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# Foreword

**Geert Bouckaert**

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According to the German philosopher Kant (1724–1804), there are three key questions to ask when one is approaching reality: (1) what can we know?; (2) what must we do?; and (3) what may we hope for?

These three questions have a fundamental relevance for Public Administration (PA) in general, but for the bridging of PA and Philosophy in particular.

## WHAT CAN WE KNOW?

Whatever the definitions of PA, or its status in the academic field (as a science, an art, or a practical profession), there is a need to work with ‘facts’ of a ‘reality’, and there is a need to know these ‘facts’ and this reality. This helps to classify three categories: the known known, the known unknown, and the unknown unknown. For a practical reform agenda it is useful to have a systematic knowledge on what we know in the field of public administration, on, for example, what works and what doesn’t, where and when, and why. For a future academic research agenda it is essential, starting with an inventory of the known known, to know the unknown. It could help mapping a research strategy, define coherent knowledge consortia, or determine knowledge progress or coverage. A major problem is the category of the unknown unknown. Here, we suddenly will realise that we were not aware of the relevance of something and of our lack of knowledge on that very issue, for example global warming. Whatever knowledge we have, it should be rigorous and ultimately relevant.

Defining a PA-fact, which then becomes an element of a question to be studied and answered, is not so easy. In studying ‘PA reform’, there are four levels of ‘facts’ which could be relevant: Green and White Papers or Government Declarations announcements which are intentions; the related legislation as laws, decrees, or regulations; the implementations of the decisions; the reformed status as an effect. All four categories of facts are crucial, and one cannot be assumed or derived from the other. In literature this set is referred to as Talk/Decision/Practice/Results (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017). In studying ‘trust’, a similar problem emerges to find out what kind of fact needs to be investigated or observed, assuming this is possible.

There is also an interesting shift in defining useful ‘PA-facts’ for research or practice. Shifting from data, to large data, to ‘big data’ changes the position and nature of inductive and data-driven research. ‘PA-facts’ also become increasingly varied: from countable objects to expectations, perceptions and opinions which become ‘facts’ just by mapping them. It results in trade-offs, balances, limits, dilemmas, contradictions, and paradoxes in describing realities. A final new type of ‘PA-fact’ are experiments which could be lab-, field- or survey-based. A virtual and experimental ‘fact’ is created. All this puts pressure or at least requires qualifications for ‘evidence’-based research and practice.

A key question is not only what a PA-fact is (ontology), but also how we can know this PA-fact. This is the PA-epistemology. There are about five major positions and scientific logics with immediate implications for research methodologies.

A scientific orthodox approach takes a physicalistic model with statistical testing of causal hypotheses between independent and dependent variables, as derived from theories. A radical constructivist position explores inductively multiple and socially constructed meanings by interpreting language and text, sometimes within an egalitarian and participatory framework. Critical realism prefers thick descriptions within broad theoretical or conceptual frameworks and looks for explanations of how key processes operate within specified contexts to produce a particular result. These three epistemological paradigms do not include a closed mathematical and algebraic model where an optimal position can be calculated as a unique solution in full certainty. Nor does it include a totally open and chaotic model, even wicked model, where there is non-certainty on variables, data, actors, and dynamics. These five paradigms represent five totally different philosophical frames.

The definition of the substance of a PA-fact – its ontological status – is a crucial philosophical choice. The derived method used to get to know this PA-fact is based on a crucial epistemological position taken vis-à-vis ‘PA-reality’. Both philosophical ‘knowledge’ questions remain too easily unanswered or become conveniently implicit. However, it is necessary to answer them explicitly. The difference between ‘belief’ and ‘science’ is that ‘to believe’ is ‘to know without facts’, and ‘science’ is ‘to know with facts’. Even if PA is also practice and art, as a science we need to know with facts.

## WHAT MUST WE DO?

The question about what to do is relevant for scientists (what to research and how) and obviously for practice. There is a need for social sciences – all sciences that are related to behaviour of individuals and societies – to describe, to explain and sometimes to predict. From a philosophical point of view, this

requires different frames for different purposes. 'To describe' requires ontology (what is a substantial fact) and epistemology (how can we know it). 'To explain' facts and dynamic realities is important to know what we must do. It requires a philosophical stand, based on the five positions mentioned earlier. 'To predict' implies a vision on future realities based on causal mechanisms that think from 'alpha' to 'omega' in terms of trajectories, scenarios ... The other way around is also a possibility, from 'omega' to 'alpha', where an ideal future position, sometimes ideologically defined, is proposed. 'Utopias' could fit in this category. This requires a normative and ethical view on the futures.

It seems that there are three major sources for PA-reform: imitation, ideology and evidence. They have three different sources of philosophical frames. Imitation, or 'copy pasting' is a mnemonic mechanism that assumes a world where everything is 'most equal' and not 'most different'. Practice demonstrates that 'copy-paste' types of behaviour are not very successful. Culture and religion do make a difference. A combination of too-Western PA, based on too-Western philosophies, for example utilitarianism, are not always, or even always not, travelling well. There is a need to have PA-communities according to different cultural communities, such as, for example, Islamic PA, Confucian PA, African PA, Latin American PA, or North American PA. Ideology, as a coherent set of values, is based on social and political philosophies. Evidence-based reform follows a rational model, sometimes combined with (American) 'pragmatism' as its philosophical approach.

In answering the question of 'what to do', two major logics have been developed: a to-do logic of consequences and a to-do logic of appropriateness. Both logics are in tension and have a very different philosophical underpinning.

First of all, there is the philosophical study of 'logic' as such, as (mathematical) syllogisms. This meta-study is also crucial in research design. Logics of consequences look at, mostly from a utilitarian philosophical framework, the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of how resources are turned into outcomes. Logics of appropriateness refer to, from an ethical philosophical framework, values, transparency, legitimacy, inclusion, openness and so on.

A major challenge is to handle the tension between these two logics and to marry them. One crucial vector that both logics may share is 'trust'. A solid logic of consequences may result in trusting the economic, efficient and effective coherence of resources and outcomes. A solid logic of appropriateness may result in trusting the system and its functioning. 'Trust' could bring both logics together; however, this adds even more to the complexity of 'trust'. This brings us to the last question.

## WHAT MAY WE HOPE FOR?

This is probably the most ideological and value-driven question. It is an essential philosophical question with a significant PA-dimension. It is about the common denominator of qualifications such as ‘good/better/best’, ‘improved’ or ‘progress’. It is ultimately about, for example, what ‘good’ means in ‘Good Governance’ or what ‘best’ means in ‘best practice’. It ultimately is about the ‘Common Good’.

Increasingly there is also a converging or even shared view on what we may hope for. The acceptance, at least at the UN/ECOSOC-level of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is a very visible answer to the question of what we may hope for. It is also clear that PA will be crucial to make that happen.

## IN CONCLUSION

To give a substantial answer to the three PA-questions of what we can know, what we should do and what we may hope for, this book – now in its second edition – gives an indispensable and substantial contribution of a solid bridge between philosophy and PA. Since this bridge did not exist yet, Ongaro had to write this book.

## REFERENCE

Pollitt C. and Bouckaert G. (2017) *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis – Into the Age of Austerity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



# Acknowledgements

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When I wrote this acknowledgements section for the first edition, I wanted to devote a first ‘thank you’, possibly a bit unusual, to those whom I would not be able to mention in this short section. For this second edition, the intellectual debt has got even wider, after having had the honour of being invited to present the first edition of this book dozens of times, in prominent universities and public institutions all over the world. The feedback I received has been hugely enriching and it has inspired very many developments that have eventually led to this second edition. These people have joined those who accompanied me during the preparation of the first edition. In the end, I owe an intellectual debt to simply too many people, colleagues in the profession and beyond. Innumerable discussions have accompanied this long intellectual journey throughout, too many to recall them all here. Your faces and your thoughts accompanied the writing of all the chapters and sections of this book, which is as much yours as it is mine.

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thus making its contribution to engaging scholars and practitioners alike into a much-needed dialogue on the philosophical foundation of public administration. I am immensely grateful to those who have believed this to be a worthy endeavour.

The impressive (for the normalcy of the field) number of book reviews that the first edition of this volume has received is not just testament to the interest elicited by the topic of this book, but also provided a treasure trove of ideas and intellectual stimuli that have proved inspirational to the writing of this second edition of the book, and for all of those I am extremely grateful.

Thanks also go the publisher, Edward Elgar, as always an excellent, highly civilised publisher who bets with courage on books that aim to go beyond the more consolidated strands.

Last but definitely not least, a thank you to a number of colleagues I will explicitly mention. To Maria Rosa Antognazza for patiently coaxing me along the ways of academic philosophical debate and inquiry; the weird expressions and outright errors the professional philosopher will detect in the book are all mine. To Geert Bouckaert and Wolfgang Drechsler, for having shared so precious advice with me during the preparation of both the first and second editions of this book; to Tony Bovaird, Robert Fouchet, Elke Löffler, the late Christopher Pollitt, Norma Riccucci, Kwang-Seok Lee, Margaret Stout, Turo Virtanen: structured as well as occasional exchanges with you – both always so nice – have nourished the pages of this book since when I wrote the first edition and then throughout the preparation of this second edition. After the first edition, I presented this book or have been called to talk about the topic of this volume on very many occasions, across the globe, in four languages – and my heartfelt thanks for the ideas, insights and at times critical but always very constructive and altogether friendly advice received go to David Arellano-Gault, Carla Barbati, Elio Borgonovi, Benoit Cathala, Roberto Cavallo-Perin, Jean-Michel Eimery-Douzans, Fabrizio Fracchia, Ting Gong, Yijia Jing, Zhiyong Lan, Meili Liu, Tippawan Lorsuwannarat, Muiris MacCartaigh, Martin Painter, James Perry, Anna Maria Poggi, Vincent Potier, Gabriella Racca, Michele Tantardini, Eduardo Villareal, Jiang Wu, Kaifeng Yang, Wang Yi, Xiong Ying and Xingan Yu.

Back in time, I owe a huge debt to my secondary school teachers: Aldo Castagnoli, Patrizia Melloni and Renata Molinari, my teachers of Philosophy and Italian and Latin literature at the Lyceum. The fire of philosophical speculation, which had already been kindled in me before I had the privilege of attending your lectures, found powerful guidance and uncountable stimuli in your teachings.

A booklet in Italian titled *Gloria o Miseria della Metafisica Cattolica Italiana?* by a colleague in the profession whom I have never met personally, Professor Dario Antiseri, sparked in me, when I was fourteen, the thirst for

the quest for truth through philosophical speculation. It has since never been quenched, as this book is a testimony. The handbook by Giovanni Reale and Dario Antiseri *Il Pensiero Occidentale dalle Origini ad Oggi* (originally written in Italian, translated into several languages) has accompanied my philosophical reflection over a quarter of a century and has proven to be a highly valuable resource in the framing of parts of this book.



# 1. Introduction and rationale

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## INTRODUCTION

This book makes the argument for bringing philosophical thought into the field of public administration. A starting point is that there seems to be a gap in the current literatures in public governance, public administration and public management. This gap is about the lack of adequate exploration and careful consideration of the links between the topics that are debated in such literatures and key philosophical issues – ontological, political philosophical and epistemological – underlying and grounding any inquiry into these topics. In the study of various profiles of continuity and change in public governance, public administration and public management – hereafter collectively referred to simply by the label ‘PA’ (more on defining issues will follow later in this chapter) – a whole range of themes, from ontological questions to political philosophical debates, tend to receive only scant attention, if any.

There are, of course, a few notable exceptions. These include works focused on issues of epistemology in PA (epistemology concerns the bases and methods of knowledge): an exemplar is Riccucci (2010); or on issues of ethics, integrity and values in public administration (a stream of research developed by authors such as Gjalt de Graaf, Wolfgang Drechsler, George Frederickson, Leo Huberts, Michael Macaulay, Mark Rutgers, amongst others); or, more broadly, works in public policy and public affairs broadly intended, adopting a philosophical stance (Garofalo and Geuras, 2015). These are topics of high importance, yet they encompass only a subset of the key philosophical themes of significance for public administration. These works are related to the core topics of this book; however, as argued throughout this section, they cover a different terrain to the one ploughed in this book, which provides the reader with a systematic introduction to the ontological and political philosophical foundations of PA.

The work that comes closest to the terrain covered by this book is probably the edited volume by Lynch and Cruise (2006), collating contributions from a range of US scholars about individual philosophers and some lines of influence of their thought on the theory and practice of PA. There are, however, important differences between the two books. First, Lynch and Cruise’s is an edited work, whilst this is an authored book – a format that will hopefully

ensure higher consistency across the parts and themes addressed. Second, the Lynch and Cruise work hosts contributors exclusively based in the US, which may lead to privileging certain focuses and emphases; as a minimum, this book, written by a European scholar, will provide the reader with a different viewpoint and angle from which to tackle philosophical issues in public administration. Third, the collection by Lynch and Cruise is organised along relatively specific and loosely coupled themes and addresses the works of individual philosophers or scholars of public administration, whilst this book is organised along key thematic areas (an overview of the structure of the book is reported in Table 1.2 at the end of this chapter). Last, when this book goes to press, the Lynch and Cruise book is almost a decade from publication (two decades from the first edition). In sum, we argue that there is a need for a book-length work addressing the theme of the philosophical foundations of PA, and we hope this book will be able to fill this gap in a systematic and novel way.

The theme of the philosophical foundations of PA is part of the larger debate on philosophical issues in the social sciences, broadly intended (a notable scientific journal in the field is *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*), as PA can be defined also as the interdisciplinary social scientific study of government (more on definitions of PA later). It is also part of the debates in the field of 'public affairs' broadly intended, to which books (e.g. Haldane, 2000) and specialised journals are dedicated (notable journals are *Public Affairs*; *Philosophy and Public Affairs*; and *Social Philosophy and Policy*). It may be noticed, however, that the public affairs themes treated in these journals tend to be quite distant from the preoccupations and the topics more often addressed by the scholars of public administration and management, and the linkages to public governance and administration are at most sporadic.

Articles touching upon a number of the themes developed in this book can be found in the contributions appearing in two scientific journals in the field: *Administrative Theory and Praxis* and *Public Voices*. The former tackles a wide array of themes ranging from public values and social justice to governance and the human nature, epistemology and others. *Public Voices* provides a variety of challenging and often unorthodox perspectives on the theory and practice of public service. However, with the exception of these journals and their distinctive emphases and idiosyncratic approaches to philosophy, what is more often detected in the literature in public governance and public administration is that philosophical considerations are brought into the analysis occasionally, and usually around specific issues, but never or very rarely in a systematic way. Nor are philosophical considerations usually brought into the analysis in a single-authored book format, which may allow for more consistency across the complexity of philosophical themes and perspectives.

Philosophical issues are, however, ubiquitous and arise almost anywhere in the most serious research works in the field. Let's take as an illustrative example a major edited work on the topic of contextual influences in public policy and management: Pollitt (2013). Pollitt takes the move from one apparently unproblematic example of a well-known management tool; his starting point is the consideration that:

Total Quality Management (TQM) on a motor assembly line has only the faintest resemblance to TQM in an old person's home who is the subject of social care, and that TQM in one hospital may be articulated in a substantially different way from TQM in the other hospital of the town. (Pollitt, 2013, p. 89)

As Pollitt promptly notices,

behind this little example lies a much-chewed philosophical problem – that of universals [and] tangled up in this is the distinction between meanings and behaviours, both of which exist, but independently of each other. Thus, TQM exists as a set of meanings, but only TQM in hospital X exists as a set of specific behaviours – the specific behaviour of TQM in a vehicle assembly plant may be quite different. (Pollitt, 2013, pp. 89–90)

This passage pinpoints that complex and widely interconnected philosophical issues surface almost at any point in serious attempts to investigate the field of public governance and management. In Pollitt's example, one philosophical issue consists of the nature of the so-called 'universals': the matter of this philosophical dispute, which originated in the medieval age, is the foundation of universal concepts (intended as terms predicated of a multiplicity of individual things, for example 'human being' or 'animal', and the 'TQM system' in Pollitt's example). It regards the issue of whether: universal concepts are real and exist as (ideal) objects; or they are real and the product of a procession of abstraction by reason, but only individuals are real in the proper sense (in Pollitt's example, the individual is 'TQM in hospital X'); or they are not real at all (the terms and the different philosophical positions on the dispute over the nature of the universals are discussed in Chapter 2). This dispute is in many respects still raging nowadays. Importantly it may be claimed that in multiple respects where a PA scholar stands in terms of her/his conception of the nature of the field of PA depends on her/his philosophical stance over the nature of universal concepts (this point is developed in Chapter 2 regarding its philosophical foundations and in Chapter 4 for applications to PA). In sum, this philosophical dispute of medieval origin, far from being outdated, is of extreme actuality and practical significance. The other philosophical underlying issue that the example of TQM in public management brings to the fore is the relationship between meanings, or 'ideas', and behaviours, the 'here and

now' or actuality of an idea that has taken shape.<sup>1</sup> From this standpoint, philosophical reflection may also shed a new light on the ways in which PA themes are examined and treated.

Philosophical issues are of utmost significance for PA. Prominent scholars in their research work have touched on related issues. Hood (1998) is a nicely crafted cultural analysis rooted in cultural anthropology; Schedler and Pröller (2007) address a range of cultural dimensions of public management (see in particular Bouckaert, 2007); and Pollitt (2013) is a collective work that tackles the issue of 'context' in public policy and management and by doing so discusses a number of philosophical themes that surface at various points. Debates have arisen over time about the contribution specific philosophical strands can make to PA, from the 'existentialist public administrator' (Richter, 1970; Waugh, 2006) to phenomenological approaches to public administration (Jun, 2006; Waugh and Waugh, 2006). However, there remains important uncharted territory lying outside the terrain ploughed by these contributions: the whole bundle of ontological, political philosophical and epistemological themes and topics that are linked to the knowledge and understanding of PA has not been the subject of treatment in itself. This book makes an attempt to fill this gap by making an attempt to provide the broad picture of the relations between the field of PA and philosophy: it is an introduction to the theme (hopefully both comprehensive and accessible) that has the ambition to be systematic or at least complete enough to furnish a base for discussion and analysis of a number of the key interconnections between 'foundational' philosophical issues and some of the key themes debated in the contemporary public governance, public administration and public management literature. It therefore makes an attempt to contribute to the 'big question' lurking in the back of the mind of many attentive scholars and practitioners: what contribution can philosophy bring to the field of PA?

Tackling this question is the fundamental thrust of this book. In the approach we propose, the starting point is the broad overview of (Western) philosophical thought, a task that is carried out in two dedicated chapters (Chapters 2 and 3; see also Table 1.2 for the plan of the book and Figure 1.1 for a graphic illustration of the connections amongst the chapters of the book). This body of wisdom and knowledge then becomes the source for selective applications to themes and issues of contemporary significance in PA: the task for the remainder of the book.

Many of the books that deal with philosophical issues in relation to PA are more often centred on epistemological questions. As already noticed, epistemology – the philosophy of knowledge – is a crucially significant part of the contribution philosophy can provide to PA, but it is not the entirety of such contribution, and ontological and political philosophical issues are equally important. Moreover, epistemological issues cannot be entirely disentangled



from ontological and political philosophical issues, and a more holistic view of philosophical contribution can be beneficial. There is another difference: usually most of the books dealing with philosophical issues in PA take the approach of starting from mapping the field of PA, and then ascribing PA scholars to different philosophical schools (e.g. Riccucci, 2010). In this book, we take the move from a broad overview of philosophical thought to revisit the field of PA from this standpoint. Our main argument is that philosophical knowledge and understanding provides a distinctive and constitutive contribution to the knowledge and understanding of PA, alongside and beyond the knowledge provided by the disciplines that contribute to the field of PA.

Many other valuable works are centred on the employment of one or a few specific philosophical views to shed light on some specific problem in PA. For example, Stout and Love provide an excellent example of such works by shedding light on the contribution the philosopher Mary Parker Follett may bring to contemporary notions of public governance (Stout and Love, 2015; see also Ongaro, 2016); the scholar Perri (2014) revisits the work of the philosopher and sociologist Durkheim; and Tijsterman and Overeem (2008) contrast Hegel's and Weber's views of the relationships between bureaucracy and individual freedom – to mention but a few. This is a highly valuable way of proceeding and may in many instances be the only feasible or meaningful way to delve into philosophical systems<sup>2</sup> without getting entangled by their bewildering complexity. They do so by adopting a specific angle from which to look at the philosophical system, to then show how this set of philosophical ideas may shed light on our understanding of one specific PA problem.

Yet the broad picture and the multifarious links that tie one specific angle from which to look at one philosophical system may get lost in this process. Key ideas in philosophy can be more fully appreciated when seen in the broader context and longer-term perspective, and many ideas attributed to modern (or quite often in the PA literature 'post-modern') philosophers may be traced back to ancient philosophies and philosophers. What matters more is that by taking the broad and long-term perspective these ideas may be better understood, vetted, perused and probed. The consideration of philosophies and philosophical ideas in isolation from the broad perspective may lead to the loss of depth and understanding of the manifold implications and nuances of philosophical thought applied to PA. It is for these reasons that this book adopts the opposite approach to most of the available publications: it reviews philosophical thought with a strong historical perspective (from the origins in ancient Greece to contemporary philosophy) and a focus on individual philosophers and their fundamental ontological views, and it then reconsiders strands of PA scholarship and especially *questions and problems* in PA in light of this broader philosophical perspective.<sup>3</sup> By taking the broad picture of the history of philosophy, rather than just picking up one or a few specific philosophical

approaches, we hope to help the readers (scholars, students and practitioners of PA) form a broader view of how philosophy may inform our understanding of public administration, public management and public governance.

In sum, to our knowledge, no systematic introduction to the theme of the philosophical issues that are foundational to PA is available in a single-authored book format, and we hope this book may contribute to fill this gap. It is for this reason that the reader will find upfront a broad review of philosophical thought over the ages, developed in two dedicated chapters (Chapters 2 and 3), before this body of knowledge, understanding and wisdom is applied to contemporary PA themes and issues (Chapters 4–10).

It should be emphasised, however, that this is just an *introduction* to philosophy and PA, intended as a valuable aid to those engaged in substantive, in-depth investigations of specific streams of philosophical thought and their influence on specified areas of public administration (public governance, public policy and management). Above all, this book is intended as an aid to the lay reader – scholar, student or practitioner – to grab the broad picture and put debates and discussions of philosophical perspectives in PA into the broader perspective of two and a half millennia of philosophical thought. In slightly more contentious words, our general assumption is that the latest sigh of some post-modern or post-something philosopher may possibly inspire nice reflections, but it does not replace the insights that may be drawn from the systematic reading<sup>4</sup> of the philosophical thought from Aristotle to Kant, from the pre-Socratics to the contemporary schools.

## DEFINITIONS: PHILOSOPHY

But what is philosophy, and why does it matter for PA? This is undoubtedly an arduous question. A good starting point lies in pointing out that philosophy – unlike ‘scientific’ disciplines – does not have a subject matter; rather, it does have key questions and themes such as (Kenny, 2010):

- ‘What there is’: Metaphysics/Ontology and God
- ‘Who we are/who I am’: Soul and Mind
- ‘How to live’: Ethics and Morality (axiology)
- ‘How to live together’: Political Philosophy
- ‘How to know/what we know’: Philosophy of Knowledge/Epistemology

The acquisition of rational knowledge and understanding of reality as such, the deployment of the ‘science of reason’ (λόγος [logos] is the ancient Greek language term for ‘reason’ or ‘word’ – the capacity to understand reality in and through language) is the ultimate nature of philosophy. A deepened understanding rather than a vaster disciplinary knowledge of a subject matter is the

outcome of philosophising (in the ‘positive’ meaning of the term: the exercise of philosophical reflection). In the original language of the people to whose genius is attributed the very invention of philosophy, the ancient Greek word for philosophy is φιλοσοφία (read ‘philosophía’), which we can translate as ‘love of wisdom’ – the pursuit of knowledge and understanding done for the very love of the wisdom that is grounded in the fullest understanding of things.

Philosophy stems from the need of the human being to reach a deeper understanding of the totality of reality and also from the questions aroused by this quest: why is there being rather than nothingness? Why do I exist? What is this totality, where does it come from and why? It is wonder and amazement in front of the totality of being that originates philosophy and philosophising. And the very nature of philosophy and its difference from the specific disciplines in which knowledge is articulated brings with it a distinctive trait of philosophising: the absence of any need to have or gain privileged access to information. It is not necessary to collate special data (e.g. out of an experiment, or a survey, or the access to unpublished documents) in order to be able to philosophise: ‘philosophy is not a matter of expanding knowledge, of acquiring new truths about the world; the philosopher is not in possession of information that is denied to others. Philosophy is not a matter of knowledge; it is a matter of understanding, that is to say, of organizing what is known’ (Kenny, 2010, p. x). Philosophy, although in continuous dialogue with the findings of the manifold disciplines into which knowledge is provisionally articulated, is ultimately based on ordinary experience.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, it may be argued that, one way or another, all the specific individual disciplines have stemmed from philosophy and have detached from it over time:

Many disciplines that in antiquity and the Middle Ages were part of philosophy have long since become independent sciences ... Perhaps no scientific concepts are ever fully clarified, and no scientific methods are ever totally uncontroversial: if so, there is always a philosophical element left in every science. But once problems can be unproblematically stated, when concepts are uncontroversially standardized, and where consensus emerges for the methodology of solution, then we have a science setting up home independently, rather than a branch of philosophy. (Kenny, 2010, pp. x–xi)

Philosophy, in the meantime, remains focused on reality as such, on being in its totality. The social sciences are among the disciplines that stemmed from philosophy; for example, economics originally belonged to moral philosophy and then set up home as an independent – albeit far from uncontroversial – science. It ensues from this and is worth noting that when a discipline is far from having its problems unproblematically stated and its concepts uncontroversially standardised – as it is widely and almost unanimously claimed to

be the case for PA (Raadschelders, 2005) – then its ties with philosophy are stronger and the unresolved ‘philosophical residue’ mentioned earlier gains in prominence. Indeed, PA has been defined as the interdisciplinary study of government (famously by Waldo, 1948/1984; Frederickson, 1980; Marini, 1971), and hence not one discipline but rather a set of disciplinary approaches aimed at enhancing our knowledge and understanding of government in action – a nature that further distances PA from a science whose terms are unproblematically stated and concepts uncontroversially standardised (the nature of PA is discussed in the subsequent part of this chapter) and hence brings it closer to philosophy. There is therefore a call for a ‘plus’ of philosophical reflection for the development of the field of PA.

Philosophy also resembles the arts, particularly in its having a significant relation to a canon: it does not have a specific subject matter, but a set of characteristic methods (Kenny, 2010, pp. xi–xii in particular). Here too we can detect a close connection to PA. The ‘double nature’ of PA as both a ‘science’ (albeit displaying high intra- and inter-disciplinary fragmentation) and an ‘art and profession’ has widely been upheld as a defining feature: this is a trait that further reinforces the claim that PA can largely benefit from being revisited from a philosophical perspective. The arts, notably ‘the art of government’, in this sense entwine with philosophy, and the art and profession of PA – and the many arts and professions that partake in the practice of PA – may therefore be better understood by revisiting them in the light of philosophical thought. In this sense, we argue that philosophy may shed light on PA as science, as well as on PA as art and profession – the art and the profession of governing through administration.<sup>6</sup> Philosophical knowledge and understanding, we argue, is constitutive of PA broadly intended.

One other issue pertaining to the very nature of philosophising is worth addressing before we turn to examining the nature of PA: what is the answer to the question ‘is there progress in philosophy?’. In fact, we may notice that there seems to be a circularity in philosophy: developing a philosophical system or examining new problems eventually leads (back) to old philosophical problems. Albert Einstein, the giant of modern physics, likened philosophy and philosophical systems to something written on honey: when you contemplate it the first time, it is marvellous, but when you go back to it later it has dissolved and what remains is just honey – that is, ‘reality’ and the same perennial questions about it. So, should the answer to this question be altogether negative, that there is no progress in philosophy? Only partly so. Following (again) Kenny (2010, pp. xii–xiii) we can observe that one answer to the question of progress in philosophy lies in it being an antidote to novel prejudices and fallacies: philosophy may not progress, but going back to philosophy may provide efficacious cure to intellectual confusion, which arises in different epochs in different forms. One prejudice of our epoch may

be the metaphor of the mind as a computer, a processor of information. The roots of this prejudice may be fully understandable given the developments and impacts of computer science over the decades since the second half of the 20th century. However, philosophers over the centuries centred their attention on other dimensions in order to understand the nature of the mind – and there may be very good reason why they did so: mind is about conscience and self-conscience; mind is about *the* subject posing itself and hence *the* object as distinct from itself; mind is about intentionality; and so on (see Chapters 2 and 3 for discussion of philosophies underlying these notions of the mind). What emerges from the adoption of a philosophical stance is that the mind is more and other than a processor of information, and any understanding of the mind requires a wider and deeper array of metaphors than that of a computer.<sup>7</sup> At another and more fundamental level, in responding to the question whether there is progress in philosophy it may be claimed that the appearance of new giants of philosophy over the epochs has brought novel perspectives to the ways in which the fundamental philosophical questions are being asked and addressed (if not answered). These may therefore have provided the later generations with new conceptual keys to tackle fundamental issues for understanding reality. For example, the ‘revolution of the knowing subject’ brought about by the philosopher Immanuel Kant (whereby the categories of being are thought to be a property of the knowing subject rather than properties of being as such; his philosophy is widely discussed in Chapter 3) may be problematic to reckon as ‘progress’ if advancement is conceptualised in terms of some form of ‘accumulation of knowledge’ (Kant’s philosophy does not ‘add’ to previous philosophies, but rather challenges and revolutionises them), but it represents a strikingly original approach to philosophising that enlarges the repertoire of viewpoints on ontology and the philosophy of knowledge, and as such constitutes an enduring addition bequeathed to subsequent philosophical reflection. Thus, although it is controversial whether and to what extent there is accumulation of knowledge in philosophy (because this would require the kind of unproblematic goal-definition, problem-statement and methodological agreement that characterise individual disciplines rather than philosophy), it does not appear improper to talk of ‘progress’ of a sort.

It is now time to briefly introduce and discuss the nature of the other main subject of this book: public administration.

## DEFINITIONS: PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

There are countless definitions of public administration, public management and public governance. It seems to be widely held (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994; Ferlie et al., 2005; Ongaro and van Thiel, 2018a, 2018b; Painter and Peters, 2010; Perry and Christensen, 2015; Pollitt, 2016a; Raadschelders, 2005),

however, that public administration can be defined as a subject matter, defined by its subject rather than as an individual discipline that has set up home, with its own uncontroversial consensus on methods.<sup>8</sup> It is considered to be ‘multi-disciplinary’ or ‘interdisciplinary’ (the difference between the two notions is basically that scholars defining PA as ‘multi’ disciplinary emphasise the limited lack of interconnections among the findings of the various disciplines that are applied to the study of PA, whilst scholars who favour defining PA as an ‘inter’ disciplinary endeavour entail that findings can be fruitfully combined and integrated for the advancement of the field). Although a discipline focuses on one category or dimension of natural or social phenomena and one method or set of methods to study them (just as we identify ‘economic’ phenomena studied by economics, geographical phenomena further divided into phenomena studied by natural geography and human geography, and so on), a subject matter is defined by the terrain it covers. Public administration has been defined as ‘a multidisciplinary endeavour with a prime focus on studying government in order to produce insights to improve government practice’ (Bauer, 2018, p. 1050). It has also been qualified by its concern with the processes of preparation, promulgation/enactment and enforcement of the law (see Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017), also considering the fact that a distinctive trait since Weber’s theorisation lies in conceiving of ‘modern’ public administration as operating under conditions of legal domination whereby the law is the legitimate source of power<sup>9</sup> rather than charisma or tradition (Rosser, 2018). Emphasis on the role of law also differentiates public administration from ‘public management’ (the latter being concerned with the relationship between resources consumed and results produced by public organisations); public administration and public management are in this respect different mappings of the same terrain (see Dunleavy and Hood, 1994; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000, 2004). Finally yet importantly, public governance is a term employed to indicate the broader processes of steering of society by public institutions and engaging non-governmental actors into public policy, as opposed to the stricter focus on governmental authoritative decisions and administrative processes (Pierre and Peters, 2000; Torfing et al., 2012). Governance also refers to the broader formal and informal rules, conventions, practices and beliefs in place in a given political regime. We will subsequently mainly refer collectively to public administration, public management and public governance as ‘PA’ unless otherwise specified.

Many (at least amongst the scholars of public administration) would agree that public administration is the interdisciplinary study and practice of government rather than a monodisciplinary approach to one aspect of government (political, economic, sociological or other). Some will point to the extant limitations of the ways in which different disciplines contribute to PA and would rather talk of ‘multi’ disciplinary rather than ‘inter’ disci-

plinary study of government (e.g. Bauer, 2018), while others will emphasise the cross-disciplinary status and contend that the significance and standing of PA is augmented rather than diminished by such status (which, *inter alia*, means that PA does not suffer but rather benefits from being a field defined by its subject rather than its method, Raadschelders and Vigoda-Gadot, 2015). Emphasis has been placed on the claim that PA lacks epistemological and methodological consensus because of its very inter- or multi-disciplinary nature, but the counter-argument (e.g. Riccucci, 2010; Stillman, 1991/1999) is that being interdisciplinary – exactly because it is interdisciplinary<sup>10</sup> – PA provides a more comprehensive understanding of government (‘understanding’ being here distinct from ‘knowledge’) than paradigm-based disciplines can furnish, because paradigm-based disciplines by definition ‘see’ only one dimension of government<sup>11</sup> (this being in a certain sense the ‘price’ you have to pay for paradigmatic and methodological consensus). In this perspective, PA is *the* study of government from an inter- or multi-disciplinary perspective for goals of generating applied knowledge.

What are the constitutive disciplines from which PA draws? Three are widely held as constitutive of PA: political science, management and law – but others are crucial too, and these include economics, organisation science and sociology.

Political science is the social scientific study of political systems and their interactions (the latter usually goes under the label of ‘international relations’, although at times the boundaries may be blurred: notably, the intensity of the interactions occurring in a polity like the European Union can only partly be read through the lens of traditional international relations studies, and in many regards the European Union can be considered as a *sui generis* political system). It generally encompasses the whole of the political process from politics as mobilisation to the functioning of political institutions to public policy. Politics as mobilisation refers to the processes of identity building and creation or depletion of the sense of belonging to the political system by its members (citizens or others), to the dynamics of party politics, to the mechanisms of the electoral systems and the dynamics of electoral competition (in democratic polities) or other forms whereby a party or group attains power (in non-democratic polities). The social scientific study of political institutions encompasses the three main branches of power: government (executive politics), legislative (legislative politics) and judiciary, as well as their manifold interactions. The analysis of public policies encompasses the dynamics of the policy process and the whole range of actors involved, public and non-public. For example, in some analytical frameworks it is spoken of ‘advocacy coalition’ (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993), whilst in others of policy sub-system (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). The policy process may conventionally be charted in phases: from agenda setting and the specification of alternatives, to

policy decision, to policy implementation and delivery of public services, to employ the fictional but useful notion of policy cycle (Kingdon, 1994). PA is significant throughout all the stages of the political process: public governance and public administration are significant also in political mobilisation, as well as the functioning of public institutions, not just pertaining to the executive power but also the legislative and judiciary powers; however, public administration and public management are habitually more closely connected to public policy (also in the institutionalisation in the academia, with many university chairs being labelled 'Public Administration and Policy' or similar denominations). PA is about the forming of public policy throughout the whole cycle; public policy is about PA in action.

In this book we expand the horizon beyond political science to encompass the branch of philosophy from which political science originated, namely political philosophy. In Chapter 5 in particular we delve into the foundational issue of justification: what makes a political system, a public governance system 'legitimate'? Other branches of philosophy are also crucial for political science and its contribution to PA, notably ontology, epistemology and ethics. We review some of these links especially in Chapters 4 and 6, after having presented the main philosophical schools in Chapters 2 and 3. The kind of inquiry we develop in this book is deeply resonant with Dwight Waldo's definition of PA as political theory and the significance of values in the conception of the administrative state (Waldo, 1948/1984). To the extent this conception of the administrative state may be thought to be 'overly American', it is interesting to note how Stillman characterised the relations between the state and PA on the two sides of the Atlantic, whereby PA makes the State in the US, while the State makes PA in Europe (Stillman, 1999) – and possibly this framing may apply more widely across the globe, distinguishing between polities in which it has historically been the State to come first (e.g. in the Confucian tradition in China), and jurisdictions in which administration may to some extent have come first (mostly this may be the case, at least to a certain extent, for Common Law systems and chiefly for the US system). In either case, PA and political theory are intimately interconnected.

Management is a constitutive discipline for PA, notably where the emphasis is on the relationship between resources consumed and results produced by public services organisations, and the main defining problem is the improvement of government practices. For Borgonovi (1973, 1984), a leading author in the Italian school of public management, public management should be seen as an integral part of the discipline of management and one of its three main pillars. Based on an institutionalist view, the starting point is a tripartite representation of society as constituted of three categories of institutions: businesses, governments, and families and third-sector organisations. Public management is placed alongside business administration and management (related



to the management of the first category of institutions, the businesses) and the management of families and third-sector organisations (third category) as one of the three main branches of management. Public management is the study of the economic dimension of the second category of institutions: public institutions (more often referred to as ‘governments’ in the English language literature). According to this perspective, the fact that since the end of WWII public management has mainly been importing knowledge from private management, rather than the other way around, is purely contingent (more scholars and more resources are available for private management nowadays, but this was not the case in the first half of the 20th century, and the situation might well reverse again in the future), and there is no super-ordination/subordination relation between private and public management, that stands on equal footing. In this perspective, the study of public administration tends to overlap with the study of public management (one critique may be that this perspective emphasises certain dimensions, like the performance criteria of efficiency, effectiveness and economy, to the detriment of others in the study of PA). Distinctive but closely related to management is the contribution of organisation science to PA (Christensen et al., 2007; Christensen and Laegreid, 2018; March, 1999; March and Olsen, 1995, 1996).

The contribution of economics (political economy) to PA may instead be categorised at a distinct level. This disciplinary contribution is prominent in the strand of the so-called ‘public choice’ (the economic study of decision-making in public settings). Influential contributions are those of Niskanen (1971, 1973, 1994) and Dunleavy (1991), amongst others. An overview of the influence of the discipline of economics in the field of PA, the kinds of contributions and the presence in public administration journals is developed by Tönurist and Bækgaard (2018).

A central problem of all three these disciplines (management, organisation science, economics) is the study of the relationship between individuals and organisations. In this book we revisit some of the foundational issues surrounding the relations between individuals and organisations as they are investigated by the disciplines of management, organisation science and economics: this is done by taking an altogether philosophical perspective, reviewing the main schools of thought and the great philosophers of the past (in Chapters 2 and 3), and then revisiting a range of PA topics from the perspectives of classical metaphysics, Kantian philosophy and contemporary strands like existentialism (see the debate on the existentialist public administrator), structuralism and phenomenology, amongst others (Chapters 4 and 6).

Law – notably public and administrative law – is a key contributing discipline to ‘modern’ public administration. In a review of the contribution of law to PA, Dragos and Langbroek (2018, p. 1068) claim that: ‘[I]t may be asserted that public administration as a discipline owes its existence to lawyers – who

developed this field in the 19th and 20th century especially in continental European countries – and political scientists.’ Although this assertion may be contested, the significance of law and lawyers for the development of PA is hard to overestimate and ‘it was not until the second half of the 20th century, following Herbert Simon in particular, that sociology and organization theory switched the emphasis in the study of public administration, with an ever-growing tendency to talk about *public management* rather than *public administration*’ (Dragos and Langbroek, 2018, p. 1068). Nowadays, the authors continue, lawyers tend to focus on the functioning of the judiciary with respect to administrative processes, on court judgement, court cases and their influence on administrative action, as well as on judiciary supervision of PA and the resolution of conflicts between citizens and public administrations. If a divorce, or at least an estrangement, has occurred between law and public administration, then can bridges be regained between law and the other disciplines studying PA (thus making PA more ‘inter’ disciplinary and less ‘multi’ disciplinary)? Recent trends and topics (and fads) that require the combination of law and the other disciplines studying PA are ‘deregulation’ and ‘better regulation’. At another level, a candidate to perform such bridging function might be the (problematic and contested) notion of ‘Good Governance’, put forward especially by international organisations like the World Bank.

This book does not directly address the contribution of positive law<sup>12</sup> to PA (let alone any discussion of the relationships between natural or revealed law and public governance). It does, however, examine through the thought of classical philosophers the relationship between ‘is’ and ‘ought’, between what is and what ought to be (the actual and the normative dimensions in the philosophical sense; see Rutgers, 2008a), which is a key underlying and constitutive dimension of law and its applications to PA (to take an illustrative example from a country with which the author of this book is familiar, it may be noticed that the two articles of the Italian constitution that are devoted to PA – articles 97 and 98 – do embody a philosophical conception of PA and provide a normative statement about what criteria should be employed to reckon the functioning of public offices as being aligned with the upheld notion of ‘good administration’).

The discipline of sociology is also widely seen as constitutive of PA since the seminal works of Max Weber (1922). Sociological frameworks like those drawn from Durkheim (Perri 6 and Mars, 2008; Perri 6, 2014) and sociological notions like that of social mechanisms are widely employed as building blocks of analyses in PA studies (Hedstrom and Swedberg, 1998; for applications to PA, see Asquer, 2012; Barzelay and Gallego, 2010; Mele, 2010; Ongaro, 2006, 2013). Given its status as one of the basic disciplines in the social sciences, if not the ‘king’ of the social sciences, debates in sociology delve not unexpectedly into ultimately philosophical questions, not least including the way in

which we conceive of ‘time’ (see Abbott, 1992a, 1992b) and of notions such as potentiality and actuality. These themes are examined – from a philosophical perspective – in Chapter 4 for the drawing of implications for PA, where the topic of social ontology is delved into.

A range of other disciplines are employed in PA studies, including psychology and cognitive psychology (notably conceived as one of the influencing disciplines in the field of the so-called ‘Behavioural Public Administration’, recently revived; see Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2017; Tummers et al., 2016; Olsen et al., 2018 – and the establishment in the middle of the 2010s by the European Group for Public Administration – EGPA – of a Permanent Study Group dedicated to researching this theme; see also Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018, on learning in public organisations); cultural anthropology (an exemplar of the utilisation of cultural anthropological theory in PA is Hood, 1998); human geography, and historiography (Melis, 1996; Raadschelders, 2000; Rugge, 2012).

The practice of PA involves an even wider range of disciplines that relate to the sectors of administrative action and public policy: from public economics to criminology, from engineering to architecture, from informatics to medicine, and so on. Indeed, PA has been seen not just as a science but also, on an equal footing and in an equally constitutive way, as an art and a profession (Frederickson, 1980; Frederickson and Smith, 2002). PA is first and foremost being practised and, in this sense, following Bauer (2018), PA is perhaps best seen as profession, as primarily interested in instrumental knowledge in the same sense like medicine or engineering are (Barzelay, 2019, argues for a conception of public management as a design oriented professional discipline – in line with the ideas of the sciences of the artificial wrought out by Simon, 1969/1981/1996 – a conception that may flank the other notions of PA introduced and employed throughout this book). The aim of PA would then be rather optimising public administration in the widest sense, that is, making the state work as legitimately, fairly, effectively and efficiently as possible.

Historically a number of civil services (like the British one) used to train civil and public servants mainly in the humanities. Public servants were seen as ‘amateurs’ whose main skills lay in general culture and in learning by practising, learning ‘on the job’. A philosophical, historical and literary culture was seen as pivotal in the public service. The underlying conception was one in which ‘understanding’ comes before (technical) ‘knowledge’. This is a conception of PA in which the emphasis is on understanding rather than disciplinary knowledge, in which to be centre stage is the bridging of knowledge and action through understanding and on linking the explanatory (why? what? questions) to the normative (the ‘should’ questions, e.g. what should PA do?). PA is in this respect an art: it is about the capacity to bridge understanding and knowledge, normative and explanatory in order to create, maintain, renew an

administrative system (like the administration of the British or the Chinese, or the French or Italian State – and on occasions in history to invent new systems of public governance and their correspondingly novel forms of administration, as Walter Hallstein and Emile Noël, first President and Secretary General respectively of the European Commission, did when they contrived the administration of the European Union, inspired also by the likes of Jean Monnet). In this perspective, it is philosophical understanding we need to resort to, and it is philosophical understanding to ultimately underpin the theory and practice of PA and hence enable the bridging of specialised knowledge and action. An overarching aim of this book is drawing the attention of scholars and practitioners in PA to this fundamental dimension.<sup>13</sup>

In a sense, this is the old question of whether governments need specialists or generalists amongst their staff (and whether academics must themselves be specialists to ensure they can go in depth and generate ‘new’ knowledge into the one topic of election, or generalists, and to ensure they have the broad view and the capacity to make meaningful connections among bodies of knowledge). The answer given in this perspective is ‘both’ – but with the important qualification that, especially at the upper tiers, generalists provide an invaluable contribution: the generalist may be a *dilettante* (Dogan, 1996, p. 99), but specialisation disperses knowledge, and understanding is a fundamental requirement for the running and bettering of PA. Generalists’ skills include

extensive knowledge of the system of government and of relevant and related policy areas ... knowledge of and experience in the various line and staff units of the organization where one is employed, as well as political sensitivity, deep understanding of the nature of the interaction between government and society, and the capacity to sense the various social trends. (Raadschelders, 2005, p. 618)

The study of public administration also needs generalists, that is, ‘scholars who make the effort to develop frameworks that help connecting knowledge about government from a wide array of sources’ (Raadschelders, 2005, p. 622). Philosophical knowledge and understanding are engine and fuel for the efficacy of this effort, for achieving this overarching goal.

