**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH IN MULTIDISCIPLINARY EDUCATION**

ISSN (print): 2833-4515, ISSN (online): 2833-4531

Volume 05 Issue 06 June 2026

DOI: 10.58806/ijirme.2026.v5i6n20 Impact factor- 7.614

Page No. 915-919

# Metaphysics and Politics: A Philosophical Reflection

**Anokwuru Christian Uche, PhD[1], Kenneth Oduma Chiabuotu Odanwu[2]**

[1]Department of General Studies, Faculty of General Studies and Communication Technology, Ogbonnaya Onu Polytechnic, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria

[2]Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ebonyi

https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2906-8204

**ABSTRACT:** The background of this study is the long standing but often neglected relationship between metaphysical inquiry and political practice. While political science has increasingly favoured empirical and institutional analysis, the underlying assumptions about being, causality, and human nature continue to shape political systems in profound ways. The problem addressed is that contemporary political discourse frequently dismisses metaphysics as irrelevant to practical governance, leading to an incomplete understanding of political legitimacy and authority. The aim of this article is to demonstrate that metaphysical commitments are not optional extras but are inherent to any coherent political theory. The method employed is a philosophical analysis of key texts from the Western tradition, including the works of Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, G. W. F. Hegel, and Hannah Arendt, tracing how their metaphysical positions informed their political conclusions. The contemporary relevance lies in current debates over natural law, human rights, populism, and the legitimacy of international institutions, all of which rest on contested metaphysical claims. The conclusion argues that the rejection of metaphysics in politics is itself a metaphysical position, and that a more explicit engagement with these foundational questions is necessary for robust political reasoning. Metaphysics and politics are not separate domains but two dimensions of a single inquiry into the good life in common. This study further situates the metaphysics politics nexus within broader debates in contemporary philosophy, particularly those concerning realism and anti-realism, the grounding of normativity, and the ontological status of social institutions. By doing so, it extends the argument beyond historical exposition to a systematic reflection on the indispensability of metaphysical reasoning in political thought.

**KEYWORDS:** metaphysics, politics, political philosophy, ontology, natural law, sovereignty.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between metaphysics and politics has been a subject of contention since the beginning of Western philosophy. For some thinkers, metaphysics offers the only secure foundation for political order, providing absolute standards of justice and right action that transcend mere opinion or interest. For others, metaphysics is a dangerous distraction, a source of ideological dogmatism that has justified tyranny, persecution, and the suppression of dissent. This article takes a different view. It argues that metaphysics and politics are not alternatives but are necessarily intertwined. Every political system, whether it acknowledges it or not, rests on a set of metaphysical claims about the nature of reality, the human person, and the structure of causality. To understand politics, one must therefore understand the metaphysical assumptions that sustain it.

The term metaphysics is used here in its classical sense, as the branch of philosophy that investigates the fundamental nature of being, existence, and the world. It includes questions about whether reality is one or many, whether there is a divine order, what it means for something to have a purpose or end, and how freedom and necessity relate to one another (Aristotle, 1998). These questions may seem remote from the daily business of legislation, voting, and administration. Moreover, the connection between metaphysics and politics is mediated by the problem of normativity. Political judgments are both descriptive and prescriptive; they not only explain circumstances but also guide action by indicating what ought to be done. However, the grounding of "ought" claims has long been tied to questions of "being." As Williams (1985) observes, ethical and political reasoning inevitably presupposes a background conception of human nature and the world, even when such presuppositions remain implicit. This article will demonstrate that the answers given to them, whether explicitly or implicitly, determine the shape of political concepts such as rights, obligations, justice, and sovereignty.

The article proceeds as follows. It first examines the classical synthesis of metaphysics and politics in the works of Plato and Aristotle, showing how their theories of forms and teleology generated distinct models of the just city. It then considers the modern rupture represented by Hobbes, who sought to ground politics in a mechanistic metaphysics of motion and a pessimistic

anthropology. The article subsequently analyses the idealist response of Hegel, who integrated history and spirit into a metaphysical framework of ethical life. A critical section addresses the attempts to purge politics of metaphysics, from logical positivism to postmodern thought, arguing that these attempts are self-defeating. Finally, the contemporary relevance of the metaphysics politics nexus is explored through the debates on natural law, human rights, and populist nationalism. The conclusion reaffirms that a politically responsible philosophy must engage with metaphysics rather than flee from it.

