

Reality: From Metaphysics to Metapolitics

By Wynand de Beer, (2019) Resource Publications, Eugene, Oregon

Reviewed by Brian Welter



South African writer Wynand De Beer, whose previous book *From Logos to Bios* was released in 2018, asserts a traditionalist perspective which draws from both ancient Greek and traditional Christian thought. The author contrasts his traditionalist view with the devastating modern ideology of liberalism. This book is heartening to all those who cannot see a way forward, out of the confusion brought on by modernity. De Beer calls on the West to return to its ancient Greek roots. He also considers the insights of more recent thinkers such as the Russians Nikolai Berdyaev and Alexander Dugin.

De Beer provides a broad definition of the West. It is part of the larger horizon of Indo-European man. This cultural zone encompasses Europe, Iran, and India. While he does not equate Christianity with the West, or see Christianity as a western religion, he does show how the early Church, up until around the year 1000 AD, was an integral part of the traditional world of Indo-European man. It carried the work of the ancient Greeks forward, just as they had founded their culture on the older Indo-European perspective that had settled in India and built itself on a tripartite view of society.

This demanding book will benefit readers already familiar with traditionalism, metaphysics, and theology. The major topics include being and non-being, death, time, good and evil, soul, body, and intellect, metaphysics versus the physical world, freedom, and hierarchy. De Beer argues convincingly that metaphysics precedes all else, including culture and society. This means that politics expresses a civilization's metaphysical values and beliefs. Unworkable or harmful politics will not be repaired with an election or change of government. It is the erroneous, evil, or shallow metaphysical underpinnings that must change.

Metapolitics therefore does not suggest a specific program aside from a program for the soul, in the tradition of Plato. The author reflects Werner Jaeger's assertion that Greek education, or *paideia*, was concerned with the metaphysics of politics. *Paideia* therefore included elements of practical methods in training the soul. The soul of man has to be elevated in order to elevate politics. Virtuous metaphysics can create virtuous metapolitics. While Jaeger shows how this is related to the Greek understanding of the virtues, and that, for the Greeks, political life depends on the state of the virtues, De Beer merely touches on the virtues or on virtue education. Perhaps this is the book's most serious lack.

The book's greatest strength is in showing the vital role of hierarchy. The author cites the fifth century Christian mystic and Platonist Dionysius to explain this significance. 'The divine righteousness in this is really true righteousness, because it assigns to all things what is proper according to the rank of each of the beings, and preserves the nature of each in its proper order and power' (4309-12 Kindle). Liberalism's destructiveness largely derives from its attempt to level everything and make us interchangeable servants of the marketplace. This does not reflect reality, because God is at the summit of creation, and the angels, humans, animals, plants, and even inorganic materials all participate in the hierarchy of being in some way. They each have their appropriate status and vocation.

What constitutes justice is allowing each element of the hierarchy to fulfill its own unique place. Many will accuse such a hierarchical perspective as an attack on nature by encouraging indifference to the exploitation of the earth because we humans can boast of superiority. However, the fact that all elements of creation – inorganic matter, plants, animals, humans – partake in a beautiful and interconnected metaphysical reality gives tremendous dignity to these creatures and to matter itself. One could easily expand on this to

develop a metaphysics of the environment that would start with the profound duties and respect humans owe nature. Though the author does not say as much, liberalism's dissolution of everything includes this respect for nature.

The author's chapter on the relationship between form and matter further supports the view on hierarchy. Throughout the book, De Beer returns to the Greek notion of the cosmos as the opposite of chaos and as something divinely ordered and beautiful. This notion does not advocate pantheism. God is not the cosmos, even though the cosmos is highly reflective of the Creator. We can learn about ultimate reality by observing the cosmos.

As for every other aspect of metaphysics, the author turns to Plato, who taught that 'the World-soul and all individual souls partake of both being and becoming' (1343). The soul orders matter. De Beer offers a Christian view to each of these Greek ideas. Ancient and medieval Christians were able to integrate Greek metaphysical ideas into their own teaching, which the Orthodox Christians still do, as exemplified in the writings of Berdyaev.

Evidently, much of this is politically incorrect. Much of this is also in reference to God, which means that the book will be of keen interest for theologians. *Reality* offers a philosophical view of many theological issues. For example, the West's nihilistic *freedom from* makes a mockery out of the true meaning of freedom, which is *freedom for* as expressed by St. Paul and ancient philosophers. The author explains clearly and even inspiringly what the traditionalist thinkers mean by liberty.

De Beer reserves some of his harshest criticism for the Anglo-American strand of western culture as the principal source of destructive liberalism. Yet he does not see this strand as definitive. It is only one part of western culture. The Greeks, the Germans, the medieval Latin Church, and Orthodox Christianity are other powerful and compelling western voices that the author cites. These other voices, which include Plotinus, Dionysius the Areopagite, John Scotus Eriugena, and, more recently, Berdyaev, give the reader much hope.

Perhaps one way to oppose liberalism is through apophatic theology, which De Beer defines as discussing and worshiping God via embracing the path of unknowing. Apophaticism avoids positive assertions about God. God is discussed by asserting what He is not. This could be a fruitful and provocative way to approach theology nowadays. Many people have embraced agnosticism or atheism and feel alienated from Christianity. Most of these are not ill-willed. De Beer notes Berdyaev's observation that

‘atheism may spring from good motives and not only from bad ones. The good as well as the wicked rebel against God’ (2515). One reason good people rebel against God is because they cannot stand the evil in the world. Perhaps by providing an alternative to an overly-systematic explanation and worship of God, apophatic theology can help such people to become open to the mystery of God.