Last, but definitely not least in the perspective of this book, PA may also be seen – alongside a science, an art and a profession – as a form of ‘humanism’ (a conception very much in line with Waldo’s – 1948/1984). Public administration is in this sense part of the humanities too, administering being concerned also and intrinsically with the making of value-laden decisions, which demand the decision-makers to exercise judgement and wisdom (see Hodgkinson, 1978, on whose thought we return to in Chapter 4). Hence another perspective along which to situate the rationale for this book is that of bringing to the fore in an explicit way the nature of PA as a form of humanism

and its partaking to the humanities too (much in line with a similar call by other authors: Herbel, 2018, makes the case for PA to re-bond with its ties to the humanities, and urges it to ‘come back to the fold’ of the liberal arts from which – Herbel argues – it originated; in a similar vein, with a more autobiographical colouring of the argument, Samier makes a plea for PA to conceive of itself as a humanities discipline, and even proposes a humanistic manifesto for PA, Samier, 2005). PA is human-made, it is made by humans for humans, and hence it must be informed by knowledge and understanding about the human nature: its traits, needs, motivations and aspirations to well-being – and the rights and obligations associated to our human condition (we return to these topics widely throughout the book).

To reinforce the case for bringing PA back to its humanities/humanistic roots, we can refer to the admonitions that Hannah Arendt (1951/1958) issued to the contemporary rulers when she referred to the death of Socrates (see Chapter 2) as the death of wisdom in both public governance and society at large: from this consideration stems her call to rediscover philosophical wisdom alongside and in a sense over technical expertise as the only way forward for a better and more humane society and public governance. Her call resonates as part and parcel of the rationale for this book, which aims to (re-) introduce philosophical knowledge into the study of PA in a more systematic way, and with it at re-bringing philosophical wisdom (the wisdom that derives from philosophical knowledge and understanding) into public governance.

In sum, the nature of PA as both science and also and in an integrated way an art, a profession and a form of humanism, drawing from the humanities, is part and parcel of its nature. To the extent PA is science, we conceive of science in a broad rather than narrow sense: we intend science as *episteme*, as rigour in generating knowledge (more on this in Chapter 2); and we intend PA as a science in the academia in the sense conveyed by the German language term of *wissenschaft*, a field of intellectual inquiry conducted through an approach that encompasses a systematic consideration for values and meanings in the study of social phenomena (Gadamer, 1960/1975; Weber, 1922, 1949). Within the framework of this broad conception of science, we intend ‘explanation’ as both the process of identifying the causes of something, and the process of attributing meaning to something (Demeulenaere, 2011, Chapter 1).<sup>14</sup>

PA draws from the social sciences and shares with them the common problems and quandaries of social scientific knowledge (more on this in Chapter 6); at the same time, due to its composite nature, it partly transcends those boundaries to enter the terrain of the canons and practices of a profession (like medicine or engineering), of a human activity which is also inherently an art (the art of governing and administering), and of the humanities (the making of value-laden decisions and the attributing of meaning to the public space).

Finally, the significance of the subject of this book, that is, PA, can hardly be underestimated. Put plainly, ‘Once people turn from nomads living in tribes to individuals living in imagined communities, government, law and administration become a fact of life’ (Raadschelders, 2005, p. 604) on which an important part of the well-being of humans depends.

## PHILOSOPHY OF AND FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The thrust of this book is eminently one of introducing philosophical thought *for* PA (philosophy for PA) and, out of the key branches of philosophy, the main emphasis is on issues of ontology. What other approaches could have been taken to bridge philosophy and PA? As a very minimum, it is possible to outline three different ways of defining how the relationship between philosophy and the field of PA can be tackled:

- *Philosophy for PA*: the fundamental thrust is employing philosophical speculation to enlighten facets of the study and the practice of PA and find new viewpoints on PA themes ordinarily debated in the dedicated literature. This approach could perhaps have been natural at the dawn and in the forming period of PA studies, when scholars and practitioners alike might have been generalists in their background, possibly literates in classics and philosophy, and ultimately amateurs in PA because demands of specialised knowledge were not as compelling as nowadays. In this approach, the starting point is the broad overview over philosophical thought, and then this huge body of wisdom and knowledge becomes the source for selective applications to themes and issues of contemporary significance in PA. However, the basic requisite lies in knowledge of the field of PA and the charting of it: philosophical thought is then deployed for critically revisiting and rethinking contemporary PA themes and issues. This book is structured according to this logic, as it aims to examine and discuss the approach of philosophy for PA.
- *Philosophy of PA*: this approach is based on professional philosophers articulating their philosophical reflection into the specific field of PA. The starting point is the thought of classical authors: from the seminal seeds in Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *Politics* to the works of authors operating in a period when the ‘modern’ state was already taking shape, notably where they more specifically theorise the role of administration within the state (like Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, in particular §§ 287–97 on PA; incidentally, it may be noticed that Hegel’s foundation of the legitimacy of the Nation State, and hence of its administrative apparatus, as the embodiment of the Absolute Reason – more on this in Chapter 3 when

Hegel's thought is introduced and discussed – is also a reminder about how powerful a weaponry philosophy may be when it comes to providing legitimacy to human artefacts, like administrative systems). One problem with this approach is that contemporary professional philosophers are limitedly engaged with PA debates, also because of the almost impossibility of becoming specialists in both fields, and hence an apparent hiatus between foundational philosophical elaborations and the issues and themes that can be found debated in the contemporary PA literature.

- *Mapping backwards from the PA field to philosophical thought*: this approach starts from the charting of the territory of PA to then engage in some backwards mapping to what the philosophical premises of the PA scholarship being vetted might be. It is best practised by engaging with the individual PA scholar and asking her/him to track backwards what the foundations have been of her/his work – although this may be practically near impossible. Riccucci (2010) is an eminent example of this way of tackling the relationship between PA and philosophy: PA streams are reviewed, the work of leading scholars vetted, and then the underlying philosophies of knowledge tracked.

Intermediate approaches may also be identified and singled out; for example, an approach focusing on key topics of contemporary significance for PA and then inquiring into them from a philosophical standpoint is an approach somehow in-between philosophy of PA and philosophy for PA.

The sheer magnitude of the body of philosophical thought poses another challenge to any work engaged in the venture of bridging PA and philosophy. It is thus likely that any work will have a main emphasis, either on political philosophy and philosophy of ethics, or on philosophy of knowledge, or on ontology, depending on the background and inclinations of the author (and to some extent also on the kindness of the publisher in offering more text space to elaborate on topics). We may then tentatively chart the combination of the basic approach to the relationship between philosophy and PA, on one hand, and the main emphasis of the study, on the other hand, and work out a mapping of some of the works that tackled this issue. The result is reported in Table 1.1. Importantly, *this book is conceived and structured according to the logic and approach of being a book about philosophy for PA* (after having fulfilled its initial task of introducing the overall set of relations between philosophy and PA). This means the present book is varied in the range of topics addressed, hopefully articulate in discussing some of the manifold ways with which philosophies and philosophical perspectives can be made to contribute to our understanding of different facets of PA, and composite in the range of themes being examined. Only books that, differently from this one, aim to elaborate a philosophy *of* PA can be selective and focused in the profiles of PA that is

Table 1.1 *A mapping of the basic approach in some studies of the relationship between philosophy and public administration*

Relation PA–Philosophy Main emphasis of the study	Philosophy for PA	Mapping backwards from PA to philosophy	Philosophy of PA
Ontology	Ongaro, <i>Philosophy and PA</i> (this book)	Uncharted territory (but see Stout, ‘Competing Ontologies for PA’)	Plato, <i>Republic</i> Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> Hegel, <i>Right</i> (indirectly: Hodgkinson, <i>Towards a Philosophy of Administration</i> )
Philosophy of knowledge	Uncharted territory?	Riccucci, <i>PA: Philosophies of Knowledge</i> Raadschelders, <i>PA Interdisciplinary Study of Government</i>	Simon, <i>Administrative Behavior</i> Waldo, <i>Administrative State</i>
Political philosophy	Uncharted territory?	Frederickson, <i>The New PA Hood, Art of State</i>	Plato, <i>Republic</i> Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> Hegel, <i>Right</i> Waldo, <i>Administrative State</i>

being examined, as those books will argue that certain dimensions of PA are central because those dimensions reflect the chosen philosophical premises (e.g. the social construction of the meaning of good public governance will be central to a relativist philosophy; conversely, a Hegelian conception of the State, and PA within it, will dwell more on the drawing of the implications of the ethical primacy of the State and its administrative apparatus; and so forth). A book like this one which puts centre stage to work out the implications of *philosophy for PA* will need to engage with the issue of how different and diverse philosophies may be employed to shed light on virtually all the facets and dimensions of PA; consequently, a book such as this one demands a bit more of the patience of the reader: You, dear Reader, will be accompanied – hopefully efficaciously – through a journey with multiple paths and threads by this book: it is for this reason that in the remainder of this chapter I will dwell at some length on the conceptual map of this journey and the articulation of the book. In the following section it is shown the logical structure of the book, also supported by a graphical visualisation (Figure 1.1) and an illustrative table (Table 1.2); a final section ‘how to read this book’ provides additional guidance on how to make the most of the resources contained in this manuscript. Limitations and issues of methods are also discussed in the remainder of this chapter.



## OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

This book takes a different approach than most other PA contributions tackling philosophical issues. Rather than starting from a chosen PA topic or issue to then resort selectively to philosophical apparatuses that may enlighten the problem under investigation, or taking the move from one philosopher's thought to then discuss the implications for PA, I start from a very broad and as systematic as possible review of philosophical thought. Based on the results of this review, the remainder of the book examines how the *systematic* employment of philosophical thought may yield fruits for a deeper and suppler understanding of contemporary research in the field of PA.

This choice of contents is reflected in the outline of the book, which is visually provided in Figure 1.1 and summarised in Table 1.2. The next two chapters delve at first into the deeper roots of Western philosophy in Greek, medieval and early modern philosophical thought (Chapter 2), and then turn to modern and contemporary philosophy (Chapter 3). Throughout these two chapters, however, links to PA themes are systematically pointed out at the end of each section, consistently with the overall thrust of this book, which is mainly aimed at a PA readership. Chapter 4 is pivotal in that it applies the findings of the review chapters to a range of themes and issues in PA. The main focus of Chapter 4 is on ontological issues. Chapter 5 shifts from ontological to political philosophical foundational issues in PA, delving into the distinction between 'common good' and 'social contract' arguments for the foundation of the 'legitimacy' of a political system and their implications for the legitimacy of public governance and of the doctrines to reform the public sector. Chapter 6 reviews philosophical-epistemological issues in PA. Chapter 7 revisits the works of three classical authors: Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas More. They accompany us on a tour into three dimensions of PA, namely the role of (public) virtues, the arguments of 'realism' in politics, and the continued inspiration that utopian thinking may elicit. They will also guide us to reflect on crucial issues, like the immutability of human nature and its implications for the study and the practice of PA. Chapter 8 revisits the notions of 'best' – or 'good enough' – 'practices'; 'models'; 'paradigms'; 'ideal-types'; and 'utopias', and how these represent powerful conceptual tools for the study and practice of PA, notably when utilised in an integrated way. Chapter 9 discusses the nature and type of contribution that philosophy may provide to the main intellectual traditions of PA, variedly conceived of as scientific knowledge, an interpretivist venture, practical experience, or practical wisdom. Finally, Chapter 10 'looks forward' and discusses how to advance a research agenda centred on bringing philosophical thought into PA, also by tackling some key challenges brought about by technological advancements,

as well as the place of philosophy into the teaching of PA, to then pull the threads on the intellectual journey of systematically developing philosophy for PA.

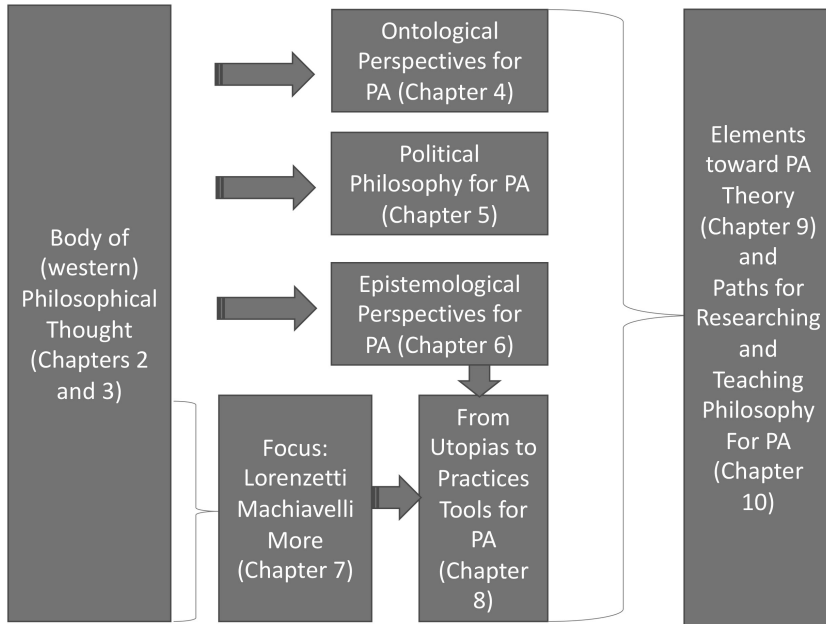


Figure 1.1 A conceptual map of the book

## METHODS

There are significant methodological questions the reader might be interested to ask at this point. What and how can we know – can the author of this book know – about philosophy? And what and how can we know – can the author of this book know – about public administration? I'll tackle the questions in order – and beg the pardon of the reader for this small personal digression (you can safely skip this section and go directly to the last section 'Overview of the book' or to the substantive chapters starting from Chapter 2).

The idea for this book stems from a longstanding interest in philosophical inquiry since I chose philosophy as a major at secondary education at the Lyceum, in Italy. It is then that I matured the consciousness of the significance of philosophy for every aspect of life, and hence also for the profession I would have chosen. I then turned to university degrees in disciplines related to public management<sup>15</sup> and soon started to devote myself to researching public admin-

Table 1.2 *Sequence of the book: a summary*

<i>Chapter 1. Introduction and rationale</i>	This chapter sets the scene and argues why philosophy and philosophical understanding is highly valuable for the discipline of public administration and public governance and management (in short: PA). Rationale and defining issues are discussed.
<i>Chapter 2. Key streams in philosophical inquiry: a selection and succinct overview for the field of public administration – Part I</i>	The deeper roots of Western philosophy in Greek, medieval and early modern philosophical thought are portrayed. The chapter provides the reader with an introduction to the distinctive and everlasting contribution of earlier philosopher. Links with and implications for the field of PA are previewed, to be further developed in Chapters 4–8.
<i>Chapter 3. Key streams in philosophical inquiry: a selection and succinct overview for the field of public administration – Part II</i>	The chapter examines modern and contemporary philosophical streams and furnishes an overview of how these may shed light on overlooked profiles of contemporary PA. Links of these streams of philosophy with the field of PA are previewed, to be further developed in Chapters 4–8.
<i>Chapter 4. Ontological perspectives and public administration doctrines and themes</i>	This chapter systematically applies the results of Chapters 2 and 3 and discusses how the <i>systematic</i> employment of philosophical thought may yield fruits for a deeper and suppler understanding of contemporary research in the field of PA. The main focus of the chapter is on ontological issues.
<i>Chapter 5. Political philosophy and public governance: the quest for justification in ‘common good’ and in ‘social contract’ arguments and their significance for the debate on the organisation of the public sector</i>	This chapter shifts from ontological to political philosophical foundational issues in PA, delving into the distinction between ‘common good’ and ‘social contract’ arguments for the foundation of the legitimacy of a political system, and their implications for public governance.
<i>Chapter 6. Philosophy of knowledge perspectives and the study of public administration</i>	This chapter reviews epistemological issues in the study of public administration, from the philosophical roots of interpretivist, positivist, and realist perspectives to the actuality of the debate over the nature of universal concepts.
<i>Chapter 7. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas More: on virtues, realism and utopian thinking in public administration</i>	If all the book is ultimately an encounter with the great thinkers of the Western civilisation, this chapter picks three authors in particular to delve into three dimensions of PA, namely the role of (public) virtues, the arguments of ‘realism’ in politics and the continued inspiration that utopian thinking may elicit. The famous painting <i>The Good Government</i> by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, the masterpiece <i>The Prince</i> by Niccolò Machiavelli and <i>Utopia</i> by Thomas More are revisited.

<i>Chapter 8. Utopias, ideal-types, paradigms, models and 'good practices': repertoire of conceptual tools for public administration?</i>	This chapter revisits the notions of 'best' – or 'good enough' – practices'; 'models'; 'paradigms'; 'ideal-types'; and 'utopias', and how these represent powerful conceptual tools for the study and practice of PA, notably when utilised in an integrated way.
<i>Chapter 9. Elements (fragments) for the philosophical foundations of a theory of public administration</i>	The chapter discusses the nature and type of contribution that philosophy may provide to the main intellectual traditions of PA, variously conceived of as scientific knowledge, an interpretivist venture, practical experience, or practical wisdom.
<i>Chapter 10. Researching and teaching philosophy for public administration</i>	This chapter 'looks forward' and discusses how to advance a research agenda centred on bringing philosophical thought into PA, also by tackling some key challenges brought about by technological advancements, as well as the place of philosophy into the teaching of PA, to then pull the threads on the intellectual journey of systematically developing philosophy for PA.

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istration and management. The idea for this book was first conceived at that time, over twenty years ago, when I began the study of PA with somewhere in the back of my mind the (deep) conviction that 'philosophy does matter for the study (and the practice) of PA'. I have since continued to cultivate philosophical interests. More recently, for the preparation of this book I have widely reviewed philosophical texts and journals (amongst the journals in the field – and without mention of journals 'specialised' in branches of philosophy like ethics, aesthetics, etc. – are *Australian Journal of Philosophy*; *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*; *European Journal of Philosophy*; *Inquiry*; *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*; and *Mind*, amongst others). And it goes without saying I reviewed as widely as possible those publications in the public administration field delving into philosophical issues (referenced throughout the book).

In the writing of the text, alongside continued exchanges with colleagues in the discipline of public administration and management, established colleagues in the disciplinary field of philosophical studies have been asked advice on excerpts of the manuscript – notably Professor Maria Rosa Antognazza from King's College London. Stretching across disciplines – notably consolidated academic disciplines and fields – is always a challenging endeavour, and I very much benefited from amicable advice during the journey. It goes without saying, responsibility for errors in this book are mine and mine only.

In sum, this is a book written by a professional scholar in public administration (a public administrationist) who is also an amateur philosopher (and long been so, since the mid-1980s), whose hope is to contribute to open a path (pathway) for triggering and nourishing a much-needed debate about the philosophical foundation and implications of the study and practice of PA. More skilled public administrationists and 'professional' philosophers will surely

develop much further what is started in this book. Hopefully, however, this work will provide useful building materials that will help pave the way for a fruitful debate that may move forward our knowledge and understanding of PA.

## LIMITATIONS

This work has a number of important limitations of which we duly need to make the reader aware. The first set of limitations stem from the other side of the coin of its very ambitions: the terrain covered by this work is huge, an expanse that stretches from a vibrant and multifarious field like PA to the immense body of reflection, understanding and knowledge that has been generated by two-and-a-half millennia of philosophical reflection. The choice of themes inevitably needed to be highly selective and very subjective. The preparatory work for this book entailed an extremely wide reading, but yet this at most can be likened to a structured, not a systematic, review of the pertinent literature in PA.

A second limitation lies in this book being mostly centred on Western philosophy. Some historians of philosophy would argue that philosophy as is nowadays generally conceived, that is, the rational knowledge and understanding of reality as such, the science of reason, as *λόγος* (logos), was an invention of the genius of the ancient Greeks that then propagated itself to the Western civilisation (Reale and Antiseri, 1988). However, in the broadest sense, philosophical understanding is proper of all human civilisations in varied ways, and great benefits would be reaped by joint efforts that were to bridge across philosophical schools to enlighten our understanding of contemporary PA. It was simply beyond the capacities of the author of this book to review other traditions such as Islamic philosophy or Eastern philosophy, for example. Although mentions are made to some notions in these philosophical traditions, no systematic treatment is attempted – it is simply a task for other books, by other authors. The focus of this book is thus on Western thought. I do hope this effort may be matched by analogous efforts from colleagues knowledgeable of – to continue with the previously mentioned examples – Islamic philosophy and Eastern philosophy, in order to jointly contribute towards a wider and wider approach to the application of philosophical thought to the field of public administration and public governance.

Importantly, the full title of this book is *Philosophy and Public Administration: An Introduction*. The second part of the title – *An Introduction* – points to another inherent limitation of this work: given the width and depth of the themes concerned, this book can only be introductory, providing a very wide overview as well as pointing to, and hopefully offering valuable insights into, a wide range of applications that philosophical thought can have for PA. But

these are intended as just starting points, from which specific, focused studies and reflections will take off for venturing into one or the other philosophical implications for PA. This book is a – hopefully insightful – bird’s-eye view.

## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

The most obvious way to read this book is in the way it is presented, from Chapter 1 to Chapter 10, from the first to the last line. However, readers of academic books are often under multiple pressures to read quickly and selectively – be they scholars aiming at taking away the key ideas needed to finalise one’s own book or article, or students striving to capture the key concepts ‘necessary and sufficient’ to overcome the looming hurdle of a fast-approaching exam.

For any purpose, Figure 1.1 guides the reader through the intellectual journey of this book in graphical format, as does Table 1.2 in verbal format. So, if you, dear Reader, feel competent enough with Western philosophy (and indeed you might be much more competent than I am), then you can skip Chapters 2 and 3, perhaps after having looked at Table 2.1, which summarises the key phases of Western philosophy and reports some key ideas for application to the field of PA. However, much of what is being discussed throughout the remainder of the book rests on the ideas and concepts introduced in Chapters 2 and 3, hence you should carefully consider the extent to which skipping those chapters represents a shortcut or rather risks driving you into a *cul de sac* later on, as the time spent on reviewing the thought of key philosophers may turn out to be very well employed for the later stages of applying those ideas to PA. As a quick test, you may ponder how confident you feel with such notions as: the coincidence of thinking and being (as in Heraclitus); or the meaning of the four causes outlined by Aristotle, and within the system of the four causes the proper meaning of the material cause. If in doubt, spending a bit more time on reviewing Greek philosophy, reported in the first sections of Chapter 2, may be worth its while.

Chapters 4 to 8 provide the core of the distinctive contribution made by this book: depending on whether your interest lies more in ontological, political philosophical or epistemological issues, you may focus primarily Chapter 4 or 5 or 6 respectively. If your interest lies in examining some of the key conceptual tools that scholars and practitioners of PA often play with (like the notion of ‘best practice’ or the one of ‘administrative paradigm’), then Chapter 8 is a core focus for you. If seeking inspiration out of masterpieces of the past like Machiavelli’s *The Prince* or Lorenzetti’s *The Good Government*, then Chapter 7 is a must-read chapter. However, the five chapters develop closely intertwined topics and resort on multiple occasions and in multiple ways to key streams of philosophical thought, and do so in a tightly interconnected way, hence a hugely more beneficial way of going through these topics is by

reading them in the sequence in which they are presented, starting from the foundational-ontological issues discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 9 revisits intellectual traditions in PA from the standpoint of their, implicit or explicit, philosophical underpinnings, and readers interested in this debate may concentrate on this chapter, which also attempts to sketch the contours of the ideational bases of a ‘theory of PA change’ – a very ambitious intellectual task which is carried out in only a tentative way here, and open to contributions and integrations: indeed this chapter is also a call to contribute a broader theory of PA change, by drawing also and systematically from philosophical thought. Finally, Chapter 10 suggests some paths – pathways – to develop a research agenda for more systematically bringing philosophy into PA, as well as to incorporate philosophy into the teaching of PA, in educational programmes at all levels, from undergraduate to postgraduate and research degrees, as well as in executive education and lifelong learning. Whether doing research on PA or working at the preparation of a new course for students of public governance and public management, you might find inspiration in this final chapter, which also discusses some challenges ahead for the study and the practice of PA, and how philosophical thought might contribute to better equip scholars and practitioners alike for tackling some of those challenges.

## NOTES

1. To which the Greek philosopher Aristotle refers as ‘entelechy’, see Chapter 2.
2. Many philosophies and philosophers would reject the qualification of their thought as ‘system’; we use the term here in a very loose sense.
3. It is, in this respect, also quite distant from the approach taken by analytical philosophy and philosophers.
4. ‘Systematic reading’ of the history of philosophy should be intended at the level that can be attained by good handbook summaries on the subject because the *opera omnia* of such giants of philosophical thought is well beyond the scope of this book.
5. A feature, it may be noticed, that has made it cheaper to write this book – it has been essentially an armchair exercise.
6. It may be worth dwelling on the ultimate reasons why one should study the history of philosophy. As Kenny pointed out, ‘[T]here are many reasons, but they fall into two groups ... We may read the philosophers of other ages to help to resolve philosophical problems of abiding concern, or to enter more fully into the intellectual world of a bygone era’ (Kenny, 2010, p. ix). This book clearly falls into the former: we search in philosophical thought enlightenment for addressing the extant concerns of our chosen field of inquiry and practice, namely public governance and administration.
7. An objection might be that developments of information and communication technologies are bringing closer to becoming ‘real’ the possibility that, in some form or sense, (man-made) ‘machines’ might also acquire self-consciousness (a huge strand of research and technological innovation that is known to the wider public mostly under the label of ‘artificial intelligence’). But the point philosophers like

Plotinus and Hegel made nineteen and two centuries ago, respectively, is different: they (attempted to) explain how self-consciousness arose on a universal scale and what it means for the totality of reality. From this philosophical perspective, the fact of machines acquiring self-consciousness, while obviously engendering huge ethical and practical problems, would not change the fundamental terms of the issue: that self-consciousness and intentionality are the conditions (from the philosophical perspective of these two authors) for things to be. Thus, in a sense, philosophical reflection on the mind may bring into perspective and relativize even some of the most astonishing, fascinating and at the same time threatening changes that technological innovation may bring about.

8. Although PA is an academic discipline in its own right, its interdisciplinary nature and inherent openness to methodological pluralism is a defining feature.
9. And bureaucracy is under conditions of political domination.
10. Intended broadly as being capable of integrating concepts and theories as developed in diverse disciplines, the capability of relating whole disciplines (Dogan, 1996).
11. 'The epistemological and methodological diversity that results from this disciplinary variety of concepts and theories-in-use means that, ontologically, the study of public administration cannot but be interdisciplinary. Public administration is the only study of which its scholars can claim to study government as a whole (and not just one disciplinarily defined aspect)' (Raadschelders, 2008, p. 944).
12. 'Positive' law refers to the laws and legislative systems as human artefacts, man-made institutions. 'Natural' law is a branch of philosophy and law discussing the existence and contents of rights and duties constitutive of the human being, of each and every person, irrespective of legislative activity.
13. While I was preparing the proposal for this book, I happened to listen to the speech – delivered at a major PA conference – of the President of the National School of Public Administration of one of the large European states (a school running large-scale training courses for civil and public servants) advocating (entirely unsolicited) the significance of integrating the study of the humanities and philosophy into the curricula of the programmes for the professional training of public managers. Although this is obviously only anecdotal evidence, it may well reinforce the argument that after some decades of administrative reforms emphasising the importance of technical instruments and ready-made solutions, an enhanced consciousness about the significance of broader interpretations of public administration and administrative action is (re-)emerging.
14. At times this may also mean generating an understand of the terms of the debate (I am indebted to the participants at a seminar held at Queen's University Belfast on 27 February 2019, where I had the privilege of being asked to present the first edition of this book, for pointing me to this consideration).
15. BSc and MSc in Industrial Engineering with a dissertation on management accounting and control in the public sector; MPhil at the London School of Economics and Political Science and PhD at King's College London, both with a thesis in public administration and management.



## 2. Key streams in philosophical inquiry: a selection and succinct overview for the field of public administration – part I

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### INTRODUCTION

This and the following chapter provide an overview of key streams of philosophical inquiry and delineate key lineages between philosophical ideas and notions and concepts employed in the study and practice of PA. These chapters adopt a mainly chronological way of presenting (Western) philosophical thought, from its roots in ancient Greece to contemporary strands; this ordering criterion may further enable the reader to appreciate the development of topics over time, and the continued dialogue in which philosophers across the ages are engaged around the key issues of being, knowing, behaving, and living together. The repartition of topics between the two chapters is not (entirely) arbitrary, as the philosopher Immanuel Kant is widely considered to have brought about a revolution in philosophical thinking, and one which delineates the contours of ‘modern’ thinking and its differences from ancient, medieval and early modern thought. It is not by chance that the Kantian notion of the subject – the knowing subject and the moral subject – is the opening point and in certain sense a lynchpin for both the treatment of themes of ontology and PA and issues of epistemology and PA (see Chapters 4 and 6 respectively).

An overview of the topics illustrated in Chapters 2 and 3 is reported in Table 2.1. Importantly, at the end of each major section of this and the following chapter a closing paragraph sums up some of the key implications for PA and relevance for philosophy for PA that can be drawn from the key philosophical themes and notions that have arisen in that epoch; while these succinct closing paragraphs can only hint to elaborations that are then developed in later chapters of this book, they may represent an already useful dashboard – or at least a set of ‘pointers’ – accompanying the reader as to what can be learnt from philosophical thought which underpins and matters so much for PA.

*Table 2.1 A (very schematic) traveller's map through Western philosophy for students of public administration*

<b>Epoch/Key themes – authors – relevance for PA</b>	<b>Key authors – philosophies</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Implications for PA/relevance for philosophy for PA</b>
Archaic (Greek Civilisation) 776 BC – 500 BC	Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Parmenides (active around 500 BC)	Introduced the key philosophical questions, notably ontological: the nature of being, the relationship of being and thought	No direct relevance – but key ideas – like that of the coincidence of being and thinking – sown here
Classical (Greek Civilisation) 500 BC – 323 BC	Plato, Aristotle	Developed a systematic and enduring configuration of the branches of human knowledge and their articulation (philosophy as apex of human knowledge); Key notions shaping (Western) thinking, like 'form/essence', 'causality', 'potentiality–actuality distinction' all took shape here and inform directly or indirectly all 'scientific' knowledge	Enduring actuality of key notions like Aristotle's four causes (for social sciences and PA); Political philosophy established in this epoch (public governance)
Hellenistic (Greek Civilisation) – Roman and Patristic Philosophy 323 BC – 476 AD	Philosophical movements (stoicism, eclecticism, scepticism, Epicure), Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church, Augustine	Ethical issues centre stage in Hellenistic period; Key concepts brought into philosophy by the Christian Revelation: notion of universal salvation and the foundation of rights of each human being – beyond ethnicity, status, or else – as God's sons; Notion of creation of universe out of nothingness; Notions of eternity and time revisited in light of creation; Trinitarian conception of God and notions of 'person'; Free will, original sin and individual responsibility	Pursuit of virtues (stoicism); Notion of Charitas as gratuitous and absolute love, underpinning notions of benevolence and the caring for each human being, and intellectual roots of modern age 'universal' human rights and contemporary notions of human person and welfare state/social rights

<b>Epoch/Key themes – authors – relevance for PA</b>	<b>Key authors – philosophies</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Implications for PA/ relevance for philosophy for PA</b>
Medieval Age 476AD – 1492 AD	Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham	The nature of universal concepts; The ontological proof of the existence of God; Scholastics and the essence–existence distinction as lynchpin (being as gifted, creatures as partaking of Being)	Understandings of universal concepts underpin different contemporary perspectives on conceptions of PA; Potentiality–actuality distinction a central issue in social sciences and PA
Renaissance mid-14th to mid-16th century AD	Erasmus, Leonardo, More, Machiavelli	Humanism: human being as micro-cosmos; Universality and immutability of human nature in each individual; The pursuit of perfection through virtues; Prominence of artistic expression in pursuit of truth	Roots of virtue discourse in Public Governance; Contribution of (Administrative) History to knowledge generation in PA; Coinage of notion of Utopia; Significance and usage of artistic expressions in PA inquiry (e.g. Lorenzetti’s ‘The Good Government’)
Early Modern Age 16th to 18th century AD	Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Locke, Hobbes, Berkeley, Hume, J. Stuart-Mill	Rationalism ‘vs’ empiricism; Subject as starting point of philosophising and the new metaphysical systems; Dualism mind–matter and its conundrums; The scientific revolution and physics as the pattern of scientific knowledge	Empiricism and the origin of concepts in the mind; Rationalism and the role of innate ideas in PA research; The role of the subject in PA research and practice
Enlightenment (18th century)	Voltaire, Wolff	Critical reason as source of human liberation (‘Enlightenment’); The age of the revolutions – English revolution (17th century), American and French revolutions; Industrial and demographic revolutions – and the principles of universal human rights; Sovereignty to the people; Self-determination of peoples/the modern Nation State	Universalistic human rights; Conceptions of liberal-democracy and the form of the modern Nation State; Initial overcoming of patrimonial state and roots of modern administrative state

<b>Epoch/Key themes – authors – relevance for PA</b>	<b>Key authors – philosophies</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Implications for PA/ relevance for philosophy for PA</b>
Modern philosophy (19th and 20th century)	Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Marx, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Comte, Rickert, Carnap, Mach, Avenarius, Poincaré, Dilthey, Windelband	Kant, the revolution of the subject, and the foundation of morality and the limits of the knowable; Historicism; Idealism; Marxism; Positivism; Conventionalism; The sciences of the spirit	Kant and the foundations of public governance in the knowing and moral subject; Historicism and the transformative dynamics of administrative systems; Contemporary epistemologies in PA and their roots in modern philosophies; Marxism, Gramsci and the notion of power in PA; The sciences of the spirit and the nature of PA as interdisciplinary social science, art, profession and humanism
Contemporary strands	Husserl, Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, James, Russell, Wittgenstein, Whitehead, Gadamer, Habermas, Mounier, Maritain, Bergson	Phenomenology; Existentialism; Structuralism; Anglophone streams: pragmatism, analytical philosophy, and process philosophy; Hermeneutics; Personalism, spiritualism, and neo-scholastics	Philosophical roots of conceptions and interpretations of PA: the knowability of the essences in PA inquiries; The existentialist public administrator; Social structures, social ontology and PA; Process philosophy and process approaches to PA studies; Conceptions of time and PA study and practice; Spiritualism, personalism and the promotion of human well-being as guiding principle in normative conceptions of PA

## ORIGIN OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE PRE-SOCRATICS

For the great Greek philosopher Aristotle, philosophical investigation is above all inquiry into the causes of things. Aristotle, who is also considered the first historian of philosophy, classified his predecessor philosophers according to the kind of cause their philosophy probed into. Aristotle himself worked out

a system of four types of causes: material, formal, efficient and final cause (we delve into this important notion later and also in Chapter 4). In this book we adopt a much more ‘textbook’ classification, mixing a mainly chronological criterion with a thematic criterion. We first illustrate ancient (Greek) philosophy, then turn to early Christian and medieval philosophy, to early modern philosophy, and finally delve at greater length into modern and contemporary philosophy. We will only succinctly and selectively highlight certain main philosophical streams, according to an ordering process also partly guided by our own necessarily subjective attribution of significance of strands of philosophical thought for PA studies. We dwell in key passages to illustrate in more detail concepts and notions that are then employed in the subsequent chapters for addressing PA themes and debates (one such notion is that of the four causes, which has seen a recent revival in the field of PA (Pollitt, 2012) and in a broader range of social sciences, for example in international relations (see Kurki, 2008, as an underpinning of ‘critical realist’ accounts).

Before we begin, it may be worth recalling the cultural, religious as well as socio-economic and political conditions in ancient Greece that constituted the fertile ground that paved the way for the birth of philosophy (Reale and Antiseri, 1988, pp. 5–10). Ancient Greek civilisation encompassed the territory of contemporary Greece, southern Italy and the Western coast of the Anatolian peninsula, with the city of Miletus, in nowadays Western Turkey, representing a key centre for the initial development of philosophy. The emergence of philosophical speculation towards the end of the so-called archaic period (800–500 BC) was preceded by the consolidation of a formidable literature in the Greek language,<sup>1</sup> which reached its apex in the poems attributed to the poet Homer, namely the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. It has been noticed how a key feature of Homeric poetry is the ‘art of motivation’, the continuous search, weaved into the poetic text, for the causes of the events that are narrated, the reasons why events occurred. Even if causes may here take a mythical form, the quest for the cause of things permeates the great Greek literature in a way that may have paved the way for the subsequent philosophical speculation. Another key trait of Homeric epic is its thrust towards presenting reality in its entirety: the world of the gods and the human world are equally represented in these poems, as are the just and the unjust in human life, the good and the bad, the joyful and the painful. The speculation on reality in its entirety, and on the position of the human being within it, is already prefigured in the great Greek literature, before taking centre stage in the full-blown philosophical speculation of the Classical period (500–323 BC) and the Hellenistic period (323–30 BC). Also Greek public religiosity displayed remarkably peculiar traits: Greek gods resembled human or natural qualities amplified and brought to perfection, rather than distant deities. It was, in many respects, a naturalistic religion that drew attention to fathoming nature (in Greek φύσις or *physis*) – a thrust that

characterised the Greek philosophical enterprise. Finally, during the centuries that immediately preceded the birth of philosophy, the Greek society changed significantly: it became wealthier and its economic strength freed time, at least for part of the population, from the constraints of material needs to devote to study and reflection. More importantly, however, Greek city states developed a climate of political liberties, identification of the ‘citizen’ (itself a Greek invention) with the political community, and free speech, which provided the breeding ground for free critical thinking that was conducive to philosophical speculation.

It was philosophers collectively known as the Milesians (because they were all from the city of Miletus) who initiated the investigation on ‘Being’ in itself – the study of being and becoming, of reality and existence – which is referred to with the term ‘ontology’: the study (λογία, *logia*) of being (the genitive of ‘to be’ ‘ον’ is ‘οντος’, *ontos* – so ontology means ‘the study of being’). Thales (c.625–545 BC) is generally attributed as the founder of philosophy because he devoted his speculation to the search for the origin or foundation of all things, their ultimate nature. He claimed to have found it in water, but this should not be intended as physical water, but rather the water is an attempt to identify and qualify the ingenerated principle (Greek, ἀρχή, or *arché*) of things, and in this sense the claim that water is the origin of things is not a theory of the physical universe, rather a metaphysical conception to refer to the totality of being.

Anaximander, a pupil of Thales, moved the search further by introducing the notion of ‘what does not have limits’, the infinite or unlimited (Greek ἄπειρον, or *apeiron*) as the principle of things. This principle embraces, surrounds and underpins all that is, exactly because each limitation (a word which in its Latin origin means ‘border’) can only stem from the unlimited (borderless). The search for the principle of all things moved further, beyond the rather more simplistic notion of ‘water’ (albeit metaphysically interpreted, as we tried to illustrate) and towards the purely intelligible notion of the infinite. Anaximander also addressed questions that Thales didn’t – notably *why* and *how* all things derive from the principle, developing an answer inspired by orphic myths (a religiosity of Eastern derivation that was widely practised privately in ancient Greece) about injustice and atonement being the sources of the dynamics of the world we live in, and how this world derives from the principle. Anaximenes, a generation younger than Anaximander, follows in the trail and revisits the thought of his masters. Although his reference to air, rather than water, as the origin of things might be considered a step back from Anaximander’s conceptualisation of the infinite, it represents a more ‘rational’ attempt to tackle another crucial question: explaining, by resorting to the very nature of the principle of everything (ontological foundation), how becoming occurs, how movement and change are introduced into the world. We will find some of these ideas in the thought of Heraclitus, the philosopher of becoming

and a lingering source of inspiration of all ‘processual’ philosophies, of all the ontologies of becoming, from the ancient times to Hegel and Whitehead.

The fragments of the works by Heraclitus (probably part of a book on nature) that have crossed the ages until our epoch suggest that this philosopher brought to a new height the intuition of the Milesians about universal dynamism. If those philosophers thought of dynamism as deriving from the principle of all things, Heraclitus appears to have put movement and change itself as the principle. In sentences that have become immortal, he stated that everything is in motion and nothing stays still, that ‘if we step into the same river twice, we cannot put our feet into the same water, since the water is not the same two moments together’ (Kirk et al., 1983, fragment 214); the second moment we descend into the river, the water and we, ourselves, have changed. This seems to entail an ontology of becoming: that each and every moment, for any reality – without exception – to be something means not to be any more what that reality was a moment before. This poses the crucial problem of how can it happen that being derives from non-being, and non-being from being: that something that exists comes out of nothingness, and that something that exists goes into nothingness. This problem has puzzled philosophers over the centuries – and still does.

Heraclitus’s philosophy is often read in stark contrast with Parmenides’s. Parmenides belonged to the school of the Eleatics, whose founder is traditionally identified in Xenophanes, active in the Western Greek colonies, located in nowadays Southern Italy. In sentences as equally immortal as Heraclitus’s, Parmenides claimed that (we report and adapt the translation provided by Kenny, 2010, p. 161): ‘what you can call and think must Being be – for Being can, and nothing cannot, be [and] Never shall this prevail, that Non-Being is ... Non-Being you won’t grasp – it can’t be done – nor utter; being thought and being are one’. These sentences have sparked a debate that has lingered for over two-and-a-half millennia. It has been argued whether ‘Being’ means ‘that to which a predicate can be attached’ and Non-Being ‘that to which no predicate can be attached’, or whether the claims refer to a radical ontology of Being as the totally positive, and Non-Being the totally negative, and hence that no change or movement is possible because Being is, immutable since the beginning and forever, and cannot trespass into Non-Being, and Non-Being ‘is not’ and never shall trespass into Being.<sup>2</sup>

Parmenides and Heraclitus are claimed to have set the terms of the dispute over whether the ultimate nature of all things and the totality of reality lies in ‘being’ or in ‘becoming’ (at times this opposition is narrowed down to the categories of ‘static’ versus ‘dynamic’ ontologies, and derived analytic apparatuses – but this dichotomy might be quite reductionist), a dispute that has featured centre stage in the philosophical debates since.

Before turning to the giants of classical metaphysics – Plato and Aristotle – we mention Pythagoras and the school of the Pythagoreans. As well as contributing powerfully to the development of mathematics, from a philosophical standpoint they were the first to point out that reality may be read and understood through ‘numbers’, that the principles of the numbers are (so they purport) the principles that govern all things. Nowadays we are accustomed to thinking that nature is investigated by searching for mathematical, functional relations (maths is the language of modern physics and the natural sciences), or that sounds and music can be expressed in mathematical forms. This has become so obvious to us that it has led our epoch to become oblivious of how amazing these discoveries are: going back to the writings of these scholars may help resuscitate the amazement that stemmed from this discovery. Two fundamental qualifications are in order: first, after Aristotle we are accustomed to conceiving numbers as mental abstractions, as an entity of reason. Pythagoreans rather conceived of numbers as ‘real’ entities, and hence the principles of numbers (the principles and laws of maths) are by Pythagoreans conceived of as principles ‘really’ underlying all things. This ushers us into the issue of the distinction between entities of reason and ‘real’ embodied entities – a distinction that is centre stage throughout philosophical speculation from Aristotle’s ‘*metaphysics of the form*’ to the ‘dispute over the nature of the universals’ (topics to which we return). Second, it may be stated that with the Pythagoreans humankind made a giant leap in that it has learnt to read reality through reason, albeit a specific expression of reason that is mathematical reason. After the contribution made by this philosophical school, the world is no longer seen as dominated by arcane and indecipherable powers, but rather it is seen as expressed in numbers: order, rationality, detectable verity become centre stage. Over the course of the development of philosophical thought, there have been gloomier visions about the penetrability of reality through reason, which are at odds with this Pythagorean vision – but philosophising as ‘the science of reason’ undoubtedly made a major leap thanks to the contribution of this school.

Finally, it should be noted that for reasons of brevity we are unable to introduce other giants of Greek philosophy, such as Leucippus, Democritus and the Atomists, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras, but it is important to emphasise what inexhaustible sources these philosophies represent for the contemporary thought. One may notice, for example, striking parallels between Anaxagoras’s philosophy of the ‘seminal reasons’ as explanations of becoming and contemporary strands of Whiteheadian ‘process philosophy’. Later in the book (Chapter 4) we will discuss similarities and dissimilarities between some contemporary trends in PA and the philosophical thought of the Sophists (the word being in capital to distinguish it from nowadays usage of the term), namely Protagoras, the doyen of the Sophists, and his many acolytes



who formed a highly influential school of thought active in ancient Greece. Sophists were the target of the darts of Socrates and his pupil Plato, and it is to his thought we now turn.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* while most of the ideas and notions introduced in this section may not have a direct application to the field of PA, it would be impossible to underestimate the significance of these developments for virtually every form of knowledge, thereby including knowledge generated in the field of PA. Moreover, one thread of this initial section has been to highlight how contemporary discourses in philosophy and the social sciences have been anticipated and how they have found their seeds in ancient Greek philosophical debate: we have just noticed in the previous paragraph the parallels between Anaxagoras's notion of seminal reasons as explanations of becoming and key tenets of process philosophy; we have also highlighted the impressive resemblance between the controversy between the Sophists, on one side, and Socrates (and Plato and Aristotle), on the other side, and the contemporary contests between relativists-post-modernists and the (critical) realists, not just in PA but across the social sciences.

