promote or excuse any specific historical political ideology.

Post-modernity – Narrating the post-apocalypse

Many see the Second World War as the culmination of modernity. After the apocalyptic scenes of Second World War, the Eastern front where millions lost their lives, D-day and the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, we entered the age of post-modernity.

The clash of ideologies proved an ontology of conflict. The grand narrative of liberal progress laid shattered and was questioned for being a *fantasy fiction* faced with the ideological resistance experienced on the continent and worldwide. Power and war had proven to be the determining factors of history. Even though the liberal democracies were victorious, the liberal ideological vision of a positivist and universal liberal peace had forever been undermined by the forces of history.

The liberal world order post Second World War was established by war and not by some peaceful, democratic deliberation – the eternal peace of Kant was a graveyard (Kant, 1795).

Germany, Japan and the axis-forces were given the blame for the war, though what could not be hidden from the courts of Nürenberg was the ideological conviction of the doomed prisoners of war, charged with war crimes. All of them died firmly rooted in their *weltanschauung* and ideological convictions of race and nation.

It was only natural that the philosophy of the aftermath of the war began to question the ontological foundation of Western civilization – the ontology of man.

Commentators found the roots of German ideology in the reactions of the idealists (Hegel, 1807), nationalists (Fichte, Herder) and romanticists to the age of enlightenment (see Viereck, 1941), as well as in *volkish* thinking and culture and in mysticism (Mosse, 1964). The National-Socialist political philosophy was described as a *metapolitics*¹. This proved the sharp divide between continental and Anglo-American philosophical tradition.

Continental philosophy had taken a blow during the war. Mostly it was the French philosophers of existentialism, structuralism and post-structuralism, who were active in the aftermath of the the war, though Heidegger continued to publish writings on civilizational critique (Heidegger, 1954a). Meanwhile and especially during the 60's flourished the German Frankfurt school, with Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse as leading figures in the cultural Marxist critical theory of modernity (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947).

What is important to note is the general tendency of disillusionment with enlightenment and modernity on all sides of the political spectrum after the war.

This was expressed in world politics by the communists during the Cold War, but today we find the very same disillusionment expressed on the right with Le Pen and the election of Donald Trump.

These illiberal tendencies are happening in France and in the USA – the two main protagonists of universal liberalism.

¹ According to Viereck, the title of his book *Metapolitics* was lifted from letter-exchanges among the Wagner-circle of nationalists (p. xxix, 4).

Ideological critique



The Helmsman (Sailor from Uusimaa), Albert Edelfelt, 1894.
Cybernetics... The politician cannot be distinguished from the philosopher.

Thus we know that history is not over, as opposed to what some liberals had proposed (Fukuyama, 1992), as some paradoxical notion in remembrance of the war that cost nearly 85 million lives, approximated. There is disagreement, still (Ranciere, 2004).

Given the return of ideology in the 21. ct. (Riis-Søndergaard, 2022), the present paper goes on to reflect upon how to contemplate the philosophy of politics and the social and political sciences, while we appreciate some insights from the critical science studies of later post-modernity. While we appreciate the critique of power proposed by post-modern theory, the world is not some desert, void of any natural or essential experience (Baudrillard, 1981; Žižek, 2002). We are home in the world (Heidegger, 1954b), but there is still conflict.

What does it mean to be political and how to study politics? What does a political philosophy entail?

Now *philosophia* is the love of wisdom. The first political philosophy took place in ancient Greece with the *Politeia* of Plato and the *Politika* of Aristotle. Where Plato represented the aristocracy, Aristotle took a more democratic approach. Common to both the philosophers were their concern with ideology, that is, the theoretical concept of politics and the philosophy of political doctrine and organization. They were themselves active in politics and in public life.

In the first philosophical treatise on politics, Plato's *Politeia*, Socrates informs of the deteriorating cycle of the five forms of government: aristocracy, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny.

This was the first ideological critique, when it took into account and debated the different forms of government. It was a metapolitics, for it considered the truths of politics².