## 2. THE CLASSICAL FOUNDATION: PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

The classical world did not separate metaphysics from politics in the way that modern thought often does. For Plato, the structure of reality directly implied a structure for political society. His theory of forms posited a realm of perfect, eternal, and unchanging essences, of which the material world is only a flawed copy. The form of the Good is the highest principle, illuminating all other forms just as the sun illuminates visible objects (Plato, 1992). This metaphysical hierarchy has a political corollary. Just as the forms are ordered by the Good, so the just city must be ordered by knowledge of the Good. Those who have ascended from the cave of opinion to the sunlight of truth, namely the philosopher rulers, are uniquely qualified to govern. Politics is therefore the application of metaphysical insight to the arrangement of human affairs.

Plato's political recommendations, including the abolition of private property for the guardian class and the equality of women in ruling roles, are not arbitrary prescriptions. They derive from his metaphysical claim that the soul has three parts: reason, spirit, and appetite. The just individual is one in whom reason rules spirit and appetite. By analogy, the just city is one in which philosophers (reason) rule the auxiliaries (spirit) and the producing classes (appetite). Metaphysics provides the blueprint; politics executes it. Critics have called this totalitarian, but for Plato the alternative is worse: a city ruled by appetite, which is tyranny.

Aristotle rejected his teacher's theory of separate forms but retained the conviction that metaphysics and politics are inseparable. His metaphysics is teleological and immanent. Aristotle's approach can be described as a form of metaphysical naturalism, in which the structure of reality is accessible through empirical observation and rational reflection on the functions of living beings. Unlike Plato, he does not posit a separate realm of forms, but he nonetheless maintains that nature is intelligible and purposive (Lear, 1988). Every substance has an internal principle of change and an end or purpose towards which it naturally moves (Aristotle, 1998). The human end, as determined by the distinctive human function of rational activity, is *eudaimonia* or flourishing. Politics is the master science because it creates the conditions in which citizens can achieve this end. The polis, or city state, is a natural community, not a mere convention, because humans are political animals. The best constitution is the one that most fully actualizes human potential, balancing the claims of virtue, wealth, and freedom. For Aristotle, to ask what a political system should be is to ask what humans are for. That is a metaphysical question.

Furthermore, Aristotle's emphasis on practical wisdom (phronesis) suggests a sensitivity to the variability of political life. While grounded in metaphysical claims about human nature, his political theory allows for contextual judgment, thereby avoiding the rigid idealism often attributed to Plato (Nussbaum, 2001).

## 3. THE MODERN RUPTURE: HOBBES AND THE MECHANISTIC TURN

The modern period witnessed a profound shift in metaphysical assumptions, with corresponding consequences for political theory. The rise of mechanistic physics, associated with Galileo and Newton, displaced the Aristotelian teleological universe. This transformation was part of the broader Scientific Revolution, which replaced qualitative explanations with quantitative and mechanistic models of nature. The rejection of final causes was central to this shift, leading to a reconfiguration of both metaphysics and political theory (Shapin, 1996). Reality was increasingly understood as matter in motion, governed by efficient causes rather than final causes or purposes. Thomas Hobbes was the first political philosopher to fully absorb this new metaphysics. In Leviathan, he famously described the commonwealth as an artificial man, a machine constructed by human artifice. The universe consists of bodies in motion; there are no inherent purposes or natural hierarchies (Hobbes, 1994).

This metaphysical reorientation produces a radically new politics. Without a natural human end, the good becomes whatever an individual desires. Without a natural hierarchy, all humans are equal in their vulnerability to violent death. The state of nature, as Hobbes conceives it, is a condition of war of all against all, driven by competition, diffidence, and glory. The right of nature is the liberty each person has to preserve their own life. Because this liberty leads to conflict, reason dictates the creation of a sovereign power by means of a social contract. The sovereign, whether one person or an assembly, has absolute authority to enforce peace. The political conclusion follows directly from the metaphysical premise: if there is no natural purpose or cosmic justice, then order must be manufactured by human agreement and enforced by irresistible power.

Hobbes's metaphysics is often called nominalist because he denies the real existence of universals. There are only individual bodies and their names. Consequently, there is no natural law in the classical sense, no moral order written into the fabric of reality. What earlier thinkers called natural law is merely a set of prudential theorems about peace. This does not make Hobbes an amoralist. He retains a strong moral vocabulary, but it is grounded in the passion of fear and the calculation of self-preservation, not in any metaphysical teleology. The strength of Hobbes's system is its clarity and its accommodation of modern science. Its weakness, from

the perspective of many later thinkers, is that it reduces politics to a mechanism of security, leaving no space for human flourishing, virtue, or transcendence.

## 4. THE IDEALIST RESPONSE: HEGEL AND THE SPIRIT OF HISTORY

The mechanistic metaphysics of Hobbes and his successors provoked a powerful counter movement in German idealism. Immanuel Kant (1998) attempted to reconcile mechanistic causality with human freedom by positing a transcendental distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal realms. However, it was G. W. F. Hegel who developed the most comprehensive alternative, integrating metaphysics, history, and politics into a single unfolding narrative. Hegel (1991) rejected both the atomistic individualism of Hobbes and the purely formal moral law of Kant. For Hegel, reality is Spirit or Geist, a rational totality that actualizes itself through history. The famous proposition of the Philosophy of Right is that what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational.