## CLASSICAL METAPHYSICS

We now discuss how 'classical' metaphysics was developed in the hands of the two giants of philosophy, Plato and Aristotle. For thematic (rather than chronological) coherence, we will discuss the thought of Plato to Plotinus, on one hand, and Aristotle's metaphysics, briefly sketching his huge inheritance, on the other hand.

There is a saying that 'Plato asked all the questions (of significance to philosophy), and his mentee Aristotle provided most of the answers we can reasonably aspire to achieve; the others added glosses'. This is obviously an exaggeration, but the significance of the contribution of these two masters of thought for the development of philosophy can hardly be exaggerated.

Aristocles, better known as Plato (428/427–347 BC), expressed himself through the rhetoric form of dialogues in which different philosophical stances are debated by fictional characters (an English translation of all his works can be found in Plato, 1997). Although Plato himself was not a protagonist in the dialogues, Socrates – who had been his mentor – systematically is, and it is generally pointed to what the character Socrates says for gleaning what might have been Plato's 'viewpoint' on the philosophical issue debated. It appears Plato attached great significance to the dialogic form, which was not just a means of expression, but in a sense was for him the essence of philosophising. As well as the more public lectures that were reported in the dialogues, he held conversations in small groups with acolytes at the school he established in Athens, significantly called 'Academy', in which he is said to have provided

more in-depth understanding of what was publicly reported in the dialogues. The dialogue form has proven inspirational, yet not uncontroversial, and exegetes and interpreters have struggled over the subsequent two-and-a-half millennia to interpret his thought. We can only leave to the experts to delve into these crucial issues of interpretation, here furnishing but a brief introduction to some key traits of his philosophy.

Plato used the metaphor of the ‘second navigation’ to suggest that reality is in a sense two-tiered: there is the world of phenomena and a world beyond phenomena, meta-phenomenal or, with a term that gained currency later and has become conventional, metaphysical (literally meaning ‘beyond the physical world’). We have already pointed out how in the pre-Socratics the search for the ‘ultimate nature’, for ‘the totality of being’ beyond the variety of the elements gained traction and represented a quantum leap from previous approaches to human understanding of the world, and yet it is only with Plato that a distinction is introduced between the material and the immaterial, between the world that can be perceived through the senses and the world of what is intelligible: the world of ideas. It is only with Plato that nature and the cosmos come to be considered no longer as the totality of being, but as only a part of it, the totality of the things that appear to the senses as opposed to the ultimate totality, whose most important part is made of what is intelligible. Things in this world participate of ideas, of which they are a mere resemblance (it may be noticed this conception of ‘participation of one reality to another, higher-level reality’ introduces the philosophical notion of ‘analogy’).

What are these ideas? Tonnes of inks have been poured on the topic and we can here only scour the surface of the debate. We take as a starting point the commentary by Kenny to the seventh of the letters traditionally attributed to Plato (Kenny, 2010, p. 44, last sentence postponed), where Plato illustrates his doctrine with the example of a circle:

There is something called a circle; it has a name, which we have just this minute used. Then there is a definition, a compound of nouns and verbs. We might give ‘The figure whose limit is at every point equidistant from its centre’ ... Third, there is what we draw, or rub out, or rotate, or cancel. The circle itself which all these symbolize does not undergo any such change and is a quite different thing. In the fourth place we have knowledge, understanding and true opinion on these matters – these collectively are in our minds and not in sounds or bodily shapes, and thus are clearly distinct from the circle itself and from the three entities already mentioned ... and there is a fifth thing which we have to postulate, which is that which is knowable and truly real.

This fifth thing is the idea of a circle: what Plato refers to as idea in itself and by itself. The idea is an objective reality that is not the property of any individual mind (this is pointed out by Plato where he highlights the difference

between the knowledge of a thing and the idea of the thing in itself: the circle pre-exists the subject getting to know it).

It may be worth noticing what is left out: in this conception there is no reference to empirics and the empirical (Kenny, 2010). This point is picked up by Aristotle for whom knowledge starts from the senses, albeit it is only the intellect that makes it possible. In this regard, the two contrasting positions between the two philosophers were made immortal in the painting *The School of Athens* by the Italian painter Raffaello, in which Plato points his forefingers towards the sky – the world of ideas – and Aristotle towards the earth: the sensible world. This picture forms the cover of this book.

The synthesis to which Plato came with the notion of the world of the ideas encompasses what – in different ways – Heraclitus and Parmenides had already introduced, albeit in very different philosophical systems: that being and *logos* (the Greek word for ‘word’ but also ‘reason’) are interpenetrated, that the horizon of thought is the horizon of being, that thought and being are the same; that Being *is* (Parmenides) and *becomes* (Heraclitus) within the horizon of thought. What Heraclitus referred to as the ‘intelligence of things’, the *logos* which governs all things in their incessant becoming, is what Parmenides referred to when he stated that ‘the same is being and thinking, the same is thinking and what thinking is in function of, because without being, in which it is expressed, you will not find thinking: in fact [thinking] is or will be nothing outside of being’ (Parmenides, *Fragments*, B8).

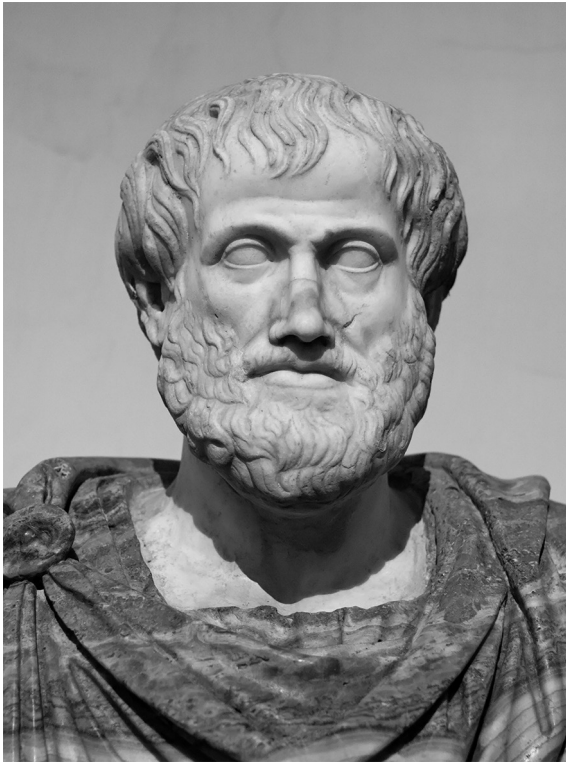
Plato also ordered the ideas in a hierarchy, famously placing at the summit the idea of the ‘good in itself’. There is a sense in which this is also an extraordinary innovation from his predecessor Parmenides: by positing an order among ideas, it ensues the logical implication that an idea *is not* another idea. This statement enables getting out of the paradox (if we may call it this way) of the impossibility of change that was purported by Parmenides: ‘Being is, and Non-Being is not’, that is, in an absolute sense Being can never transition into Non-Being, but it exists a non-being (in lower-case letter) intended as diversity and alterity, for example a square *is not* a circle. Every idea, in order to be *that* idea necessarily has to be diverse from all other ideas. This concept of a sort of ‘relative’ (as opposed to absolute) non-being will be picked up more systematically by Aristotle for combining the explanation of movement and becoming with the eternity of being.

Finally, Plato has developed a widely elaborated political–philosophical thought, notably in *The Republic*. His conception of the justice and the common good is crucial. This is discussed in Chapter 5, where the conception of common good is the starting point for a tour on the issue of justification of a(ny) political system, and its enduring and far-reaching implications for the field of PA.

Plato has left a huge inheritance. His teachings have fallen on fertile ground, notably his influence directly exerted on his pupil Aristotle. His written works, an important part of which have been conserved and transmitted for posterity, have elicited philosophical speculations across the millennia. Many philosophical strands stemmed from his work, of which ‘neo-Platonism’ (evoked in different guises over the centuries and indeed more often to be referred to Plotinus’s thought) is but one of them. It may be argued that an entire ‘fundamental orientation’ in philosophising, a basic stance or line of thought of special significance (also for its continued influences on contemporary social sciences and public affairs) stems from Plato’s thought: all philosophies that posit interiority (that is, reason, innate ideas, (self-)conscience) as the starting point of philosophising, rather than sensorial perception, may be claimed to have Plato as their ascendant. Philosophies that take as their commencement interiority constitute a stream that was developed – amongst innumerable others – by philosophers such as Plotinus, Augustine, and on through the ages to Descartes, one of the founders of modern philosophy, to contemporary philosophers like Bergson. Descartes’s famous ‘*cogito, ergo sum*’ (I think, then I am) posits as the only certainty the doubting of everything by the subject. The more complete form of Descartes’s famous statement is ‘I think, *doubting being an act of thinking*, then I am’, which therefore takes interiority as the starting point of philosophising. As discussed widely in Chapter 4, a range of approaches not just in philosophy but also in the applied social sciences and specifically in PA have their roots in rationalism, spiritualism and the notion that ideas are, at least partly, innate. The roots of these philosophical stances can in many important respects be ascribed to the philosophy of Plato.

We can now turn to the other giant of metaphysics: Aristotle from Stagira (384/383–322 BC), a pupil of Plato at his Academy for over a quarter of a century ‘and it can safely be said that in no other occasion in history was such intellectual power concentrated in one institution’ (Kenny, 2010, p. 57), although after the death of Plato Aristotle left the Academy and Athens, to then return only later on and establish his own school, known as Lyceum, or the Peripatetic school.

For Aristotle<sup>3</sup> (see Figure 2.1), knowledge requires both intellect and experience: one divorced from the other is insufficient to attain the knowledge of things. Hence, differently from Plato, the senses (apparently banal as it may seem, he was the first to point out human beings have exactly five senses – sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste – and none has been added to the list or subtracted since) are part and parcel of the process of knowing. According to Aristotle, philosophy is the inquiry into the causes of things, and metaphysics is primarily the search of the prime causes, the causes of everything. He identifies four causes: material, formal, efficient and final. The material cause is the material element of which a thing is made. To borrow Kenny’s



Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle> (accessed in 2017 and 7 April 2020).

Figure 2.1 Aristotle

metaphor of a chef cooking a risotto (2010, p. 8), the material causes of the risotto are the ingredients of which it is made; in the case of a human being, the material causes are the flesh and bones of which she or he is made. The formal cause is the form or essence of a thing. For Aristotle, form is unity and organisation of elements, the ‘what it is’ of something (the Greek term is *eidos*, form – what gives something the form that makes it to be what it is; the common Latin translation is *quod quid est* or *quidditas*, what something is). This notion is central to Aristotle’s philosophy and to all metaphysics and we will discuss it further later. Continuing for the moment with the risotto example, the recipe for the risotto is its formal cause, the ‘order’ that makes ingredients to form a risotto. Material and formal causes are in a sense intrinsic and static: they describe what something is, not why it comes to being (or to corrupting and dissolving). The ‘extrinsic’ or ‘active’ causes are the efficient

and the final ones. The efficient causes are the forces for change, what makes change happen. In the risotto metaphor, the efficient cause is the chef acting on the ingredients according to the pattern set by the recipe: the cooking is the efficient cause. The final causes are the goals or ends (in Greek, *telos*), why something is brought about: the satisfaction of the clients of the restaurant who order a risotto is the final cause. The system of the four causes as worked out by Aristotle is of enduring significance. In Chapter 6 we provide a systematic examination of the contemporary significance of Aristotle's four causes for PA (and the social sciences).

Besides the system of the four causes, Aristotle (see *The Complete Works*, English edition 1984) developed a range of concepts that have since formed the backbone of metaphysics.<sup>4</sup> We have already encountered the notion of form as principle of unity and organisation of elements: what makes a person to be a person, a horse to be a horse, or a triangle to be a triangle. Aristotle strove with the issue of what distinguishes a specific individual from an idea (intended as the form or essence that all individuals having the same nature share – for example, that of being a human being, or a horse). In this perspective, individuals are the synthesis of matter and form, and in this process matter acts as the principle of individuation: two human beings share the same form (they are 'human beings', it is their essence) and are made distinct (individuated) by matter: the matter composing me as the author of this book is not the same matter composing you, reader of this book – we share the form of human beings, we are distinguished by the matter. A related notion is that of 'entelechy', the becoming actual of what is only potential: this happens only when form is given to matter (though the two – form and matter – can never be distinguished in practice, but only conceptually). Although, as we shall see, the notion of matter is not less problematic than that of idea, all philosophies and all approaches to the study of social realities that share a thrust towards gaining an understanding of the essence of the things that are being studied have, to a smaller or bigger extent, their roots in Aristotelian philosophy.

Other key notions were developed by the philosopher of Stagira and bequeathed to philosophical speculation for the subsequent two-and-a-half millennia. First, the notion of the *categories of being*: the first (foremost) category is that of substance; the other categories are: quality; quantity; relation; action or acting; receiving or undergoing an action; place; and time. By means of these categories, Aristotle introduces 'diversity', and hence the possibility of a relative non-being, tackling the issue raised by Parmenides in the same way Plato did: a thing 'is' (nothing can be predicated of the absolute 'non-being'), but it may 'not be' in one place, or not be at a given moment in time. In this sense, therefore, non-being occurs in a relative, rather than an absolute sense. Second, the *distinction between potentiality and actuality*: an embryo in a woman's womb is 'in potentiality' an adult human being, though not in actu-

ality. Potentiality and actuality apply to all categories. In order to explain how things transit from non-being to being, from potentiality to actuality, Aristotle in his metaphysical system posited God as the pure actuality, which enables all things to come into being. Third, the distinction between *haphazard and substance*: haphazard for Aristotle is a way of being that depends on another being and is not related to the nature of the thing (its essence or form, or substance): a human being may be seated or standing, may be tanned or pale, and so on, without this altering the substance or essence of what ‘being a human being’ is. Fourth, the *notion of correspondence* of being as truth, whereby it is the correspondence between what the human mind links, on one hand, and the fact that these things are actually linked in reality, on the other hand, that determines the ‘truth value’ of a proposition: what was later summarised in the scholastic philosophy (developed in the Middle Ages drawing from Aristotle) as *adaequatio intellectus nostri ad rem*: the adequacy or correspondence between our intellect and the thing. For Aristotle, this notion does not concern being in itself, rather it pertains to the field of the logic, intended as the criteria the mind has to apply for knowing what is real.

Indeed, Aristotle is considered the founder of logic, and he elaborated a method of logical reasoning, the syllogism, which for centuries has been synonym of *the logic*. In its very basic structure, a syllogism is based on a major and a minor premise. The major is an assertion of general validity (e.g. all human beings are mortal); the minor premise is a statement (like a qualification) on a specific case (e.g. Plato is a human being). The structure of the syllogism enables arriving at a demonstration or conclusion (Plato is mortal). Aristotle also laid the foundations for what later came to be referred to as ‘practical syllogism’, a way of relating means and ends. Aristotle describes in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (III book, Chapter 3, 2002 for an English edition) the relationship between ends and means in the following way:

We deliberate not about ends but about means. For a doctor does not deliberate whether he shall heal, nor an orator whether he shall persuade, nor a statesman whether he shall produce law and order, nor does anyone else deliberate about his end. They assume the end and consider how and by what means it is to be attained; and if it seems to be produced by several means they consider by which it is most easily and best produced, while if it is achieved by one only they consider how it will be achieved by this and by what means this will be achieved, till they come to the first cause, which in the order of discovery is last.

Recently, practical syllogism has continued to draw the attention of philosophers, for example von Wright (1971), and its theoretical potential for framing PA as a form of practical reasoning has been explored recently by Virtanen (2018).

Aristotle also made a major contribution to ethics, and elaborated a conception of ‘virtue’ that has travelled the ages. Virtues for Aristotle are acquired. They are a state of character that is expressed both in purpose and in action (it is *praxis*, the Greek word for the purposeful action, the action shaped by values and sense of direction; Kenny, 2010, p. 213). He distinguished between two types of virtues: virtues as the ‘proper mean’, that is, avoiding either excess or defect, striking the proper balance between opposing impulses or passions which by their nature tend to the excess (so, for example, the temperate person will avoid drinking or eating too much, but also too little); and virtues as the attainment of perfection according to one’s proper nature. The proper nature of the human being as a ‘rational animal’ lies in the full deployment of reason. Reason can be distinguished into a practical reason and a contemplative reason. Practical reason is concerned with the knowledge of the mutable circumstances of life and, in this case, a fully rational life will be one lived in wisdom, that is, fully guided by the practical reason (although the philosopher of Stagira did not provide a systematic account of the structure of practical reasoning, the previous excerpt briefly hints at Aristotle’s reflections on practical syllogism). Contemplative reason is orientated towards the understanding of the immutable and eternal truths, which is the goal of philosophy; contemplative reason leads to a fully realised life, to the fulfilment of our nature as human beings: a notion expressed by the Greek word *Eudaimonia*, the living of a full life. This notion is central to Aristotle’s and Plato’s political–philosophical notion of the common good, which we specifically discuss in Chapter 5. The notion of virtue would permeate medieval thought and up to the modern and contemporary age – albeit challenged. We will ponder over its continued significance for public governance and public administration in Chapter 6 by revisiting the work *The Good Government* by the great artist Ambrogio Lorenzetti.

Finally, Aristotle also worked out a famous taxonomy of the forms of government, which he based upon a wide survey of the constitutions of Greek city states, a work that credited him as the founder of comparative politics (and comparative PA, Aristotle, 1962). He distinguished between three virtuous forms of government – kingship, aristocracy and *politeia* – and three corrupt forms – tyranny, oligarchy and democracy (the last one would in later epoch take on a more positive connotation than in Aristotle’s conception), and delves in insightful ways into the relative strengths and weaknesses of each of them, and their long-term sustainability. Aristotle distinguished between the qualities of an individual and the qualities as a member of a political community, that is, a ‘citizen’. Aristotle’s speculation about the virtues of the citizens and the governors that enable the attainment of the well-being of all members of a given political community have set the bases for centuries of philosophical and civic thought about ‘virtue politics’ and the role of virtues in public governance and the significance of civic participation to the destinies of one’s own political



community, and notably its self-sufficiency (its capacity to remain independent and prosper). We devote an important part of Chapter 6 to this topic. Finally, Aristotle made some key claims that have traversed the centuries (they are contained mostly in Book I of *On Politics*): that man is a ‘political animal’, meaning that it is made by nature to live in a political community, hence the state itself exists by nature; the *polis* – the political community, patterned on the city-states of ancient Greece but by extension the state in general – is the ultimate form of human organisation and exists to satisfy the highest goals of human life; the polis shelters all the other associated forms of human life, from families to businesses; and it alone should be governed ‘politically’ (Ryan, 2012, p. 83). For Aristotle the political community is distinguished from all other forms of social life and the notion of ‘political’ pertains in its proper sense only to the state. Interestingly, this may represent a point of differentiation between ‘Western’ conceptions of politics and Confucian ones, which may tend to see the state as an extension of the family and other forms of social life, rather than seeing the state as pertaining to a higher order than the other forms of associated life, as in Western conceptions shaped by the bequest of Aristotle.

For reasons of brevity we skip here both the philosophy of the Hellenistic period (which includes major philosophical schools such as cynicism, the Epicurean school, stoicism, scepticism – all in uppercase to stress that the contents of these philosophies are quite distinct and different from the meanings given to the respective terms in contemporary everyday language) and Latin philosophers like Lucretius and Cicero, but we cannot miss out a reference to the last ancient Greek philosopher, Plotinus (205–70 AC), who elaborated a very original and ambitious philosophical system whose influence lingers throughout the centuries.

The starting point of Plotinus’s philosophy is what he called the One. The One is not the one of mathematics, rather the supreme principle of unity. Plotinus was in fact the first to ask the question ‘why the Absolute is, and why is it what it is?’. The answer is that the Absolute poses itself. He theorised the One as *causa sui* (cause of itself), the Absolute that poses itself and in which necessity and free will totally coincide. He also conceived of the absolute as infinite, of which nothing can be predicated (this too being a point at least partly novel in Greek philosophy); the absolute is beyond being, thought, life – but is the cause of them all, as super-being, super-thought, super-life (the term ‘super’ being used in the Latin sense of ‘above’ or ‘beyond’). This poses the problem of how all things derive from the One. Plotinus introduced forcefully into the philosophical debate the question of unity and multiplicity, of the relationship between the One and the Many, which has since permeated philosophical investigation. The answer furnished to the question of how the many derive from the One is that this occurs by hypostasis or procession. The

argument, in a very schematic way, is as follows. The One can only think, or better contemplate, itself (although Plotinus warns against referring to the One as 'it' – nothing can be said that is predicated of the One). The rationale for this, put in a very rough way, lies in the One – the absolute unity – having nothing outside of itself. By thinking (contemplating) itself, a distinction is introduced between thinker (contemplator, the subject) and thought (contemplated, the object) – the totality of thought, that is, the world of ideas of Plato is thus posed through a hypostasis of the One. By posing itself the One also poses the other from itself. Plotinus develops here on Aristotle's idea that thinking is inherently an activity of contemplating, and contemplating is inherently creating, albeit in a sense partly different from the notion of creation in Christianity. This is what he called the *Nous* – translated as Intellect or Spirit, depending on what emphasis is given, whether more philosophical or more religious; we will refer to it here as Intellect. The Intellect is being *par excellence*, thought *par excellence*, life *par excellence* – but the Intellect cannot be the ultimate reality because of the duality of subject and object, of thinking/thinker (the act and the agent: the active) and thought (the passive), which is inherent to it. The ultimate reality must be above it, that is, the ultimate reality is the One. By contemplating itself the Intellect, in its turn, hypostatizes itself in the Soul, which commands and orders all things and the universe. Although the Intellect is a life of eternal, immediate, simultaneous possession of all objects,<sup>5</sup> the Soul is desire (thinking is itself desire; just as looking is a desire of seeing, thinking is an activity of apprehension, where apprehend is the root word in Latin for 'taking', and hence volition is inherent in thinking). By desiring to transfer downwards what is eternal the Soul does so in succession, it poses things in succession, and this continuous, restless succession *is* time (and so time derives from eternity, but eternity is beyond time). The Soul is life stretching and hence flowing into successive moments whilst being loaded with the past moments: it is time in past, present and future. By contemplating downwards, the Soul orders all things of the world, by contemplating itself it preserves itself, by contemplating upwards towards the Intellect, the Soul thinks (which is at the origin of its creative activity). It is in the Soul that there is plurality (the Many). Indeed, Plotinus distinguishes the supreme Soul from the particular souls: matter plays a role in it (drawing from Aristotle's thesis that forms are individuated by matter), but matter itself is the soul deprived of its link with the One, total deprivation of the positivity that is in the One; matter is absence of being, or at most the last tail of being. This idea will be picked up by the philosopher Henri Bergson (amongst others) when he refers to individual living beings as an arrest of the flow of life and to spatiality as the arrest of the activity of the conscience (see Chapter 3). The possibility to contemplate upwards enables the Soul, and each soul, to return to the One (to the supreme unity). This occurs not like in Plato through 'Eros' (love) or in

Aristotle through virtue, but rather through ecstasy, that is, by dispossession of any alterity (hence any duality or multiplicity), as the only way to achieve the infinite accretion of the self is by dissolving the self into the One, by undertaking the abandonment of the individual alone on her/his own (the sole individual) to *the* Sole (the One).

Plotinus's philosophy represents an inexhaustible fount of ideas (consider the inexhaustible implications of understanding of thinking as contemplating, creating, desiring) and a powerful reminder of what Greek philosophy meant when claiming that 'the horizon of being is the horizon of thought': one of the major achievements of Greek philosophy.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* a large number, probably most of the key conceptual tools that are being used across all the branches of knowledge, thereby including the modern sciences, have been elaborated and, often, brought to the utmost levels of perfection in the Classical Age of the Greek civilisation. By way of example, the very notion of causality and the conception of knowledge as 'understanding the causes of things' – which underpins so much of modern inquiry that calls itself 'scientific' (knowledge that is achieved through rigorous methods) – has been wrought out by the Greek philosophers, notably Plato and Aristotle. The application of these conceptual tools from philosophy may be developed in even more direct a way for the field of PA, which is far from having become an independent science with its problems unproblematically stated and its concepts and methods of inquiry uncontroversially standardised. An example is the usefulness of revisiting the four causes elaborated by Aristotle as a coherent system, whereby in the field of PA (like e.g. the field of international relations) it is also the final cause and the formal cause – not just the efficient or the material cause – to be meaningfully employed for the progress of knowledge in the field (this point is widely elaborated in Chapter 6). Importantly, the very branch of political philosophy as a distinct area within philosophy has been established and has taken form through the works of – most notably – Plato and Aristotle. Chapter 5 discusses the application of political philosophy more systematically to the field of PA, notably by focusing the issue of 'legitimacy', what makes a political system – and, as part of it, public governance and public administration – 'just' and hence 'acceptable' for the members of the political community (i.e. for the administered). Finally, ethical issues become centre stage, especially during the Hellenistic period, sowing the seeds for the development of the 'virtue' discourse and the key question of the significance of the practice of virtuous behaviour for the quality of public governance.

## PATRISTIC PHILOSOPHY

The Patristic philosophy was elaborated by the ‘Fathers of the Church’ (*patres* is the plural for ‘father’ in Latin, hence the term patristic) during the first centuries AC. Believers in the Christian revelation, they strove for elaborating a deeper understanding of the revealed faith – the Christian theology – and by doing so they also carried out a powerful synthesis between Christian revelation and classical Greco–Roman philosophical thought. With the spread of the Christian faith across the expanses of the Roman Empire, which in the first centuries AC stretched from nowadays England to the Middle East, from Central Europe to the Sahara Desert, encompassing all the Mediterranean basin, the (Judeo–) Christian cultural and philosophical revolution occurred and informed Western philosophy and culture forever.

We dwell here briefly on some of the tenets of the Christian revolution of special significance for philosophical speculation. First, the very notion of monotheism, the affirmation of God as ‘the only one’ (‘Thou shalt have no other gods’, states one of the Ten Commandments proclaimed in the Bible, Exodus 20:3 = Deuteronomy 5:7); a theological stance radically diverse from Greco–Roman polytheism. Second, the notion of the absolute transcendence of God (hence of Being). God is conceived of as totally ‘other’ from the world in a way that differs from the horizon of the Greek philosophical speculation, which tended to see the entirety of reality – both ideal and material – within the horizon of immanence (with the partial exception of Plotinus’s thought). Third, the very notion of creation, that is, that entities are created by God out of nothingness. In this perspective, being is gifted to entities, entities are brought into being by Being (God): this is a perspective that in a sense overcomes the argument by Parmenides that ‘Never shall this prevail, that Non-Being is’: non-being is not, but entities – things that are – can come to being out of nothingness, and this occurs through an act of creation.

If these notions are novel to the Greek thought, at the same time the Greek thought contributed to shape the way in which the Christian revelation was culturally informed and propounded. When Christ is referred to as ‘The Logos’, as in the most famous prologue of the Gospel According to John, the findings of Greek philosophy should all be taken into account in interpreting the meaning of the words used by John (John’s Gospel is written in Greek): the Logos is the ‘Word’, and notably the most important word in any statement, that is, the ‘Verb’, but *logos* in Greek is also reason and the order of things, as we already saw in Parmenides: ‘the same is being and thinking, the same is thinking and what thinking is in function of, because without being, in which it is expressed, you will not find thinking: in fact [thinking] is or will be nothing outside of being’ (Parmenides, *Fragments*, B8). Being and *logos* as reason are

interpenetrated; they are the same. When John refers to Christ as The Logos in the perspective of creation ('all that was made, was made through Him'), from a philosophical standpoint he entails that the very being of all things is one with the Person of Christ.

The Trinitarian conception of God has had huge implications for philosophical thought. In Christian theology God is conceived of as one substance and three Persons, who in the order of the relation are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the substance are one and only one substance. Later theological and philosophical speculation elaborated on the Trinitarian mystery conceiving of the nature of the Trinitarian relation as person. (Thomas Aquinas conceived of the relation of total and absolute love between the Father and the Son as having itself nature of person: the third Person of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit – *is* the total and absolute love between God the Father and God the Son; theologically and ontologically, total and absolute love *is* Person.) St Augustine [one substance, three persons that according to the category of relation are the Father and the Son and the Spirit], the German philosopher Leibniz, in addressing the Trinitarian mystery, wrote of 'an entity, by which an entity is related to an entity' – the persons of the Trinity are entities that cannot exist without other entities, hence essentially relational (see the important work on the Trinitarian theology of Leibniz by Antognazza, 2007). The category of relation, encountered in Aristotle as one category of being, becomes central in philosophical reflection in and through theological thought: this may have sown the seeds of much of modern intellectual thought, including the non-theological one, in which the category of relation is centre stage. The turn in the 17th century from the quest for the substances of things, which characterises all classical philosophy throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance and was still present in 17th century rationalists, to the search for relations that features so prominently in modern and contemporary philosophy (see Chapter 3) – relations between things (the search for functional relations between phenomena is a key trait distinguishing the natural sciences since the scientific revolution of the 17th century from the previous approaches to the study of nature) and relations between the subject and the object of knowing – may be argued to have been profoundly affected and informed by centuries of theological reflection on the mystery of the Trinity.

The faith in the incarnation of God in history in a man, Jesus Christ, brings with it a revolution in the conception of the human being. For the Greco-Roman culture, the human being was simply a part of the totality and did not occupy any special place. It had a distinctively rational nature (the possessing of rationality singled out humankind from all other living creatures), but this distinctive trait did not endow humanity with a special place in the world. The Greek civilisation placed the human race as part and parcel of the cosmos, of the general order of the universe. With the Christian revolution, the human

being becomes central in the history and order of the creation (as we shall see, with modern philosophy the human mind as the subject of knowing will enjoy a special place and will become for many philosophers the starting point of philosophising). This entails a radical anthropocentrism – the ‘special place’ reserved to mankind, chosen and loved by God in a special way above all other creatures. The human being is conceived of as free, and with a special possibility: to adhere to the will of God. The capacity to adhere freely to the will of God makes each and every human being occupy a special place in history, which, in the Christian perspective, becomes the history of salvation.

The revolution of values brought about by the Christian faith revolves around the centrality of love (as charity and mercy): the Greek notion of love as *éros* permeating the philosophy of Plato – a form of love that somehow presupposes the lover to possess ‘agency’ and to be active in striving towards the object of love – is reinterpreted through the lens of the total gratuity, whereby each and every human being is first of all recipient of the love of God (mercy), is first and foremost passive, rather than active, and only by virtue of the received love becomes active (charity). Christian love, the sacrificial love, the love that donates itself totally, is indicated through the Latin word *caritas* and the Greek term *agape* – a notion of love different from the love of friendship (*philia*), the love that drives the desire of joining the beloved (*éros*) or even love as affection and empathy, ‘liking’ someone or something (*storge*). As part of the Christian tenet of the centrality of love, the care for each person – irrespective of her/his origin and condition – becomes a central value. The seeds of principles that the contemporary women and men hold dear, like the universality of human rights and of ensuing ambitious political–social and administrative arrangements, like the building of ‘welfare states’ or ‘welfare societies’ aimed at ‘taking care’ with a universalistic thrust of a wide range of needs of the human person from education to health and social care, have been sown by the Christian revolution.

Christianity also introduced a linear (rather than cyclical) conception of time. The Greek had different notions of time, and some philosophers (e.g. Anaximenes) thought of it as circular, the eternal recurrence of the same, a notion later picked up by Nietzsche when he advocated a revolution against Christianity and the restoration of the spirit of the ancient Greek, the 4th century BC Athens (see Chapter 3). In Christianity, time is linear and proceeds from an origin (the creation) to an end (the *Parousia*, the return of Christ on earth and the Final Judgement). It is also in St Augustine that the conception of time as pertaining to the subject rather than the object becomes a central question in philosophy.

Christian theology brought about a new way of conceiving of evil (the giant of Patristic and paramount figure of spiritualism St Augustine elaborated an interpretation of evil as the absence of being: if all that is has been created

by God, then it must be good, and evil as the absence of goodness has consequently the ontological status of non-being) that has since permeated Western thought (see notably Augustine, 397/400).

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* Christianity has permeated every aspect of Western civilisation and as part of it Western philosophy (the main subject of this book), hence it is nearly impossible to single out specific areas which may track the influence on the Christian revolution on PA more specifically. However, if one is to be pointed out, this would probably be the notion of *charitas* as gratuitous and absolute love: this conception underpins notions of benevolence and the caring for each human being which has shaped such a large part of the ways in which public services have been governed and provided over the centuries, at least in the Western world (and in many regards later on ‘exported’ though the massive forms of policy transfer effected by Western colonialism). Moreover and also crucially, however impressively complex the question is, it may be claimed that key intellectual roots of modern age ‘universal human rights’ and contemporary notions of human person have been shaped by the Christian conception of love, and, as a manifestation of that, that the deeper and longer term roots of social rights and the welfare state/welfare society also lie to a significant extent in the spread of the Christian conception of love as *charitas*.

## MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

We start our brief tour of medieval philosophy with the work of Anselm of Canterbury. Born in Aosta, located in the north-west of today’s Italy (and for this reason also known as Anselm of Aosta), he was monk, prior and abbot at the abbey of Bec, in the south-east of England. A distinguished theologian and philosopher, he was also involved in a dispute over a question destined to dominate medieval philosophical thought: the dispute over the nature of the universal concepts (see later). He worked out a proof of the existence of God that would enjoy an extraordinary longevity. The gist of the argument is that God can be defined as

something than which nothing greater can be conceived ... But for sure, that than which nothing greater can be conceived cannot exist in the understanding alone. For suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can thought to exist in reality, which is greater ... therefore it is beyond doubt that there exists, both in the understanding and in reality, a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. (*Proslogion*, c.2, reported in Kenny, 2010, p. 478)

It is the very concept of God that makes it certain that it exists. In fact, whoever denies the existence of God must have the concept of God, otherwise he would not know what he is denying. If he has the concept of God, then he is con-

tradicting himself in denying it, because the very concept of that than which nothing greater can be conceived implies that it exists also in reality, which is greater than existing only in understanding. This argument has been called the ontological proof of the existence of God. In working out his argument, Anselm also introduced the notion of imaginary world, the idea of other possible worlds than the one in which we happen to be, to argue that God must exist in the real world. Both the ontological proof and the methodological idea of conceiving of alternative possible worlds to speculate about the property of this one would endure the centuries and are still matter for lively philosophical and theological debates.

We can now turn to a major figure of philosophy: Thomas Aquinas. Most of his work is developed in the *Summa Theologiae*, a systematic investigation and discussion of key philosophical and theological themes, and also the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. The style adopted in his works provides the author and us readers with rigour and self-discipline in the line of argumentation (Kenny, 2010, p. 309): an introductory set of challenges or difficulties against the position in favour of which Aquinas intends to argue are introduced (usually a triad). These objections to the thesis argued for are followed by a consideration on the other side (introduced by *Sed contra*: ‘Against this position’, or ‘But on the other hand’), usually drawn from an authoritative text. After this, the main position propounded by the Aquinas is developed. By adopting this style, in developing his main position the Aquinas has to systematically engage with the contrary positions of which the reader is aware and whose rationale and underpinnings had initially been introduced. A thorough exercise of self-discipline, which is carried out throughout the discussion of virtually all the major philosophical themes – from the existence of God to the conditions of knowledge to the roots of human liberty – wrapped up in a work (see Aquinas, 1258/1264) which amounts to more than 2,000,000 words!

A key notion in the philosophy of the Aquinas is the differentiation between essence *and* existence, which coincide in God and are distinct in all the entities. The essence is the ‘what it is’ of a thing, its form: it is basically the Aristotelian conception of form seen above: what gives something the form that makes it to be what it is. If in God essence and existence coincide (because God *is* being, it does not *have* being), for any other entity essence does not identify itself with existence. This means that those things that exist could also not exist and, equally important, could also never have existed, and could not exist anymore in the future: they are *contingent*. The world as a whole is contingent: it may be or not be. The world does not exist by its own virtue, but by virtue of something other, whose essence is identical to its existence: God. It is for this reason that Aquinas’s philosophy has been called the metaphysics of the *actus essendi*, of the (contingent) ‘act of there being’. This metaphysics purports the metaphysical contingency of all entities: they receive and partake



of being, they have being (that is, they *are*) because they have received (passive stance) being and participate of it. This is a conception that relies on the notion of ‘analogy’, which plays a central role in Aquinas’s philosophy: the participation to being by entities, whereby the cause (Being, in uppercase) leaves a trace of it in the effects (beings or entities), although entities only *have* being: they possess it, because they have been gifted the participation to being. Analogy entails that between the Creator and the created things, between being and entities, there is only a difference of grade: what is predicated of entities can also be predicated of God, albeit not in the same way or with the same intensity. Significantly, the cause of all entities is not necessitated in providing the existence: being is granted as a pure gift, and it is granted by the absolutely other (which entails the absolute transcendence between God and the created entities). In this perspective the key questions that philosophy addresses can be formulated as (see Reale and Antiseri, 1988, in particular pp. 424–5, Vol. 1): why being rather than nothingness (this a question at the centre of the philosophies of Leibniz and Spinoza; see later)? And why does being allow/enable entities to be (this question plays centre stage in the metaphysics of 20th century philosopher Martin Heidegger)?

If all entities participate of the same being, because the cause (the Creator) has left a trace – an effect – in all things, then there is a fundamental comparability of all things amongst themselves. The intellect can detect similarities as well as dissimilarities between things, and hence it can make judgements about the things of the world by applying knowledge gained about one experience to other experiences, that is, through reasoning by analogy. Referring in an analogical way to one thing means that that one thing participates something of another one, albeit transcending it: but knowledge may be attained by analogy of a known thing to unknown things. Thus, another related way of employing analogical reasoning pertains to the sphere of the philosophy of knowledge: one way of gaining knowledge about one thing is by identifying profiles in which that one thing participates something of another one, has something in common with another one, which transcends the first. This notion has been widely used in theology, whereby knowledge of God or God’s attributes may occur by analogy with things of this world, which, although completely distinct from God, may partake some properties – these properties being knowledgeable to human beings.<sup>6</sup> Analogy, with varied meanings and underlying defining and epistemological claims about ‘external validity’, is also a central notion in many contemporary disciplines, whereby the claim is that knowledge may be attained by analogy of a known thing with unknown things. This also applies to the field of PA, where countless studies are implicitly or explicitly based on analogical reasoning: transferring knowledge generated in one domain to another domain, grounded on commonalities of properties between the two.

We return to reasoning by analogy in Chapter 3 when discussing issues of philosophy of knowledge, notably certain critiques to Popper's epistemology.

As it has clearly arisen, the distinction between potentiality and actuality is central in the philosophy of Aquinas.<sup>7</sup> All entities of the world, all events of history may be but also may not be. Apart from God, whose essence also entails the existence, all other things are simply a potentiality to being, an attitude to exist (*'id quod potest esse'*, 'that which can be'). The potentiality–actuality distinction is of crucial significance not just in the realm of metaphysical speculation: this notion is also central in any realm of the individual and social life, and hence notably, for the specific purposes of this book, for all the applied disciplines such as management or public administration that aim at 'making things happen' (one definition of 'management'). The underpinning of this or any similar definition statement about management and public management is the distinction between potentiality and actuality, and how to transform the potential into actual. Leading scholars like Bardach (1998) noticed that in the social sciences, and notably in public administration and policy, there seems to be an inadequate treatment of the notion of potential (for example, what is the meaning of the claim that if a 'good practice' had one effect under a given set of circumstances, then it would make similar effects apparent under different circumstances? How do we deal with this 'potential to make change happen', and also how do we deal with the counterfactual arguments that a practice, which allegedly 'worked' in one case, 'could have had' another effect under only slightly changed circumstances in the other case?). Counterfactual arguments are crucial in many design sciences where the objective is to shape the world in a different way (by adopting a new management technique or a new public policy, by appointing a new 'leader', and the like) in order to achieve 'better' outcomes.

Another key distinction in Aquinas's philosophy is between ontological truth (*adequatio rei ad intellectum dei*: the adequacy of a(ny) thing to God's intellect) and logical truth, which concerns us as the subject of knowing: the adequacy of our intellect to the thing (*adequatio intellectus nostri ad rem*). The notion of 'truth' is a widely debated issue over the history of philosophy: Aquinas's position, following Aristotle's, is that the criterion of verity is the correspondence of the concepts in the intellect with 'how things are' – although this does not mean that the concept is the thing, but simply that correspondence to things is the truth criterion.

Aquinas was an influential intellectual of his time, but he also had an incredibly powerful afterlife in the form of a philosophical school of thought, called 'scholastic', which continued for centuries and still is alive, generally referred to as neo-scholastic; this stream of thought has been developed over the centuries based on the body of philosophy elaborated by St Thomas Aquinas. Philosophers belonging to the scholastics are also called 'schoolmen'.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* like for Classical Greek philosophy, medieval philosophy has provided a huge repertoire of conceptual tools that permeate knowledge generation – notions that can probably more easily be applied in a direct way in a field of inquiry that is far from having become an independent science with its problems unproblematically stated and standardised methods. More specifically, we revisit neo-scholastics and possible implications for PA in Chapter 4, notably in relation to the key notion of the distinction between potentiality and actuality.

## THE DISPUTE OVER THE UNIVERSALS AND ITS CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE

A philosophical dispute that raged during the medieval time, and whose significance hasn't lost its actuality, is that over the nature of the universals<sup>8</sup> – a problem whose terms are fraught with implications also for the more circumscribed purposes of our book, namely outlining some path(way)s for more systematically employing philosophy into PA. The matter of the dispute is the foundation of universal concepts intended as terms predicated of a multiplicity of individual things, for example 'human being' or 'animal'. It regards the issue of whether universals are real (of which there are two versions: they do exist as ideal objects, more a Platonic position; or they are the product of a procession of abstraction by reason, but yet only individuals are real in the proper sense – Thomas Aquinas) or not. The latter position is called nominalism: universals are only nouns (*flatus vocis*, the utterance of voice). The dispute over universals produced an incredibly lively debate during the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries. Giants in this debate were scholars Guillaume de Champeaux (in English: William of Champeaux, 1070–1121), Pierre Abélard (1079–1142), Roscelin of Compiègne (Latinised as Roscellinus Compendiensis or Rucelinus, 1050–1125), St Bonaventure (1221–1274), Robert Grosseteste (1175–1253), Joh Wycliff (1320–1384), St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), William Ockham (1285–1374) and John Duns Scotus (1265–1308).

The first position is that of (radical) *realism*, initially stated by William of Champeaux: universals are metaphysical entities actually subsisting. The problem with this position is that if universals exist as things (albeit conceptual things), then all individuals should be the same, not just in the sense of having the same characters (like Siamese twins), but exactly the same (what else explains the mingling with haphazard elements?). More subtly, the objection (e.g. in Pierre Abélard in *Le Pallet*, 1079 – Chalon-sur-Saône, 21 aprile 1142) is that the universal for its very nature is something that can be predicated of a plurality of entities (in Latin: *quod notum est predicari de pluribus*). If this holds, it cannot be a thing in itself, an objective entity which, as such, cannot be predicated of another entity (in Latin: *res de re non praedicatur*). On a more

evaluative rather than analytical note, it may be reckoned that the individual would be fundamentally de-valued if it were not an individual, if each individual were at most a manifestation of one and the same universal thing.

At the very opposite we find the position of (radical) *nominalism*: nothing exists beyond individuals (in Latin: *nihil est praeter individuum*) – universals do not exist, what remains of them is the physical utterance of a voice. For this position universals are at most vague labels used to classify objects – but they cannot be predicated of things (they don't say anything of what a thing is, 'of what which is in common with a class of other things', to use a modern-day terminology drawn from the study of logic).

A third position called moderate realism can be delineated as follows. It is individuals that exist, but reason can distinguish, separate and, in a sense, abstract the characteristics that qualify and are in common to all individuals of the same species. It is on these elements in common (*similitudo* or *status communis*), as captured by the mind, that universals – universal concepts and notions – are founded. Universals are concepts. They lie in the mind (of human beings, as God's intelligence may differ), and signify the *status communis*, the common elements or properties that qualify a species or category of individuals (the common properties of all human beings, or of all dogs, or of all Total Quality Management systems, to hint back to Pollitt's example recalled in Chapter 1, because the notion of universal concept applies not only to 'natural' entities but also to man-made entities, artefacts like the deliberately engineered social systems for the running of a public organisation, like a strategic planning system, a management accounting and control system, a human resources management system, a Total Quality Management system, and the like).

Another way to formulate the problem is whether universals are *ante rem* (first universals exist, then things are made as copies from that pattern); *post rem* (universals exist only in the mind that abstracts them, if they exist at all), or *in re* (universals exist only in concrete individuals, from where they are abstracted by the mind) (Reale and Antiseri, 1988, pp. 396–400).

The dispute over the universals continues to our days, often intermingling with the issue of how to interpret Plato's ideas. Logicians and analysts of language have tried out a variety of approaches: Frege's propositional logic and predicate calculus; the theory of classes; the notion of ideas as paradigms, and so on. However, it seems that in crucially important respects the basic terms of the problem are still the same on which medieval scholars debated quite a number of centuries ago.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA*: as widely discussed later in the book (Chapter 6), the actuality of the medieval debate over the nature of the universals is witnessed by the observation that where a scholar stands in that debate may be closely linked to where s/he stands in conceiving of the social sciences in general and of public governance specifically. Realist

positions in the conception of the universals appear hardly compatible with radical social constructivism, which tends to be aligned with a nominalist conception of the universals, and it appears the opposite may also hold: nominalist positions in the conception of universals are difficult to reconcile with realist positions across the whole gamut (we refer the reader to Chapter 6, where contemporary social constructivism and critical realism in PA are extensively discussed).