Spiritually, the author notes, this approach, also called the *via negativa*, can be a purification. The popularity of Rumi and other Sufis in the West may indicate the need for such a purification from overly-dogmatic thinking about religious principles. Given the failure of evangelical Protestants to turn the West away from its post-Christian path, the following spiritual analysis from Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky may provide guidance: ‘cataphatic theology revolves around God’s descent towards us in His self-manifestation, whereas apophatic theology involves our ascent to God’ (2553). Perhaps since the age of the scholastics, the West has had enough cataphatic, or positive, theology. This is a dogma-oriented theology. De Beer describes the apophatic theology that helped form the earliest metaphysics in the West: ‘the Hellenic notion of the soul’s primacy over the body implies that pure knowledge (*gnōsis*) is only attainable after death’ (2565). Throughout the book, De Beer proves himself to be an able theologian as well as metaphysician.

De Beer addresses today’s culture without turning it into his main concern. He does not directly consider many contemporary social problems, and when he does, it is from the metaphysical roots. He does not provide quick and easy solutions because the problems of today’s world, often stemming from the rejection of traditional metaphysics and religion, cannot be worked out with policies or the charisma of a leader or movement. In this sense De Beer is a radical. He wants change from the roots, or rather, to the roots. The transformation he calls for will likely take decades or centuries to come to pass.

Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and other Neoplatonists, both Christian and pre-Christian, hold critical answers. Technology, in contrast, can offer very little in De Beer’s perspective. The continual reference to the Indo-European peoples is a call for these peoples to be themselves by embracing their roots.

Throughout the book, De Beer continually reminds readers of the Greek roots to western metaphysics by highlighting the meaning of relevant Greek

terms and how they have been used in metaphysics and philosophy: “‘The Greek word *alētheia* is a combination of the prefix a- (signifying lack) and the Greek word *lēthē*, meaning forgetfulness. Therefore, for the ancient Greeks, truth means unforgetfulness, un-concealment, and disclosure.’ [Nicholas] Laos adds that Martin Heidegger had (correctly) related *alētheia* to the notion of disclosure, or the way in which things appear as entities in the world. Consequently, ‘existence’ corresponds to ‘disclosure’” (2256).

De Beer also shows the central role of mathematics in the search for wisdom. Many Greek thinkers asserted a mathematical basis to the cosmos. De Beer links Pythagoras’s claims about numbers and music to later claims by Plato and Aristotle ‘on the priority of form over matter in the constitution of physical reality, which in the case of living beings is found in the priority of soul over body’ (3512).

De Beer’s most practical solution is to embrace Dugin’s multipolarity as metapolitics. Metapolitics refers to a way of thinking that transcends party politics and parliamentary squabbles. De Beer helps readers see that we have an incomplete and dissatisfactory grasp of politics. We have starved our politics of the most essential elements. Who are we as a people and as individuals making up our nation? What are we striving for and why? How do we serve humanity? How do we serve creation? What is the metaphysical truth of politics? These are questions that no contemporary politician or political thinker makes time for, but the Greeks and later philosophers have thought of them.

Dugin writes with a certain urgency, as if we are facing a crisis. But it is a metaphysical crisis, and not only one of bombs, economics, and legislatures. Politics must be analyzed from a spiritual view, as Berdyaev knew when he wrote (as cited by De Beer): ‘In its demonic will to power the state always strives to exceed its limits and to become an absolute monarchy, an absolute democracy, an absolute communism’ (5011). Metapolitics is therefore wary of utopian political projects. In metapolitics, the state of the people’s soul determines the state of the political culture. ‘The state belongs to the world of sin and does not in any way resemble the Kingdom of God,’ De Beer quotes Berdyaev (5011). Modern politics will always turn demonic because it is the expression of materialism, the will to power, and the rejection of God and metaphysical principles such as hierarchy and being.

Unsurprisingly, Dugin is against liberalism because of its repudiation of everything that is not of the state, of everything that has metaphysical mean-

ing and truth such as the family. Liberalism, especially in the post-modern strain, is ‘a satanic parody of true freedom’ in De Beer’s words because it leads to a loss of identity and a loss of personhood. Dugin’s words, cited by De Beer, encapsulate the Western rebellion against tradition in the form of liberalism: ‘Freedom from is the most disgusting form of slavery, inasmuch as it tempts man into an insurrection against God, against traditional values, against the moral and spiritual foundations of his people and his culture’ (5568).

De Beer argues that Dugin’s geopolitical multipolarity would allow for a breath of fresh air into the worlds of politics and culture, because it values all traditional cultures for the unique contributions that each one can make to humanity. This multipolarity, which is a practical expression of his metapolitics, rejects the current hegemon’s one-size-fits-all liberal anti-traditionalism which seeks to destroy every traditional culture and degrade every person so that we all become identical, interchangeable workers and consumers, the slaves of global business. De Beer notes that Hellenism can offer a way out because it ‘offers the prospect of a sustainable international order through its assimilation and transcending of both individualism and holism, being based on the metaphysics of personhood’ (5667). It is the modern loss of personhood that Greek metaphysics can heal. This healing would be the basis of a renewed and viable metapolitics.

Thus, metaphysics is not an abstract branch of philosophy unrelated to the here and now, but something that we need. It provides the authenticity that the nineteenth-century Romantics prized, the veneration and protection of nature that the environmentalists evoke, the family, social stability, and chastity that conservative Christians value, and the international brotherhood and cooperation that certain starry-eyed cosmopolitans envision. Ultimately, De Beer’s most important point is one that he implies but does not say, which is that nominalism is meaningless. Just giving something a name does not make it real. The real exists whether we want it to or not. This is a revolutionary thing to argue in our nominalist times.