Hegel's metaphysics is holistic and developmental. The truth is the whole, and the whole is a process of self-realisation. Central to Hegel's account is the concept of recognition, the idea that individual self-consciousness is constituted through mutual acknowledgment. This insight has had a lasting influence on contemporary political theory, particularly in debates about identity and multiculturalism (Honneth, 1995). Human beings are not isolated atoms but are constituted by their social and historical relations. Freedom, for Hegel, is not the absence of constraint but the recognition of oneself in the other, the experience of being at home in one's social world. This metaphysical conception yields a distinctive political theory. The modern state, as Hegel conceives it, is the actuality of the ethical idea. It is the rational embodiment of Spirit in institutions such as the family, civil society, and the bureaucracy. The state is not a necessary evil, as in liberal thought, but the highest expression of human freedom.

The political implications of Hegel's metaphysics are complex and contested. His account of the state has been accused of justifying authoritarianism and suppressing individual rights. However, Hegel insisted on the importance of civil society, with its market relations and corporate associations, as a sphere of individual freedom distinct from the state. He also defended legal rights and due process. The deeper point is that for Hegel, politics cannot be understood apart from metaphysics because the political community is not a contract but an expression of a shared ethical substance. To ask why one should obey the law is, for Hegel, to misunderstand the nature of ethical life. One obeys because the law is the external embodiment of one's own rational will. This answer only makes sense within a metaphysical framework that posits the unity of individual and universal.

## 5. THE ATTEMPT TO PURGE POLITICS OF METAPHYSICS

The 20th century witnessed a sustained effort to free political thought from metaphysical entanglements. The logical positivists, led by the Vienna Circle, declared metaphysical statements to be meaningless because they could not be verified empirically. A. J. Ayer (1936), for instance, argued that metaphysical statements lack cognitive meaning because they cannot be empirically verified. This position sought to eliminate metaphysics entirely from philosophical discourse. Political philosophy, on this view, should confine itself to the analysis of concepts and the logic of justification, avoiding substantive claims about the nature of reality. In the English-speaking world, this attitude shaped the rise of analytical political philosophy. Thinkers such as Isaiah Berlin and H. L. A. Hart focused on liberty, rights, and the rule of law without invoking metaphysical foundations. Berlin's value pluralism, while avoiding metaphysical absolutism, nonetheless presupposes a view of human values as incommensurable and irreducible, a claim that itself carries metaphysical implications (Berlin, 1969).

A different but related critique emerged from postmodern and deconstructive traditions. Friedrich Nietzsche (1967) had declared that the Christian moral order, itself a metaphysical inheritance, was a fiction that had outlived its usefulness. Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics as a projection of human values onto the structure of reality represents a radical challenge to traditional philosophy, yet it also introduces its own metaphysical perspective on the nature of truth and power. Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida argued that metaphysical claims, such as the appeal to truth, justice, or human nature, are always implicated in power relations. To speak of metaphysics is to engage in a will to truth that excludes and marginalizes alternative voices. The political task, for these thinkers, is not to find the right metaphysics but to unmask and resist the metaphysical pretensions of existing orders.

Despite the sophistication of these critiques, this article contends that they fail to escape metaphysics. The verification principle of logical positivism is itself a metaphysical claim about the nature of meaningfulness. It cannot be verified empirically, so by its own standard it is meaningless. Similarly, the postmodern insistence that all truth claims are expressions of power is a truth claim about the nature of discourse. It claims to know something about how language and power relate, which is a metaphysical claim about reality. Even the refusal of metaphysics is a metaphysical position. As Heidegger (1962) observed, the attempt to think without ontology merely falls into a naive ontology of the present at hand. Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics as a forgetting of Being underscores the difficulty of escaping ontological assumptions. Even attempts to reject metaphysics remain entangled in inherited conceptual frameworks. The question is not whether politics will have a metaphysical foundation, but which foundation it will have and how explicitly it will be acknowledged.

## 6. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE: NATURAL LAW, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND POPULISM

The debate over metaphysics and politics is not merely historical. It animates some of the most urgent controversies of the present day. One such controversy concerns natural law and human rights. Contemporary defenders of human rights often appeal to a minimal conception of human agency and autonomy as the basis for universal claims. Yet even this minimalism presupposes a metaphysical commitment to the moral significance of persons (Griffin, 2008). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights appeals to the inherent dignity and equal rights of all members of the human family. But what is the source of this dignity? For religious thinkers, it derives from the divine creation of humans in the image of God. For secular thinkers, it must be grounded in reason or in a shared human nature. The latter position is metaphysical. It asserts that there is a universal human essence that commands respect, regardless of legal recognition. Critics, including legal positivists and cultural relativists, deny that such an essence exists. They argue that rights are conventional, created by political agreement. The debate cannot be settled by empirical evidence alone; it requires metaphysical argument about what humans are.