## LATE MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

If the scholastic philosophy tended to dominate the 13th and 14th century, the criticisms moved it to pave the way to a ‘crisis’ of the entire medieval philosophy and, later, to the dawn of the philosophy of the modern age. Such crisis was triggered also by the critiques formulated by John Duns Scotus and especially William of Ockham.

Scotus advocated taking simple or univocal concepts as the starting point of philosophising, and claimed the univocal, individual entity to be object of intellection (his writings are collated in Duns Scotus, 1950).<sup>9</sup> Taking a differing stance from analogical reasoning, he claims that transcendental predicates are univocal, not analogical, and transcendental disjunctions apply to whatever there is: every being must be either actual or potential, either necessary or contingent, either finite or infinite – and this property of transcendental disjunctions to be univocal applies to God as well. (As we shall see later, Kant turned this perspective upside down and located transcendentals in the mind of the knowing subject, rather than as properties of being as such.) Scotus also introduced a subtle distinction between subjective and objective potentiality. Subjective potentiality is for Scotus what the Aristotelian notion of potentiality is about: for Scotus, Aristotle by potentiality intended the potentiality of the ‘subject of the power’ to become something (the potentiality is ‘endowed’ to whoever or whatever holds the power of becoming something), for example an embryo can become a child, a child an adult human being, and so forth. Objective potentiality occurs when something receives the potentiality to become: it is the *terminus* (recipient) of the power as opposed to the subject of the power to become. For Scotus, things can also come into being as terminus of power held elsewhere. This paves the way to the notion of synchronic contingency: possibilities, not compatible in one world, are possible in different possible worlds – a notion employed by modern philosophers who have widely used the notion of alternative possible worlds. (Leibniz, who famously spoke of this as the best of all possible worlds, is attributed the introduction of the notion of ‘possible worlds’ into philosophical debate, but the roots of this concept lie in the notion of objective potentiality introduced by John Duns Scotus, and before him in the structure of the argument formulated by

Anselm to demonstrate the existence of God.) To gauge the significance of this notion, it may be considered that any time a counterfactual argument is used (arguments like ‘what would happen/would have happened if something were different/had been different from what actually occurred?’, ‘what alternative outcomes would occur/would have occurred if something had been different from what actually happened?’), we are somehow resorting to the philosophical notion of alternative worlds,<sup>10</sup> whose way was paved by Scotus’s notion of objective potentiality. Counterfactual arguments are crucial in many design sciences (Simon, 1969/1981/1996), like PA, whose goal is taming knowledge for shaping the world in different ways in order to achieve alternative ‘better’ outcomes (e.g. what alternative outcomes may be attained by adopting a certain new public management technique or a new public policy, by appointing a new ‘leader’ at the helm of an organisation, and the like).

The crisis of medieval philosophical thinking is strongly associated with the critiques to the scholastic formulated by Ockham<sup>11</sup> (see for key writings Ockham, 1985), and notably his criterion of investigation of reality known as ‘Ockham’s razor’, which is stated as follows: ‘*entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*’, that is, ‘you must not add any entity or notion that is not strictly necessary’ (in order to explain something). It is a very ‘modern scientific’ approach to theorising whereby parsimony in theorising is highly valued. From his philosophy – whose corpus is obviously much wider than just the statement of the criterion of the ‘razor’ – it is entailed that we as human beings cannot know the essence of things, only the qualities or accidents of things that experience reveals to us (this is the starting point of much of the philosophical tradition of the empiricism, which will flourish in Britain). Nor can we know by analogy – there is a hiatus between finite and infinite, and only the pure act of creative will of God can link the two. Ockham goes the other way around than the ancient Greeks, at least in Plato’s tradition because Aristotle has a differing stance on this, for whom the core question is: how does individuation derive from ideas (ideal archetypes)? Instead Ockham’s position is that reality is ‘all in the singular’, only individuals are real. This position may of course be criticised – and it has been widely – but it had a huge influence on subsequent philosophical thought. Amongst his many contributions to philosophy, Ockham also introduced the distinction between mental terms (which is the same) and verbal terms (oral or written, which change across languages), a concept that prefigures the notion developed by the linguist Chomsky of the distinction between superficial and inner structure of a sentence (the superficial structure changes between languages and within a language, the inner structure is the same): a notion widely used in linguistic studies and that represent a major component of contemporary philosophical research work – as well as of discourse analysis, which is widely employed in the humanities and the social sciences alike.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* like for medieval philosophy more widely, late medieval philosophy has furnished the modern scholar with key concepts that permeate knowledge generation, like the principle of parsimony in introducing notions when theorising or the notion of counterfactuals, which have a prominent role in PA inquiry.

## RENAISSANCE

Situated between the medieval and the modern age, Renaissance as an epoch stands out, distinct from both medieval age and modern age. The Renaissance had its birth as well as its zenith in the Italy of seigniories, principalities and republics, and of the innumerable genial artists that operated in the peninsula during the period that spanned, approximately, from the second half of the 14th century to the first half of the 16th century. From Italy, the Renaissance as a philosophical, artistic and cultural movement spread throughout Europe, in different waves and with highly varied impact. Also referred to as ‘humanism’, Renaissance put the human at the centre (intended not just as the human species, but all that is ‘human’). It is a multifaceted epoch, immensely rich from a cultural viewpoint, where artists and literates are the main protagonists, possibly more than philosophers in the strictest sense, and here we can only touch upon a very few of the ideas that were delved into and debated across Europe during the Renaissance.

One is the idea of the vocation to perfection of human beings, omnipresent in humanistic writers: we will discuss its significance for government and public administration when we debate the role that virtues play in good government and good governance in Chapter 6. Another powerful idea, of clear neo-platonic imprint, is the notion that each human being is a micro-cosmos; it is the idea that all that is in reality is somehow reflected in each and every person: a powerful reminder that in investigating reality scholars always hold two options: alongside the option of ‘watching out’ to what is empirically detectable, scholars also always hold the alternative – complementary – option of looking inside oneself, into our own conscience and soul. For example, what is ‘ethical’ in the behaviour of public servants may be studied by observing actual behaviours, but also by deriving from our conscience what is meant by ethical behaviour, under given circumstances, possibly also thought experiments.

A third key idea is that of the immutability and universality of human nature, which is powerfully summed up in a key motto of Renaissance: *homo sum: nihil human mihi alienum est* – ‘I am a human being, nothing that is human is alien to me’ – meaning that each and every human being encapsulates in herself/himself the entirety of humankind. Key thinkers of this epoch who strongly argued about the immutability and universality of human nature are

Machiavelli and Guicciardini. In the field of PA there are different positions on this theme, and the implications of the immutability, or otherwise, of human nature are of enormous magnitude for the way in which the discipline is studied and practised. One such implication is whether we can learn from history or not. Machiavelli argues that we can, and one underlying reason is exactly that human nature stays the same over time – which is not to say that it is impermeable to influence from the environment, but that the nature of mind and soul (the capacities to understand and the motives to act, when conditions allow) stay over time and across latitudes. Releasing this assumption may lead to very different inferences about what we can learn from history – indeed it may ultimately mean giving up the very possibility of learning from history.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* the education of the Christian Prince – hence the question of what skills and qualities are required of governors – has been central to Renaissance thought, which has thus furnished the posterity with reflections whose enduring value cannot be underrated about the ‘profession’ of governing and administering, and the requisite virtues and skills required for this purpose. Indeed, some of the key contributions we discuss widely in Chapter 7 for their contemporary significance and relevance to a range of PA topics – like *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli and *Utopia* by Thomas More – are literary masterpieces of Renaissance.

## THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

It does not appear an overstatement to say that the scientific revolution that occurred over the 16th and 17th century, and the ensuing Industrial Revolution of the 18th century, changed the world.

The two revolutions are deeply interlinked, and the philosopher Francis Bacon (‘the philosopher of the industrial age’) is probably its leading exponent: knowledge must be capable of helping practice, and he famously linked knowledge and power in the statement that ‘knowledge is power’. Many of the tenets of ‘modern’ science were conceived during this epoch, by Bacon as well as physicists like Galileo and Newton, including the notion that knowledge is public (the procedures whereby knowledge is gained must be made public to ensure replicability), inter-subjective, progressive and cumulative (given the statement of problem and method, consistent accumulation of knowledge becomes possible), grown and tested through repeated observations. From this conception derived a different organisation of intellectual work and of the academy: one akin to our contemporary conception of knowledge production by groups of researchers studying similar problems with public methods of inquiry and repeated, precise observations. Knowledge, in this perspective, proceeds step by step from induction based on a larger and larger number of observations, and it does not rely on the authority of the past, in stark contrast



with the primacy of the *auctoritas*, the idea of appealing to the authority of illustrious scholars of the past to justify a claim, which characterised medieval thought. Indeed, in the new intellectual ambiance of the scientific revolution the authority of the past may, and in a certain sense must, be challenged: ‘*Nullius in verba*’ (‘nothing is in words’) is the motto of the Royal Society of London for the Promotion of Natural Knowledge, chartered in 1662 by King Charles II and whose establishment was heavily influenced by Bacon’s philosophy. Facts and experiments,<sup>12</sup> not the authority of past thinkers – or the *idola*, idols, that society and tradition produce and that encumber the understanding of things – drive the way forward for Bacon and his contemporaries, in what came at the time to be termed ‘scientific knowledge’. This is in many respects still the way in which not only the natural sciences but also the social sciences proceed – or at least this is the conventional term of reference propounded for how they should proceed, although alternative paradigms contend this claim (we will discuss the terms of this contention in the field of PA in Chapter 4).

Bacon also provided insightful views into the way in which the social context, within which scientific production occurs, may powerfully affect (and ‘bias’) the production of scientific knowledge. He may in this sense be attributed the qualification of the first sociologist of knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Bacon also introduced the idea of the elimination by induction of false theories, in order to leave but one ‘correct’ theory. This is known as the *experimentum crucis*, ‘the crucial experiment’ or literally ‘the experiment of the crux’, as a way to call between two competing theories and discern which one holds and which one to discard. The episteme of this method for testing theories, however, was criticised by Karl Popper (on the ground that infinite alternative theories can always be produced, hence no experiment is really a test between two theories) as well as by Pierre Duhem and others (see Chapter 3). Indeed, in the natural sciences, and even more so in the social sciences, rarely can it be spoken of ‘crucial experiments’ that can decisively discriminate between two or more theories and attribute validity (albeit provisional) to one theory and rule out on a definitive basis the others.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* the modern conception of ‘science’ and scientific knowledge was conceived of in Europe in this epoch, and these notions remain the term of comparison for all endeavours to set up any ‘science of PA’ or the ‘administrative sciences’. Although social sciences took off mostly a century later during the Enlightenment and the 19th century, many of the seeds of modern social sciences have been sown in this epoch.

## EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

The commencement of early modern philosophy is often associated with the French philosopher René Descartes (see notably Descartes, 1637; and more widely the collection of readings in Descartes, 1998) and with his most famous approach of the ‘methodological doubt’, summed up in the statement: ‘*cogito, ergo sum*’ ‘I think, then I am’. The statement is however crippled of a key component, the full statement being: ‘I doubt, then I think (doubting being an act of thinking), then I am’. The doubting by the reflective subject becomes the commencement of philosophy because nothing else can constitute a ‘certainty’ from which philosophising can take the move. It is in this sense that Descartes has brought about the ‘revolution of the subject’ that characterises modern philosophy: the thinking subject is the commencement of philosophy (and for Descartes the only thing of which the thinking subject may be certain is its own doubting).

He also introduced a duality that is still haunting the contemporary man: the dualism materiality/spirituality, that has permeated the debate to our days, owes much to Descartes’s distinction between *res cogitans* (literally ‘the thinking thing’, the thinking substance) and *res extensa* (literally, ‘the extended thing’, the thing whose defining property is to have an extension). It has been noted that this distinction, and especially the notion of matter as inherently defined by its having an extension, was profoundly attuned to the Newtonian physics that was emerging at the time, but is put into question by the developments of modern physics. The argument of Descartes in a nutshell is that what remains of every material object, after decomposing it, is its extension, and hence this is its ‘substance’. But modern physics has shattered this perspective: the functional equivalence of energy and mass (stated by Einstein’s famous equation), the indeterminacy of position and movement of small objects like atomic and sub-atomic particles,<sup>14</sup> and recent (though contested) notions like dark matter and antimatter<sup>15</sup> are all casting serious doubts on the property of extension as being the qualifying feature of matter.

However, Descartes’s conception of the universe as made of simple, dull matter everywhere, without ends (in both the finalistic sense and the physical sense), without borders and without purposes was a perfect fit for the way in which Newtonian physics was progressing, and the way in which it was getting rid of medieval and Renaissance notions of nature. Nature is in this conception not made of substances to be known, it is just matter whose relations and interactions can be measured, that are entirely expressible through mathematical formulas. The discovery of such mathematical formulas was the task of physics. It is at this time that physics becomes the ‘second discipline’ in ranking after philosophy. In this epoch physics and philosophy become the

trunk and the roots, respectively, of knowledge, with all the other disciplines being placed in a subsidiary position. During this period the idea also arises that animals could be just machines (Descartes added a question mark to the statement: it was a question he posed, not a claim he made). In this dull world, the human being is singled out as unique amongst living beings because it is the only one to be made of two substances at the same time: the thinking thing and the extended thing.<sup>16</sup>

Descartes, like other constructors of novel metaphysical systems like Spinoza and Leibniz, can be ascribed, broadly speaking, to the camp of ‘rationalism’, at least in the very basic sense that they make the assumption that ideas are at least partly innate and hence that reason can proceed, to some extent, ‘on its own’ in knowing the world. In this scheme, the camp opposite to that of rationalism is empiricism, where this means assuming that all ideas derive from the senses. This is by far an oversimplification, but somehow may serve the purpose of shedding light on one key point distinguishing diverse philosophies: those belonging to the camp of rationalism and those in the camp of empiricism. The distinction between rationalism and empiricism lingers and appears far from being overcome, and today scholars still tend to fall (though not squarely) into either camp (in the field of PA, this point is stated by Riccucci, 2010; see Chapter 4 in particular where she works out a classification of the philosophical stance of contemporary public administrationists).

We can now turn to the other builders of great metaphysical systems of the 17th century: Spinoza, Leibniz and Malebranche. Baruch Spinoza was the philosopher of ‘pure necessity’ and the immanence of all in God; Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz of the transcendence of the absolute Being-God.

Spinoza (for an English edition of his main works see Spinoza, 1951; see also Spinoza, 1677) is rationalist in that his philosophical thought commences from one idea that does not derive from experience: there is only one substance, this is God – the demonstration of whose existence occurs along the lines of the ontological proof – and all the rest is derived according to the criterion of absolute necessity. In this perspective, nothing exists that is contingent, and hence nothing exists outside of God. This position may be classified as belonging to pantheism (all is God) and monism (there is only one substance). For Spinoza, the *res cogitans* and *res extensa* are just two out of infinite attributes of God-Being (God as the totality of being). The assertion of the category of necessity as the ‘dominant property’ of Being is part of the bequest of Spinoza that will have a huge influence on later modern philosophers, notably Hegel (whose philosophical system also owes to Spinoza the pantheistic vision, although for Hegel it is more appropriate to talk of pantheism: all is ‘in’ God). Classical metaphysics relied on the transcendental disjunction: something that is, either it is necessary or it is contingent. It did not claim that

one of the two would be the only 'dimension' of Being. Spinoza instead leans towards asserting that necessity is the only category of being.

Leibniz was a genial thinker, active in governmental roles for most of his life, and his philosophical intuitions furnished a wealth of materials for philosophical speculation over the centuries. It is only recently that the majority of his writings have become available, and recent discoveries have shed new light on this genial thinker (see Antognazza, 2009, 2016; for a previous collection of his writings translated into English, see Leibniz, 1988).

Leibniz developed an original philosophical system: the theory of monads (a philosophical system which at face value is quite hard to come to grips with because it is far from intuitive, especially for the contemporary man not plunged into the culture of the epoch). Monad is a word of Greek origin for unity, and it has its roots in Aristotelian notions, notably the notion of form (which we have already encountered and that refers to 'unity and order' as the essence of a thing) and the notion of 'entelechy' as the becoming actual of what is otherwise only potential. Such notions are reinterpreted by Leibniz in original ways by conceiving of Monads as whole worlds or micro-cosmos (an idea of neo-platonic origin that enjoyed wide currency during the Renaissance). For Leibniz, reality is made of monads, whole worlds interconnected (harmonised is the term used by Leibniz) amongst themselves by God. Importantly, for Leibniz reality is made of whole things, intended as objects of intellection: thus, a human being is *not* made by the cells, molecules and atoms that compose her/him at a given moment: this is a spatial understanding of things – but for Leibniz a human being and a cell are two different objects of intellection, and as such they co-exist next to one another, harmonised by God, rather than 'composing' one another in relations of parts and wholes. Leibniz also made an ingenuous attempt to harmonise modern physics (to whose development he himself contributed) and metaphysics, endeavouring to pursue a synthesis that was probably never attempted any more in modern times after the passing away, in Hanover in 1716, of the Philosopher of Leipzig.

Methodologically, Leibniz asserted (assumed) that certain principles, like the a priori principles of non-contradiction and of sufficient reason, are innate, and therefore he may be firmly ascribed to the camp of rationalism.

Nicolas Malebranche is regarded as the main exponent of the philosophy of occasionalism (a stream of thought with a long history in both Christian and Islamic thought, also in relation to the central question of explaining God's miracles and the 'disruption' they bring about to the 'natural' cause-end-effect chains): centred on the idea that God (as *natura naturans*, shaper of everything) is the one and only true cause of everything (*natura naturata*, nature as created), occasionalism is critical of the causal power of creaturely causes, and in its purest form (global occasionalism) treats all other causes as at most 'occasional' (thence the name of 'occasionalism') and God as the only genuine

cause of everything, while in more moderate forms (local occasionalism) it allows in certain domains of reality for creaturely causes to exercise their power, while always upholding that God is the ultimate genuine cause of all (a systematic review of the philosophy of occasionalism, to which we refer widely here, is elaborated by Lee, 2008/2019). The main underpinning of occasionalism is the argument about conservation of the created world to lie in an ‘act of continuous creation’ by God. In a nutshell, the key question here is how the world is kept into being (conservation) by God: if this occurs through a direct, non-mediated act of continuous creation by God, then in the strongest sense God is the only and genuine cause of everything – the logical alternative being that if it suffices that God ‘merely conserves’ things into being, then these creaturely things can wield causal power over each other (and hence their influence cannot be reduced to that of merely occasional causes); intermediate positions may explain forms of local occasionalism.

The nuts and bolts of the philosophy of occasionalism (Malebranche, 1997) can be better appreciated when set in the context of the 17th-century debates on mind–body interactions triggered by Cartesian philosophy, with questions dominating the debate like: what is the causal power of bodies (the extended things) on the thinking things, and vice versa? Or do extended things only have causal powers on other extended things, and thinking things on other thinking things? And so forth. To better set in perspective occasionalism, it is meaningful to ponder on the logical alternatives to it (Lee, 2008/2019): Cartesian interactionism, allowing for creaturely causes to wield power on each other, and Leibnizian ‘pre-established harmony’, whereby substances (monads) only wield causal power on themselves, while it is God’s harmonised order of the universe to enable change to occur in a coordinated fashion amongst substances (Leibniz held the view that finite substances do not have the causal power to bring about change in other substances, though they can be causally active in causing their own successive states).

We can now pause for a moment and reflect on the directions that philosophy has taken at the dawn of modern thought. From Descartes, via Spinoza, Malebranche and Leibniz, to Hegel we witness in continental Europe the development of the great metaphysical systems. These philosophers are not just attempting to criticise or integrate previous metaphysics (mainly, Plato’s and Aristotle’s metaphysics) as most medieval philosophers have been doing. Rather, they strove to re-establish metaphysics through a new system that attempts to supersede all the previous ones. The same thrust is shared by Kant, although his direction is in a sense the opposite: not to establish a new metaphysics, but to draw the limits of any future metaphysics (as testified by his significantly titled work *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Present Itself as a Science*). What we here behold are attempts to a radical re-foundation of philosophy. These attempts were mainly continental

European, notably in France and especially Germany. On the other hand, British and American – Anglophone – philosophy took a different direction, more in continuity with the idea of criticising and integrating previous philosophies than re-founding the whole philosophical discourse. The roots of much of Anglophone philosophy are probably to be found in empiricism. It is to this stream that we now turn.

## EMPIRICISM

Empiricism is a philosophical strand central to the development of both natural and social sciences (and that should be kept distinct from its ‘offspring’ known as positivism, which we discuss later), and it is a mainstay, it almost embodies a ‘stance’ that constitutes a multifarious and yet central stream of thought for the field of PA (see Riccucci, 2010, who neatly distinguishes empiricism from positivism and its neo- and post-variants).

Some of the roots of empiricism can be found in the critique of the knowability of the ‘substance’ by the human mind, already surfaced in Ockham and, in different terms, in Scotus.<sup>17</sup> It is a central theme in John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: substance, intended as what underlies and sustains<sup>18</sup> what we can perceive through the senses, is, he claims, unknowable (it may be noted that Locke does not deny the existence of the substance, but rather its knowability). This argument is in many respects a precursor to Kant’s conception of substance (he will use a different term: ‘noumenon’) as the pure limit to human reason; the unknowable, but yet necessary, limit of knowledge. Knowledge for Kant and for Locke can only be developed on phenomena – for Locke knowledge is knowledge of those properties of things that manifest themselves ‘empirically’ and that we capture through the senses. This is a key claim of Locke’s philosophical contribution, although we should immediately alert the reader that the analysis of how human knowledge unfolds, developed by the English philosopher, is far more articulate and sophisticated than this bare statement. His influence on subsequent developments of philosophical and scientific inquiry can hardly be exaggerated, because much of modern philosophy distanced itself from the search for the substance of the things and concentrated instead on what of their properties is knowable. In a certain sense, much of modern philosophy has adopted the basic stance, if not the specific terms, of Locke’s philosophy (his writings are collated in Locke, 1975).

This central statement of the *Essay* has been the target of harsh critiques. The question is whether the notion of substance as ‘what sustains’ is a pertinent depiction or rather a caricature of what classical metaphysical philosophers meant. Is ‘that which sustains’ what Aristotle or Aquinas meant with substance? Or is it rather essence, the form of things that they meant with substance? For example, dad, mum or our partner in classical metaphysics

‘are’ first and foremost persons, and then they also hold qualities like having an extension, having a colour of their skin or their eyes, and so on, and they are not just a collection of perceivable properties (their extension, colour of skin and eyes, etc.)? These properties are not the whole, or indeed the essence of mum or dad or the partner, who are persons. Substance in classical metaphysics may well be something different and more than just ‘what lies under and sustains’. And so, we are back to the fundamental question: is the idea of substance to be tucked in the category of the useless, or of the useful? As the reader will guess, the question is not over and the issue of the human possibility of knowing the substance of things resurfaces in different guises in different epochs, from idealism and neo-idealism to phenomenology, as we shall see in Chapter 3.

Another key author of British empiricism is Hobbes, who developed a metaphysics of corporeism. Hobbes is famously associated with the notion of the state as a ‘Leviathan’, a theory of the state developed in his homonymous work *Leviathan* (1961/1996). The Leviathan is a sea monster (referenced in the Old Testament) to which Hobbes likens the state as a necessary evil. Given that human beings are mutually a potential life threat, the only remedy that can realistically be deployed lies in the concentration of the monopoly of the force into an impersonal entity, the state. The state, a produce of human beings, is inherently ‘invasive’ into individual liberty, and yet in its absence the world would be worse because it is the sole guarantor of the possibility of a relatively safe life (in Locke, another essential function of the state is also as guarantor of the safeguard of private property). We will return to the political philosophy of Hobbes in Chapter 5, in relation to the notion of a ‘social contract’ perspective to the foundation of the legitimacy of a political system. Here we notice how Hobbes’s argument still lurks ubiquitous in contemporary politics and PA studies: is the state invasive of the private sphere, or do private organisations like businesses and corporations have the upper hand and capture the state (or the portions of it that are of interest for the pursuit of their own interest)? Does the state ‘invade’ the private sphere in overall equitable and fair ways, or rather inequitably and unfairly (e.g. by treating people differently from different social and ethnic groups)? These and related questions recurrently surface in the field. Hobbes’s critique may elicit pertinent and yet at times forgotten questions. Let’s take by way of example the practitioners’ as well as academic’s debate on the benefits and challenges of ‘joined up government’, ‘whole of government’, ‘holistic government’, and the like. It is widely held that a more coordinated government would almost by itself be beneficial, but from the perspective of Hobbes’s critique, wouldn’t a holistic government, empowered with modern technologies of collection of personal data and coercive means unthinkable at Hobbes’s time, also be a major threat to individual liberty? And what if government is not democratic or respectful of human

rights, with appropriate checks and balances in place? What if portions of the coercive apparatus of the state can be captured by closed, unaccountable social groups, perhaps by means of corruptive or collusive behaviours? The actuality of Hobbes's concerns lingers.

A 'radicalisation' of empiricism occurred in George Berkeley and David Hume. Berkeley (see *Opera Omnia*) claimed that 'matter does not exist and that material objects are only ideas that God shares with us, from time to time. His slogan *esse est percipi* – to be is to be perceived – was widely quoted and widely mocked' (Kenny, 2010, p. 560). Berkeley's bequest<sup>19</sup> will be picked up by idealist philosophy within a different frame.

Hume's poignant critiques of the possibility of knowledge – notably of the limits of empirical knowledge, which for the philosopher is the only possible form of knowledge – still occupy centre stage in contemporary culture (Hume, 1777). A contested claim made by Hume regards whether the notion of causality is ultimately significant, or rather what humans can see when they think to be observing causality in action (that 'A is the cause of the effect B') is only a regular conjunction of events, a temporal order whereby we first observe A and then after a temporal lag we observe B. His philosophical inheritance furnishes continued stimuli to constantly be vigilant and aware of the uncertain bases of human knowledge and to draw the borders of the knowable and the validity of what is known; Hume's formulation of the notion of 'belief' has also been widely picked up in sociology, whereby the observation that beliefs lead human beings to undertake certain courses of action rather than others is a useful starting point for innumerable streams of sociological research; equally influential has been Hume's notion of moral sentiments and the idea that sympathy for other human beings may represent the root of natural virtues such as meekness, clemency or generosity (Kenny, 2010, p. 697).

However, there seems to be an irrational drift of empiricism with Hume: in his thought, empiricism might have pushed itself beyond healthy critical vigilance and awareness of the limits of human knowledge, over the cliff of irrationality (Reale and Antiseri, 1988, pp. 430–1).

Empiricism continued to dominate British philosophical thought, and, amongst others, John Stuart Mill's *A System of Logic* (1843/2011) continued the great tradition of the British empiricism.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* as aptly indicated by Riccucci (2010), the dichotomy between a key tenet of rationalism (that ideas are at least partly innate) and of empiricism (that ideas can only be formed through sensorial perceptions, though they cannot be reduced to perceptions) remains a key point of contention in the PA debate. This topic is elaborated in Chapter 6, where possible ways for a fruitful integration of both perspectives for the advancement of PA studies are discussed.



## ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE AGE OF THE REVOLUTIONS

Enlightenment is a cultural–philosophical movement that came to define an epoch spanning the 18th century, which had its epicentre in France and spread throughout Europe. It is marked by the praise of the critical reason and an ambition to bring humankind into adulthood by the use of reason. The roots of many social sciences, like economics, can be traced back to this epoch. Also key notions like that of universal human rights (as codified for example in the UN charter of human rights) were fully theorised in this epoch, which is also the epoch of eventful moments for political thought like the American and the French revolutions. Indeed, this epoch brought about four major revolutions that have forever changed the course of history: the revolution in England, the English and notably the Glorious Revolution towards the end of the 17th century, which put to the fore the political philosophy of liberalism and the notion of human rights, and the idea of representative (parliamentary) democracy; the French revolution, which redefined the notion of sovereignty (belonging to the people of a country) and established the compelling idea of the universal rights (the rights of the human being as such, of each and every human being, as well as the rights of the citizens of a country, in the famous French expression: *les droits de l'homme et du citoyen*), as well as introducing forms of direct democracy; the American revolution, establishing the right of each people to self-determination and propounding the ideal of democracy; and the industrial revolution, which has pushed through a quantum leap in the possibilities of manufacturing goods by resorting to non-animal power force – revolutions which have redefined the West (and the world), and which continue to define the West and its quest for the affirmation of universal human rights and liberal democracy as *the* principles underpinning public governance.

Turning to Enlightenment as a philosophical movement, this philosophical stream has emphasised the centrality of critical reasoning and stressed the power of reason to free humankind from its prejudices, and to lead it into continuous progress, both intellectual and material. A number of social sciences that are central to PA, like economics, became independent disciplines in this century (notably, economics detached from moral philosophy to become the discipline which studies the problem of making decisions on scarce resources to achieve objectives which are alternative and can, at least to some extent, be prioritised and ranked in terms of preference). It is not an overstatement to claim that the ideals of the Enlightenment represent a continued source of inspiration for many contemporary scholars, in all disciplines and this includes PA. The very idea of the encyclopaedia as an orderly collection of all human knowledge without establishing any special hierarchy amongst

the branches of knowledge (encyclopaedias are in alphabetical order) is an invention of the Enlightenment, and continues to be an inspiration, including for PA (the second decade of the 21st century has witnessed a flourishing of encyclopaedias dedicated to PA, like for example the *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Public Administration* or the *Springer General Encyclopaedia of Public Administration, Public Policy and Governance*).

One author we pluck from this epoch for the significance of his thought on the philosophy of public administration is Christian Wolff (1679–1754). The definitions and distinctions he proposed wielded a large influence particularly on German philosophical thought over the century, notably his distinction between those disciplines that proceed by way of reason – for which the principle of non-contradiction is the ultimate criterion of truth – and those that proceed by way of empirical evidence. Importantly he was one of the first to develop a justification for state intervention in society beyond the strict regulatory function of protecting fundamental rights and administering justice. His thought is deemed by some PA scholars to be foundational to the modern theory of PA conceived of as a branch of knowledge: a concept encompassed in the German notion of *staatswissenschaften*, which might be translated as ‘political science’, but is a wider, more encompassing notion to indicate the range of disciplines that, combined, enable the knowledge of government in action (Drechsler, 2001b).

One dominant note, and possibly one key limitation, of the Enlightenment is an emphasis on a temporal knowledge. A dominant narrative of the Enlightenment is about the critical reason rising above prejudices that had accumulated in history and performing a liberating role from prejudices: the past is seen not so much as constitutive of the present, but rather as a source of errors that critical reason can amend. This assumption of human reason, now rid of prejudices operating at a sort of ‘year zero’, has informed important strands of social sciences. Indeed, the very idea of analysing a phenomenon starting from the assumption that  $t = 0$  (time equals zero) is drawn from the consolidating method in the natural sciences after the scientific revolution and has gained traction in the social sciences as well. As we examine in the next chapter, philosophers like Hegel reacted harshly to this assumption and Hegel’s dialectical approach where the whole of the past is conserved in the present through the synthesis of thesis and antithesis presents an abysmally different philosophical stance.

In conclusion, although it is up to historians to gauge the extent to which the Enlightenment still inspires contemporary scholarly work across the disciplines, and notably for our purposes in the disciplines related to PA, it appears a warranted claim that much of the thrust of the Enlightenment in terms of scholarly inquiry being aimed at dismantling prejudices, unveiling biased opinions and, by resorting to critical reasoning, shedding light on phenomena

is something that still enthuses scholars and the self-conception that social scientists have of their mission. Equally, the idea that critical reason can amend past errors and make mankind start from ‘year zero’ still finds adherents in different milieus, both of scholars and practitioners.

The dawn of what we nowadays call ‘the modern age’ also gave rise to another distinctive feature: the conception of innovation (in any dimension: not just technological or industrial, but more broadly social and political) as a permanent thrust of a society has become a defining trait of European civilisation first, and the entire world later on.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* the Enlightenment provided the intellectual environment for the establishment and development of the social sciences (e.g. economics) in the terms in which they are conceived of nowadays. Also the conception of the ‘encyclopaedia’ and the idea of taking stock of existing knowledge without putting it in a hierarchy but rather, more humbly, listing what is known in alphabetical order originated in this epoch. The mushrooming ‘encyclopaedias of PA’ of these days are the direct heirs of this idea matured in 18th-century France. France – alongside England and the US – also gave birth to the notion of universal rights and the universal rights discourse that is so centre stage in nowadays politics, and thence it ought to be also in the PA debate. Implications of the rights of every human being as such and the rights of the citizen in her/his capacity as citizen of a country (in the famous French expression: *les droits de l’homme et du citoyen*) are also crucial to making sense of the development of social rights, the welfare state, and to contemporary notions of welfare governance and welfare society.

## NOTES

1. It is interesting to note that the Greek alphabet, which originated from the Phoenician signary (Phoenician is a West Semitic language like Hebrew. In fact, ‘aleph’ and ‘bet’ – in their Hebrew form – are the first two characters of the Semitic system, from which the Greek term ‘alphabet’ originates), is in itself an ingenious invention of the Greek, in a sense preparatory to philosophical speculation. As explained by Sansone (2009, pp. 37–9), while in the Phoenician signary the fourth symbol (dalet, represented by the symbol Δ) may represent any one of the syllables *da*, *de*, *di*, *do* or *du*, the fourth character of the Greek alphabet (delta or Δ) represents that which the syllables *da*, *de*, *di*, *do*, and *du* have in common (the sound ‘d’). The Greek letter delta ‘stands for something that cannot be pronounced independently and can be defined in abstract terms: the Greek alphabet is analytical, in a way that Phoenician is not, in the sense that it reduces the sounds of the spoken language to its elements, beyond which it cannot further be reduced. In fact, “elements” (*stoicheia*) is the word used to refer to the letters of the alphabet, the same word they used to refer to the material elements of the physical world’ (Sansone, 2009, p. 39). The Greek language – even the alphabet – was conducive to abstract, speculative reasoning. The German philosopher Heidegger even claimed that ‘Being’ revealed itself in different epochs in one preferred language:

first Greek, then Latin, then German. This statement was indicted as ‘ontological racism’, that is, that one specific ‘national’ language conveys and leads to Being itself in ways that other languages cannot, and we concur with the accusation. However, the power of the Greek language and alphabetic system undoubtedly facilitated the giant leap in philosophical speculation that occurred during the Classical period of the Greek civilisation.

2. The English language may be misleading here, because of the presence in ‘being’ of the suffix ‘ing’, which denotes movement and change. This is not the case in the Greek *ὄν*, *on*, or the Latin, *esse*. Linguistic considerations also raise challenging speculative questions about the structure of the Greek language, which is a predicative language, differently from other languages (like for example Chinese), which are not: would the very formulation of Parmenides’s propositions have been different in a non-predicative language? And would it have conveyed the same meanings? This question also relates to the role the Greek language, its structure and configuration, may have had in triggering the ontological quest that has been part and parcel of the Greek civilisation.
3. A footnote on Aristotle’s bequest might be worthy of attention, especially for readers schooled in countries which place a great emphasis on teaching the achievements of the modern natural sciences, but less emphasis on educating pupils, at secondary school, also on philosophy and metaphysics (such may be the case, e.g. for a number of Anglophone countries): it is in these contexts very often pointed out at school two things which Aristotle did get wrong: the principle of inertia in physics, and the geo-centrism in astronomy. This may leave the student, at least in the back of her/his mind, with some sense of fallacy associated with Aristotle’s thinking across the board. It should be pointed out that Aristotle is a giant of metaphysics, who was limited by the available observations at the time as regards the advancement of physics, but crucially the questions he addressed are metaphysical in nature, and it is on these terms – that of metaphysical thinking – that Aristotle’s contribution to human knowledge should be gauged.
4. Aristotle is also credited with having first introduced the distinction between specific disciplines or sciences (in Greek, *episteme*), characterised by a specified subject matter and method, and philosophy as such.
5. Aristotle already posited that the actuality of intellect and the actuality of intellect’s object is one and the same. Renaissance’s thought, heavily inspired by a neo-Platonism mediated and actually mostly derived from Plotinus’s thought, conceived of a form of immortality for the contemplating person. Those living a life attaining the contemplation of fundamental truths enjoy a form of immortality: when contemplating, the contemplating intellect and the contemplated object are one and the same. The person contemplating an ‘eternal truth’ partakes of that very truth and of its eternal character and therefore enjoys a form of immortality by partaking of the eternity of the truth it contemplates.
6. This is also referred to as ‘positive theology’. Negative theology develops a form of knowledge of the divine by discerning what properties of worldly things are *not* participated by God.
7. Aquinas proposes a number of proofs – five to be precise – of the existence of God, which cannot be illustrated here. But the reader will have at this point surmised one and probably the favourite one takes the move from the contingency of all entities: only pure actuality – God *is* being – can enable potentiality to become actual – *entities* have being. If all is just potential, and at some point in time should have not existed, there has to have been a moment in time when nothing existed.

But how can something come out of nothing? A cause that is not contingent must be posited: and this is God.

8. Establishment of universities and the foundation of the religious orders of mendicant friars were two events of eminent importance to the development of philosophy (alongside the full translation and circulation of Aristotle's body of works), as witnessed by the belonging of the main protagonists of the dispute over the universals: William Ockham and John Duns Scotus were Franciscan friars ('Friar Minors', 'Grey Friars') like St Bonaventure; Thomas Aquinas was a Dominican friar (the so-called 'Black Friars' because of the name of their habit, or 'Friar Preachers'). They taught in the newly established universities of Oxford and Paris.
9. For Scotus, it is not matter to be the principle of individuation (like in Aristotle): it is neither matter nor form nor the composite to individuate a thing, but a third thing, its *haecceitas* or 'thisness' (being 'this'), to make individuation. To illustrate with an example, in Socrates we have both a common human nature (essence or form) and an individualising principle ('this' specific human being is Socrates, not anybody else). This principle of individuation is an attempt to address the major problem of what makes something univocal and distinguishable even if it belongs to a species or categories (there is a strong echo here of the dispute over the universals which continued to rage at the time Scotus was writing), as well as an attempt to revisit the issue of the One and the Many. It has raised severe criticisms. Two major problems can be identified. One definitional regarding the *haecceitas*: what is it? Is this notion useful in order to better our understanding or not? Ockham would answer negatively and would suggest to eliminate it as a non-useful concept: it falls under the axe of Ockham's razor, a notion that is introduced in the following paragraph. The second problem concerns the implications of foregoing matter as the principle of individuation: if it is neither form nor matter to be the principle of individuation, what is left?
10. A distinction should be made between the conceptualisation of a whole alternative world (with properties different from those of this world) and a different state of affairs to what actually happened (as in counterfactual arguments), where the properties of this world are assumed to continue to be in place.
11. The main thrust of Ockham's philosophy is limiting the scope of what can be explained by reason in order to give way to faith (although interestingly in his proof of God's existence he emphasises the 'remaining into being' of entities, rather than the act with which they are initially created and enter into being as the proof of God's existence: a line of reasoning that seems to tie closely with Aquinas's philosophy whereby things receive their being by Being-God).
12. Including mental experiments, like those carried out by Galileo – a method which subsequently came to be neglected, at least until an entire theory that revolutionised physics, the theory of relativity worked out by Albert Einstein and initially entirely based on mental experiments – reinstated in the community of scientists a heedful attitude towards the significance of mental experiments.
13. The sociologist Karl Mannheim, also drawing from Marxian thought, as well as a range of prominent sociologists like Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, Werner Stark and many others developed the branch of the sociology of knowledge in the 20th century.
14. According to Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy and Schrödinger's famous equation, it is impossible to estimate with absolute precision the position and movement of a particle: the better the position is known, the more imprecise the movement of the particle can be estimated, and vice versa. What we are left with

is a distribution of probability of presence of the particle (a 'cloud' where the particle is), although we may be somewhat reassured by the fact that Schrodinger's equation states that the integral of the position of the particle equals 1, that is, that the particle is somewhere in the universe!

15. Recent astronomical theories postulate the existence of an invisible dark matter that can be detected only due to the gravitational field it causes, that is, it apparently is a causal agent because it generated a gravitational field, but it is impossible to locate in space, and hence its extension cannot be measured – if it exists at all.
16. It goes without saying many philosophers radically objected to both these propositions: that animals are machines and that the human being is a mix of two difference substances. We will see the radical critique formulated by Bergson in this regard by advancing an alternative metaphysics of life and the universe.
17. The British medieval philosophers (whom we have already encountered) who had already ploughed the terrain of Anglophone empiricism. However, an important part of their works was written in the then *lingua franca* – the vehicle language – of the medieval time – which was Latin rather than English.
18. The Latin etymology of the word substance is 'what lies underneath', and in this sense can also be interpreted as 'what sustains'.
19. A popularisation of this idea is purveyed by the movie *Matrix*, where human beings are portrayed to live an altogether mental life.

### 3. Key streams in philosophical inquiry: a selection and succinct overview for the field of public administration – part II

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#### KANT AND THE REVOLUTION OF THE SUBJECT

Kant's philosophy is a major attempt to set the limit of what is knowable to human rationality. To this purpose, Kant (see Figure 3.1) introduces the distinction between phenomenon and *noumenon*, a distinction which is the lynchpin of his philosophical system. Phenomenon is here defined as the thing as it appears (the term derives from the Greek *phainesthai*). The term noumenon<sup>1</sup> refers to the thing in itself, the thing 'as it is', which is also the thing as thought by the intellect. In order to better grasp this passage, it is useful to recall that, as the Greek philosophy unveiled, being can be properly understood only within the horizon of thought. The term noumenon derives from the Greek *noein*, which means 'to think', and according to Kant, the noumenon is something we can think but we cannot know. If the reader is confused about it, s/he may perhaps be comforted by the fact that Kant himself strove with this notion, which is part and parcel of his philosophical system. Moreover, this problematic issue was exactly the point of lever used by idealist philosophers just a few years after Kant's passing away for turning Kant's philosophy entirely upside down by establishing a (dialectical) identity between the thinking subject and the thought thing, and by means of this to overcome the limits posed by Kant to human knowledge. According to Kant, human knowledge can only be restrained to phenomena, albeit in a sense profoundly different from empiricism. Things in themselves can only be grasped by an original intellect (God) in the act in which it poses them into being (it creates them), but not by human beings.

Knowledge is about 'correct' judgements by the reason, and a judgement is a connection of two concepts, one being the noun and one the predicative: what is claimed about the subject of the sentence. Kant outlined a typology of judgements. What is predicated about the subject of the sentence may be implicit in the noun (for example, that all bodies are extended because corporality entails

extension<sup>2</sup>); these judgements are called 'analytical'. Alternatively, what is predicated about the noun may not be implicit in the noun (for example, that all bodies are heavy); these judgements are called 'synthetic'. Analytical judgements are universal and necessary, but do not add to knowledge because what is known was already implicit in the subject of the sentence. Synthetic judgements add to knowledge by predicating of the subject of the sentence something that was not already implicit in it. Judgements may then be before experience ('a priori') or after experience ('a posteriori'). We may then have different categories of judgements. First, analytical judgements a priori: these are universal and necessary, but do not add knowledge because what is predicated of the subject of the sentence was already implicit in the subject, nothing was added through experience; they are in a sense tautological. Then we have synthetic judgements a posteriori that add knowledge –and through experience, something is predicated of the subject of the proposition, but not in a universal and necessary way. The question for Kant thus became whether propositions that both add knowledge and are universal and general in kind are possible. The answer to this question has brought about a Copernican revolution in thought (Kant explicitly referred to his philosophy as bringing about a Copernican revolution in knowledge of the kind that Copernicus brought about in cosmology when discovering that it is the Earth that revolves around the Sun, and he was conscious that after him philosophy would not have been the same any more).

The revolution (in the etymological sense of the Latin *revolvere*: to turn things upside down) brought about by Kant can be outlined as follows (Kant, 1781/1787). Rather than being the subject to revolve around the object, that is, rather than being the subject trying to discover the properties or laws of the object, it is the object that revolves around the subject, it is the object that must adapt to the properties of the subject that knows it. The categories, that is, the modes and conditions of being that for classical metaphysics were the conditions of Being as such, are for Kant the conditions of the knowability of objects by the subject (he refers to these categories with the term 'transcendental', borrowed from classical metaphysics but re-interpreted in the sense we have just specified). These are conditions of the object only in relation to the subject and as posed by the subject.

This assertion has powerful implications, for example for the notions of space and time, although not altogether new because other philosophers had already dealt with similar perspectives:<sup>3</sup> space stems from the relations between things, time from the succession of things. In Kant's philosophical conception, time is not in things; instead it is in the subject that knows things phenomenologically. More specifically, time is the form of the intuition of all phenomena after they are perceived by the subject and hence become interior to the subject. Likewise, space is the form of all the external phenomena, of



all phenomena before they are caught by the senses (and then become ‘interior’ to the subject). Things are in space and time because the subject orders them in space and time. Space and time do not exist outside the subject. The other categories of being (in classical metaphysics) are also not properties of the object but forms of the subject. Categories like possibility/impossibility, necessity/contingency, existence/inexistence, causality and dependence (cause-and-effect), and the others (for which Kant worked out a frame, identifying twelve categories and relating them to the kinds of judgements the subject can formulate. These categories are grouped into four classes: quantity, quality, relation and modality) are therefore forms whereby the knowing subject orders phenomena. To re-state: categories are not *leges entis* (laws of the entity), but *leges mentis* (laws of the mind): ways in which the mind knows the entity.