The politeia of Socrates and Plato is an aristocratic state led by philosopher kings, lovers of wisdom and reason – this was the ideal state.

In general, it is interesting to note that Plato in large part was influenced by the mystical thinking of Pythagoras and they both believed in the immortality of the soul.

So the ideal state of Plato was led by an mystical aristocracy that believed in the transmigration of the soul and the good rule of reason.

This sounds interesting given present day revival of metapolitics.

Are there other alternatives to the democratic government possible for the 21. ct.? The liberal world order – the so called eternal peace – has shown itself to be an illusion, hence the disillusionment of the modern day ideologues and metapoliticians with present politics.

Plato's politeia was metapolitics – man and the state related the same divine idea. That was the political order.

The times call for a renewed thinking about politics. What we need is a revival of spirit³, usually proposed by conservative philosophers, that accounts for the ideal of man and the ideal of state. We propose the concept *metapolitics* as a political philosophy that can lead mankind forward in the 21st ct. True politics is metapolitics, for it considers the metaphysics first to qualify the politics.

As a politics of truth⁴, metapolitics is critical towards ideology – it is ideological critique, for we consider and critique the ontology and the epistemology of science in light of the debate on metaphysical truth.

Metapolitical thinking is metaphysical thinking, when we ask the question of being – the truth of being (Heidegger, 1927).

2 The tradition of political science started with the Athenians, but back then the science was considered metapolitics. It was idealistic, normative and prescriptive. The philosopher kings were political leaders as well as scientists. The science of governing was called cybernetics, *kybernesis* – from the art of navigating. The captain, *kybernetes* (Plato).

3 Even Foucault called for a spiritual revival to counter the reductionism of liberalism and Marxism (Foucault, 2020)

4 See Foucault's lectures on *parrhesia* – the act of telling truth – the politics of truth (Foucault, 2019)

Metapolitics

Metapolitics attempts to answer this question by casting politics as a question of ontology.

Viereck defines metapolitics as related to a specific ideology, that of the National-Socialists. According to his definition, the metapolitical ideology consists of 1) romanticism, 2) scientific racism, 3) economic socialism and 4) the supernatural volk-collectivity (p. 4).

Viereck goes on to contrast a split in Western culture between the German romantics and the classical West.

This analysis lacks the reflection that metapolitics has been *the* politics of the West since Plato and that the Christian politics of the middle-ages must be considered metapolitics as well. This is the age-old tradition of political science. There is a tradition.

In political science the concept is used to describe the metascientific investigation of the conceptual language of the study of politics (Gregor, 2003: p. 9).

Gregor contrasts his own definition to that of Viereck and a third argument, which seeks to define metapolitics as a poetic of politics and political science.

We will combine those 4 arguments for metapolitics into a definition that entails: 1) metaphysics, in the tradition of Plato, 2) ideology, 3) science and 4) poetics.

All the aspects are important for the practice of metapolitics.

While we consider the theory it is interesting to note how political science can help us explain our ideology and the metaphysics that underpin it.

Poetry is important as the involved and engaged expression of an art, which politics is.

We now have our constituents for a metapolitics of the 21st ct.

Let us now turn to investigate, how metapolitics plays out in world affairs, concentrating on what metapolitics might imply for the conceptualization and study of politics – what it means for our understanding of the political and the political inquiry, political science.

Political epistemology and epistemic warfare

When we engage in political science, we engage in political epistemology. The metapolitics implies, that the political study is carried out on a metascientific level, so what must be debated is the metaphysics and the ideology, hence the importance of ideological critique.

The metascientific inquiry into the conceptual language of political science takes into account 1) analytical (logical), 2) synthetic (empirical) and 3) normative (ethical) propositions for truth.

But the metaphysics-debate takes into account all those propositions for truth, when we talk about transcendental truth (logical) and transcendent/experiential truth (empirical).

The normative aspect is considered ideology, but all those aspects are intertwined in metapolitics.