A second contemporary relevance is the rise of populist nationalism. Populist movements often reject universalist claims, whether of human rights or of global governance, in favour of particularist appeals to the people, the nation, or the native soil. Political theorists such as Laclau (2005) have analysed populism as a discursive construction of "the people," suggesting that collective identity is not given but constituted through political articulation. This raises further metaphysical questions about the reality of social wholes. These appeals rest on metaphysical claims about the reality of collective identities, the organic nature of the community, and the primacy of place and tradition. The liberal response, which invokes abstract principles of justice and rationality, rests on a different metaphysical picture of the autonomous individual capable of universal moral reasoning. The clash between these pictures is not merely empirical or strategic. It is a clash of ontologies, of competing visions of what ultimately exists and what matters.

Finally, the environmental crisis has forced a metaphysical reckoning. The mechanistic view of nature as mere matter in motion, available for human use, is increasingly seen as complicit in ecological destruction. Environmental philosophy has increasingly challenged anthropocentric metaphysics, arguing for the intrinsic value of non-human entities. Thinkers such as Naess (1989) advocate a deep ecological perspective that reconfigures the human relationship to nature. Indigenous philosophies, which often attribute personhood and agency to non-human beings, offer a different metaphysics with different political implications. The debate over the legal rights of rivers, forests, and animals is a metaphysical debate about the kinds of beings that exist and the obligations humans owe them. Politics cannot avoid this debate; it can only conduct it poorly or well.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This article has argued that metaphysics and politics are not separate disciplines but mutually implicated dimensions of human thought and practice. The classical tradition from Plato to Aristotle established that questions about being, purpose, and the good are inseparable from questions about justice, authority, and the best form of government. The modern rupture initiated by Hobbes replaced teleological metaphysics with a mechanistic one, producing a politics of sovereignty and contract. Hegel's idealist response reintegrated history and spirit, offering a vision of the state as the actuality of ethical life. Attempts to purge politics of metaphysics, whether positivist or postmodern, have failed because they inevitably rely on metaphysical claims of their own.

The contemporary relevance of this argument is clear. Debates over human rights, populism, environmental justice, and international order are at root debates about the nature of reality, the human person, and the good. To pretend otherwise is to conduct politics with a willful blindness that serves no one except those who benefit from unexamined assumptions. The task of political philosophy, and of responsible citizenship, is to bring these assumptions to light, to test them against reason and experience, and to argue for the metaphysical vision that best supports a just and flourishing political order. Metaphysics is not an escape from politics but the deepest form of political reflection. To think well about politics, one must first think well about what there is, what matters, and what humans are for.

Ultimately, the refusal to engage metaphysics does not eliminate it but renders it implicit and therefore unexamined. A philosophically responsible politics requires not only empirical knowledge and institutional design but also clarity about the underlying structure of reality that such practices presuppose. The task is not to impose a single metaphysical doctrine but to cultivate a reflective awareness of the assumptions that guide political judgment.

## REFERENCES

1) Aristotle. (1998). *Metaphysics* (W. D. Ross, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Original work published ca. 4th century BCE)
2) Aristotle. (1998). *Physics* (R. P. Hardie & R. K. Gaye, Trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (Original work published ca. 4th century BCE)
3) Aristotle. *Politics*. Translated by C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998.
4) Ayer, A. J. (1936). *Language, Truth and Logic*. London: Gollancz.

5) Berlin, I. (1969). *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
6) Griffin, J. (2008). *On Human Rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
7) Hegel, G. W. F. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Edited by Allen W. Wood, translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
8) Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell.
9) Hobbes, T. *Leviathan*. Edited by Edwin Curley. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994. (Original work published 1651)
10) Honneth, A. (1995). *The Struggle for Recognition*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
11) Kant, I. (1998). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
12) Laclau, E. (2005). *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.
13) Naess, A. (1989). *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
14) Nietzsche, F. (1967). *On the genealogy of morals* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). New York: Vintage. (Original work published 1887)
15) Nussbaum, M. C. (2001). *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Rev. ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
16) Plato. (1992). *Republic* (G. M. A. Grube, Trans., rev. C. D. C. Reeve). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company. (Original work published ca. 4th century BCE)
17) Plato. *Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.
18) Shapin, S. (1996). *The scientific revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
19) Williams, B. (1985). *Ethics and the limits of philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.