If the foundation of the object is in the subject (the object supposes the subject), then every representation (perception) of the object in the subject presupposes a unity of the subject which remains itself, immutable in the face of the mutable representations that ‘flow’ on it (Kant refers to it as ‘transcendental apperception’). This is also the unifying point of all the syntheses that the thinking subject operates (that is, of all the judgements made by the subject according to the twelve categories) and it is also referred to as the ‘I think’. This is not the individual ‘I’, but rather the structure whereby every subject capable of rational knowledge is a thinking subject, it is what makes it a rational subject.

To summarise, perception by the subject (experience) has two forms – space and time – and intellect has twelve categories. Together they shape the conditions of knowing. This, for Kant, is how we know and all we can know.

One key consequence is that human knowledge is confined to phenomena. In this regard, Kant argues that three key ideas – that of God, soul and world – are unknowable to the human being. We cannot demonstrate the existence of God, nor can we demonstrate the non-existence of God. We cannot know the soul as an ontological substance; we can only be conscious of the activity of thinking (the ‘I think’), but not of the noumenic substance of our own ‘I’ (because it transcends experience). We cannot know the world, intended not as the physical world but as the totality of things and their causes. (We may also add that this statement is and remains a significant caveat to modern astrophysicists to refrain from jumping from empirical discoveries to ultimate assertions about the beginning, end or nature of the universe.) However, the human being as a rational entity has an irresistible, unstoppable thrust towards transcending experience, and this occurs through the three ideas of God, of the world, and of the soul. These are unknowable and their existence, or non-existence, indemonstrable, but they serve a regulatory function: they provide coherence and

in a sense an overarching framework to the use of intellect to make judgements about experience.

A big question arises: is it therefore impossible for human beings to be in a deeper relation with the 'things in themselves', beyond phenomena? Are we confined to phenomena without having any 'connection' with things in themselves? For Kant, the answer is that in terms of knowability, things in themselves will always escape the grasp of our mind, but we human beings can accord with them, in a certain sense, through both the moral and the aesthetic<sup>4</sup> life. In a major attempt in the whole history of philosophy to establish the foundations of morality, Kant introduced and elaborated the notion of categorical imperatives in his 1788 work *Critique of Practical Reason* (where 'practical' in the title refers to the question 'how to behave' and does not have any utilitarian denotation). Imperatives are something that must be complied with, irrespective of the effects produced by the action: only categorical imperatives are moral duty. For example, a tax-payer may return the self-assessment for fear of sanctions, for simple habit, or with the intention of complying with her/his duty; only in the last case the behaviour is moral. It is interesting to note that the state does not have any means to impose the kind of intentionality with which the tax-payer acts – although it may be more or less effective in ensuring tax compliance. In other words, external entities may hold sway on the actual behaviour of somebody, but not on the intentionality with which an action is accomplished (at least in Kant's conception): intentionality is the realm of morality. Consequently, for Kant, behaviours based on external motives – whether they are the compliance with the customs and mores of the place where you live, or the pursuit of happiness, or the perfecting of yourself through virtue, or the adhering to the Will of God – are heteronomous ways of behaving. Whatever the behaviour is founded on, some external content or motive is not moral in the sense Kant means.

The categorical imperative, or moral law, does not depend on specific contents; it is rather the pure form of a general moral legislation that is valid for each and every being which is rational. For Kant this is also the foundation of liberty: it is the conscience of our<sup>5</sup> duty, of having a duty to comply with, that makes us conscious of our liberty. Kant would frame this claim more or less this way: 'by doing your duty, you recognise that, for the very reason of being doing your duty, you are free' (otherwise the moral duty would be meaningless). In this way, the human being is told of her/his liberty (s/he recognises to be a free will), even if s/he cannot have any knowledge of its liberty because, as demonstrated in the critique of pure reason, only phenomena are knowable and liberty is not a phenomenon but a thing in itself, and hence it is not knowable. It is through morality that the human being can recognise its liberty and freely adhere to the order of being, to the world of noumena. Adherence to reality beyond phenomena can only be chosen by doing the moral duty. Liberty

is the independence of our free will from the laws that regulate phenomena. This can be summed up as: ‘You must, hence You can’ – you must adhere to moral law, hence you are free because you could also have not adhered to moral law. It is from the fact that you did your duty that you can infer that you are free: first comes morality, then freedom – however weird this might appear to us. (Immanuel Kant was the most regular of persons. He lived an extremely regular life doing exactly the same things every day, he did not marry or travel, or have any activity or hobby. He devoted himself totally to philosophy, and yet he was one of the most revolutionary people history has known – in terms of originality of thought.)

One might wonder at this point what formulation of moral conduct capable of guiding practical action can be drawn from this notion of morality. This problem engages Kant who, in the *Critique*, seems to have wavered a bit to then formulate the criterion that moral behaviour must conform to rules that if they became universal laws rather than just guiding the conduct of the person who formulates them, they would be acceptable. However, drawing practical guidance from this criterion proved not to be immune from contradictions. He eventually formulated the (most famous) statement of moral conduct ‘Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as means, but always at the same time as end’ (Kant, 1785/2005). The underlying assumption is that each and every human being belongs to a ‘kingdom of ends’: every rational being is an end, and must be treated as an end and never as means (better: as means ‘only’ – as Kant recognises that in everyday circumstances we all need each other in instrumental ways: I need the baker for having fresh bread, the physician when I am ill, etc. – but I must never treat the baker or the physician in only an instrumental way because this would be tantamount to negate the humanity that is in each of them).

The reader may have noticed this represents a sort of ‘rational formalisation’ of the commandment of mutual love between human beings that can be found in the Gospels. Interestingly, in this regard there is another argument developed by our philosopher: given perfection in morality cannot be achieved in this life, Kant argues that we need to postulate the immortality of the soul in order to enable it to adhere to morality in a total way; the rational being is a moral being and hence it ‘must’ endure eternally in order to fulfil its very nature of being rational and hence moral. In Christianity, the human being has a natural predisposition to perfection, but is not left to walk all the way to perfection alone, but is instead helped by the incarnate God to fill the (abysmal) gap determined by the original sin. Kant in a sense halts a step before: because the categorical imperative is a regulatory ideal that can never be fully accomplished in this world, it must be postulated that full accomplishment will be

achieved, and hence that the rational human being will be endowed with the immortality required for perfection to be achievable.

The rational subject, as Kant conceives of it, is limited in terms of what it can know, but it is a 'strong' subject in all other respects, very far from representations of it as the malleable product of societal conditioning depicted by some relativist or post-modernist contemporary philosophical strands. Indeed, this subject – always an end, never just a means – is, we argue, a key term of reference in public governance, public administration and public services management. Kant provides a major attempt to establish a moral foundation of not just individual life but also social life, and hence public life: he then provides a major attempt, and an inescapable one, to the normative foundation of the practice of public governance and administration. Since morality as founded in Kant's philosophy does not depend on any external motive (although it does not exclude those motives which will be influential on actual behaviour but cannot ground morality), the ultimate foundation of the moral behaviour of all the citizens of a political system, and of public servants in particular with regard to public governance, is ultimately grounded in the moral law of always behaving in such a way to treat humanity, whether in one's own person or in the person of any other, never simply as means, but always at the same time as end. This is a universalistic foundation of public governance, applicable anywhere and anytime<sup>6</sup> in any system of public governance that human (i.e. rational) beings establish.

It should be noticed that for Kant behaviours can comply with external motives, all these lying outside the foundation of morality as Kant intends it. Behaviours driven by external motives are diverse in nature from the behaviours that are patterned on the morality that a rational being is demanded of as such, for its very being a rational being. Compliance with the customs and mores of the place where one lives, the pursuit of happiness, the perfecting of yourself through virtue, or the adhering to the Will of God, are therefore all totally acceptable, and any concrete system of public governance could and should incorporate and be tolerant towards all these behaviours. But it should not assume them as the ultimate foundation of morality and, one might argue, of the moral legitimacy of public governance.

Any attempt to provide grounding to ethics – and notably for the purpose of our book ethical behaviour in the public service – cannot renounce confronting itself with Kant's attempt to an 'absolute' foundation of moral behaviour.

The work of Kant has been hugely influential on philosophy. Similar for other masters of philosophy, it can be stated that his thought is inescapable – nobody after Kant can philosophise setting his contribution aside. At the same time, no human philosophy can provide the last word or represent a full stop: his claims have both been resisted from a classical metaphysics viewpoint and turned upside down from the viewpoint of the philosophy of idealism.



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:Immanuel\\_Kant\\_\(portrait\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:Immanuel_Kant_(portrait).jpg) (accessed 17 April 2020).

Figure 3.1 *Immanuel Kant*

The philosophical debate around the knowability and the very meaning of the ‘thing in itself’ continued over the subsequent two centuries, and still endures. Philosophical movements like phenomenology (see later) interpret the phenomenon more as a door open – or at least ajar – to the knowledge of things in themselves rather than as a compelling limit. Philosophers rooted in classical metaphysics, like neo-Scholastics, tried to reconcile the subject of Kant with the overall frame of Aristotelian–Thomist metaphysics. However, it is idealism that, only a few years after the passing away of Kant, first challenged his philosophical system, carrying out a major attempt to turn it upside down. It is to this philosophy we now turn.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* Kant’s ‘revolution’ in philosophy, that brought the knowing subject and the subject of moral judgement centre stage, has not been without its critiques (as we shall right from the next section); however, it continues to potentially represent a major starting point for any conception of public governance, by providing a grounding for what any human being (indeed, any rational being), hence any and every member of any political community, may be able to know and by providing the moral compass for value-based decisions by any member of the political community: we discuss this possible usage of Kantian philosophy widely at the incipit of both Chapter 4 and Chapter 6 (from the angle of the moral subject

and the knowing subject respectively): the Kantian subject of knowledge and capable of moral judgement can be taken as a starting point of attempts to ground the foundations of public governance.

## IDEALISM

There are two crucial underpinnings of Kantian philosophy: first is the notion of noumenon as the thing in itself, which is the condition of knowability but is not itself knowable to the human being,<sup>7</sup> and second is the 'I think', the unity of the thinking subject as condition for knowing to occur.<sup>8</sup> By giving a different interpretation to these two buttresses of Kant's philosophical edifice, idealist philosophers have turned Kantian philosophy upside down.

Idealism is associated chiefly with three philosophers: Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling and Georg Wilhelm Hegel. The thought of each of them has been vetted in countless books, and in the 20th century there has been a reassessment of Fichte's and Schelling's original thought as an autonomous body whose reach goes well beyond the interpretation of it as just a 'preparatory phase' paving the way to Hegel and Hegelism: an interpretation that was indeed spread by the same Hegel and his numerous acolytes, who held a dominant position in German academy over the 19th century. However, the extreme synthesis that we are forced to do in these few pages leads us to focus, exclusively for reasons of brevity, mainly on Hegel's philosophy, whose influence has loomed large over philosophy. The so-called dialectical method he worked out and the derived conception of how history progresses have figured prominently in the humanities and the social sciences since, and also have far-reaching implications for the field of public administration. Hegel's conception of the state has been extremely influential on debates in public governance.

Fichte's philosophy is the starting point of idealism. By providing a revolutionary interpretation of Kant, in the literal sense since he turned Kantism upside down,<sup>9</sup> Fichte reverses the traditional assumption of classical Aristotelian metaphysics that first something needs to be, then it acts (action follows being; in Latin: *operari sequitur esse*) into its opposite – it is action that precedes being (in Latin: *esse sequitur operari*), where the very action that precedes any other is the action whereby the 'I' poses itself in what Fichte calls the principle of identity as  $I = I$ , and by posing itself also poses the non-I. Both are contained in the unlimited I that poses all reality by acting. The 'I think' that in Kant was the function of thinking, more methodological premise for rational knowledge to occur than ontological principle, here becomes the absolute foundation of reality: the thinking of the 'I think' establishes reality. This 'I' really deserves the use of the capital letter that the English language attributes to the pronoun designating the first person in the singular (unlike most other languages that

use the lowercase character for the first person in the singular, for example in French ‘je’, in Spanish ‘yo’, in Italian ‘io’ and so forth).

Schelling adds another key component to the idealist philosophy:<sup>10</sup> nature is conceived of as the ‘non-I’, that stands in opposition to the pure ‘I think’.<sup>11</sup> He then re-interprets the principle of identity (which led Fichte to pose the  $I = I$ ), taking the move from Spinoza, into an absolute identity of I and non-I in God, and hence arriving at a form of panentheism (that everything is *in* God<sup>12</sup>). In the last phase of his thought, Schelling profoundly modified his philosophy, especially by re-introducing the distinction (which played a central role in medieval thought) between essence and existence, leading to outcomes that in many respects preconise the dissolution of idealism.

Hegel’s philosophy synthesises the absolute ‘I think’ of Fichte and the nature as non-I of Schelling in a way that trespasses both. The starting point of Hegel’s philosophy is the dialectical method and the ‘triadic’ logic of thesis–antithesis–synthesis that he applies at heights so ambitious that they had probably never been attempted before, nor have since.

Initially conceived of in ancient Greece by the works of the Eleatic school, and elaborated especially by merit of the philosopher Zenon, classical dialectic was brought to its zenith by Plato. But in Hegel’s interpretation dialectic acquires a dynamic thrust it did not have in classical metaphysics. Since in Hegel reality is becoming, the three moments of thesis, antithesis and synthesis acquire a specific meaning. Often in Hegel the thesis is seen as an assertion made by the intellect (which for him is static, inadequate to comprehend the inner tissue of reality), then reason (often in Hegel written with the initial in capital: Reason) intervenes to trespass and overcome the limits of the intellect by positing the negation, or contradiction, of the thesis, namely the antithesis. The action of posing the antithesis, in which the thesis seems to dissolve, is the negative function of the reason: this is followed by a positive function of the reason whereby, dynamically, thesis and antithesis as the two opposites are synthesised into a superior unity: the unity of the opposite determinations. This synthesis is the positive function of reason, also called by Hegel ‘the speculative moment’. Thesis and antithesis continue to live in the superior synthesis: in fact, Hegel utilises the terms, in the German language, of ‘*aufheben*’ (to overcome) and ‘*aufhebung*’ (the overcoming) to express the speculative synthesis. The point is that the German term *aufheben* has three meanings: it indicates the negation of something, as when a law is repealed by a new law; the preservation of something, the securing of something for the future; and the lifting up of something, the putting of something on a higher level. Thesis and antithesis then get overcome yet maintained and ultimately heightened in the synthesis.<sup>13</sup>

Having reached this point, Hegel’s famous statement that ‘all that is rational is real, all that is real is rational’ should not be as a surprise for the reader.

This is not to be intended as a proposition whereby the predicate (in the first part of the sentence: 'is real') is predicated of the noun (in the first part of the sentence: 'all that is rational'), but as a dialectical synthesis: there is no distinction between rational and real. The rational 'I think' of Kant has now radically changed function: it poses reality, and indeed the 'I think' dynamically is reality, because there are no longer any borders between reality and rationality. Equally, it should be clear why for Hegel the past is never 'past', but it is all kept (preserved) into the successive superior synthesis, every time more perfect (analogously to Spinoza's philosophical system, a key category in Hegel is that of necessity: all that is real is necessary, which also means that all events of history happened by necessity – and each of these necessary events is kept in the ever more perfect progress of history).

To follow the ambitious application that Hegel made of dialectic reasoning, the reader should at this point fasten the seatbelt because Hegel's philosophical system aimed at reaching heights rarely if ever seen before and after him. Indeed, no realm of human history, philosophy, art, religion or any other conceivable aspect of reality is left outside Hegel's philosophical system; with Hegel philosophy is not just placed at the apex but it becomes all-encompassing. Indeed, for Hegel the Absolute Spirit takes full conscience of itself in philosophical speculation, which reaches its apex in his own philosophy: put directly, for Hegel, God fully takes conscience of itself in his (Hegel's) philosophical system (humbleness was not a virtue of our philosopher). We can only hint here to some phases of one of the most intellectually fascinating, genial, ambitious – and often derided – journey that human mind ever conceived. In *Logic* (1816/1975), Hegel starts from the 'being' of Parmenides as the thesis posed by the intellect ('being' here is for Hegel a static notion), to then conceive of non-being as the antithesis (the challenge or negation posed by reason performing its negative function), to finally interpret Heraclitus's 'becoming' as the synthesis (speculative reason making the synthesis of thesis and antithesis). In this beginning there is already all ontology (Parmenides and Heraclitus), but this commencement (the first dialectical synthesis of Hegel's system) is just one of some thirty stages of the 'Idea in Itself'. The second stage is when becoming gives rise to something determinate (becoming 'makes something happen', and hence produces something determinate), that is, it gives rise to determination. Determination is negated by 'something else', the otherness of something, but the something else of something is always in turn overcome by something else, and so on giving rise to the indeterminate, that is, to the infinite, or the notion of infiniteness. This is the second synthesis in Hegel's philosophical system. Here Hegel makes a detour to emphasise the significance of the infinite and to ridicule all philosophers who claim that the finite is the only reality. For Hegel, any philosophy that attributes true being to finite being as such simply does not deserve the name of philosophy



(unless this is conceived as just a dialectical moment of a superior synthesis). Contemporary philosophers, who appeal to Hegel for explaining the becoming of being and at the same time claim that the finite is the only reality, should be equipped to wrestle with this peremptory statement made by the German giant of philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

From the infinite, Hegel then moves to the being for itself and the being out of itself: ‘the One and the Many’ central to the philosophy of Plotinus. This is part of the third stage of dialectical synthesis that Hegel examines. These three stages are just the initial ones of something like thirty stages of what Hegel refers to as the accomplishment of the ‘Idea in itself’. One might well consider this to be enough, but the Idea in itself is, in Hegel’s system, followed by nine stages of the ‘Idea outside of itself’, that is, nature. Hegel discusses the whole of the natural world, from space and time as dialectical moments of ‘place and movement’ (which is the synthesis), and so on to systematise the entirety of the physical and biological world (and of physics and biology as disciplines).

And (the reader is advised to keep the seatbelt tightly fastened) all this is just preparatory to the utmost moment, the philosophy of the Spirit or ‘Idea that returns in itself’. In this part of his gigantic framework,<sup>15</sup> Hegel first treats the soul (thereby including all anthropology and psychology), then the whole of history and the foundation of the State (including law, morality and ethics – the last one being the superior moment for Hegel), to then most famously conclude his journey with the renowned statement that art (the arts, from Greek art to Medieval, Renaissance and then Reformed art), religion (from Greek religiosity up to Christianity) and finally philosophy (from Greek philosophy to medieval Christianity up to modern German philosophy as the accomplishment of philosophy) compose the supreme dialectical moments of the Absolute Spirit: in speculative philosophy God itself ‘knows, enacts, makes and enjoys eternally’ reality as a whole – that is, God itself is now fully revealed to itself. Hegel’s journey is vertiginous.

The reader can now respire, unfasten the seatbelt and appreciate why most of the philosophy of the two subsequent centuries has (also) been a reaction to Hegel’s extraordinarily ambitious philosophical construction (Hegel, 1807/1977, 1816/1975; see also the collection in Hegel, 1968).

Whatever the criticisms that can be moved to such comprehensive, systematic account of reality, Hegel’s historicism and the dialectical method occupy a central place in the humanities and the social sciences. So does one other part of Hegel’s thought, namely his conception of the state – the rational state – a theme mainly developed in *Philosophy of Right* (1821/1991; here we follow mainly the summary in Ryan, 2012, pp. 688–94 in particular). Hegel’s approach to the state and its role is – needless to say – triadic. The trio is represented by the constitution, international relations and the stage of world history. The last term is the one that engendered most contention, especially

where a claim is made that ‘peace among nations ... would produce stagnation’ (*Philosophy of Right*, p. 324). This has been interpreted by commentators and critics as legitimating war, and notably the wars later led by the Prussian State (of which Hegel was a citizen), especially after the unification of Germany; in other words, of having legitimated Prussian aggressive nationalism, up to the totalitarian form it later took under Nazi Germany. It is, however, more likely that Hegel simply had a realistic view of war as an instrument of the state, not much dissimilar from the realist tradition in the field of international relations. The point is that when this view is wrapped into the Hegelian framework of the dialectical progress of history in which each and every historical event is interpreted as a necessary stage of the life of the Absolute Spirit, the claim about war salvaging the world from stagnation may definitely look like an outright legitimation of war.

The other element of major interest (for the purposes of this book) of Hegel’s conception of the state is his confidence in the administrative capacity of the modern state, a theme worked out in *Philosophy of Right* (notably §§ 287–29). Hegel seems to show a great reliance in the capacity of the state to control its territory and efficiently manage its citizens. Indeed, in this frame citizens play mainly the part of ‘subjects’ of the state; whether enough room is given in Hegel’s system to ‘citizens as citizens’ (in the contemporary liberal–democratic sense of the notion) is questionable, although arguably this may be a circular relation: the citizen fully becomes a citizen through the state, and an end of the state is providing the conditions for citizenship. What emerges from Hegel’s view is the vision of a strong state endowed with a strong administrative apparatus, served by a civil service which becomes a distinct social class: the instruments for building such bureaucratic apparatus delineated by Hegel were to be further worked out – based on profoundly different, though perhaps not so radically as it is often considered to be the case (Tijsterman and Overeem, 2008), philosophical premises – in the thought of a country fellow of Hegel: Max Weber. The vision of the modern state as being endowed with a strong administrative apparatus, independent, or at least endowed with a degree of autonomy from politics, and tasked with both implementing the laws and with contributing to framing new ones based on its capacity to provide impartial advice to political organs, is in many respects still around nowadays, entrenched and deeply enculturated as part of the conception of governance of the contemporary German state and a number of other continental European states (and beyond). Whether the capacities that Hegel purported the state to hold are actually still there in the contemporary continental bureaucracies hollowed out by New Public Management-inspired reforms, slashed by budgetary cuts, poached by powerful transnational corporations controlling assets greater than those of many countries, is an empirical question. However, the vision of the state that Hegel propounded seems to linger and have remained with us two

centuries later, continuing to permeate contemporary debates (e.g. Tijsterman and Overeem, 2008).

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* we have seen how Hegel's philosophy of the state can form the basis of a philosophy of PA: a specific way of conceiving of public governance and administration (and notably one in which the bureaucracy does not have to be tamed, like in many liberal conceptions of the state emphasising the protecting of citizens from bureaucratic 'interference' into their lives, but rather the civil service is seen as a constitutive and essential part of a free state: ultimately, a constitutionalist account of bureaucracy and an 'optimistic' view of its role can be ascribed to Hegel's conception of administration); developing such distinctive philosophical conception of PA is not within the remit of this book, which aims at providing an introduction to the use of philosophy for PA (see Chapter 1) – it would be a fascinating task for another book, by other authors (and see Tijsterman and Overeem, 2008, for an insightful revisiting of the contemporary significance of the Hegelian philosophy of administration for contemporary public governance). At another level, it is in Hegel's thought that can be found some of the key roots of conceptions of the state as a central integrating force within society, a key trait of the *Rechtsstaat* model of state which permeates the basic culture of governance of many contemporary administrative systems across the world (Pierre, 1995, p. 8; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017, pp. 60–2).

Hegel is also the author at the roots of the philosophical approach known as *historicism*, and of a conception of time which still plays a role as a term of reference to be confronted with for virtually any *weltanschauung* (world view) that can be elaborated: we vet into some implications of conceptions of time and history for PA in Chapter 4.

## THE INHERITANCE AND THE OVERCOMING OF HEGEL; MARX AND GRAMSCI

Judgements of Hegel's philosophy are bitterly divided. As aptly summed up by Ryan (2012, p. 654, who seems indeed to lean heavily towards the critical), 'To those intoxicated by his system, he has seemed to illuminate the universe in ways unparalleled by any other thinker. Those who have thought it all hot air have dismissed him (in Schopenhauer's memorably abusive phrase) as a "nauseating, illiterate, hypocritical, slope-headed scribbler".' Whichever the slant (and for a more positive appraisal of Hegel's inheritance, see Stewart, 1996), the bequest of Hegel is huge.

Soon after his philosophical system came to be formed, he started to have acolytes, especially in Germany where his academic influence burgeoned. It is commonly distinguished between a Hegelian right and a Hegelian left, bitterly divided on two key issues: politics and religion. Whilst the right Hegelians

generally maintained, in the political sphere, that the Prussian State as it stood embodied the development of the Spirit, the Hegelian left riposted that the Prussian State was just a stage of a larger process and should have been dialectically overcome. In religion, the Hegelian right interpreted Hegel's philosophy as broadly compatible with the dogmas of Christianity, whilst the Hegelian left found Hegel's philosophy irreconcilable with Christendom.

We here focus the thought of one philosopher whose philosophical system at the inception can be ascribed to the Hegelian left, although he later developed an original thought that went beyond Hegelism and occupied large swathes of the philosophical debate and of politics alike during the 20th century: Karl Marx.

To better appreciate the distinctive thought of Marx, it is important to consider the harsh critiques he moved not just to Hegel (with whose system lineages can however be tracked), but also to the Hegelian left (let alone the Hegelian right) and, beyond the Hegelian system, to classical economists like Smith or Ricardo, to the stream of thought of the so-called 'utopian socialism' associated with Babeuf, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen (amongst others), and to other forms of socialism like the one advocated by Proudhon (one of the preferred target of the darts of Marx). Marx propounded a scientific socialism that was – for him – different from the socialism of benevolence of the Utopian socialists and Proudhon: it was based on an understanding of the economic bases of societal and cultural-ideological processes, whose proper investigation required the overcoming of classical political economy.

Before we shift from the critique (*pars destruens*) to the *pars construens* of the thought of Marx, some qualifications are required. First, a distinction has been drawn by historians of philosophy between the thought of Karl Marx, to which we refer as Marxian philosophy, and Marxism as an ideology whose huge influence shaped an important part of the history of the 20th century. 'Marxian' refers to interpretations of Marx's original thought.<sup>16</sup> 'Marxism' is an ideology, or a gamut of ideologies, which spread and had a huge influence during the 20th century. The influence of Marxism on political thought, and hence also on the debate about public governance and the organisation of the public sector, can hardly be exaggerated. It has had a huge influence throughout the 20th century, and entire political regimes have been inspired by interpretations of Marx's thought – and still are, either directly (Cuba) or indirectly (mediated by Maoism and pre-existing conception of governance, notably Confucianism, in China and other countries) at the time this book goes to press. We cannot track these influences within the limits of this book: it would simply be impossible here – it is a task taken up by innumerable other books. Nor can we even hint to the countless books devoted to the analysis of Marxian thought that fill university libraries across the world. We will outline here just

some key traits of his thought that we deem of most direct significance for the purposes of this book.

A key influence on Marx is another philosopher, Ludwig Feuerbach, and notably his critique of religion. Feuerbach's criticism is rooted in the Hegelian conception of history: in this perspective, the dialectical unity of finite and infinite, of human and divine is assumed, but rather than being the human to be eventually absorbed into the divine as in Hegel, in Feuerbach it is the divine to be interpreted as a projection of the human and be absorbed within the human. This is seen as a historical process, and it represents a major point of difference from the Enlightenment critiques of religion. Those critiques were in many respects metahistorical: the reason of the Enlightenment enables the human species to escape the myths and legends, the prejudices of human infancy and see the world through adult eyes – and for some scholars of that epoch this meant getting rid of the religious phenomenon as something related to the infancy of humankind (for others it meant 'theism', a sort of rational religion; for still others it meant a renewal of the way in which the Christian faith was lived). For Feuerbach, the development of religion is a historically necessary process, which leads to objectivise the suffering of the human species, and in this perspective God is conceived of as the conscience of the human species.<sup>17</sup> This claim was a powerful influence on Marx, who pursued through his philosophy a sort of turning upside-down of Hegel's framework, starting from the material conditions rather than the Intellect of the 'I think', while keeping the dialectical logic as the key conceptual tool for the explanation of the becoming of things and history.

The dialectical method is central in Marxian thought. He borrows the idea from Hegel, but reverses the perspective: from dialectical idealism into dialectical materialism. History proceeds through contradictions that are solved into superior syntheses, but these occur at the level of the material, concrete, economic conditions – whilst juridical, moral, philosophical, religious ideas are derivatives of these underlying dynamics occurring at the level of the economic structures regulating society. This is probably the key bifurcation where the distinction can be made between those who recognise the contribution of Marx to philosophy and sociology but do not adhere to Marxism as an ideology, and those who adhere to Marxism. For the former group, economic structures and conditions do have an influence on ideas and on the cultural, moral and spiritual life of a community and humankind at large: but these influences are not deterministic, it is not a one-way (from the material conditions – the relations in economic production processes – to the cultural and spiritual), but rather a two-way influence, and the cultural, moral, spiritual dimensions have their substantive autonomy from the economic dimension. For the latter group, instead, the study of economic structures is the key to understanding

the totality of human phenomena: this assumption is not philosophical – it is ideological.

Marx elaborated other key notions that have entered the philosophical and social science debate, including that of alienation:<sup>18</sup> the dispossession of the fruit of the labour of the worker by capitalist-dominated structures.<sup>19</sup> Equipped with these conceptual tools, he famously described history as a struggle between classes for the control of production means. If the bourgeoisie managed to overthrow the ruling noble class of the feudal society (and by gaining control of economic structures to impose its values over the values of the nobility-led medieval age), it was now capitalism to be on the verge of collapsing, by generating with its own hands the proletariat, which, once it had taken conscience of its condition of alienation, would have led to a revolution, spreading from the countries where capitalism was more advanced to the rest of the world. At first, the state would have controlled the means of production, but that would have been just a transition phase towards a world without private property, without division between manual and intellectual work, without alienation and, notably, without the state; a return of the human being to her/his fully human condition. A famous slogan coined by Marx is ‘to everybody according to his needs, everybody in accordance with his capacities’ (*Critique of the Gotha Program*, 1875).

Marxian forecast has not materialised, though, and the reasons for this have been widely debated (and we can here only refer the reader to innumerable books on the topic); but what is left of Marxian analytical apparatus for the study of the field of PA? I will take an illustrative example that combines: an original interpretation of Marx, the one developed by the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci, to show how some of the concepts originally developed by Marx may bear fruits as analytical tools in contemporary governance and PA debates. The starting point is the work of the Marxian philosopher Antonio Labriola, who interpreted the dominance of the economic moment as the influence of last instance (some might interpret it as a sort of concession to the Marxian orthodoxy), but he argues that the interrelations between economic structures and cultural superstructures are two-way and articulate, rather than being one-way and deterministic. This is a starting point for Gramsci (his main work, *Lettere dal Carcere [epistles from jail]*, was written in the 1930s whilst Gramsci was in jail, during the Mussolini regime and was published posthumously; see Gramsci, 1947). He theorised that a class, in order to become dominant, must first shape common sense and common wisdom: it must permeate the superstructure with its values, it must infuse its values in the larger ‘civil society’ (a notion and political science category that he contributed to introduce into political thought, and which he interpreted as opposed to the ‘narrower’ political society). Only later and as a consequence of this process of acquisition of ideological dominance in the national culture,

the class that wins the battle of the values will also take control of the political society, and of the state apparatus by achieving the office of government. In this vision, intellectuals become an instrument of cultural domination: they are defined by Gramsci as ‘organic intellectuals’, where ‘organic’ means part and parcel of the political party that represents the class and whose function is to elaborate and spread the values of the political party to which they belong by acting as the elaborator in intellectual forms of the needs of the masses – the proletariat, the workers class – that the party represents and aims at bringing to hegemony.<sup>20</sup> In Gramsci, the political party performs the role the Prince plays in Machiavelli (see Chapter 7) – like the Prince, the political party must be properly educated for developing the skills necessary to grab and keep power. Indeed, this synthesis of Marxism and a distinctive interpretation of Machiavelli’s thought is highly original, and one of the most interesting contributions to political thought provided by the Italian thinker. For Gramsci, rather than an individual, it is an organisation to play the key role in the struggle for political power that Machiavelli considered the essence of politics. And the war for political power may be won not necessarily in a decisive, one-off battle, but rather it may be conquered because the enemy – that is, for Gramsci, the other classes and the other parties representing those classes – get worn off, and this happens because the winning party imposes its values over society.

This vision of brutal, ruthless conflict for power might look horrific from an evaluative standpoint, but it contains important conceptual tools for analysis, at the interfaces and interstices between bureaucracy, political parties and other organised forms for conquering political power, that should not be overlooked by PA scholars. Let’s see an illustrative example: Marxism was the ideology of the largest communist party in Western Europe, the Italian Communist Party, until at least the middle of the 1980s. Inspired by Gramsci’s thought, and operating under conditions making the immediate conquest of political power via elections largely impracticable, the ruling elite of the Italian Communist Party pursued a strategy of shaping the values of civil society. A key target became the education of the younger generations, which in Italy occurred mostly in the public school system. Soon after the cooling of political tensions in the aftermaths of WWII, when it became clear that Italy would stay in the Western camp, the public education apparatus became one of the main targets of the Italian Communist Party. The key link in the transmission chain was identified in the production of school texts and handbooks, and hence in the role performed by the intellectuals that write them (and to some extent the publishers who distribute them, but as these were driven mainly by commercial logics, they were considered easier to steer). The indoctrination of school teachers was part of the process of shaping, in the long term, the values of the successive generations of Italians, educated (but in Gramsci’s perspective the most appropriate term is ‘indoctrinated’) in the values of the working class

(as interpreted by the party). By changing the values of society as a whole, over a number of decades getting to the office of government for the Italian Communist Party would then have been the almost automatic resultant of such a process.

As known, the takeover by the Italian Communist Party never happened, and so the result of this ‘social experiment’ cannot be observed. To make a long story short, this happened because the Communist ideology inspired by the ‘Soviet beacon’ (Gramsci was a fervent admirer of the soviet regime) at first tottered and then faltered and collapsed when the Berlin wall fell, bringing down with it the very Italian Communist Party, which changed name and nature over the subsequent decades. (The story should be completed by also noticing that the other parties did not stand still: the Christian Democratic Party notably exploited its position of office-holding by wielding an influence on the functioning of the education administrative apparatus – recruitment, career progression, and the like: often micro-managed by political appointees, see Cassese, 1993; Ongaro, 2009 – a move also aimed at counteracting the influence of the Communist Party on the Italian school system. It is in fact instructive to note that, although Italy generally had coalition governments, the post of minister for education was always held by an exponent of the Christian Democratic Party over the entire period 1948–92, that is, since the collapse of the Christian Democratic Party in the early 1990s.) But there are in Gramsci’s thought a number of conceptual tools – like the emphasis on the significance of changing publicly held perceptions by infusing the national culture with the values of one’s own party; or the analyses of the dynamics whereby political parties, especially the best equipped ones for grabbing power, strive to capture segments of the public sector in order to advance the party political agenda by manipulating the administrative apparatus – that should be part and parcel of the toolkit of PA scholars. We discuss this perspective of inquiry into public governance and administration issues in more detail in Chapter 4.

We can now complete this tour of post-Hegelian philosophy by turning to the critiques of Hegel’s philosophy stemming from different standpoints than the Marxian, always keeping in mind that contemporary philosophy is in a number of respects the product of the reaction to Hegel’s system. The Copernican revolution in philosophy brought about by Descartes, Kant and Hegel gave the subject a sort of absolute centrality in ontology: with it, prominence was acquired by another key property of the (human) subject: will and willpower. An original interpretation along this line is provided by the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. For Schopenhauer, our very body, and notably the muscles through which we exercise our will and which get resisted by the forces that oppose us, reveal that in essence we are willpower. Since willpower is conflict and tearing, life is in essence pain.<sup>21</sup> Liberation from pain can only occur by means of the abandonment (transcending) of will towards the non-will, for



which the Latin language has a specific word, *noluntas*, the negation of the *voluntas* (willpower). The abandonment of will, the giving up of any act of will, occurs through art and, ultimately, religion: religious *ascesis* through unconditional love (*charitas* or *agape*) can free humankind. The underlying philosophical conception is that it is an act of will, rather than cognition, to establish the world – or more precisely its representation: for Schopenhauer the world *is* representation – and this is an implication of the centrality given to the subject in the ontology of modern philosophy. Schopenhauer interprets the world as a representation of the subject, on which we strive to exert our will: the only possibility to discover the intimate nature of what we are is through willpower, and our only possibility to liberate ourselves is through giving it up.

This might appear quite abstract philosophical speculation, but this philosophical conception may be linked in ways closer than one might deem to social constructivist approaches (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). If reality is socially constructed, then not only cognitive capabilities, but also the intertwining of acts of will provide the building materials. The main point of difference between most of the contemporary social constructivist debate and Schopenhauer is the direction undertaken: rather than taking the route of individuals negotiating among themselves a shared narrative of good governance as means to making sense of a socially constructed reality and somehow bettering it, which is the way towards betterment that is referred to in some social constructivist approaches (see Abel and Sementelli, 2004, in particular for a highly elaborated presentation of this argument in the field of public governance; this point is widely discussed in Chapter 4), Schopenhauer suggests to simply abandon this representation, that is, to abandon the world altogether. Admittedly, in Schopenhauer's approach inspired by a religious afflatus there is very limited scope for public administration and public services: at most, they should act as enablers of artistic and religious life, which ultimately leads to salvation in Schopenhauer's perspective. Schopenhauer has been an influential philosopher and, although his legacy does not include a school proper (there are no 'Schopenhauerians'), his bequest lingered and affected subsequent philosophical elaboration, and notably (we deem) social constructivist approaches.

The road of putting willpower at the centre was pursued to the extreme, and to utterly surprising consequences, by another German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. He famously proclaimed that 'God is dead' and the world dances on chaos, and advocated a sort of return to the world of the 4th century BC Athens – that is, before Socrates and before Christendom, who for him corrupted mankind. Nietzsche's thought is imbued with soteriological elements, albeit fiercely adversarial of the Christian faith. Indeed, most of his philosophy is an attempt to 'make sense' of living in a world without God and exploring paths to cope with its consequences. The path to salvation lies in the

acceptance of the tragic dimension of life (as fathomed by the masterpieces of Greek tragedy) and the pursuit of the spirit of Dionysus, the deity that in Greek mythology is associated with grape harvest and wine as well as with acting and drama, and ‘what wine and acting on stage have in common is that they allow a person to set aside temporarily his or her ordinary, everyday identity and so the worship of Dionysus is characterized by a momentary suspension of the roles that society imposes on individuals’ (Sansone, 2009, p. 140). What is possibly suggested by Nietzsche with the advocacy of a return to the spirit of Dionysus consists of setting aside the roles imposed by a society fraught with ‘Christian values’ and, through ritual madness, achieving a different self by fully embracing life. What is advocated is a pure acceptance of mankind as it is, attained by getting rid of revealed religion, of piety and mercy, and of the weak amongst human beings. One of the many provocative claims of Nietzsche is that during Renaissance the Borgia pope (notorious for his far from irreprehensible behaviours, and at the same time extraordinarily active in making of Rome even more than it already was the concentrate of artistic masterpieces we all admire) almost succeeded in getting rid of Christianity ‘from within’ and re-affirming the spirit of Dionysus at the very heart of the papacy. But his near achievement was – notices ironically Nietzsche’s with his abrasive satire – thwarted by Luther, whose predication (as known, it formed and forms the basis of Christian reformed churches) re-instated Christendom for five more centuries. In sum, making a very long story short, for Nietzsche the pursuit of the spirit of Dionysus would bring about the so-called super-human or ‘beyond human’, a new creature (new in the existential sense, not in the biological sense) that would establish its own values rather than being subdued by the values of revealed religions.

It may at this point be noticed that a risk of drifting towards the irrational and the dominance of capricious, arbitrary will and the irrational over the rule of reason (and at times also over reasonableness) somehow lurks in any philosophy where both rationality and the subject are treated as ‘weak’. These approaches are undoubtedly also a produce of the reaction to the absolute, omnipresent reason of Hegel. However, we would argue that extolling the irrational and willpower to the detriment of rationality (like the critical reason of the Enlightenment and Kant) also brings with it a high dose of risk of sliding down the path of the dominance of the capricious and the arbitrary will.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, Nietzsche also brought another element of the Hegelian system to its extreme: for Hegel (borrowing from Spinoza), the key category of being is that of necessity: all that is, necessarily is. This notion has been taken up by Nietzsche (in particular in the work *Zarathustra*) to the point of re-proposing the theory (already present in ancient Greek philosophy) of the eternal recurrence of the same: because everything obeys to the law of absolute necessity, every event will repeat itself indefinitely. This is meant literally: the same

person will be re-born infinitely and will re-do the same things in the same circumstances. We would argue, however, that the ultimate thrust of this claim is not proposing a new cosmology, but rather it is undertaking a way to make sense of life: it is ultimately a way to find salvation (in the spirit of much of Nietzsche's work, which is about finding a way to make sense of a world without God: how to cope with the abysmal challenges posed by the consequences of living in a world in which 'God is dead'). The only choice, for Nietzsche, is to accept this eternal repetition willingly, to embrace our destiny of the 'here and now' being the only reality, although this gesture too will have already followed an infinite number of cycles beforehand.<sup>23</sup>

Nietzsche in a sense showed the contradictions in bringing to the extreme the absoluteness of the ontological category of necessity. It is the critique of the category of necessity as the *only* category of being (to the detriment of the category of *possibility*) that represented a key contribution to the dissolution of the Hegelian system brought about by the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. His thought was extremely influential on the philosophical movement of existentialism, which we examine later and which has had a distinctive influence on PA.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* Marxism and the thought of Gramsci continue to provide a range of conceptual tools and guiding ideas for researchers and practitioners alike in the political realm; for PA scholars specifically, it brings to the attention the centrality of the notion of power, a key trait of any political system which may be problematic to operationalise (March, 1999), and it has surely been overlooked by PA scholars, yet retains a key role for any deeper understanding of the dynamics of administrative systems.

We have also briefly hinted to how the Copernican revolution in philosophy brought about by Descartes, Kant and Hegel, which has given the subject a sort of absolute centrality in ontology, re-interpreted through the lenses of the subsequent 'crisis' (crumbling) of the 'strong' subject wrought out by these philosophers has paved the way for forms of subjectivism, relativism and (radical) constructivism that constitute an important part of contemporary social sciences, and a relatively small but quite vocal stream in PA (which we discuss widely in Chapter 6).

## HISTORICISM, THE SCIENCES OF THE SPIRIT AND THE PLACE OF VALUES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, WEBER

We can now go back to the main track of German historicism, stemming (or at least heavily affected) by Hegel's inheritance, where we encounter a number of key figures whose studies have provided major conceptual tools to the

social sciences, and to PA specifically, notably Wilhelm Dilthey and Wilhelm Windelband. We owe to Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911; see a collection of selected writings in Dilthey, 1976) the notion of the ‘sciences of the spirit’ as distinguished from the natural sciences, that were at the time (19th century) developing at astonishing speed and apparently establishing a paradigm for the progress of human knowledge in general (an idea elaborated by the philosophical strand of positivism, to which we turn later). The sciences of the spirit are characterised by the fact that what they study are expressions of human life (in German, *Erleben*), objectifications of the spirit in the form, typically, of institutions (churches, states, religious or cultural–philosophical movements, and the like). When studying these objectivisations of the spirit (*erlebnisse*), the investigator, that is, the subject of the process of knowing, who is him/herself a human being, is in a sense identical with the object of the process of knowing, which is the life historically lived by other humans who by means of their collective action effected historical events (the spirit in action). For example, when a scholar studies Luther and the Reformation, and then the councils and the Catholic Counter-Reformation, s/he is in a sense re-living those events, partaking of them, and finally and ultimately seeing the world in a different way by means of having gone through those events by having re-lived them through the study s/he has pursued.

It is in this fundamental sense that the sciences of the spirit are radically different from the natural sciences. They are inherently historical (different from the natural sciences that are a-historical), and by being the investigator a historical being him/herself, as is the object investigated, the kind of knowledge and understanding that can be gained in the sciences of the spirit is qualitatively different from the natural sciences. When studying the development of administrative capacity at the federal level in the US at the turn between the 19th and the 20th century (as is done in the excellent work by Skowronek, 1982), or the forming of bureaucratic autonomy in American federal agencies (Carpenter, 2001) or the parallel developments of public services in sectors like health, education and policing in Belgium and England since WWII (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2009), the investigators (and we as readers) are in effect re-living experiences historically lived by public servants and changing ourselves and our view of the world through this experience. A key message for the discipline of PA, which partakes with the other social sciences the nature of science of the spirit, is that there is inherently and constitutively more than detached data collection and analysis or experimentation along the road of achieving an understanding of public institutions and their inner workings.