To engage in political science on the level of metapolitics therefore takes skills – it is an art of governing and the combination of government and political science is a political metascience, a political epistemology and integral to metapolitics.

In 1970, Giovanni Sartori called for an increased focus on methodology, the logic of political conceptualization, concept formation, rather than merely new methods.

It is metapower, since in the metascientific practice we conceptualize and define the language for understanding, truth and meaning – we set the norm for what can be described as true and meaningful statements, professional standards for performing the political study and in that sense, we are giving meaning to world and world affairs – the political conduct of men.

In conceptualizing, classifying, theorizing and schematizing, we define an episteme of knowledge as a metapower practice, for we define what it is possible to say and what can and will be heard according to power-relations (Foucault, 1966).

That is why the poetics are so important to politics, political philosophy and by the same logic political science. A poetics is important for giving language to the existential call of man, that is the call of life and for its visionary potential as a creative outlet for transcendental and existential consciousness and contemplation.

Continental tradition is supportive of the philosophical, historical, phenomenological and hermeneutic approach, whereas the Anglo-American tradition has been known for the analytical approach.

In *Separate Tables* (1988), Gabriel Almond defines the hard and soft methodological approach, the scientific versus the philosophical in political science as well as an ideological divide between right and left politics.

Metapolitics does not stop there. We propose that ideas of political science are integral to the art of governing akin to for example Foucault's notion of self-reflexive governmentality (Foucault, 2007).

We cannot separate political philosophy, politics and political science – metapolitics is an art of governing and a poetry that relates those three aspects of the political.

The epistemology we seek is therefore a political epistemology that practice political science as a call.

The call is associated with a poetic urge to conceptualize and express the politics of man.

This is the call of metapolitics.

But this call is as old as man – it is the call of life and it is what informs man of his existentials. The metaphysics of his being in the world, as we have described in considerations on ontology.

This existentials calls for man to engage with the world and world politics according to the normative explications of the existentials. As such we are cast into the world – given to act on the life-principle.

This means we are political by nature – politics is in our blood. Therefore the metapolitician must explicate his metaphysics and ontology as politics – as metapolitics. There are political implications of metaphysics and ontology we must consider as engaged, historic and poetic beings.

A poetics of politics

“Unless someone can distinguish in an account the form of the good from everything else, can survive all refutation, as if in a battle, striving to judge things not in accordance with opinion but in accordance with being, and can come through all this with his account still intact, you’ll say that he doesn’t know the good itself or any other good. And if he gets hold of some image of it, you’ll say that it’s through opinion, not knowledge, for he is dreaming and asleep through-out his present life, and, before he wakes up here, he will arrive in Hades and go to sleep forever (Plato: book 7, 534b, Socrates on the importance of dialectics for educating the future rulers of the politeia).“

“Tell him that he’ll make no mistake in likening those who rule in our cities at present to the sailors we mentioned just now, and those who are called useless stargazers to the true captains (Plato: book 6, 489c. Socrates on respect for the art of governing ships and cities – the good rule of the philosopher-king – the true captain).”

As philosophers, we are called to take part in the politics of society. We are ready to explicate analytic, synthetic and normative truth to improve the politics. The metapolitical language we apply is enhanced by poetics.

The metapolitics of the future is led by philosophers – poets of the art of governing.

An epistemology of hope

The metapolitical call for engagement with world and world politics leads to an awakening in society and express the metaphysical hope for the phenomenological unveiling of the truth of being – the realization of spirit in world politics.

It is the task of metapolitics to affirm this unveiling of the truth of being.

This is hope.

As philosophers, we are masters of the way – the doctrine of the heart. This is the age-old religious and philosophical teaching of the truth of man.

For there is truth.

The truth is that we are given life-principles and an existentielle and we are cast to act according to the fact of this call of life.

The metaphysical or transcendental existentielle is what is essential to man and informs our being in the world as well as our engagement with world politics.

As political philosophers, we are called to enact a science that is guided and informed by the highest ethical principles and normative propositions for the good rule. For this we are engaged with metapolitics.

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