A genial precursor of philosophical historicism is the Neapolitan philosopher Gianbattista Vico (1668–1744). One of the first philosophers of history, he may be considered a forerunner in many areas of the social sciences. A crucial contribution by Vico, which in many respects anticipates and

informs Dilthey's notion of the sciences of the spirit, is the so-called principle that 'truth is made'. Vico, abiding by a notion of knowledge as correspondence ('the conformity of the mind with God's order of things', see *The First New Science*, 1725, p. xxiii), famously stated the *verum factum* principle, that is, that truth is made: what he means is that the social world is man-made, and for this reason it is also the part of the world that we can know better. Contrarily to what seems to be nowadays common wisdom, that is, that the natural sciences set the paradigmatic form of knowledge and the social sciences should follow the pattern, Vico states that we can attain full knowledge only of the human world, because it is the only world of which we can trace the causes (also by means of imagination, speculation, pure reasoning) for the very reason that it has ultimately been made (been laid down) by humans, throughout the history of civilisation.<sup>24</sup>

This philosophical stance is based on the rediscovery of an old maxim: '*Latinis "verum" et "factum" reciprocantur, seu, ut scholarum vulgus loquitur, convertuntur*' – 'for the Latins "true" and "fact" are reciprocal, that is, as the common school people state, they may be swapped'. In other words, we may get to know, we may have knowledge of the causes only of what has been made by human beings, because we as human beings are the authors of it (in Latin, 'factum' is both 'fact' and the past participle of 'to make', so 'factum' here refers to something that both is a 'fact' and that has been 'made'). This entails that a different kind of knowledge is possible of man-made reality than what is attainable of natural (let alone divine) reality. In sum, for Vico the 'weak' sciences are the sciences of nature, and the 'hard' sciences are the sciences of human-made institutions, the social sciences. This is a big challenge for the many contemporary tendencies to put a premium on imitating and reproducing the protocols of knowledge generation and 'verification' of the natural sciences into the social sciences: a trend to which public administration is far from being immune. For Vico, those who pursue that direction are simply heading the wrong way.

Other anticipatory discoveries we owe to Vico include his reflections on the role of institutions. For Vico, institutions – although originally the creation of human activity – once established become powerful shapers of what is appropriate behaviour to which human courses of action have to comply, albeit with a larger or smaller leeway. This theoretical perspective might on face value look nothing new, given the wide currency nowadays enjoyed by the so-called 'logic of appropriateness' in explaining how decisions are made in organisations, as well as the diffusion of the strand of the theoretical perspective of normative neo-institutionalism (see March and Olsen, 1996; Peters, 1999/2005); however, about three centuries ago this way of looking at human-made institutions was profoundly innovative, and proved seminal (although the lineage to Vico's thought is not always fully acknowledged). Another genial conceptual

novelty introduced by Vico are his reflections on the ‘heterogenesis of the ends’, that is, in more contemporary social science language, on the unanticipated consequences of purposive social action (Merton, 1936).

Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915) coined another conceptual distinction, which proved seminal for later developments of the social sciences: it is the distinction between nomothetic and idiographic approaches to the investigation of social phenomena. In nomothetic approaches, the thrust is towards the ‘discovery’ of covering laws, of regularities in empirical phenomena so systematic to deserve being entrusted the status of a ‘law’. Idiographic accounts, conversely, are thicker and deeper in terms of knowledge gained of the intrinsic case, the historical event or concatenated series of events (episode) about which an understanding is acquired by the investigator, and yet without the pretension to draw from this generalisations of sort; in fact, quite the opposite – it is the uniqueness of the happening of a certain episode that is the focus and the thrust in idiographic accounts. In later interpretations, the idea arose that so-called ‘limited historical generalisations’ can be drawn from idiographic accounts, notably when such accounts are treated through the comparative method (Ragin, 1987), but also from single (idiographic) case studies, in such ways that knowledge initially generated by means of an idiographic approach is capable of producing transferrable knowledge, that is, knowledge ‘useful’ also elsewhere in different circumstances. In the field of public administration and management, this approach has found fertile ground – traditional exemplars include Selznick (1956); examples of recent works include Barzelay (2001), Cejudo (2003), Gaetani (2003), Gallego (2003), Mele and Ongaro (2014), Ongaro (2006); and a recent advocacy of rediscovering idiographic accounts in PA is Terman (2011).

Another major figure is Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936), who introduced the distinction between factual judgements and evaluative – value-based – judgements. This notion would be widely elaborated by Max Weber (1864–1920), the giant of sociology, philosophy – and PA. Weber, a founder of the discipline of sociology and a central figure in PA, introduced a number of key concepts that still constitute the lynchpin around which some crucial discussions in the social sciences occur. First, the distinction between factual judgements and evaluative judgements, that is, judgements based on values and the consideration of what ‘ought to’ be alongside what currently is. Weber famously theorised that the selection on what is investigated with scientific method, out of the immensely wide complexity of reality whose entire exploration is beyond reach, occurs on the basis on the values of the investigator. A crucial difference between Rickert and Weber is that for the former the values transcend individual consciences and the ‘ought to’ is presupposed of any value selection made by one, specific social investigator. Weber seems instead to lean more towards an inherently subjective view of what values will actually

guide social scientific investigation: the problems and the intellectual curiosity that guide social scientific investigation are more historically contextualised in Weber, and they ultimately lie in the individual investigator.

A second key notion distinguishing the human sciences and the social sciences from the natural sciences is that of interpretive approach: understanding (*Verstehen*) is required in the social sciences and the humanities, and knowing/explaining (*Erklären*) characterises the natural sciences.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* the authors examined in this section are central and directly relevant for PA thinking and they introduced key concepts on which PA, and the social sciences at large, widely rely, like the notion of the ‘sciences of the spirit’; the conceptualisation of nomothetic and ideographic knowledge; the distinction between factual judgements and evaluative judgements. We have also noticed the significance of historicism and how conceptions of how history unfolds, and of conceptions of time, for PA studies (these are discussed in Chapter 4) Weber also introduced the method of the ideal typing, that we discuss later in Chapter 8. Also crucially for PA, Weber elaborated the so-called bureaucratic model, or – named after him – Weberian model of public administration, based on the notion of power as grounded in the primacy of the law, rather than in tradition or charisma. Also most famously, Weber outlined the conception of ‘politics as vocation’, and its implications for the role of charismatic political leadership, on one hand, and conceptions of citizenship and the underpinning notions of negative and positive freedom enjoyed by citizens, on the other hand. These crucial topics are not further discussed here because they have been widely covered in a deluge of other PA works (for an overview and review of the inheritance of Weber in Europe and the US, see Rosser, 2018). The treatment of Weber’s thought<sup>25</sup> here is disproportionately brief only because it is already so extensively discussed within the discipline of PA, and the thrust of this book is bringing to light contributions from wider philosophical streams than those already enjoying wide currency in the field of PA.

## POSITIVISM, CONVENTIONALISM, POPPER

Positivism lies quite at the opposite of historicism, in terms of ontological and epistemological stances. Positivism is a philosophical movement that was born and grew rapidly in the 19th century and whose key tenets include a total, indeed fideistic, reliance on the primacy of ‘scientific knowledge’. It is, in important respects, an offspring of empiricism, but with its distinctive twists. Scientific knowledge, patterned on the natural sciences that had been consolidating since the 17th century in Europe, is deemed to be the only form of knowledge. Notably, the method(s) of the natural sciences (summed up as ‘verification’ of theories by testing them against ‘facts’) is also considered

applicable to the study of society: the method of the natural sciences is the model for the social sciences as well.

This total reliance on scientific knowledge is coupled with a very optimistic view of the benefits that can derive from progresses in such knowledge: scientific knowledge was considered by 19th century positivists as the key resource for addressing and ultimately solving all the problems that had historically afflicted mankind: progressivism and optimism are thus qualifying traits of positivism. In this perspective, the ‘fact’ is the only solid foundation of knowledge and indeed of the organisation of individual and associated life: idealism and spiritualism are rejected and dejected as ‘metaphysical’ (it is with positivism that the term ‘metaphysic’ acquires the negative connotation which is so widespread nowadays). Leading figures of positivism include Auguste Comte (1798–1857), Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) and Roberto Ardigò (1829–1920).

To better situate positivism in historical perspective, it should be noticed that a number of key tenets that can be found in positivism, like the primacy of the critical reasoning searching for ‘facts’ to unmask and dispel prejudices, were flags already flown by the Enlightenment and before by the protagonists of the scientific revolution in the 17th century. On the other hand, the factual scientific progresses that had been brought about during the 18th and 19th centuries and the material progresses engendered by the deployment of the effects of the Industrial Revolution that started in England in the 18th century and was spreading throughout Europe have surely inspired that optimistic – ‘positivistic’ – view of human development that characterised 19th century Europe. European nations, although deploying an aggressive colonialism in Africa and Asia, were enjoying a historical and political context of limited warfare in Europe (with the exceptions of the Crimean and Franco–Prussian wars), and the worldwide dominance of Europe through colonialism in Africa and Asia was the breeding ground of a form of political–cultural dominance of the Western civilisation across the world. All these contextual factors might help explain the ‘optimism’ that pervaded the epoch, and its philosophical movements.

From an epistemological standpoint, one key tenet of positivism is the importance of induction for knowledge. This has to be situated in the frame of a harsh polemic towards the notion of the ‘syllogism’ (of Aristotelian origin and widely upheld during the medieval age) as the lynchpin of logic. John Stuart Mill developed a harsh critique of it: if the major premise is indemonstrable (e.g. all humans are mortal), then the minor premise and the derived consequence (Wellington is human, and hence Wellington is mortal) become wrong (Mill, 1843/2011). The critique is that it is only through inductive reasoning that we can achieve reliable knowledge (in the example, knowledge about the major premise of the reasoning: that all humans are mortal), and therefore the demonstration could occur only via empirical, factual testing



(Wellington at that time was alive and well, and his mortality for Stuart Mill could not be proven via the major premise, as in syllogistic reasoning). This critique has opened as many problems as it has allegedly settled: although forms of inductive reasoning, like statistical inferential analyses, are everyday tools of the social scientist, problems about how to generalise from induction are still unresolved and continue to haunt logicians and social scientists. Mill also introduced the distinction between *heteropathic* and *homopathic* laws (Mill, 1843/2011), by contrasting two modes, the ‘mechanical’ and ‘chemical’ modes, in which causes may act conjointly. For Mill, the gist of the mechanical mode lies in the property that the total effect of several causes acting in concert is identical to what would have been the sum of effects of each of the causes acting alone: in mechanics, the vector of the forces is the sum of each of them (considering the direction and verse of each force in the space); this is the homopathic effects of each individual component of a system operating under homopathic laws: that is, the total effect is the sum of the effects produced individually by each part. The gist of the chemical mode, conversely, lies in the fact that the joint action of multiple causes is not the sum of the effects of each cause had they been acting individually, as shown by a chemical reaction, whose effects are not the sum of the effects engendered by each component in isolation; this is the heteropathic effect of each individual component of a system operating under heteropathic laws. This notion has paved the way for the elaboration of the notion of ‘emergence’ and of emergent properties, and the ensuing stream of thought called emergentism, discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to social ontology and its application to PA.

Positivism has a revival in the 20th century embodied in the so-called neo-positivism. A key promoter was the ‘School of Vienna’, led by such figures as Moritz Schlick (1882–1936) and Rudolf Carnap (1891–1970).

One major strand of critiques to positivism came from a movement known as conventionalism. Authors in this strand include Mach (1838–1916), Avenarius (1843–1896), Poincaré (1854–1912), Duhem (1861–1916) – although not all of them can be placed, at least not squarely, under the label of conventionalism. Mach developed a critique of the assumptions of absolute space, time and movement of Newtonian physics that paved the way to its crisis and, later on, the acceptance of the astonishing implications for the conception of space and time brought about by theory of relativity elaborated by Albert Einstein. He minted the conception of scientific knowledge as economy of thought: the more valuable a theory is, the more it covers a wide range of phenomena with explanations that are the simplest possible. The criterion of parsimony (already encountered in William of Ockham) that permeates current conceptions of what a ‘good’ theory is owes much to Mach. The key contribution by Mach, which constitutes the essence of conventionalism, is more revolutionary than the criterion of parsimony though: it is the claim that theories do not have, or

do not necessarily need to have, an intrinsic validity in terms of detecting the causes; they are just functional relations ‘that function’ for predicting a range of phenomena; they are a ‘fit for purpose’, apt convention and hence the mint of the term ‘conventionalism’ to describe this philosophy of science. Like any convention, they may be replaced by another if it proves to be more suitable.

A key contribution by Avenarius is the notion that experience, in order to be an acceptable ‘valid’ source of knowledge, has to be made public through verbal assertion. This methodological assertion embodies both a critique and an assumption. The critique is to the very possibility of the experience of the interiority, in direct criticism of Descartes’s methodological approach of the ‘I think’ and all the followers, a critique that he brought to the point of dissolving any psychological experience and reducing it to the purely biological element. The assumption is that for experience to be valid, it must undergo the requisite of being public: the publicity of the research process and the procedures for their replicability, which has become a widely held criterion in the natural and social sciences alike (‘always conduct your research as if a fellow scientist were behind your shoulders observing all you are observing’), although in the social sciences this may be far from being totally unproblematic, let alone always feasible.

Poincaré elaborated the notion of science as a rule for action. The starting point is the consideration that not all facts can be given heed, and hence it is the scientist to select what facts deserve being observed and studied – a statement that resonates in Weber’s notion of values guiding the choice of phenomena to be observed and studied. In this perspective, ‘valid’ theories are those more productive of results in terms of being useful and ‘handy’ for studying phenomena – or just handy: so Euclid’s geometry for Poincaré does not contain a higher degree of truth value than other geometries, but it is widely used because it is the most handy of geometries, at least for the problems of the common people.<sup>26</sup> Implications (quite astounding on second thought) include that theories, contradictory amongst themselves, may co-exist in explaining different phenomena, or phenomena seen from different angles, like in theoretical physics where the theory of relativity and quantum theory co-exist, albeit being partly contradictory (but they are applied to different phenomena, the theory of relativity applies to the cosmic scale of the extremely big, quantum theory to nuclear and sub-nuclear particles and the extremely small<sup>27</sup>), or like the ‘double nature’ of light, described as a wave or as a sheaf of particles, depending on how it is observed.

Duhem developed a critique of the *experimentum crucis* conceived by Bacon (Chapter 2). He argued that any time a hypothesis is tested, what is tested is effectively a whole range of hypotheses, auxiliary to the one being tested, not just the one allegedly undergoing the crucial experiment. For this reason, it cannot be drawn from the result of the experiment that the alternative, oppo-

site hypothesis is ‘verified’ (if the experiment leads to discard – falsify – the tested hypothesis). Karl Popper went further in this line of critique, arguing that it is also not possible to formulate only one alternative hypothesis to that which is tested: infinite alternative theories can always be produced, and hence no single experiment is capable of testing which one to retain and which to discard between two theories.

Concepts and notions worked out by conventionalism are now part and parcel of the toolkit of the natural and the social scientist alike, and public administrationists are no exception: it is hard in this respect to overestimate the influence of these ideas on contemporary scholarly research in the field (a simple browsing of books on the methodology of the social sciences, and the less numerous books dedicated to researching PA, points to this, e.g. van Thiel, 2013). It is equally impossible to overestimate the influence of Karl Popper on the philosophy of knowledge (Popper, 1934/1977).

Karl Popper made a major contribution to the epistemology of the sciences as well as to politics and liberal political thought. For reasons of brevity, here we only touch very briefly on one key contribution he made, namely the critique of induction and inductive knowledge that forms such an important part of both positivism and conventionalism, as we have seen. For Popper (making a very long story short), induction does not exist and it cannot ground any knowledge. Knowledge is always the product of the testing of a theory – not any theory, but those that are most parsimonious and capable of providing explanations of phenomena, provisionally valid if they successfully undergo the testing, until they get falsified, that is, until evidence can prove the theory wrong. The theory is not immediately entirely rejected: it may still serve the purpose of providing a partial explanation of some phenomena (Newtonian physics is still widely retained and employed for its capacity to explain most phenomena for the purposes of most branches of applied engineering; however, it is falsified when it comes to explaining phenomena in the very macro-scale of astrophysics or the very micro-scale of particle physics), but it will eventually be replaced by a more supple and apt theory, which will be held ‘true’ only insofar as, and until, it will be disproven by novel evidence and experiments: it is the so-called principle of falsification. But where do theories come from? For philosophers like Charles S. Peirce the observation of surprising facts may be a powerful source of conjectures and hence, ultimately, theory generation. Popper is more open to a multiplicity of paths towards theory formulation. The mind for Popper is not *tabula rasa*, a blank sheet or a blackboard on which, through induction, ‘veritable’ knowledge can be written through accumulation of experience, and false knowledge, that is, prejudices, should be wiped out with a board rubber. Popper does not criticise Peirce, for whom induction was just a source of opportunity for thinking of and elaborating a novel theory to then be tested, but rather Positivists, who claimed

that accumulation of scientific knowledge could occur through pure induction. Knowledge for Popper always starts from expectations or ‘hypotheses’ that are already in our mind: they may derive from tradition, from philosophical speculation, and most often these expectations presuppose a metaphysics and derive from it. But, hypotheses must always pass through the sieve of empirical testing and experimentation. Only the hypotheses (and the sets of related hypotheses that constitute a theory) that provisionally pass empirical testing can be held as ‘provisionally’ true, until further testing will disprove them. For Popper, there is asymmetry between falsification and verification: thousands of controls cannot ‘verify’ a theory, cannot prove it is true. One disproof is enough to falsify a theory.

Popper’s epistemology has been seminal for a huge debate about how scientific knowledge proceeds, and notably whether it proceeds only through theory-testing, or also through induction, of which there are different forms. No final word can of course be uttered on this gigantic problem of philosophy of knowledge. According to Popper’s epistemology, scientific inquiry is seen as a competition between scientific paradigms: sets of core hypotheses, a sort of nucleus of assumptions which as such are never directly tested, but from which a range of hypotheses are derived and tested. To the extent they ‘pass the test’ of empirical falsification, they are provisionally held as true; and they are encompassed into wider and more sophisticated theories. However, often these sophisticated theories rely on a core of untested hypotheses. When one or more experiments lead to discard some of the consequences of such hypotheses, theories may be adapted or refined to encompass the disconfirming evidence. It may also happen that new evidence cannot be accommodated into pre-existing theories. This may lead to the old paradigm running into crisis and a new paradigm to arise and ultimately replace it – temporarily before it is also challenged by newer paradigms (which at times may represent the re-proposition of old and forgotten ideas). The philosopher Kuhn (1962/1996) is associated with the conceptualisation of scientific knowledge as proceeding through an alternation of periods of ‘normal science’ in which accumulation of knowledge (in the form of convergence, consistency, problem-solving capacity, see Riccucci, 2010) occurs within one dominant paradigm, and periods of paradigmatic revolution in which a new paradigm replaces the old one in the given discipline (Reale and Antiseri, 1988). It is questionable (and questioned in heated debates), however, whether in the field of PA it is possible to speak of ‘dominant paradigm’ and ‘accumulation of knowledge’. It seems more appropriate to speak of a plurality, if not a babel, of co-existing paradigms (Riccucci, 2010).

Popper’s epistemology has raised huge questions. Is this the whole story? Does knowledge progress only through theory-testing, and then conceptual tools like reasoning by analogy have to be dumped and ruled out of the array

of possibilities available to the investigator? The story might be more nuanced – and fascinating. First, is ‘reasoning by analogy’ to be ruled out?<sup>28</sup> What is meant by reasoning by analogy is (in a very synthetic way) a process whereby knowledge of some other entity (the targeted object of knowledge) is attained by means of the knowledge of one entity which partakes with the target entity certain features. It also generally means the more ‘strictly’ metaphysical assertion that the knowledge of entities participating of being is a way to reach an imperfect knowledge of being as such (and it forms a branch of theology relating to what can be known of God through knowledge of entities: see in Chapter 2 the philosophy of Aquinas). These questions are more contemporary than usually thought of, although in contemporary ‘scientific’ journals they are usually discussed in different guises. When asked the question ‘what is a theory and how does theory-construction proceed?’, contemporary social scientist and organisation theorist Karl Weick provocatively answered that theory construction would be about standard theory validation (whereby a hypothesis or set of hypotheses are tested by empirical means) if such a thing existed at all: However, ‘the reason it does not is that validation is not the key task of social science. It might be if we could do it, but we can’t’ (Weick, 1989, p. 524). Rather, he depicted theory validation or verification as the resonating of a theory to the experience of other experts; and what is the ultimate source of the ‘experience’ of other experts? It is the experiential knowledge of other things, with which they compare the claims of the proposed theory; ultimately, we would argue this is a form of reasoning by analogy re-proposed, albeit in partly different guises than traditional metaphysics, to the attention of contemporary social scientists as the way to theory construction. Weick (1989) went further to advocate the usefulness of metaphors in theorising in organisation studies. The conclusion we can draw is that reasoning by analogy may enjoy much broader currency in contemporary social sciences than generally considered.

This line of argument is not meant to dismiss the huge influence of Popper on the philosophy of science. Popper has been a hugely influential philosopher and scholar. A highly significant approach in contemporary social sciences, referred to as ‘critical realism’ and propounded by prominent scholars like Pawson (2006; Pawson and Tilley, 1997), is significantly indebted to Popper’s philosophy. It is instead meant to remind of other, alternative paths of inquiry that have roots in century-old traditions of philosophising and that may continue to contribute to knowledge.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* concepts elaborated by these philosophers are crucial for the epistemology of social sciences in general, and notably for PA (it may also be noticed that positivism, and its intellectual heirs, have shaped a major intellectual tradition in PA, which is widely discussed alongside other traditions in Chapter 9). We will return to

Popper in the next chapter and in Chapter 5 (where we also discuss the political philosophy of the ‘open society’ and its ‘enemies’) as well as in Chapter 6 and 8.

## PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology is associated with the work of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), who is considered the founding father of this movement, and philosophers like Max Scheler, Nicolai Hartmann, Rudolf Otto, Edith Stein, amongst many others. Alongside its distinctive contribution, phenomenology also had a major influence in the development of another philosophical movement of the 20th century, namely existentialism, to which we turn at the end of this section.

Crucial for the development of phenomenology are the works of Bernhard Bolzano and Franz Brentano. Bolzano is a logician and mathematician who vehemently opposed the claims of psychologism about the origins of mathematical and logical concepts lying in psychological processes; instead, he claimed that the truth value of a proposition lies in itself, that verity is given in each and any valid proposition, irrespective of whether it is expressed or not, or whether it is thought or not (thus in certain respects returning to claims of classical metaphysics). Franz Brentano highlighted the intentionality of psychic phenomena, which are characterised by the fact they are always referred to as something that is other than the psychic phenomenon itself (when a subject endowed with psychic activity thinks or feels, the thinking or feeling is inherently intended towards ‘otherness’: in psychic processes of representation, the object is purely ‘present’ in front of the thinking subject; in psychic processes of judgement, the object is affirmed or denied; in psychic processes of sentiment, the object is, at the most basic level, loved or hated). This also has roots in classical philosophy: in the Scholastics, *intention* refers to the concept in its inherent characteristic of indicating something diverse from itself (tending to something, stretching out to something other than itself). Brentano was a mentor of Edmund Husserl.

The starting point of phenomenology is the possibility of knowing the essences (Husserl, 1913, English transl.); it is a movement aiming at ‘going back to the essences’ of things, beyond psychologism – whereby concepts are considered to be the product of psychological processes – as well as beyond positivism – whereby knowing is observing facts. For phenomenology, facts are not the ultimate reality; instead they are doors open to the essences – phenomena are not the limits of knowledge (like in Kant), but the door through which the things in themselves may become known. When conscience catches a fact ‘here and now’, it always gets an essence, for example this colour is a particular instance of the essence ‘colour’, this sound is a specific instance of the essence ‘sound’, this triangle is an instantiation of the essence ‘triangle’,

and so on; and although the fact is contingent (this sound might also not there be) and facts are varied (the sound of a piano, a violin, a trombone, etc.), in each and every experience of a sound we may recognise an essence, the common essence of a(ny) ‘sound’. This is a point of difference with empiricism: knowledge does not occur by abstracting common features by means of comparison of similar observations; it is first and foremost knowledge by means of intuition of the essence of things (even ‘similarity’, used in empiricism to compare ‘similar’ observations – is already an essence we know, before we use it: we use the essence of similarity in order to compare).

The method for knowing essences lies in the process of ‘epoché’ (from the Greek *ἐποχή*, a term derived from the philosophical movement of scepticism), which is intended as the suspension of judgement; that is, the bracketing of judgement in order to ‘enable’ things to manifest themselves to the conscience (this process is technically known as ‘phenomenological reduction’). It should be noticed here that the English term ‘epoch’ has the same origin: it also refers to a process of suspension to let the distinctive trait of one historical period emerge and qualify that period, which thus becomes a distinctive ‘epoch’ of history. The knowledge of essences is articulated into a formal ontology, the general knowledge of essences, and regional ontologies, the knowledge of essences pertaining to certain areas, like nature, morality, society or religion. Research in these areas has led to philosophical investigations of moral values (like in Scheler’s work), or of the religious experience of the sacred (as in Otto’s work).

There is – we may say – much of Aristotle in the knowability of things through phenomena. However, there is also the modern philosophy of the Cartesian ‘methodological doubt’ and the centrality of the subject. For Aristotle, like for the entire Greek civilisation, the subject, notably the human subject, was ultimately a part of the universe, without any special role to play in Being and the knowing of Being. But for modern philosophy after Descartes and Kant, the subject is a starting point. Also in Husserl, what cannot be the object of phenomenological reduction is the conscience, or subjectivity, which is labelled the ‘phenomenological residue’ and which cannot be bracketed: the world, according to Husserl, is constituted by the conscience. The question is whether ‘constituted’ means that it is established by the subject, or just revealed and given meaning by the subject. It is at this juncture that we find the distinction between idealist phenomenology and realist phenomenology. Idealist phenomenology, to which Husserl adhered in the last part of his life, stresses the subject as establishing the world, whilst realist phenomenology sees the subject as the ultimate recipient of the revealing of the world and the giver of meaning to it, but the world ultimately ‘pre-exists’ the subject.

Both strands, however, share an opposition to positivism: the observation and measurement of ‘facts’ detached from the essences that may be intuited

does not lead to knowledge, or at least does not lead to profound knowledge: it may at most scan the surface of things. (Neo-)Positivist philosophers have retorted that the assumption that inside ‘facts’ it is always possible to capture essences simply adds a ‘morass’ of (what Neo-Positivists argue to be) ‘interpretations’ and vague concepts that hinder rather than advance clarity of knowledge. Phenomenologists in turn reply that the investigation of essences is conducive to a deeper and more meaningful knowledge of reality than the measuring and labelling of things that characterises the positivistic stance.

On a concluding note, it should be clarified what, in our view, phenomenology is not: it is not social constructivism/constructionism in its idealist or in its realist variant. First, it is not ‘social’: Husserl placed the absolute subject at the centre, rather than inter-subjectivity which is centre stage in social constructivism (inter-subjectivity is a notion that originally figured in Hegel’s philosophy). Nor is reality ‘constructed’ in a phenomenological perspective: the world may be ‘constituted’ by the subject (in the idealist perspective, see earlier); but things can be known in their essence rather than being constructs – knowledge is penetration of essences, getting to know essences by means of phenomena as open doors. If these qualifications of phenomenology are appropriate, then some applications of phenomenology to PA (see Waugh and Waugh, 2006) appear ungrounded. We discuss this claim when applying phenomenology to PA.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* we discuss application of phenomenology to PA – as part of a larger approach to inquiring and investigating society, for example including moral values, religious values – in Chapter 6.

## EXISTENTIALISM

Existentialism is, like phenomenology, a philosophical movement that occupies a major place in 20th-century philosophy. It is associated with philosophers like Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers in Germany, Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre (1938, 1943) in France, and Nicola Abbagnano (1946/1963) in Italy. In this very concise summary we will refer mainly to Heidegger, first to his masterpiece *Being and Time* (1927), and then to the works after the so-called ‘turn’ in Heidegger’s thought, namely all the subsequent works.

The entry point for understanding existentialism is to describe what existential analytics is about: the very word ‘existentialism’ derives from the root word of ‘to exist’, that is, *ex-sistere*: ‘to stay projected towards the outside’. For existentialists, the experience of existence, which is ultimately unique and irreducible to anything else, is the starting point of philosophising. But the experience of existence requires being analysed with its proper method, which is referred to as ‘existential analytics’. Key experiences (in the plural) of exist-



ence become centre stage for the understanding of Being: the human being is in fact that special entity (the root word for entity in Latin means ‘what that is’, what has the property of being) that interrogates itself on the sense of Being. It is, in this sense, the door open to being (existentialism and phenomenology both look for a door open towards Being, but while phenomenology searches for it in phenomena, existentialism heads towards the experience of existing in itself as the pathway towards Being). In this respect, existentialism shares with modern philosophy the starting point of the subject interrogating itself and the world, although the emphasis in existentialism is on the ‘lived experience’ rather than the pure act of thinking by the thinking subject, as in Descartes.<sup>29</sup>

The distinctive trait of the human being as ‘existence’ in its very nature of being a ‘possibility’ is brought centre stage:<sup>30</sup> the existence is never a simple ‘being present’, the existence is never ‘an object amongst other objects’; it is always constitutively a projection, the concrete possibility of becoming something but also something else (and in this outright rejection of the category of necessity as the sole category of being it is evident the lineage of existentialism to the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard, a harsh critic of Hegel’s philosophical system). Key traits of existence are the ‘being-in-the-world’ (in the original German: *in-der-Welt-sein*), the ‘being-with-the-others’ and the ‘caring’. The world is not originally something to contemplate, but instead it is a set of possibilities and instruments for each human being to use in order to accomplish its own existential project. For this reason, for Heidegger the problem of whether the world exists and how its existence can be demonstrated (one may consider here both the Cartesian methodological doubt or the scepticism of the empiricist David Hume) is pure non-sense: there cannot be a subject without a world, nor is there an ‘I’ without the others (for Heidegger, like for Husserl, the others are not inferred as other ‘I’ alongside one’s own ‘I’: they are originally given – the other ‘Is’ (the plural of ‘I’) are originally and constitutively given to the individual ‘I’). If the existence is originally in the world as a set of possibilities, then existence expresses itself in ‘caring’, in taking care of the world. Existence can also be authentic or inauthentic: it is inauthentic, or anonymous, when it is dominated by chatter and by fatuous curiosity, when, ultimately, the existence renounces its distinctive trait of choosing what to become and lets itself be driven by impersonality, for example by maxims like ‘everybody does it’, ‘everybody says it’.

This constitutive dimension of existence has been picked up by scholars of PA (see Waugh, 2006), especially during the 1970s, for depicting the distinctive figure of the ‘existentialist public administrator’ who ‘cares’ and ‘takes responsibility’ for the general public rather than accepting impersonality as the key trait of bureaucratic behaviour. It is the profiling of the so-called ‘pro-active public administrator’, the administrator for whom ‘caring’ is a central notion, and possibility rather than necessity is the dominant onto-

logical category. It is a philosophy of responsibility and decision in public administration different and possibly at odds with the Weberian conception – or at least at strain with certain interpretations of the Weberian bureaucracy. We return to this perspective in Chapter 4.

By developing his existential analytics, Heidegger (like Jaspers) arrives at the constitutive dimension of existence – which is its death. Death is here conceived as the possibility that all other existential possibilities become impossible. Death is the possibility of the impossibility of carrying out any project, that is, of accomplishing one's own existence. This is the 'being-for-the-death' that characterises existence, and which is ultimately a totally individual experience – nobody can take upon her/himself the dying of somebody else. Put simply: each of us has to face her/his own death, and 'death' is ultimately, always, *my* death. This means that in order to live an authentic existence each of us has to 'live-for-death', not in the sense of effecting it through suicide (this is not at all Heidegger's thought), but rather in the sense of living every moment of the existence in the consciousness of death. This consciousness is not an intellectual act, but is embodied in the experience of anguish. Anguish is the sentiment of nothingness, of non-being. It is the consciousness of ultimate annihilation that characterises each and every existence. It is in this sense distinguished from fear, which is the dread of some other entity – we fear a threat posed by an entity, but we feel anguish in front of the non-Being as such.

Existentialist reflection on the nature of the being-for-the-death led Heidegger to what he referred to as 'the turn' in his philosophical reflection. The turn is a shift from the centrality of the individual existence and the analysis of it (the existential analytics developed in *Time and Being*, probably the single book that most shaped existentialism as a philosophical movement) to the orientation towards Being 'in itself'. The turn consists in the rediscovery of the process of 'unveiling' of Being or, to use Heidegger's favourite expression, the non-hiding of Being: the keyword here is the Greek 'ἀλήθεια' (aletheia), and the non-hiding of Being is a historical process, but yet revealing the transcendence of Being. Heidegger carried out a radical critique of all metaphysics, from Plato and Aristotle to Hegel and even Nietzsche, as having led astray philosophical thought. Starting from Plato's world of ideas, he considered it as the point of departure from the main road tracked by the pre-Socratic philosophers: the very notion of idea – whose root word in Greek is 'to see' – entailed a dominating role by the subject who sees, and hence first sowed the seed of that 'willing of possession', denounced by Nietzsche, that has dominated all (Western) philosophical thought throughout two-and-a-half millennia, impeding philosophy to become the venue of the unveiling of Being, rather hindering it. Of central significance are his reflections on the question concerning 'modern' technology (and its difference to the *techne*, or *technè* from the ancient Greek language, of the Greeks), where he suggests that

instrumental understandings of technology are shallow, remain to the surface whilst something deeper happens when technology affects the relationship between humankind and Being. One main road towards the rediscovery of the unveiling of Being is represented by the arts, to which Heidegger – a man with an incredibly vast culture spanning the divinities, the humanities and the arts – assigns a special power in enabling an understanding that philosophical reasoning has lost (he elaborated a distinctive aesthetics, or philosophy of the beauty, in his work *Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry*; Heidegger, 1981/2000). His philosophy gives both a special and a specific significance to the artwork: each artwork is a ‘whole world’ where the non-hiding of Being occurs, and hence contemplating a masterpiece is a source of understanding. If art is revelatory beyond what philosophy and the sciences can shed light upon, then the contemplation and appropriate interpretation (exegesis, hermeneutics) of the artwork is a way for gaining distinctive and otherwise unreachable insights, and the study and the interpretation of artistic masterpieces can provide a source of insights into reality.

This applies to all ‘regions of being’. In this sense, it can be argued that it also applies to public governance and administration. We claim that this is also the case with the masterpieces that have addressed the world of governing, of public governance and of public administration – and we illustrate this through the discussion of Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s famous masterpiece *The Good Government*, which we examine in Chapter 6, based on consolidated scholarly work on the theme.

There is another key notion in Heidegger’s analytical apparatus that deserves mentioning – also for its implications for PA. Heidegger carried out a radical critique of the notion of ‘time’ that is used in the sciences as they consolidated since the 17th century. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger develops an analytics of time that takes the move from the notion of ‘ecstasy’, in the etymological meaning of ‘staying, or lying, outside (of oneself)’. For Heidegger the fundamental dimension of time is the future: existing means projecting; the primary meaning of any (human) existence lies in its projection to build her/his own future in the world through the activity of ‘caring’. But ecstasy applies to all dimensions of time: if the future is lying outside of oneself towards what will be, the past is staying outside of oneself towards a situation of fact to accept it (something which is past cannot be changed, although it can be interpreted and accepted); the present, finally, is lying outside of oneself to stay next to the things. There are two ways of ‘living the time’: authentic and inauthentic. Authentic is when existence as the being-for-the death lives by assuming death (one’s own death) as a qualifying trait of existence: this way one lives without being overcome by the mundane things of life. The authentic present becomes the living of the present as ‘instant’, in which the human being decides her/his own destiny, and the authentic past is when the existence accepts and

re-lives the possibilities that tradition has given us. A key implication of this conception of time is that the time used by the natural sciences and – in most cases – the social sciences (that is, the time that can be dated and measured) is inauthentic time: it is *not* the time of life, nor is it the time in which we may gain any authentic understanding of being. This is a fatal blow for most of the ‘knowledge’ that is generated through ‘scientific’ procedures. The challenge applies, perhaps even with a special intensity, to the scholarly study of political communities and the ways in which citizens’ lives unfold in them: is the ‘real’ time of lives of the citizens unfolding in their communities taken into account in studies of PA – even those that adopt qualitative methods, longitudinal perspectives and forms of direct, participant observation?

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* existentialism has inspired and elicited a strand of studies in PA, which has also led to minting the term, and profiling the figure, of the existentialist public administrator, widely discussed in Chapter 4. Separately, we also return on Heidegger’s notion of time and its implications for PA also in Chapter 4.

## STRUCTURALISM

Quite at the opposite of existentialism, the starting point of structuralism are – as the name conveys – the deeper structures that, according to this philosophical movement, explain society and humankind. The human subject or ‘I’, whose utmost prominence we have encountered in modern philosophy since Descartes, is dethroned by structuralism to give way to the inner structures into which the ‘I’ dissolves.

One of the founding fathers of structuralism, Claude Lévi-Strauss, in exile in Brazil during the 1940s while war was raging in Europe, carried out a famous study on the populations of the Amazon and, based on findings from his study, claimed to have identified certain elementary structures of kinship that appear to characterise that distant society – distant from both Eastern and Western civilisations (Lévi-Strauss, 1949). His contention was that his study shed light on ‘laws’ that characterise societies across time and space (famously, he studied the prohibition of incest). Analogously, Michel Foucault, a very prolific and highly influential author, devoted his attention in a range of renowned works to exploring how epistemic structures perform as key drivers of historical processes. The work of these and other philosophers aims at uncovering the deeper structures<sup>31</sup> that govern human societies.

Structures are a key category of analysis in both the natural and social sciences in order to explain phenomena (‘features that, *prima facie*, seem likely to affect the process of public management reform [...] include structural, cultural and functional elements’, to stick to the subject matter of our book and mention a much-cited book in the field of public management: Pollitt and

Bouckaert 2004, p. 40). The findings of the previously mentioned scholarly works about deeper structures influencing society, either its constitutive family bonds like in Lévi-Strauss's work, or the transition between epochs on which Foucault's study sheds light, might be accommodated quite laicly within a variety of philosophical perspectives. But what characterises structuralism is the suffix 'ism' at the end, something which we might translate (from ancient Greek) as 'all is' or 'the entirety of being is': so structuralism as a philosophy asserts that structures explain everything. This is the philosophical meaning of structure: deeper, unconscious structures are the ultimate explanation of reality (or that part of reality which is within the reach of some form of human knowledge). Structuralism is thus an attitude that pretends to explain the human and the social in terms of deeper structural influence in which the human subject, the 'I', the conscience and the self-conscience are ultimately dissolved. This is also the problem with structuralism: structures are part and parcel of the explanation of human societies, but why the hidden dynamics and why should the hidden 'reasons' of deeper structures be *the* reality, the totality of being? And what criterion of truth enables the identification and distinction of the 'true' ultimate structures of being? In fact, if we follow the central claim of structuralism, we are led to a contradiction: human rationality and conscience should at the same time be the judge about the truth value of the claim that reality ultimately consists of deeper structures whilst they themselves dissolve into these structures; human conscience is at the same time claimed not to exist other than dissolved into structures that transcend it, and yet at the same time this assertion can only be grounded by a rational conscience stating it. It is these questions that pose serious limits to the pretensions of structuralism to qualify as an ontology. However, the findings of the manifold studies in this stream are evidently important contributions to the understanding of social dynamics, and by themselves can quite easily be accommodated into different philosophical viewpoints and accepted within a wide range of perspectives. The influence of structuralism on the social sciences is undoubted, and there is still much that can be borrowed from it, notably in the study of public governance, by plucking into the toolkit of structuralist thinkers. Moreover, a structuralist perspective may represent a critical alternative framework to other approaches, that when combined may shed additional light on human and social phenomena (one might contrast the structuralist anthropology à la Claude Lévi-Strauss with cultural anthropology and the notion of human culture as an irreducible act of creativity à la Tylor, 1920; Kroeber, 1952, in order to see how fruitful the combination of different perspectives may be in shedding light on social phenomena).

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* structuralism and notably the potential multiple applications of the notion of social structure to the advancement of PA studies is discussed in Chapter 4, where also and

more broadly the topic of how PA can tap from, and benefit of, the findings of social ontology is developed. Social ontology may be seen as a branch of ontology, a regional ontology whose focus is on the nature and foundations of social entities and their constituent or essential properties. Its lineage is in many respects in structuralism, as well as in Vico's thought, and we will return to these philosophies when discussing in Chapter 4 the implications of social ontology for PA studies.

### OTHER KEY 20TH-CENTURY STRANDS: PRAGMATISM, PROCESS PHILOSOPHY, ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY, HERMENEUTICS, POST-MODERNISM, PERSONALISM, SPIRITUALISM

We now turn our attention to another array of philosophical movements. Their common characteristic (albeit we promptly recognise this is a quite subjective classification) lies in featuring more of an *emphasis* on a distinctive aspect or dimension of philosophising than a doctrinal or ideological corpus proper.

#### **Pragmatism**

The first one we review here is American pragmatism. It is probably the first distinctive philosophical movement to originate in the US (hence its qualification of 'American'). In this philosophy, the truth of a notion is traced by its 'respective practical consequences ... What difference would it practically make if this notion rather than that notion were true' (James, 1907, p. 45). This assertion by James provides an effective depiction of the key emphasis of pragmatism. It is easily recognisable that it is more a philosophy of knowledge than a philosophical system *tout court*. It also places an emphasis on a process vision of reality as becoming, which seems to resonate deeply with the American culture: 'True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify ... The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process' (James, 1907, p. 201). To illustrate with an example: 'what is 90 degrees? Is it hot or cold? The pragmatist would ask, are you boiling water or are you playing basketball? The truth is in the experience, the problem and the context' (Shields, 1995). The influence of pragmatism on the development of the social sciences in the US can hardly be exaggerated, although the specific influence on PA studies is matter for finer-grained studies aimed at gleaning its distinctive influence out of a range of philosophical approaches affecting the study of this field (Snider, 2000).

## Process Philosophy

Linked to pragmatism, at least in its emphasis on becoming, is the so-called process philosophy. It is a radical ontology of becoming, whose roots can manifestly be traced in the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (see in particular Whitehead, 1929), an influential author, notably in the Anglophone world, but also beyond it (a Whiteheadian society is still up and running, featuring regular meetings and a kaleidoscope of initiatives, and some of its members are scholars active in the field of PA). The key notion for Whitehead is that of ‘event’: it is events and the becoming of things that we need to understand for gaining a deeper comprehension of reality, rather than substances; and it is interactions, mutuality of actions that shape the becoming of things – these interactions and mutuality are what Whitehead termed of ‘conrescence’.<sup>32</sup> Whitehead stresses how this philosophy is more consistent with modern physics notions of events occurring in the space–time of the Einsteinian theory of relativity as opposed to the old Newtonian physics centred on the notion of an absolute time and an inertial matter as the ‘substance’ of things. Research works centred on ‘process accounts’ are a notable feature of social scientific research in general, and political science and public administration research in particular, notably in American strands of research (one may think of the works of Abbott, 1992a, 1992b on general epistemological issues in the social sciences; Allison, 1971 in political science; and Barzelay and Campbell, 2003; Barzelay and Gallego, 2006, 2010; Asquer and Mele, 2018; amongst others in the field of PA). An interpretation of the thought of Mary Parker Follett along the lines of a Whiteheadian philosophy of becoming as its key ontological underpinning is developed by Stout and Love (2015; see also Ongaro, 2016; Stivers, 2006), drawing implications for how we conceive of public governance, on one hand, and workplace in PA, on the other hand.

## Analytical Philosophy

The *language turn* in philosophical studies also features prominently in the 20th century. The emphasis here is on the analysis of language to frame logical–philosophical problems: Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein are key authors, and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in the UK have become worldwide centres of the analytic movement and the philosophy of language. This movement is also intertwined with the developments of modern logic (in its turn intimately tied to developments in mathematics in the 19th and 20th centuries, like most notably the establishment and impressive growth of set theory, a theoretical stream associated to the thought of the mathematician Cantor and which pushed mathematics beyond its core remit of investigating the nature of numbers and of geometrical points and properties of

space, interlinking it even further with logic), and notably with the work of the Italian logician and mathematician Giuseppe Peano as well as with the works of Frege. These developments have not gone unnoticed in the field of PA: the development of formal logic was a major intellectual aim of the philosopher Carnap and the school of Vienna, and this was a major influence on Herbert Simon, a towering figure in the field of organisation studies and PA (we elaborate more widely on Carnap's influence on Simon and PA research in Chapter 6). More recently, a thoughtful application of Frege's principles to the public administration debate about the nature of context and contextual influence in PA is developed by Bouckaert (2013). What is considered as 'modern' logic (as opposed to classical logic founded by Aristotle and centred on the syllogism) owes much to its encounter with the analytic movement, as does contemporary linguistic analysis. Subsequent developments like those brought about by Noam Chomsky are also indebted to the analytic movement. Chomsky has worked out, *inter alia*, the distinction between superficial structure and deeper structure of a sentence. He worked out a method to analyse the transformations whereby the deeper structure of a sentence, its non-ambiguous meaning, can be transformed into different structures, of which there are many, and that can in turn be expressed in compliance with the grammar rules of any one of the extant specific human languages that can be detected throughout the world and in history. Other key developments in contemporary language studies include the notion of 'sign' as the relation between a signifier and a signified, a notion that enjoys wide currency and extensive usage across the humanities and the social sciences in textual analyses. Analytic philosophy has acquired a notable status, highly influential if not dominant, at least in Anglophone contemporary philosophy. More limited or indirect appears the influence of this philosophical movement on PA studies. Putting it directly (and a bit simplistically), it seems there is room for importing tools and approaches from the methodologies developed within the analytic movement into the field of PA.

## Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a philosophical movement chiefly associated with Hans Georg Gadamer (*Truth and Method*, 1960/1975). His work provided an approach to the interpretation of texts, based on the notions of 'pre-comprehension' and of the text seen not just as an object in front of the reader, but rather as impinging and clashing on the reader. In this perspective, the effects of a text become part of the text beyond the original intentions of the author (that the author may have intended). This configures the hermeneutical cycle. In Gadamer's philosophy there is also a re-valuation of prejudices, that he intends as pre-judgement – they are deemed to be the inevitable starting point of any approach to a text. This is a view at odds with Bacon (see Chapter 2) and much



of the Enlightenment approach whereby philosophical reflections consists, for an important part, of erasing and rubbing away all prejudices. For Gadamer, prejudices deriving from intellectual ‘authorities’ are a starting point of any comprehension of a text, provided – as the Enlightenment suggested – they can be criticised rather than demanding uncritical allegiance. For Gadamer, the encounter with a book is ultimately ‘making an experience’ – the dialectic experience – and it is a form of knowledge well distinct from the ‘collection of observations’ at times acclaimed as the only starting point in knowledge generation (in opposition, for example, to positivism). Within this encounter, conceived of as ultimately an individual experience (Pareyson, 1971), truth can be attained, but truth does not exhaust itself within any one individual’s existential experience and encounter with it. The hermeneutical method has been applied to a wide range of fields; this includes in legal studies and, notably in relation to the field of PA, it is interesting to note the application of the hermeneutical method in administrative law, to the administrative procedure.<sup>33</sup>

### Post-modernism

Another, and multifarious, philosophical strand goes under the label of ‘*Post-modernism*’. It is hard to define it because the very authors working in this tradition incessantly repeat that post-modernism is undefinable. Amongst its key authors may be included the philosophers Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida. One attempt to capture some traits can be by means of a cultural–philosophical parallel of the transition from the industrial society to the information society, from material goods to information-based services, and hence from the values, premises and philosophical foundations (like positivism) of the industrial society to an undefined society where those features are no more extant but where others and new ones have not yet taken shape. It has for this reason also been defined as a combination of hypermodernity and pre-modernity (Lyotard). In the social sciences it is often associated with social constructivism (Berger and Luckman, 1966) and the hyper-accentuation of the role of the (weak) subject in construing reality, and also with forms of inter-subjectivity and inter-subjective agreement in construing society and reality at large. It enjoys a certain consolidated, although quite delimited, remit in the field of PA, with key authors, journals (mainly *Administrative Theory & Praxis*) and recurring claims, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Often contrasted to post-modernism is critical realism (Pawson, 2006; Pawson and Tilley, 1997), centred (in our interpretation) on an attempt to combine classical realism (of Aristotelian imprint) with the role of the subject in modernity brought about by modern philosophy. This is also discussed further in Chapter 4.

## Personalism

*Personalism* is a philosophical movement associated with the philosopher Emmanuel Mounier, owing also to the works of Neo-Scholastic philosophers like Jacques Maritain and phenomenologists like Scheler, who applied the phenomenological method to the investigation of the essences of moral values. Personalism advocates a radical humanism and stresses the flourishing of the totality of the human person, as opposed to any reductionism, which for Mounier is any philosophy that ends up with a one-sided depiction of the human being (be it ‘the economic man’ or the Nietzschean ‘super-human’).

Mounier propounded a return to a radical humanism, a new Renaissance centred on the notion of ‘person’. His thought can be better appreciated in the perspective of the polemic he engaged with both Marxism and capitalism, which for him are philosophies that ultimately operate a form of reductionism, emphasising one aspect of the human person to the detriment of its totality and entirety. For Mounier the three dimensions of the person are vocation, incarnation and communion. Vocation is the call to realise a project that each and every person has – or receives – and that for Mounier is a qualifying trait of human life. Incarnation refers to the fact that the body is always part-and-parcel of a person, contrary to those philosophical strands that tend to conceive of the human being as an abstract ‘I think’. Communion refers to the perspective whereby it is only in the belonging to a community of persons that the individual person can accomplish her/himself and fully develop its vocation. It is a relational rather than atomistic conception of the human being and her/his flourishing. *Communitarianism* in the version propounded by Mounier is closely associated to the philosophical movement of personalism. Later in the book we query whether this perspective can enable getting beyond the common good versus social contract traditional dichotomy – this argument is developed and further discussed in Chapter 5.

But with philosophers like Carl Schmitt the notion of communitarianism went down an altogether different route: a nationalistic interpretation, whereby ethnic ties get pre-eminence. In this perspective, individual liberty must be tempered by the responsibility of the individual towards the community, conceived of at the national level, as the national community forged by ethnical or linguistic-cultural bonds. This altogether different interpretation of the notion of ‘communitarianism’ is also discussed in Chapter 5.

## Spiritualism

*Spiritualism* may be seen as a distinctive stream within a larger movement that emerged between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th across Europe, mostly – at least at its inception – as a reaction to posi-

tivism. Spiritualism is a movement whose main tenets include the claim that philosophy cannot be absorbed into science and scientific knowledge; the consideration of the specificity of the human being, and the significance of her/his interiority, liberty, conscience; and relatedly, that introspection and conscience are part-and-parcel of any investigation of reality, and that the interiority of conscience is a door open to transcendence and God. Key authors to whom this movement refers go back in time to Plotinus and Augustine, and then to the founder of modern philosophy – Descartes – and to cultural movements that have defined epochs of Western civilisation, like Renaissance and romanticism.

An author in the *spiritualist stream* and the Platonic–Augustinian tradition, but whose philosophical elaboration displays highly original traits, is the French philosopher Henri Bergson, on whose philosophy we conclude the chapter and our introductory journey across Western philosophical thought. In the next chapter, the philosophical ideas introduced are applied to key issues and problems of the field of PA.

The key thrust of the philosophy of Bergson is getting a deeper understanding of life as actually lived by ‘real’ living beings, and notably self-conscious living beings. Against any reductionism of life to its chemical processes, he claims that life has a unity that reductionism completely misses. But how to understand this unity?

Before we turn to this, we should ponder on the rationale behind the fierce polemic that Bergson conducted against any metaphysics that conceives of entities as immersed in a present without real duration. The starting point of his philosophy is the notion of time as duration (worked out in his first major philosophical work, *Essai sur les Données Immédiates de la Conscience*, 1913, English edition 1989). By taking the move from the lived time that each human being experiences (an approach whose methodological premise are in Descartes: the investigation of the self as the most undoubtable evidence), Bergson develops what is now a classic critique of the very notion of ‘state of conscience’, where the critique is to the stability or static nature implicit in the usage of the term ‘state’ in the expression ‘state of conscience’. In fact, Bergson argues, any sensation, representation or volition that occurs in our conscience never ceases to mutate and change over time, albeit changes may be so small as to be almost imperceptible and it is only when attention is given to the accumulation of such changes that the self perceives to have transited from one ‘state’ of conscience to another and different ‘state’. But conscience is – as vividly expressed through a very famous metaphor – a snowball. It continually grows by absorbing the future through the lived present into an ever-increasing past and, like snow for a snowball, the whole of the lived time is kept and constitutes any living being: we are the totality of our lived past. It is only for purposes of action that selectively certain ‘parts’ of the past are arti-

ficially plucked and brought into the spotlight through the process of remembering, because it is the abstraction operated by intelligence that artificially distinguishes and re-aggregates moments of our life under certain abstract labels (so, our 'professional life' gets distinguished from our 'private life', our 'youth' from our elderly age, and so on). The key innovation brought about by Bergson to the philosophical thought is that for Bergson the 'self-conscious I' is an activity continuously open outside of itself (projected towards the future via the present) and 'at the same time' (so to speak) constituted by duration, that is, by the conservation of the totality of its past activity: the totality of the past of the lived time gets conserved in what is conceived of as a process of accretion.<sup>34</sup> In Bergson's philosophy there are profound analogies with the Aristotelian notions of form and unity, but the distinctive novelty brought about by the French philosopher lies in conceiving of the time as the tissue of which every (living) being is made.

In this philosophical perspective, time is the tissue of which reality is made. Duration is the continuous advancement of the past that grows on its very activity of 'gnawing' the future, bite by bite, and yet conserving the totality of itself. The activity of remembering is an intermittent activity that occurs if and when possible, but the totality of the past does not need the activity of remembering for keeping the totality of itself: the past conserves the totality of itself by itself, and we are constituted – in other words, *we are* – the totality of our past. All that we have perceived, felt, thought and wanted since our infancy constitutes what we are. It is only for purposes of usefulness and practical action that our conscience rebuffs most of our past and lets only what is necessary for the purposes of the most immediate action pass to our attention. Our (as living beings) volitions, emotions or thoughts do not transit continuously from non-being back into non-being by staying an indefinitely little moment (instant) into being; instead, the totality of our past volitions, emotions or thoughts is conserved, whilst we continuously project towards the future, and the new volitions, emotions or thoughts are absorbed into our ever-growing past (which shapes what we are: what is referred to as 'our character'). Here Bergson distinguished between the time of mathematics (and physics: hence a famous contention with Albert Einstein on the nature of time) and the time of life. The time of mathematics is a spatialised time, the time of the pure instantaneity: the world, for mathematicians, dies and is born again at every instant;<sup>35</sup> this time that does not last, that has no duration, is not the real time of life. From this also derives the crucial distinction between remembering and memory: memory is the totality of our past that constitutes us. Remembering is for the action: we only remember what is required for action.

A key question addressed by Bergson is whether the living body is a body – a 'portion of matter' – like any other or not? Although it obviously occupies and carves out a piece of matter, and it can be sectioned and portioned (through

vivisection and dissecting), the main difference between a portion of matter and a living body is that in a portion of matter the present does not contain anything more than what was already present in the causes that have determined it to reach that given status, whilst the living body lasts: its past is all contained in its present, there remaining real and active. It is for this reason that a living body passes through phases, changes and eventually gets old – because it does have a history. Bergson does not deny the fundamental identity of organic and inorganic matter, but rather the claim is that any portioning of the reality of a living body would not be the living body as such, for example a thousand pictures of Paris from any imaginable angle simply are *not* Paris. Anywhere there is life, a registry where time is written is open. The most immediate analogy is therefore between each living body and the universe as a whole – not portions of it – which is also constituted by the totality of its past. From this originates the idea that the universe is in continuous accretion, enhancement of the whole, in every act of will by living, organic beings (although Bergson is cautious to remind the reader that the universe as a whole is a construction, different to the ‘reality’ of a living being).

But what does it mean talking about ‘life in general’ in the frame of Bergson’s philosophy? For Bergson, life is like a current, flowing from one living being to another one through the germinal cells (as outlined in his 2005 work ‘*L’Evolution Créatrice*’). The evolution of species is thus an endogenous process: it is not caused by pre-determined efficient causes (in the Aristotelian definition of the system of four causes) because assuming these causes would be denying the reality of duration, and because all that happens would already be in the causes when they are ‘present’. Nor is the evolution of species caused by final causes because analogously assuming these causes would entail that all life is simply present in front of these final causes without having a real duration (and this is a point of difference between Bergson and Leibniz, or at least the part of Leibniz’s thought that was known at the time Bergson was operating). Life is a flow, like a current: famously summed up in the expression ‘*élan vital*’ (‘the vital thrust’).

It remains the open question of the source of this *élan vital*, the source of life that shapes matter, unfolds through the multiplicity of individuals and yet is a single stream that penetrates through each individual and that unites them all. Evolution occurred through the unfolding of life along different sub-streams, against the resistance of matter. One direction has brought the accumulation of energy in the vegetal world. Another direction has brought the capacity of channelling and deploying energy in the most rapid ways, like in arthropods and vertebrates. Finally, in human life a qualitative change occurred by having broken through the counter-movement of matter and having achieved the liberation of conscience. The super-conscience that is at the origin of the *élan vital* has in the human species liberated itself – it can now pursue liberty, free

acts rather than the automatism of instinct. And where is mankind – and life – soaring through it? Mysticism is for Bergson the true religion that enables getting beyond the limits of humanity towards the absolute/transcendence (the theme is developed in his last work: *Les Deux Sources*, 1932).

Bergson by proposing a distinctive philosophical interpretation of the evolution of life (quite diverse from the one proposed by Darwin, 1859, and closer to the one proposed by other scientists, like the biologist De Vries), addresses, from a very original angle, the philosophical issue of the relation between conscience and brain (a key question in the philosophy of the mind). What is the brain for Bergson? In a famous metaphor he likened it to the blade of the dagger (conscience): the brain is not the totality of the conscience (as the blade is not the totality of the dagger, but a part of it), but it is that part that enables action. And conscience for Bergson is definitely not a product of the brain. Rather for our philosopher it is life that shapes matter – in other words, the distension of the spiritual activity is matter – not matter that makes life. Space is conceived of as extension of conscience, and matter as consolidation and inertia of acts of creation/acts of will.

Another highly innovative and original contribution by Bergson lies in his conception of intelligence and its relation with instinct. For Bergson intelligence is the capacity to classify and search for relations between things, looking at them from the outside. It is the intelligence of the natural sciences (and of most of the social sciences). Intelligence is the capacity to make use of inorganic matter by shaping it in the most functional ways. But intelligence stays at the surface of things, turns around its object without ever penetrating it (because it operates in a spatialised time where duration disappears). The capacity of penetrating the essence of things only occurs to instinct. Instinct is the faculty of utilising organic instruments for the pursuit of goals that are administered by nature itself: the eye for sight, the mouth and jaws for biting and eating, and so on. Instinct has an inner knowledge of things, but instinct by itself is blind – it can only repeat what it is apt to. Instinct and intelligence, which have a common origin and still keep trace of this commonality, are complementary: instinct drives into things, intelligence knows relationships amongst things. It is only intuition, instinct accompanied by conscience, that can get to *know* the things, those things that by itself intelligence can only relate. This poses a problem: that intelligence (the intelligence labelling and searching for relations) loses contact with the essence of things and their ‘real life’ in becoming. And isn’t this an experience that many researchers, including public administration researchers, have undergone? The sense that the real life of an organisation, or a public policy process, is lost when what is sought are relations that are treated in a spatialised time that does not correspond to what happened to the real organisation, made by real, living people? According to Bergson, when time is bracketed in research work, what

is triggered are the faculties of the intelligence, which takes multiple views of the time-less (life-less) object from the outside, for purposes of classification, detection of relations and ultimately intervention on the surveyed object for practical purposes. But life – the life of individual human beings making the organisation, and hence in a certain sense the life of the organisation as a community of living beings – gets lost, the unfolding of life in time wanes, fades away. This might be the philosophical, metaphysical underpinning of the experience researchers have when shifting from research methods intensive in contact with real lives (like ethnomethodology or case studies – especially longitudinal, thick, in-depth case studies) to research methods that require bracketing time, taking static views of people and organisations (snapshots: but a thousand pictures of Paris, even if taken from any possible spatial viewpoint, will never be Paris – as a living community made by living people).

We conclude the chapter on this famous metaphor: a thousand pictures of Paris from any imaginable angle are *not* Paris. We have so far hinted to possible implications of philosophical (ontological, epistemological) ideas for PA from innumerable angles, but we have not yet addressed the developments that may be brought to the field of PA by the more systematic application and examination of such ideas. It is to this task – walking the Paris of PA from within rather than hinting to it from a kaleidoscope of angles – that we turn in the next chapter.

*Implications for PA/Relevance for Philosophy for PA:* there are manifold implications for PA that, not unexpected, the many and so diverse streams of philosophical thought carry with them for PA. It is a purpose of this book to shed light on the potential contribution that a range of philosophical streams of thought can provide to PA: these are discussed throughout Chapters 4, 5 and 6, and from a different angle in Chapter 9.

## NOTES

1. One of the few ‘technical’ philosophical words that we maintain in this book, hoping not to bemuse the reader, given the centrality it enjoys not just in Kant’s thought but in the philosophical reflection that stemmed from it.
2. Although this notion, which seemed evident to Kant based on Newtonian physics, is not in modern physics (see, for example, the debate on ‘dark matter’ – its effects are felt, but it is not clear ‘where’ it is, and in what sense it is extended, and therefore it may be not all bodies might be ‘extended’). We return to this point later.
3. The philosopher Leibniz, for example, developed a conception of space and time whereby these are conceived as ‘ways in which things appears to the subject’: space and time stem from the relations with which they are ordered by the subject.
4. Kant conceived of the beauty as the sentiment of order and harmony, of what is liked beyond any instrumentality associated to the object, and of the sublime as the sentiment of the infinite. Through aesthetic experience (reflective judgement, in Kant’s terminology), the human being can partake through sentiment what is

denied in terms of knowability of both the finite and the infinite. This conception will prove hugely influential on romanticism.

5. In the sentence 'our' refers to we humans as rational beings.
6. This truly embodies the spirit of the Enlightenment, which Kant so powerfully brought to vertiginous heights.
7. Kant never reduced reality to the phenomenon; rather he postulated that phenomena are the perimeter of human knowledge.
8. The thinking subject is the main point of departure of philosophising since Descartes; however, Kant like Descartes before him and many other philosophers later on have struggled to come to grips with the nature and foundation of the unity of the thinking subject.
9. Fichte had the highest esteem of Kant, and he even hints in this works that maybe Kant did not reveal the consequences of his thought (consequences that Fichte was claiming to now be shedding light on) because he (Kant) possibly did not consider his times ripe enough for people to understand the revolution that was on the verge of being brought about.
10. This is the interpretation Hegel gave to his thought: as we have already seen, Schelling's thought should not be seen as just one phase towards the Hegelian philosophy; moreover, Schelling transformed quite radically his thought more than once over his lifetime.
11. The philosophy of nature was centre stage during the epoch of the romanticism, of which Schelling was an influential exponent.
12. Different from pantheism that assumes that God *is* everything.
13. I am indebted to Wolfgang Drechsler for having pointed out this three-fold meaning of the German term *aufheben* and its usage in Hegel's dialectic.
14. To better set Hegel's statement in context, it is important to notice that Aristotle conceived of the infinite (in mathematical terms) as a potentiality, not an actuality (a notion that can be conceived of in potentiality but can never actually occur), and this has been the prevailing wisdom over two millennia, and still was at the time of Hegel. Later in the 19th century, the German–Russian mathematician Cantor argued that, under certain formal definitions of the concept of infinite, the notion of infinite as a mental entity could be thought to exist in actuality; indeed, Cantor even argued that there be different orders of infinite, that is, in a bit of a *vulgate*, over-simplistic expression, that some infinities are 'more infinite' than others, meaning that an infinite defined in such a way to be obtained through a certain mathematical process is, according to Cantor's theory, of a higher order than another one (however counterintuitive it may *prima facie* be).
15. Part of this argument is masterfully delineated in an earlier work of Hegel, which many commentators deem to have embodied heights unparalleled in the rest of his production: *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807/1977).
16. It is very difficult to refer to something like 'the original thought of Marx' – in fact his philosophy has been subjected to multifarious readings and used as source of inspiration to carry out massively impactful social experiments across the world. It is nowadays virtually impossible to disentangle an 'original' thought from such array of interpretations and experiments.
17. According to this perspective, theology originates in anthropology.
18. The notion of alienation was already in Hegel, defined as the objectivisation of the ideal that when it meets the material world becomes 'other' from the subject who acted in the pursuit of it. For Hegel, alienation is inherent to the process of objectivisation, as a resultant of a dialectical process. Hegel gave a larger ontological



- meaning to the notion of alienation than Marx. For Marx, alienation was a deviant product of society; for Sartre, any social act becomes modified by the other(s) and the very encounter with materiality, and for this very reason the meaning of the act is modified and its concrete manifestation ‘becomes’ other than that the subject initially wanted through the act – the act becomes stranger to the will who pursued the act, feeds back becoming alien to the will, and hence the process of alienation.
19. It may be interesting to notice that the most famous work (alongside the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848) by Karl Marx, *The Capital* (1867), was written in a world capital of capitalism like London, where Marx lived after he was exiled from Germany, France and Belgium, toiling to earn a living and with almost no livelihood but the support and the help of his lifelong friend Friedrich Engels (who edited the second and third volumes of *The Capital* after the passing away of Marx). Engels’s original thought is also a key inspiration for Soviet Marxism.
  20. Many of us scholars, who uphold intellectual independence as a condition for the exercise of the research work only at the service of the search for truth, may well find this interpretation of the role of intellectuals repugnant.
  21. A notion Schopenhauer derived from Indian philosophical thought, notably the Upanishad, with which Schopenhauer was in contact through the frequentation of the orientalist Friedrich Mayer.
  22. The incomplete notes for a projected book ‘The will of power’ that Nietzsche never finished were later arbitrarily manipulated and interpreted as justification of the pursuit of power by the strongest, and furnished ideological backing to Nazism. Although this is probably not what Nietzsche would have meant (because he fiercely opposed any philosophical ‘system’ and the very idea that one principle can explain reality, and because his concerns were more about furnishing a sense to a barren post-Christian existence: his focus was more on individuals desperate about how to live one’s own life after ‘the death of God’, and all his philosophy is very far from entrusting any salvation power to the State), but when irrational will and the orgiastic dimension of life become prominent and acquire a salvific status, the risks of fatal drifts arise.
  23. On a more subtle interpretation, it may be argued that perhaps Nietzsche intended that one has to choose to live ‘as if’ everything recurred the same infinitely, so that she/he might ‘take control’ of her/his destiny by accepting its necessity.
  24. *‘questo mondo civile egli certamente è stato fatto dagli uomini, onde se ne possono, perché se ne debbono, ritrovare i principi dentro le modificazioni della nostra medesima mente umana’* (‘This civil world [that is, society] has certainly been made by humans, and it is for this reason that it is possible, and we must, discover its principles within the modifications of our own human mind’ –Vico (1725).
  25. The notion of disenchantment of the world is another key notion elaborated by Weber, which we cannot even touch upon here. It is the progressive intellectualisation of the way in which humankind investigates the world, and the problem of the meaning of the world – and of our presence in the world – which scientific reason will never be able to respond to.
  26. Indeed, it was the discussion on the famous fifth postulate of Euclidean geometry that sparked the debate about whether a foundation of geometry (and sciences more at large) on ‘undoubtable’, self-evident truths could be established, or whether the starting points of geometry (as well as the sciences) can ‘only’ be attributed the status of mere ‘conventions’. In the Euclidean tradition, self-evident truths are referred to as either ‘axioms’ (assumptions valid in geometry as well as

- across fields of knowledge) or postulates (self-evident truths typically pertaining to geometry) – and conventionalism questions the very notion of ‘self-evident truth’.
27. At least partly because recent developments in physics seem to expand the scope of application of quantum theory.
  28. We should also add another caveat, derived from a renaissance thinker: Guicciardini who is notable for his empiricism to which he added a strong caveat towards the challenges of generalising from induction: ‘È grande errore parlare delle cose del mondo indistintamente e assolutamente e, per dire così, per regola; perché quasi tutte hanno distinzione e eccezione per la varietà delle circostanze, le quali non si possono fermare con una medesima misura; e queste distinzione e eccezione non si trovano scritte in su’ libri, ma bisogna le insegni la discrezione’ [‘It is a huge mistake to make judgements about the things of the world based on law-like generalisations, in a way that is indistinct and absolute; because almost in anything there is the need to distinguish and find out the exceptions to the rule, which depend on the varied circumstances; and such varied circumstances cannot be treated in a one-size-fits-all way; in order to learn how to distinguish the varied circumstances and spot the exceptions it is necessary to wield discretion, because this know-how cannot be learnt in books’], *Ricordi*, n.6 (online at: <https://letteritaliana.weebly.com/discrezione-e-fortuna.html> – accessed 7 April 2020).
  29. At the end of his search Martin Heidegger will also go back to the pre-Socratics, that is the philosophers before Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, for discovering the unveiling of the mystery of being, and he will thus in a sense reject both classical and modern philosophy.
  30. There is here a strong influence of the 19th-century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, considered a precursor of existentialism and whose philosophy is centred on the critique of the metaphysical category of necessity as constitutive or inherent of Being, as in the Hegelian, and before the Spinozian, system of philosophy.
  31. There are manifold definitions of structure, and debates on the meaning of the term ‘structure’ are countless. One that may suffice for the purposes of the present introduction is that of structure as ‘a system of self-regulating transformations’ (e.g. Piaget).
  32. Parallels may be drawn between Whiteheadian notion and the seminal reasons of change worked out in ancient Greek philosophy especially by Stoic philosophers. As the readers will have noticed, and to the risk of repeating this point as a refrain, it is a key emphasis of this book to stress how taking the broad and long-term philosophical perspective may be enlightening in contextualising and setting in perspective modern and contemporary thinkers.
  33. I am indebted to Fabrizio Fracchia for having pointed out this line of application of the hermeneutical method of direct relevance to PA studies.
  34. This approach distinguishes his philosophy from Descartes’s, and is a very insightful way of addressing a range of critiques that were moved to Descartes, including the one by Locke’s (in his *Essay*) where he distinguished between the ‘self-conscious I’ and the observable qualities of its activity, or the criticisms by Maine de Biran where he highlights how the Cartesian ‘I’ is a purely passive substance, a sort of blackboard recipient of what is thrown over it.
  35. From which, for Bergson, Descartes erroneously derived his notion of continued creation – from a creationist perspective, the partaking of being by the contingent

entities as a gift of the absolute Being is maintained by living beings as they are the totality of their past.

## 4. Ontological perspectives and public administration doctrines and themes

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### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we revisit a range of key themes in public administration and management, in light of key philosophical ideas introduced in the previous chapters. Our thrust is making a contribution to bring fundamental issues of ontology, as arisen over the centuries in (Western) philosophical thought, into the PA discourse. Differently from other major books dealing with philosophical issues in PA (Raadschelders, 2011; Riccucci, 2010), this book takes as its starting point not the classification of strands of inquiry in PA to then delve into their philosophical foundations and premises, but rather it starts from philosophical approaches, themes and schools, to then delve into some of the implications for the study and practice of PA. In this sense it is quite deductive and ambitious in taking the broad perspective – and in many respects it embodies a very ‘European’ scholarly tradition and approach.

This chapter deals with themes more pertinent to ontological issues, whilst political philosophical issues are discussed in Chapter 5 and epistemological ones in Chapter 6.

The chapter is structured around key themes. They are listed here, with some captivating questions highlighting the gist and the significance of each theme for PA, to then be briefly introduced in the remainder of this section and discussed in depth throughout the chapter:

- The foundation of the subject capable of moral judgement and knowledgeable assessment of administrative courses of action? The Kantian transcendental subject as a possible grounding of contemporary public governance.
- Deeper societal structures bearing explanatory power? The contribution of the philosophical movement of structuralism to PA by enlarging the gamut of explanatory factors to include structural explanations alongside institutional, cultural and functional ones.
- Social structures and social ontology: revisiting the ontological underpinnings of the relationship between agency (individual freedom) and social structures in social scientific explanations.

- Power, power, power? Neo-Marxism and Gramsci and the significance of the notion of power for PA studies and practice.
- Caring for the world? The Existentialist Public Administrator.
- Past, present future: do we really understand them? Time in the study and practice of public administration, and implications of the perspective of philosophical historicism for PA.
- *It is, it can be* or *it might be*? Necessity and possibility as categories of being (transcendentals), and their significance for PA.
- *One human nature or many*? How conceptions of human nature may inform the study and practice of PA.

The chapter thus first examines some implications of the Kantian transcendental subject, discussing the extent to which it may provide a foundation to the field of PA. It then turns to discussing societal structures and their explanatory power, through at first revisiting the contribution the philosophical movement of structuralism may bring to PA, to then discuss issues of social ontology and notably the ontological underpinnings of the relationship between agency (individual freedom) and social structures in social scientific explanations. Next, we examine Neo-Marxism and notably Gramsci's always-of-actuality contribution, notably in taking the notion of power to the fore of PA studies (never oblivious to the fact that the bureaucratic apparatus is a centre of power in perennial interplay with other power centres like, most obviously, the political party as the modern Prince – a topic which is further elaborated in Chapter 7 where the actuality of a thinker, Niccolò Machiavelli, inspirational to Gramsci as well as to so many other thinkers across the ages is introduced). In quite sharp contrast with Gramsci's thought, the notion of 'caring' as wrought out in the philosophical stream of existentialism is then discussed in its application to PA: most notably, the profiling of the figure of the 'Existentialist Public Administrator'. The chapter then turns to key ontological topics like the notion of time and the notion (technically called 'transcendental disjunction') of the contraposition 'necessity–possibility', and their significance for the ways in which we study and understand PA; some reflections on the significance of metaphysical contingency and ontologies of possibility (as opposed to ontologies of necessity) are presented. Finally, in a most classic 'last but not least', we turn to considerations about human nature and what this may mean for PA, notably by delving into the issue of (alternative or complementary) conceptions of human nature and how they may inform understandings of PA, a topic which is situated in-between ontology and political philosophy and thence also furnishes a bridge to the subsequent Chapter 5 (as well as to later chapters: the actuality of Machiavelli is in fact manifest here too, since the Florentine writer forcefully argued about the immutability of human nature and its significance for underpinning any claims about the very possibility of learning from

history, with significant implications for any philosophy of knowledge in the humanities and the social sciences, which we discuss in Chapter 6, as well as for better appreciating Machiavelli's ever-valid teachings, which we explore further in Chapter 7).

## KANTIAN TRANSCENDENTAL SUBJECT

Like for much of modern philosophy, the thought of Immanuel Kant represents a consolidated and well-grounded starting point. Normatively, the foundation of morality and ethics in the rational human subject attempted by Kant aims at providing a universalistic foundation to practical behaviour driven by values: a notion generally indicated with the Greek word *praxis*, which denotes purposeful action, action shaped by values and sense of direction, the performance of an activity that has moral significance.

This foundation to practical behaviour takes the form of moral law or categorical imperatives guiding the behaviour of each and every human being. Epistemologically, the knowability of phenomena grounded in the very rationality that constitutes the human being furnishes grounding for the possibility of a limited yet founded scientific knowledge that can guide collective behaviour. Although the political philosophy of Kant is a relatively limited area (but we notice that Kant did a very important foray into public, and notably global, governance by making an attempt to outline a system of global governance capable of going beyond the then consolidating Westphalian order: he did it in the essay *On Perpetual Peace*, 1795, often seen as a philosophical inspiration behind the establishment in the 20th century of the League of Nations and, subsequently, the United Nations) and his general philosophy does not prescribe per se how to build a competent and accountable (Rainey, 2003) system of public governance, it does provide the grounding for argumentation about the criteria and the foundations that such a system might have, by furnishing the underpinning about what is knowable and what is moral for each and every member of the political community. The road from the principle of moral law as Kant formulated it – ‘act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as means, but always at the same time as end’ – to any design prescription about public governance is a long one, and yet a foundational criterion is provided against which to normatively assess any governance system (i.e. public governance systems *must* be designed and effected in such ways to always treat humanity in every person never only as means but also always as an end); analogously, knowledge of phenomena is grounded in reason in the Kantian philosophical system, and hence he furnishes a foundation for any knowledge claim about social and public phenomena; ultimately, the human being, in the philosophy of Kant, is equipped with both the capacity to know

and the capacity to act morally. In this sense, any attempt to provide grounding to ethics – and notably for the purpose of our book ethical behaviour in the public service – cannot renounce confronting itself with Kant’s attempt to an ‘absolute’ foundation of moral behaviour (see, for example, Lynch and Lynch, 2006, pp. 71–2 in particular): treat the humanity in your person and any other person always as an end and never only as means – the kingdom of ends. This philosophical underpinning endows the public administrator in the administering of public powers with an overarching criterion against which to gauge her/his course of action.<sup>1</sup>

The foundation of morality in Kant has been challenged in innumerable ways; possibly the loudest one is that which takes a relativist slant and argues about the impossibility of any absolute and universalistic foundation of morality. However, criticisms have also come from altogether different philosophical angles. In fact a powerful challenge to the Kantian assumption that moral behaviour and considerations of interest and advantage must be entirely distinct, notably when it comes to issues of foundation of public governance, comes from a philosopher active over two millennia before: Plato. As aptly summed up by Bird (2006), if complying with morality does literally *nothing* to promote anyone’s interests, or actually works against them, then this poses a problem for the legitimacy of a political system: even if it complies with criteria of morality, if a political system does nothing for promoting the well-being of its members, what is its rationale, its *raison d’être*? We return to this point in Chapter 5.

A philosophical approach that ‘dissolves’ the Kantian moral subject into ‘impersonal’ structures is the philosophical movement of structuralism. We turn to this topic in the next section, before delving into the issue of how to combine individual agency (epitomised in the Kantian subject) with social structures in the subsequent section, devoted to discussing more at large the topic of social ontology.

## STRUCTURALISM AND PA

Structuralism is a philosophical approach that puts at the heart the analysis of social structures, notably those deeper, universal and immutable structures which (according to this approach) characterise societies across time and space. As discussed when introducing this movement (see Chapter 3), it is more an emphasis and a focus of analysis than a philosophical system *stricto sensu*, at least if decoupled from the highly problematic philosophical assertion that ‘structures explain everything’, that is, that the human and the social, the ‘I’ and self-consciousness can be entirely dissolved into deeper structural influences. Social structures, in this strong sense, must be distinguished from institutions. Differently from institutions, structures are not man-made (human

products) – they somehow pre-exist or at least are not amenable to deliberate design; instead, they constitute the bases on which deliberately designed social interventions may be engineered (at least to the extent that structures enable rather than constrain individual freedom – as we have seen, in the perspective of structuralism, individual agency tends to be disparaged).

Structuralism has been employed in various strands in the social sciences, like the field of communications studies, but (to our knowledge) very limitedly if at all in PA. If we ask the question ‘to what extent are the findings of structuralism and the analyses of social structures taken into account in PA studies?’, the direct answer seems to be ‘very limitedly’. This may be due to a number of reasons: possibly because social scientists operating within a structuralism frame are not interested in PA, and/or complementarily because PA scholars are not trained in the kind of analyses carried out in structuralism; or possibly PA scholars have deliberately rejected the kind of social determinism which seems to be entailed by structuralism, that leaves so small room – if at all – for human agency and deliberation. Moreover, structural factors may well be reckoned by PA scholars as but one set of explanatory factors, perhaps likened to environmental factors, which can be set alongside functional and cultural factors (to stick to a quite common way of framing ‘explanatory factors’ in the analysis of public organisations, see Christensen et al., 2007; Christensen and Laegreid, 2018). Thus, it is possibly the recognition of the limits of structuralism by PA scholars to have driven it out almost entirely (to our knowledge) from the field of PA.

However, it would be inappropriate to dispense with structuralism lightly. In fact, it might be argued that, to the extent these limitations are taken into account (and this means notably that alternative categories of factors are weighed in, individual agency is given its proper room, institutions are not dissolved into structures but rather considered as human artefacts that survive their initial creators and have enduring effects on society), the analyses of societal structures worked out in studies in this stream may be a useful addition to the field of PA. They may also improve our understanding of political-administrative institutions in relation to social structures. They may enhance our understanding of individual agency, especially where agency is seen contextually as ‘being empowered to do something in particular’ rather than as a property of human beings (Clarke, 2013, p. 32), and hence the analysis of structures may be a way to further shed light on what are context and contextual influences (Pollitt, 2013), notably by enabling to better distinguish those features that are universal and immutable across societies – hence a-contextual, as they are a permanent and universalistic trait – from those that are mutable and context-dependent proper. In sum, there seems to be room for some, probably overall limited yet significant, introduction and diffusion of structural(ist) analyses into the field of PA.



The key issue with structuralism – and the root of the scepticism by PA scholars towards this approach – lies in the suffix ‘-ism’: whether all can be dissolved into deeper structures is an ontological position at odds with any philosophy claiming individual agency – human freedom – is real. If we take the ‘soft’ version of structuralism: the emphasis on investigating social structures – then we have a philosophical movement which has contributed and can continue to contribute to querying the explanatory power of social structures: an issue which underlies not just sociology (in itself a contributing discipline to PA), but the social sciences more broadly (and thence PA an interdisciplinary field drawing on a range of social sciences).

We have noticed in the treatment of structuralism the ontological assumption about social structures pre-existing human action and underpinning it – and not being man-made. This philosophical point is contested by other authors engaged in efforts to elaborate an understanding of social structures from different ontological perspectives. It is then appropriate to devote our attention closer to the notion of social structure (here more loosely defined than in structuralism, e.g. – following Elder-Vass, 2010, p. 86 – by defining a social structure as ‘the causal powers of a specific social group’, a group of interacting social individuals, possibly including social norms or social positions), and the related philosophical debate about social ontology, whose roots may be traced also to a philosopher who put centre stage the notion of the man-made (made by the human beings) world: Gianbattista Vico (Chapter 3).

## SOCIAL ONTOLOGY

We have seen in Chapter 3 the original contribution of the Neapolitan philosopher Gianbattista Vico, who famously stated the *verum factum* principle, that is, that truth is made, by which (in a nutshell) he referred to the idea that, being the social world man-made, it is for this reason also the part of the world that we can know better. Hence, contrarily to what seems to be nowadays common wisdom about the natural sciences setting the paradigmatic form of knowledge that trailblazes, and the social sciences being urged to follow in the trail, Vico (see Chapter 3) argued that we can attain better, and indeed potentially full knowledge, only of the human world (and not of the natural world), because it is the only world of which we can trace the causes for the very reason that it has ultimately been made (been laid down) by humans, throughout the history of civilisations. For this ontological reasons, knowledge of society (as the human-made world) can be attained through multiple means, thereby including imagination, speculation, and pure reasoning – alongside empirical observation and analysis.

In Vico’s thought it may also be traced the foundations of the field of *social ontology*, a notion which only recently has acquired wider currency and has

become an area of active inquiry. In a nutshell, social ontology may be seen as a branch of ontology, a regional ontology whose focus is on the nature and foundations of *social entities*: ‘the study of what sort of things exist in the social world and how they relate to each other’ (Elder-Vass, 2010, p. 4). Its focus is on the constituent or essential properties of social entities, and on the generative mechanisms that bring about social entities.

Durkheim introduced the notion of social fact and the central question of when – under what conditions – a fact is ‘social’ (Durkheim, 1894/1964 and 1897/1952). He did so also by delving, in a most famous essay, on the nature of suicide: by demonstrating the influence of social conditions on even such most individual act, that is, the choice of taking one’s own life, Durkheim aimed to uncover the ‘reality’ of social facts and their influence – causal power – on individuals’ lives. Social entities encompass such entities like: social groups, social conventions, customs and habits of a society, social norms, institutions and organisations, social practices, social processes, social structure. To complement this definition, it can be defined by contrast, rather than by enumeration/illustration, what is non-social: it is considered to be non-social the physical, the biological (e.g. the neural activity of the human brain, or the genetic make-up of the human body), the psychological, and so forth; so, an act of eating together by two or more human beings is social (a social event), the act of the stomachs of each of the two individuals digesting the food is not (it is a biological event) – although the distinction might not be so clear-cut, and conceptually as well as practically it may quite often be problematic to distinguish the social from the psychological, for example to assess whether or not an act can be attributed the quality of being social (e.g. somebody gesturing to offer to shake somebody else’s hand) without the corresponding psychological state of the person doing it not being attributed the quality of being social, on the ground that the latter is psychological.

A key debate in social ontology is the one framed in the terms of ‘methodological individualism vs holism’: that is, whether social facts (practices, events, processes and the like) of any kind can be explained ultimately by direct reference to the actions of its constituents, and the ultimate constituents of social worlds are individuals, or conversely whether macro-social entities carry explanatory power. The question, from a philosophical standpoint, is linked to the issue of the ontological status of social structures. We have already encountered the (radical) structuralism position whereby social structures are conceived of as pre-existing and underpinning human action. An alternative ontological position posits that social structures ultimately only exist within human minds and bodies (a position often associated, e.g. to Giddens, 1984), while the position asserting the reality of social structures as *sui generis* entities is often traced back to the work of Durkheim.

The question whether social structures ultimately exist (at least in some sense) only within human individuals, or (again, at least in some sense) outside of human individuals, is an ontological question, notably a question of that regional branch of ontology which is social ontology (the debate has seen leading sociologists being involved, like Giddens 1984; Bourdieu, 1984; Archer, 2003). The related question whether social structures hold causal power (they may explain social phenomena ‘on their own’), or not, is also an ontological question. And – of course – the very nature of individual agency, of what is meant when referring to ‘individuals acting socially’, the capacity of individual human beings to act socially, is also an ontological question evoking the question of what is free will, and what is the scope for individual will to be ‘free’ (whether human beings can make choices; whether choices humans can make are only circumstantiated and contextualised, or whether there is the possibility for human beings to make ‘uncaused’ choices, choices unaffected or at least undetermined by social circumstances, although they may then bear significance in the subsequent course of action undertaken by the individual, which will be socially impactful).

Ultimately, it may be noted that the foundations of social ontology lie in ontology *tout court*. Scholars whose ontology admits the existence of collective entities beyond the individual minds will tend to accept or even forcefully claim the existence of social structures (e.g. in ‘impersonal’ social structures like in the Marxian/Marxist tradition, Chapter 3). Scholars whose ontology is orientated to place centre stage the individual mind will be inclined to underpin social ontology in the individual (see e.g. the contribution of the thought of Locke – Chapter 2 – on social ontologies centred on the individual, and the ensuing major debate about methodological individualism: for an insightful overview, Demeulenaere, 2011).

Certain approaches to social ontology may claim to be based on relatively undisputed assumptions, but they are not. For example, theories of emergence and the so-called *emergentism* aim at offering justifications for claims of causal efficacy that are often presented under the label of being ‘scientific’ whilst ultimately they are – and they can only be – metaphysical. Emergentism is a vast philosophical-epistemological-sociological stream of thought whose clout encompasses both the natural and the social sciences which is predicated on the notion of emergent properties, whereby the whole is more than the sum of the parts and it holds a distinctive causal power which the parts separately considered do not have. So for example the component parts of a vegetable or animal substance do not lose their mechanical and chemical properties as separate agents but at the same time, as an aggregate whole, they also acquire physiological or vital properties in addition; so for example the cell of a living body is more than the chemical components of it, in its distinctive capacity to grow and reproduce itself that it possesses only by virtue of its new order (the

terms ‘emergence’ was coined in 1875 by G.H. Lewes drawing from a distinction introduced by John Stuart Mill – see Chapter 3 – between what Mill called homopathic and heteropathic laws – Lewes, 1874–79). A robust and coherent argument for emergentism<sup>2</sup> to underpin a certain social ontology is worked out by Elder-Vass (2010).

Emergentism is at times presented as a relatively self-evident, undisputed starting point, but far from that, it is instead predicated on certain metaphysical assumptions, and it is totally incompatible with a range of ontologies developed throughout the centuries. For example, the claim that the mental is an emergent property of the biological, which in turn is an emergent property of the physical-chemical, is at times presented as plainly evident, whilst it is profoundly contested and an entirely metaphysical assertion. Let’s take the following claim that ‘mental phenomena, both when we are conscious of them and when we are not, are somehow produced by the networks of neurons that make up a large part of our brains’ (Elder-Vass, 2010, p. 90). Thought is produced by the brain! This assertion is presented as evident – and it may look like this for the ordinary man or woman of the 21st century accustomed to bowing before ‘science’ and any claim which is presented as ‘scientific’ (meaning it is upheld by the current state of the art of knowledge in the natural sciences) – but it is utterly metaphysical, and far from being ‘evident’. Let’s take the philosophical perspective of Kant or of idealism (in this aligned): from this perspective, the oft-heard assertions like the one above that thought is the product of the brain, and related statements ‘the newly developing sciences of the brain will help us to answer [the mind/body question that has preoccupied philosophers since Descartes]’ (Elder-Vass, 2010, p. 90) are total nonsense: thinking is being, and brains do not think (active form of the verb), rather they are thought (passive form). For Kant and the Idealists (Chapter 3), like for Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato and Plotinus, thinking and thought come first, and the horizon of being is the horizon of thought, an understanding of things for which we are indebted to the ancient Greeks (Chapter 2) – and the brain and the neurons are objects of intellection, if they are to be (to exist) at all. What is disconcerting here is not the taking of a philosophical stance, but the ignorance of the metaphysics on which it relies, and the ontologies that it pretends to sweep away without even noticing!

Also the reference in passing to Descartes is misleading: Descartes grounded its metaphysics on the assertion that the material (*res extensa*, literally, ‘the extended thing’, the thing whose defining property is to have an extension) and the mental (*res cogitans*, literally ‘the thinking thing’, the thinking substance,) are two diverse substances: they, so to speak, belong to parallel ontological orders, hence it cannot be claimed that one ‘produces’ the other; indeed other philosophers even posed all causal power only in God, treating mutual influences between substances as at most occasional causes, like in the philosophy

of occasionalism of Malebranche (for more on the philosophy of Descartes and Malebranche, see Chapter 2). Other philosophers, like Spinoza (Chapter 2) even claimed (metaphysically) that there are infinite modes of being, of which the material and the thinking are but two; in fact, for Spinoza the *res cogitans* and *res extensa* are just two out of infinite attributes of God-Being (God as the totality of being). And still other giants of metaphysics, like Leibniz, have wrought out metaphysical systems totally incompatible with emergentism: for Leibniz (Chapter 2), reality is made of whole things (monads, see Chapter 2); thus, a human being is *not* made by the cells, molecules and atoms that compose her/him at a given moment (*contra* to emergentism); for Leibniz, a human being and a cell are two different objects of intellection, and as such they co-exist next to one another, harmonised by God, rather than ‘composing’ one another in relations of parts and wholes. As the reader will have noticed, seen from the vertiginous perspective of metaphysical thinking, how problematic apparently unproblematic claims that ‘thought is produced by the brain’ look!

This is not to say that we do not recognise that emergentism is an important strand in the contemporary philosophy of both the natural and the social sciences – contributing amongst other to complexity theory – yet what we highlight is the lack of philosophical consideration about the ultimate ontological groundings of a(ny) social theory. Social ontology ultimately is based upon and relies on ontology as such (social ontologies are grounded in the general ontology of the philosophy – philosopher or philosophical stream – on which they are built), and ontological considerations have to be treated seriously and explicitly, on their full terms, if social theories are to be provided of their underpinnings.

Based on these premises, philosophy for PA has to engage with social ontology as a field of inquiry, given PA is a social entity and partakes of society. So for example social ontological approaches to conceiving of ‘institutions’ and ‘organisations’ as complex social structures that hold causal power beyond those held by ‘simpler’ norm circles is a major contribution that PA can tap from social ontological thinking, given institutions and organisations, and notably *public* institutions and organisations, are a central object of inquiry of PA studies (in Simmel’s terminology – Simmel, 1955 – an example of a norm circle is the one dictating to individuals in certain societies that ‘when you meet somebody, you have to shake their right hand’; the point here is that the properties of normative institution to wield influence on what is ‘appropriate’ behaviour for individuals, or the properties of organisations to hold causal power by virtue of their capacity to provide coordination of individual behaviours, go beyond those of norm circles, and therefore digging into the social-ontological underpinnings of those additional causal powers – as Elder-Vaas, 2010, Chapters 6 and 7 does – contributes to an enhanced under-

standing of how public institutions and organisation affect social systems). PA may benefit from the findings of social ontology, notably where this branch of knowledge sheds light on essential properties of social entities, like institutions and organisations, of specific significance for PA themes and problems.

Another key author who – amongst many other influences – can also be seen as lying at the roots of social ontology, and whose thought we have not yet explored in relation to the advancement of the field of PA, is Karl Marx.

## NEO-MARXISM AND GRAMSCI

In Chapter 3 we briefly outlined some elements of Marxian thought. These include, alongside the notions of alienation and class conflict, the perspective of dialectical materialism, according to which history proceeds through contradictions, that is, struggle, of conflicting poles (thesis and antithesis), operating primarily at the level of economic structures, that are solved into superior syntheses. We have also dwelt on the limits in terms of forecasting power of Marxism and Marxian thought, whose predictions simply did not materialise. In particular, we dwelt on the limits of deterministic, linear causality proceeding from the economic to the meta-economic, noticing the interesting interpretation of Marxism provided by the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci, who elaborated an original synthesis of Machiavelli's thought about the role of the political party as the modern 'Prince' with a two-way interpretation as reciprocal influence of the economic and the meta-economic, noticing how the grasp of power for the political party passes through shaping the dominant values in the pertinent jurisdiction: conquering civil society to then conquer the office of government and the state apparatus, although the state apparatus may also be targeted selectively in order to wield influence over society: we saw in Chapter 3 the case of the Italian Communist Party attempting to hold sway over the public education apparatus to inform pupils' values, and using the work of the so-called 'organic intellectuals' as means to infuse and inform societal values. The general point to be made out of this example is that the bureaucratic apparatus of the state can also, always, be seen as a powerful instrument that can be put to the service of specific, partisan interests, and ultimately as an instrument in the pursuit of power, or for the retention of it, if the actors intending to use instrumentally the bureaucracy are already in power. The Weberian ideal-typical conception of the administration as neutral and subject only to the law (see Chapters 3 and 8) can be, and to some extent will always be, aspirational, but cannot dispel the alternative, however gloomier, vision of it as, potentially at least, instrumental to specific interests (see Arellano-Gault, 2020, for a detailed discussion).

We may now question: what does Gramsci's thought have to say for now-days discussions of public governance? A major work of translation and

reinterpretation is necessary, *inter alia* to incorporate the effects of globalisation processes which were simply out of the picture of Gramsci's reflection. However, lineages, or at least parallels, may be drawn with later approaches that enjoy wide currency in contemporary debates. We here hint at a few of these. First, studies on the links between neo-liberal agendas and the diffusion of the New Public Management (NPM). The argument has been put forward that global capitalism requires independent regulatory institutions for creating trust in markets: these represent a key element in NPM recipes for reforming the public sector, hence, the argument goes, NPM doctrines are aligned to, or even originate from, the interests of organised global capitalism (Roberts, 2010). More broadly, studies have pointed out the links between NPM and the neo-liberal ideology, with some seeing the former as a product of the latter. Although studies like Roberts (2010) draw from different theoretical sources than Marxism, there is a flavour of Marxian acumen in dissecting societal forces and reading complex phenomena through the analysis of the economic processes and notably the lens of the struggle for the control of resources. More specifically, there seems to be much of Gramsci's original interpretation and acuity in reading the doctrines that come to be propounded globally (in our nowadays globalised world) as being at least partly manufactured by economic interests striving to achieve cultural dominance as an instrument to shape the common wisdom and way of thinking (in our case, of the way in which the public sector should be organised) in order to advance their own agenda and priorities. The public discourse about the way in which the public sector should be organised is not an immaculate terrain where free thinkers debate about the best possible conceivable solutions to common good problems, but rather a battleground in which organised interests (which in Gramsci were represented by the political party as the modern Machiavellian Prince) are active alongside free thinkers, and seek to advance their own agenda by achieving dominance in the shared values, locally or more often globally, and hence to shape the organisational form of the public sector in order to most expand their clout. Gramsci reminds us that the search for ideological domination (which we independent scholars see as a danger) may be part and parcel of contemporary public management doctrinal debate (indeed, Gramsci probably would have been a perpetrator of such attempts to ideological domination, were he active today).

This line of intellectual inquiry brings us back to re-considering how power be quintessential to public governance and any understanding of its dynamics. Power in its basic definition as 'the capacity of A to make B do what A wants' as well as in more elaborate interpretations of it. What is especially salient for PA studies is that administrative apparatuses are part and parcel of any power struggle among organised groups (political parties or others, like organised forms of representation of labour – like the trade unions – or of capital).

Gramscian thought also chimes, perhaps unexpectedly, very well with contemporary, in vogue approaches to public governance like ‘governmentality’ (originally elaborated by the French philosopher Foucault; and recently critically discussed for applications to public management, see Ferlie and McGivern, 2014; Ferlie and Ongaro, 2015, Chapter 3) or ‘metagovernance’ (e.g. Baker, 2015), which share the basic guiding idea that ‘making people think in such a way that they will behave according to the desiderata of the actors in power’ is a very powerful instrument indeed (this is an idea which dates back to the very first attempts to establish ‘successful’ political regimes since the origin of humankind, but on which authors such as Gramsci provided further original elaborations and interpretations). It seems that taking stock of the bequest of the Marxian apparatus, notably in the elaboration worked out by Gramsci, for the field of PA is a fruitful task yet to be accomplished – although this is an assignment for other books, by other authors.

From structures and collective entities like political parties we now turn to the individual in the most fundamental metaphysical sense.

## THE EXISTENTIALIST PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR

Although the origins of the movement have to be found in the German philosophers Heidegger and Jaspers, existentialism was popularised particularly by the works of Jean-Paul Sartre. ‘Existentialist philosophy was the rage on college campuses and intellectual circles during the 1960 and 1970s’ (Waugh, 2006, p. 511) in the US as well as in France and elsewhere, at least in the ‘Western world’. The key notion of ‘caring’ was brought to bear significance, notably on the shoulders of the public administrator who in this perspective should take responsibility over and beyond her/his tasks and duties strictly defined, in order to address the pressing issues of the day (Richter, 1970). The philosophical roots and justification for this approach are to be found in the notion of ‘caring’ as constitutive dimension of human existence, as well as in the very conception of existence as ‘project’ and projection towards the future, which are distinctive traits of existentialist philosophy – an authentic life is a life that cares (see Chapter 3). Based on these philosophical notions, the freedom to act of public administrators was evoked and invoked, and public administrators – tenured officials – were encouraged to embark in a call to address urgent societal needs that entailed some form of political activism. The argument was that ‘bureaucrats, as they gain more and more knowledge of cause–effect relationships and how that knowledge might be applied, have a social obligation to exercise their *free will* in the public interest’ (Waugh, 2006, p. 514, emphasis in original). The backdrop was the ample evidence – at least in the US debate – that administrators of the time were quite often not free to use their own judgement, even when remedial actions to clearly per-



ceived policy failures were widely evident. Indeed, whistle-blowers often paid dearly for their behaviour, and frustration about the apparent unwillingness of top officials to correct programmatic deficiencies, even when solutions were known and available, was the fuel underlying this call to a different role for public administrators (a call which is continuing to be evoked, for example by O'Leary, 2020).

These circumstances seemed to point out that authentic organisations sensitive to the true essence of reality were possible (Waugh, 2006, p. 515) and could be effected by the commitment of public administrators engaging in the authentic life (and professional life is part and parcel of life *tout court*) that existentialism envisages. It was a 'call to act' grounded in the existentialist philosophy, driven by a possibility to know reality beyond 'technical' value-neutral tools of administration, a kind of knowledge grounded in phenomenology (see Chapter 3 for an overview, and Chapter 6 for applications to the field of PA). This call left a mark on the first Minnowbrook conference on the state of the art of PA, which occurred in 1968 (Marini, 1971), as well as on the conception of the 'new public administration' as later elaborated and systematised by Frederickson (1980). These influences may also be found in the later works of Dwight Waldo, who played a key role in the organisation of the Minnowbrook conference, and in the scientific production, *inter alia*, of Robert Denhardt and Maria Aristigueta.

An interesting and original perspective to public governance, shifting the emphasis from the administrator (as in earlier applications of existentialism to PA) to the citizen, is developed by Jun (2006). He aims at elaborating a sophisticated synthesis of existentialism with the perspectives of hermeneutics and phenomenology, blended with ethnomethodology, post-modern thinking and critical theory. Jun (2006) is probably one of the most effective spearheads of the relativist school in PA – to which the author adds insightful analyses of the influence of administrative cultures across Eastern Asia (mainly South Korea and Japan) and the West (mainly the US), respectively the places where he grew up and where he spent his professional life. The work has a value-driven and normative tone – as appropriately declared by the author at the outset 'My approaches can be characterized as self-consciously value-laden and normative, rather than nominally value free and descriptive', and this is surely a manifesto of the opposition to Neo-Positivist approaches, which is a key trait of the interpretivist and constructivist school. A tenet of his approach is the active involvement of citizens in promoting public values, and his book aims at outlining a process for the social construction of public administration in a democratic context – the social construction of a democratic public administration where employee participation, citizen involvement, empowerment and consultation are centre stage, not just as outcome but in the dialectical process of construing a public administration and an administrative theory in which

the emphasis is on *public* in the administrative process. Jun's perspective is as much interested in the 'existentialist citizen' as it is in the existentialist administrator. He advocates a social design approach that encompasses both the general public and the governmental sides of public administration. Social design is intended as an evolutionary, developmental, integrative process that should contribute to the construction of shared realities (or intersubjectivities), leading to a process of invention, evolution and self-governance (Jun, 2006, Chapter 4, p. 83 in particular) in order to improve democratic governance without sacrificing the unique individuality or autonomy of each person, and changing organisations by relating the organisation and the individual, the administration and citizens (p. 258) – although it is not always crystal clear what is the difference between the advocated novelty of 'social design' so intended and participatory approaches to public governance. Although Jun's work probably fits the post-modern thinking more than existentialism, his original work is a worthy contribution emphasising the citizens' side of public governance, a contribution which highlights the enduring influence of existentialism in the field of PA. Revisiting existentialism may thus equip with novel perspectives about the responsibility of the public administrator and the citizen in public governance, and may represent a valuable viewpoint from which to look at issues of public ethics and the relationship between citizens and public administrators.

However, the existentialist perspective must deal with the key issue of the foundations of public accountability: to what extent active responsibility by the public official, as far as becoming political activism, is compatible with being held accountable to the public (Bovens et al., 2014)? This issue was present in the debate in the early 1970s, when it was questioned whether such activism by public administrators would meet the conventional democratic test of administrative responsibility; the counterargument was, and is, that not using expertise and experience to address socio-economic problems was both unprofessional and poor citizenship (Waugh, 2006, p. 523). But the issue remains, possibly exacerbated in constitutional frameworks other than the US. It may be argued, notably, that Weberian (and Neo-Weberian) conceptions of bureaucracy, fundamental in PA theory and widely diffused across continental Europe (Rosser, 2018), set up a system of public accountability that may be ultimately at odds with the existentialist perspective of the active, engaged public official: what are the criteria for holding activist public officials to account? How is bureaucratic impartiality (a principle inscribed in the constitution of many countries) compatible with behaviours that trespass into political activism by tenured officials? These are tough questions that remain to be addressed in an existentialist perspective, and the warnings about the dangers of personal passions in public services formulated by Paul du Gay remain in all their actuality (du Gay, 2000).

Whatever the appraisal that may be given of the dilemmas of public accountability and responsibility in public administration elicited by existentialism, this philosophical school provides a powerful reminder that public organisations and administrative action are ultimately made by free individuals. Bureaucrats and all those wielding responsibility for public services and the public good, elected and tenured officials, policy entrepreneurs or simply engaged citizens, are persons existentially involved and engaged, operating in circumstances that place huge demands on them, also because of the very nature of public services which often deal with issues of the meaning of life vis-à-vis death (the consciousness of death as defining existence is a key tenet of existentialism, see Chapter 3) – one can think of healthcare professionals, or professionals in the sectors of homeland security or defence whose jobs are inherently about others' lives, either because they cure or because they may be demanded to end somebody else's life. It is also a reminder that human existence is never 'an object amongst other objects', but rather constitutively a projection towards the future, a project that can be characterised as (in Heidegger's terminology) 'being-in-the-world' and 'being-with-the-others', and hence caring for the others is a defining trait of each and every human existence. This consideration brings with it a perspective irreducible to any simplification of human behaviour in a public setting as responding only to logics of utility maximisation, or to neutral-impersonal rule following, or to habit-following. Existentialist philosophical thought is for scholars and practitioners alike a powerful reminder that the globally human, existential dimension of the practice of PA irreducibly transcends any modelling or simplification; existentialism reminds us of the practice of PA as praxis: an activity that has moral significance and that in the original usage of the term by Aristotle meant notably a special kind of human activity, the life of the citizen devoted to the political. Stylised models may be of aid for highlighting specific relations between phenomena that may support administrative action, but it is not possible to reduce human agency – and human agency in public services – to those stylised behaviours.

## HISTORICISM AND PA

So far in this chapter we have scarcely devoted attention to time, history and the historical perspective in explaining reality. In Chapter 3 we examined the thought of scholars like Gianbattista Vico, Wilhelm Dilthey and Wilhelm Windelband, and we reckoned the significance of the conceptual tools they provided contemporary social scientists with. These conceptual tools include Windelband's distinction between nomothetic and idiographic accounts and the enduring significance of the latter for the social sciences and for public governance and administration. It also includes Dilthey's notion of the 'sciences of the spirit' as distinguished from the natural sciences and characterised by the

fact that what they study are expressions of human life. We therefore noticed that the investigator, him/herself a living being, is in a sense identical to the object of the process of knowing, which is the life historically lived by other humans who by means of their collective action effected historical events (the spirit in action), concluding that the sciences of the spirit may in a sense lead to a deeper knowledge than what is enabled by the natural sciences. This line of argumentation had already been anticipated by Vico's *verum factum* principle (whose literal sense is that 'truth is made'), meaning that we can attain a fuller knowledge of the human world than of the natural world because for the former we can trace the causes not just by empirical investigation but also by means of imagination, speculation, pure reasoning, for the very reason of the commonality of nature between those who made and those who behold the human world, that is, human beings. The human world is, in the deepest sense, 'historical'.

In contemporary PA scholarship there are manifold ways in which 'history' is made to weigh in in explaining administrative phenomena. A large community of scholars work widely in the theoretical perspective of historical new institutionalism (Peters, 1999/2005) – scholars like, to mention but a few, Bezes (2009), Kickert (2011a, 2011b), Ongaro (2009, 2011, 2013), Parrado (2008), Spanou and Sotiropoulos, 2011, Di Mascio et al. (2013, 2017). At another level, Raadschelders (2000) and Rugge (2006), amongst others, have delved into the significance of historiography for public administration, and produced interesting accounts on various profiles of administrative history. Pollitt and Bouckaert have dedicated two books to navigating 'timeship' (Pollitt, 2008; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2009). From partly different epistemological premises, Asquer, Barzelay, Gallego, Mele and others have advocated 'processual institutionalism' as a methodological approach to the study of public management (Asquer and Mele, 2018; Barzelay and Gallego, 2006, 2010; also Ongaro, 2006), centred on a radical historicism (namely, that knowledge can be attained only of historical episodes in their historical context) which is close to philosophical historicism *stricto sensu* (whereby being only reveals itself in history, over time, and there is no knowability of things beyond their happening in time).

These are all significant examples of the manifold dimensions along which 'history' and 'time' are brought into the field of PA. However, there seems to be some reticence even in the PA scholars most attentive to the historical dimension to further explore the implications of the philosophical thought of Vico, Dilthey and Windelband and explicitly make the argument about the distinctive nature of the study of 'the world made by humans' as contrasted to the study of the natural world, and about the kind of knowledge that can be attained by the investigator, her/himself human, through investigation of the unfolding of human action in history; recalling the illuminating citation from

Vico mentioned in Chapter 3: ‘the civil world has certainly been made by humans, and it is for this reason that it is possible, and we must, discover its principles within the modifications of our own human mind’ (*The First New Science*, 1725 at: [http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/new\\_science.html](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/new_science.html)). A dialogue between the PA scholarship most heedful to the historical dimension and philosophical historicism might prove fruitful for the advancement of PA (and might possibly also offer novel, interesting and possibly challenging material to professional philosophers in this stream).

There is, of course, a major philosophical theme underlying any debate on history and historicism – the key topic of the philosophical foundations of the very notion of time. It is to this topic we now turn.

## TIME IN THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

A limited but very significant stream of works, notably by Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert (Pollitt, 2008; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2009; Bouckaert, 2007), have addressed the theme of how the temporal perspective is treated in public management and policy. Pollitt (2008) proposes a frame for navigating ‘timeship’, tackling *inter alia* the crucial issue of the appropriate time horizon to be adopted for the proper understanding of administrative phenomena. Bouckaert (2007) has delved into manifold cultural conceptions of time and how they affect public administration and management (whereby, e.g. certain culturally construed notions of time define it as ‘linear’, evolving from a beginning to an end, or at least moving from a neatly distinguished ‘before’ to a sequence of ‘afters’; other notions of time conceive of it as circular, returning to the same, or similar, point after having effected a cycle; other conceptions of time separate neatly the spheres of the past, the present and the future, while others consider past, present and future as at least partly overlapping; and so forth). The specific take to the topic that this book deploys is that of considering the implications for public administration studies of revisiting certain foundational issues lying in the very notion of ‘time’ as it has been debated in philosophical thought.

The French philosopher Henri Bergson famously introduced the distinction between the ‘spatialised’ time of physics and time as duration, the latter being the time of life, according to his line of argumentation. In the Bergsonian perspective (see Chapter 3), the past is conserved and kept in its entirety into the present: time is the tissue of which each living being is made, as is the universe as a whole, although not inanimate portions of it (Bergson, 2005). Life for Bergson (like for Heidegger in this respect, although within a different philosophy) is continued projection towards the future by plunging oneself into the present, and accumulating progressively every instant of the lived

life into our past, like a snowball that continuously grows along the way and conserves in itself the totality of the snow that it has encountered. This is the time people live, according to Bergson. If we accept this ontology of time, then it follows that this is the real, lived time of public administrators at all levels, as probably most ethno-methodologists, and more widely students employing techniques fit for reaching out in a more holistic way to administrative phenomena, would acknowledge. Such distinctions, indeed contrast, between the 'spatialised time' of social phenomena when they are studied 'from the outside' and the lived time as duration when plunging into social phenomena, has been widely employed in many domains across the social sciences (e.g. in communications studies, see Kember and Zylinska, 2012), but yet its potential has so far not been reckoned (at least to this author's knowledge) in discussions about change and continuity in public administration and governance; at the very least, this attention to the notion of time adopted is not made explicit and mainstreamed as a methodological point in the vast majority of the works in the field of PA. However, it is tautological to state that the time of life is the one practitioners experience in acting (administering), and hence it may be queried – on the foundational, ontological ground of the underlying conception of time – the kind of fit currently existing between the knowledge supplied by the PA scholarly community and the demand for employable knowledge by those practising public administration. Part of the often-evoked misfit between scholarly knowledge on offer and the knowledge demanded by practitioners may also possibly lie in the implicit underlying conception of time employed by the two groups respectively in the creation and usage of such knowledge.

A philosophical perspective of central significance for any analytical frame in which the past bears explanatory power is the dialectic approach, famously associated with the great German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (see Chapter 3). In this perspective, the thesis and the negation of it (antithesis) do not annul each other, but rather they are synthesised dynamically (that is, over time) in a superior unity of the opposite determinations, in which they both continue to live, albeit transcended in their initial reality. A dialectical process being in operation has sometimes been evoked in longitudinal studies in public policy and management. The debates on 'the trajectories of public management reform' (nourished by seminal works like Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000, 2017) is one sheer example, notably when they introduce the model of the Neo-Weberian State (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004, 2000/2011; Drechsler and Kattel, 2008; see also Ongaro, 2009, Chapter 7), which – we suggest – implies the thesis–antithesis–synthesis logic that is predicated of the dialectical method for analysing historical progress: the thesis is the Weberian model, the antithesis is the managerial model, and the Neo-Weberian model is the synthesis (albeit 'progress' is here detached from the inherent determinism, driven by a logic of necessity, that can be found in Hegel, as well as in significant por-

tions of the philosophical stream of historicism). In short, a Hegelian conception of time may be deemed to underpin explanations of public management reform trajectories pointing to a Neo-Weberian synthesis. In Hegel's dialectical perspective, after one pole and its contradiction (thesis and antithesis) have occurred, history is no more the same. Evolution of history, for Hegel, is like a helix: there is both circularity in the movement from thesis to synthesis via the antithesis and progress or development, an overall 'trajectory'. For Hegel, time constitutes things – it's not just merely the backdrop against which things appear (come to being) and disappear (return to non-being); therefore, after having occurred, two poles will not repeat any more, they will not re-present themselves identical.

Adopting a dialectical philosophical stance also entails rejecting any model of history as the oscillation between two poles: as a continued alternation between two poles that recur fundamentally unchanged, a philosophical position which brought to the extreme evokes the eternal recurrence of the same (which is another philosophical stance with a very long history whose roots can be traced back to a stream in ancient Greek philosophy), brought again into the philosophical debate of the 20th century by Friedrich Nietzsche (Chapter 3). Hegel's philosophical position constitutes a challenge to the extreme position of the eternal recurrence of the same but also more generally to 'pendula approaches' whereby history repeats itself in similar guises. Such pendula approaches form part and parcel of much of the common wisdom in PA, as it has been shaped by 'classic' works, like Simon's 'proverbs of administration' (1946) or Hood and Jackson's administrative arguments (1997). These works do not claim that administrative history actually oscillates between poles; instead, these studies were pitched at the level of administrative argumentation, noticing how prescriptions often come in opposite, potentially contradictory pairs (Simon, 1946), or how 'new' doctrines on public sector organisation may actually embody old positions that show up again in new guises. Based on these and other considerations, some studies have taken the longer-term perspective and, by means of time series or other techniques, have pursued the objective of detecting patterns in administrative doctrines and practices, and notably of detecting whether a pattern of alternation between two poles may have explanatory power. These are empirical studies, but it may be noticed the ontological assumption of the search for such patterns is that one state of affairs 'dissolves' when the pendulum swings, to then 'reappear' when the pendulum sways back. Although this logical passage may have gone unnoticed, this is not an empirical datum but an ontological assumption, and one that runs counter to the Hegelian dialectical perspective: for Hegel (and for historicism at large, as well as for other philosophies) the passing of time forbids returning to the same state of affairs, in the most fundamental sense, because the past is incorporated into the present and is constitutive of it.<sup>3</sup> In short, helix-like or pendula-like

conceptions of administrative change are predicated on different and contrasting ontologies. As argued throughout this book, making such ontologies more explicit, and debating their implications also for empirical scholarly work may benefit the reach and depth of PA as a scholarly endeavour.

The Hegelian conception of the dialectical evolution of history also poses a big question for the foundation of the theoretical perspective of historical (new) institutionalism (HI). HI is a theory to explain the enduring influence of past choices over contemporary institutions and policies (Peters, 1999/2005; for a later review, Ongaro, 2017). The foundational question in HI lies in the explanation of causality: why do past choices about the structure and processes of government cause present effects? What is the causal foundation of path dependency? One theoretical justification for HI is grounded in the perspective of the ‘logic of appropriateness’, whereby institutions are deemed to shape what is considered appropriate by decision-makers, and hence constraining the boundaries of what is considered to be feasible or opportune by decision-makers. Another theoretical justification for explaining path dependency lies in rational choice and argues that institutions shape the opportunity structure within which decisions are made. But both causal logics presuppose that the past is influential because it has produced something that has remained and is ‘present’ at the moment the causal effect is produced: institutions remain, they continue into existence, and it is their very presence to be the causal factor. Without that cause which is ‘present’, no effects would be produced. This is a widely held assumption in scientific – including social scientific – discourse, yet things might be more complicated.<sup>4</sup> The assumption that only what is present may have an influence (it may be the cause of something) is a specific epistemology based on distinctive philosophical foundations. But other philosophers thought differently: Hegel and Bergson, albeit from very different angles, both point to the past being influential in a more constitutive way: the totality of the past constitutes what we are (what everything is) and construes and enables the possibility for individually and collectively projecting ourselves towards the future. This applies both to individual lives (Bergson) and to broad, collective historical processes (Hegel): the question then becomes whether it applies to institutions as well.

In a riposte to those who claimed that ‘the past is dead’, the novelist William Faulkner in *Requiem for a Nun* puts into the mouth of a citizen of the fictional city of Jefferson, Mississippi, the following comment: ‘The past is never dead. It’s not even past’ (cited in Sansone, 2009, p. xv). Time may matter in a more fundamental sense than too often held in scholarly inquiry, and also by those who are most heedful to bringing time and the temporal dimension into social science explanations (Abbott, 1992a, 1992b; Pettigrew, 1990, 1997; van de Ven, 1992, van de Ven and Poole, 1990) and notably in the field of PA (Asquer, 2012; Barzelay and Campbell, 2003; Barzelay and Gallego, 2010; Bouckaert,



2007; Ferlie and Ongaro, 2015; Mele, 2010; Mele and Ongaro, 2014; Ongaro, 2006; Pettigrew et al., 1992; Pollitt, 2008; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2009).

If the totality of the past is conserved, is maintained and shapes the present, then this very consideration poses a fundamental challenge to all epistemic approaches (and notably for the purposes of this book those applied to studying administrative phenomena and public governance) that take the move from the apparently innocuous and self-evident assertion that phenomena can be studied by setting a system ‘at  $t = 0$ ’ (or ‘given  $t = 0$ ’, that is, resetting time to zero), because  $t$  never equals zero, according to these philosophical perspectives.

Another challenge comes from the conception of time as ecstasy elaborated by Heidegger (‘ecstasy’ in the etymological meaning of ‘staying – lying – outside of oneself’, see Chapter 3). For Heidegger, the future is projecting ourselves towards what will be; the past is stretching ourselves towards a situation of fact to accept it, and the present is lying outside of oneself to stay next to the things. The question thus becomes: what do we ultimately do when we study past cases? For Heidegger, more than detecting causal nexuses, we are ultimately ‘accepting’ them – which is quite a different stance. What do we ultimately do when we ‘draw lessons’ for the future? The drawing of lessons is but a part of a broader constitutive, existential dimension of projecting out of ourselves, in a Heideggerian perspective. What do we ultimately do when we apply knowledge to present situations? For Heidegger, application of knowledge is but a part of the fact we are ‘caring’ for things, we are lying outside of ourselves to stay next to the things. The big problem raised by Heidegger is that the time of science (both the natural and the social sciences) is inauthentic, while the life we live and experience together with the others occurs in the authentic time whose tissue is the projecting of the individual existence outside of oneself: hence an irremediable gap between the scientific–technological knowledge accumulated (in our case, by the administrative sciences) and the practice (praxis) of – in our case – administration and administering.

However, to strike a more positive note to end this reflection and look towards possible bridges connecting this apparent chasm between philosophical notions of time and the everyday practice of PA studies, certain approaches in PA may be more sensitive than others to this issue. For example, Barzelay and Campbell’s treatment of time in the book *Preparing for the Future*, an account of strategic visioning in the US Air Force (Barzelay and Campbell, 2003), is based on a processualist approach that owes much to such philosophers as Mary Parker Follett (herself a major contributor to organisational studies alongside philosophical studies; see Feldheim, 2006; Stout and Love, 2015; Ongaro, 2016), and represents an interestingly distinctive approach in the field of public management. In a similar vein are the works by Asquer (2012), Barzelay and Gallego (2010), Mele (2010), Mele and Ongaro (2014), Ongaro (2006), Pettigrew et al. (1992) – authors active in public management

drawing from works in the broader social sciences by scholars such as Abbott (1992a, 1992b), Pettigrew (1990, 1997), Pierson (2004), van de Ven (1992) and van de Ven and Poole (1990).

## POTENTIALITY AND ACTUALITY

In Chapter 2 we briefly hinted at the endurance of the thought of Thomas Aquinas over the centuries. His thought and the tradition of the Scholastics is a continued and highly influential presence in the philosophical debate. In the 19th and 20th century, the neo-scholastics is associated with philosophers such as Desiré Mercier (1851–1926), Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), Étienne Gilson (1884–1978) and Francesco Olgiati (1886–1962). Two notions widely elaborated within this tradition are worth plucking for the purposes of this book. The first one is that of metaphysical contingency and the *actus essendi* (act of being); the second one is that of analogy. We have already discussed the latter in Chapter 3 in relation to – and as a conceptual tool for the critique of – Popper’s philosophy of science. Here we discuss (briefly hint to) some implications of contingency metaphysics.

In Aquinas philosophy, things are contingent in the most metaphysical sense: all entities of the world, all events of history may be but also may not be. They have the potential to exist, but their existence is contingent (only in God does essence also entail existence). This is a crucial metaphysical transcendental, defining a type of ontology based on the category of the possibility. Other ontologies we have encountered claim the opposite: that all things that are, necessarily are (like in Hegel, who derived this notion from the philosophy of Spinoza – see Chapter 2; as we have seen earlier, Nietzsche also theorised the necessity of being up to the point of predicating the eternal recurrence of the same).

Within the realm of the category of possibility, the potentiality versus actuality distinction is crucial. Put simply: the potential for a thing to exist is different from the thing actually existing. To show the practical implications of this philosophical category, it is argued that a proper consideration of this philosophical theme may shed light on key topics in public management like the ‘can it work?’ debate: can NPM reforms work in context ‘X’? What happens if doctrines ‘Y’ are transferred to context ‘Z’? How can a practice ‘A’ that has proved successful (generated the effects ‘B’) under circumstances ‘C’ replicate its effects under circumstances ‘D’? And crucially, could the same effects (‘B’) have been obtained otherwise (caused by a practice ‘E’ rather than ‘A’)? And could ‘A’ have *not* generated the effects ‘B’ under circumstances ‘C’, maybe due to chance events? These and many similar questions are considered very ‘practical’ questions, and yet their philosophical premises raise hugely problematic issues. Key to these issues is the question of the potentiality–

actuality distinction in philosophy, and whether the underlying ontology is one based on the transcendental category of ‘possibility’ or on the category of ‘necessity’. Put, again, very simply, if one adopts an ontology of necessity the answer to the question above – ‘could ‘A’ have *not* generated the effects ‘B’ under circumstances ‘C’, maybe due to chance events?’ – is ‘*no*’, whilst if one adopts a contingent ontology is it ‘*yes*’.

Similar considerations apply for counterfactual argumentations, which try to grapple with the crucial questions: what would have happened otherwise? What if (things had gone differently)? Sophisticated techniques have been developed in the social sciences to come to grips with these questions, like the synthetic control methods, which aim at providing a systematic way to choose comparison units in comparative studies by using a combination of comparator units for construing what ‘would have happened’ in the absence of a certain policy intervention (Abadie et al., 2015). The key point to notice here is that such methods, to be meaningful, presupposes an ontology of possibility, rather than one of necessity. A point with huge implications, to which we can only hint here, as we do in the following section.

## OF NECESSITY OR OF POSSIBILITY?

The idea of the necessity of being (all that is, necessarily is) was introduced, at least in modern philosophical thought, by Baruch Spinoza (see Chapter 2) and then came to dominate the philosophical system of Hegel and many of his philosophical heirs (see Chapter 3). The rejection of the Hegelian system goes hand in hand with the contestation that it is *possibility* to be the overarching category of being (as vehemently argued by the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard): that things that are, might also have not been, and vice versa.<sup>5</sup>

We argue that across the social sciences research, and notably for the purposes of this book, the PA research, the very basic stance towards this fundamental ontological issue – whether necessity or possibility is the overarching category of being – draws a major differentiating line in terms of the fundamental stance of the researcher. For example, when Pollitt and Bouckaert in their study of the trajectories of administrative reforms and their antecedents and consequences argue for ‘chance events’ playing a role (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004, 2000/2011), they seem to recognise more explicitly than other authors their basic stance about possibility as the ultimate category of being.

If we assume Popper’s perspective that it is ontological assumptions to drive scientific inquiry, the question is: in the scientific research in PA, what ontological perspective drives the investigator when studying the administrative phenomena? Is the investigator assuming that what is observed is ultimately inherently necessitated (ultimately, it could not have been diverse<sup>6</sup>)? Or, is

what is observed assumed to ultimately be just one possibility out of many; that is, ultimately, things could have been otherwise? Chance, free will, otherness-transcendence (what is outside the immediate horizon) all weigh in in this latter ontological perspective, which will tend to see the world as, literally, a world of possibilities, while they tend to be ruled out in the former, which will tend to see the world as tantamount to one big chain of necessitated causal relations. The question arises as to what is the role of the PA scholar in either world? In the latter (a world of necessary causation), the PA scholar will probably resemble more the detached observer, not engaged with the world (because the world cannot be changed, if it is necessitated), focused on discovering at least some proximate rings of the huge causal chain of which the world is made. In the former, the PA scholar will be more akin to an engaged student, who sees the world as malleable and which can be shaped by human beings, through the exercise of free will and intent (along an intellectual line from medieval thought and the role of intentionality in human actions to modern-day existentialism): a vision of human liberty enacting purposeful designs to change the world – and public governance and public policy within it – also thanks to being equipped by the findings of PA research.

## BETWEEN ONTOLOGY AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: CONCEPTIONS OF HUMAN NATURE AND THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

A major object of philosophical inquiry of high significance for the field of PA as well as across the social sciences is the investigation into the main traits of the notion of ‘human nature’, a central yet at least partly elusive concept. The topic is located across the philosophical branches of ontology, on one hand, and political philosophy, on the other hand. It pertains to ontology insofar as the investigation into the reality of humanity is part and parcel of the inquiry into the nature of being, and it pertains and it is in a sense the starting point for political philosophy as well as ethics, since the questions about ‘how to live together’ and ‘how to live well’, which are, respectively, the central question of political philosophy and of ethics (Chapter 1), rely on the understanding of human nature to be addressed, and notably the question about ‘how to live together’ cannot be addressed unless the question of the ultimate nature of the beings who have to live (well) together, that is, humans, is also addressed; as we shall see in Chapter 5, an inquiry into human nature is exactly the starting point of Plato’s argument about the ‘common good’ as the criterion that provides legitimacy to a political system. The very possibility of using the term ‘nature’ and talking of human nature, which ultimately means talking about the ‘essence’ of the object of study, is premised on the analyses carried out by

the philosophers Vico and Dilthey, who identified the distinction between the natural sciences, on one hand, and the ‘sciences of the spirit’ and the study of the ‘man-made’ world, the world made by human beings, on the other. These philosophers highlighted the very possibility for scholars and beholders of the human world to gain a deeper understanding of it, for the very reason that the subject of the process of knowing, her/himself a human being, is in a sense identical with the object of the process of knowing: the human-made world. It is for this reason that talking about the ‘nature’ of the object of study does not appear inappropriate nor ‘unscientific’, quite the contrary.

Bringing this topic to the forefront of research in the field of PA is not an altogether novelty: an explicit and very insightful attempt to probe into the link between human nature and the management of public services (notably the performance of public services) is provided by Talbot (2005), who elaborates on the implications of the human being characterised as ‘the paradoxical primate’. In his work, Talbot takes the move from the (ontological) consideration that human beings are inherently paradoxical (hence the human being as the ‘paradoxical’ primate) for drawing implications for the ultimate foundation and justification of the criteria against which to assess the performance of public organisations and public programmes.

Considerations about human nature and whether and how it enables to uphold certain values also suffuse practitioners’ understandings of PA. For example, the code of conduct of the British civil service asks civil servants to always uphold four core values:<sup>7</sup> *integrity* (defined as ‘putting the obligations of public service above one’s own personal interest’), *impartiality* (defined as ‘acting solely according to the merits of the case and serving equally well governments of different political persuasions’), *honesty* (defined as ‘being truthful and open’) and *objectivity* (defined as ‘basing one’s advice and decisions on rigorous analysis of the evidence’). (It may be noticed the call to the highest standards of both intellectual objectivity and intellectual honesty, a notion very much tied to the ‘stewardship’ conception of the UK civil service: civil servants as stewards of the government of the day, by ‘serving equally well governments of different political persuasions’.) While the status of these values may be questioned (whether they are a basic standard, for civil servants never to be found faulty of), or rather are more an aspiration, urging civil servants to always strive in the pursuit of these obligations, they surely raise questions about whether human nature enables or hampers the attainment of such a high-level bar of expected behaviour.

What arises from this brief review of the topic is that issues of values (public values) and issues about human nature and whether and how it may – or may not – enable to uphold certain values are centre stage for any inquiry into the foundations of PA.

Hodgkinson (1978) sets out a highly significant attempt to develop what he calls 'a philosophy of administration', where by administration he basically means the executive function in all organisations, public or private. An important preliminary qualification here is that the scope of Hodgkinson's book is different from this one: the difference between Hodgkinson's work and this is that the present book is about *public* organisations, while Hodgkinson is interested in examining human nature – its essence and its behaviour – in every organisation, public or private, and sees organisations and the organisational phenomenon as a crucial field of the social space where human life takes place. Moreover, the meaning in which the term 'administration' is used is different between the two books: Hodgkinson by administration intends the exercising of the executive function in an organisation, whereby administering is intended as 'the art, science and profession' of making decisions in organisations (broadly intended it is tantamount to the managerial function in an organisation); this book is about 'administration' intended in a different sense, as a dimension of the public sphere, a reality of the living together of human beings in a political system endowed with a public administration. Finally, Hodgkinson's work aims at proposing a philosophy *of* administration: the function of the preposition 'of' is here crucial, as his focus lies in working out a synthesis of diverse (at times disparate) philosophical positions in order to attain an original synthesis which aims at constituting a standpoint on the phenomenon considered (see Chapter 1 on the distinction between philosophy 'for' and philosophy 'of' public administration). With this important qualification in mind, Hodgkinson's work is relevant for the purposes of this book insofar as he develops on a crucial ontological issue, the human nature, and applies an understanding of human nature to the theory and practice of organisations, thereby encompassing the public organisations. There is thus an overlap with the remit of this book to the extent that: (a) Hodgkinson's findings and theoretical propositions may be applied *also* to public organisations (as a subset of the category of organisations in general, though his focus is always on the individual organisation rather than on, for example, the broader public administrative system, or public governance more widely, which are instead part of the object of study of this book); (b) the executive function is *one* aspect of central significance of public administration (although not the only dimension of PA); and (c) it is kept in mind that Hodgkinson aims at advancing *his own* philosophical propositions (philosophy *of* administration), rather than exploring how philosophical thought in its varied streams may be brought into the field (philosophy *for* public administration). Having set out this important clarification on the differences between Hodgkinson's work and this one, we can now turn to review the original contribution made by Hodgkinson's 'Towards a Philosophy of Administration'.

Hodgkinson's starting point is that administration (as the performance of the executive function) is both an area of applied logic (practical reasoning, in Aristotle's framing of the issue) and an area where the exercise of value judgement is quintessential. Thence, philosophical knowledge and understanding is part and parcel of the essence of the activity of administering an organisation. Hodgkinson very effectively reviews a disparate literature on organisations and decision-making in organisations to pave the way for the core of his analysis: the relations between the perennial human nature as it embodies over the ages in individual human beings, on one hand, and organisations as the field where administrative action (the exercise of the executive function) takes place, on the other hand.

A key tenet of his approach is the distinction between 'is' and 'ought to be', a key philosophical notion which we have encountered and examined. Based on this notion and the centrality of values in human action, and hence also in human action within organisations, Hodgkinson outlines an analytical model of the concept of values, which places values for human beings at three levels; simplifying a lot, at one level we can find values associated to 'pleasure' (affective and hedonistic dimension: what the individual 'likes'); at another level values which are assessed for their consequences or their appropriateness (from social consensus to desirability of expected outcomes of social action); at the third level values whose foundation belongs to the moral order or on religious or faith grounding: the 'principles', like the Kantian categorical imperative, or the guiding imperatives that derive from adhesion to a religion or a faith. Whilst this tripartite model of human motives may be criticised on manifold groundings (as an even very rapid skimming of the pages above in Chapters 2 and 3 might indicate), yet the purpose of 'modelling' value-based human behaviour for the objective of understanding human behaviour in organisations is laudable and part and parcel not just of a philosophy of administration but valuable starting point for a philosophy of *public* administration too, and calls for such efforts are most welcome.

An especially brilliant chapter in Hodgkinson's so insightful book is Chapter 9 (pp. 151–70), which delves into the pathologies of administration, that is, the pathologies inherent with the dynamics whereby human beings strive to reach the apex of organisations, to be 'successful' in their professional life, whereby the measure of such success lies in enjoying the concentration of power that can (allegedly) be found when attaining the top posts, when becoming administrators at the top of an organisation. It is here that philosophical perspectives are at the front of the analysis and make Hodgkinson's study so distinctive and penetrating.

His insights into the pathologies of organisations take the move from the dilemmas of the Platonic guardians: those with the virtues for wielding power do not have the predisposition to pursue it: they would rather withdraw from

power, not strive for it, and compete with the aggressive people to attain it. Ambitious men and women, not the philosophers, will have the drive to achieve success in organisations (as in the saying: ‘nice guys finish last’). This poses a dilemma for the administration of any organisation, if human nature is such that those less versed in the art of administering it are the same who strain most to reach the hierarchical apex, then negative or adverse selection may be the natural equilibrium for an organisation. This argument may be further reinforced if we assume the Machiavellian prince (Chapter 7), or indeed the stylised version of it depicted in the following passage, as the model of human nature:

a thoroughgoing Machiavellianist will righteously scheme for the betrayal and downfall of his superiors and will use his peers and subordinates as means. Not, as Kant would have it, as ends in themselves ... Yet withal he will not let this be seen; it must not be perceived or at all obvious in any way that this is going on: quite the opposite, especially in a culture which elevates the values of sociability, co-operation, and conformity. It must be well-concealed and disguised ... He will necessarily become adept in all the arts of human relations manipulation and acquire the full panoply of political skills, arts and skills ... he may even succeed in deceiving himself by resort to several species of rationalization: he is doing it for the family, his dependents or, even, for his organization, his country or, pseudo-philosophically, because if he doesn't somebody else (much worse) will. (Hodgkinson, 1978, pp. 160–1)

Another pathology of organisations starts from another trait of human nature: aggressiveness. The problem here lies in the fact that aggressiveness may be seen as a feature facilitating the climbing of the organisational ladder: ‘One is unlikely to climb far in the organisational hierarchy without it’ (Hodgkinson, 1978, p. 162). The problem becomes organisational when this trait of climbers in organisations is coupled with the nature of administrative roles as authoritative ones, that ‘are functionally dependent upon the attitudes of compliance and the zones of acceptance or indifference’ (Hodgkinson, 1978, p. 162); the issue is that:

compliance can be construed as a way of abdicating responsibility ... Conscience can be suspended [so that] ‘any competent manager of a destructive bureaucratic system can arrange his personnel so that only the most callous and obtuse are directly involved in violence. The greater part of the personnel can consist of men and women who, by virtue of their distance from the actual acts of brutality, will feel little strain in their performance of supportive functions. They will feel doubly absolved from their responsibility. First, legitimate authority has given full warrant for their actions. Second, they have not themselves committed brutal physical acts’. (citing Milgram, 1974, p. 122) (Hodgkinson, 1978, pp. 162–3)



A consideration which brings us to another key aspect of organisations: that they may act as decoupling individual morality from ‘organisational morality’:

formal organizations are in certain critical aspects antagonistic to ordinary morality ... This antagonism comes about because of the organizational value of rationality and the nomothetic principle of depersonalization. In the complex bureaucracy, individuals are not whole persons but role incumbents ... they are *parts*, replaceable and substitutable ... Morality, in glaring contrast, is a function of total personality and overflows any role [however] Organizational goals combined with rational procedures for their attainment ... make organizational life analogous to chess. Within the game there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ [in the sense of morally just or unjust, our note] moves, only those of more or less efficacy given the set system of rules which cannot in itself be challenged ... even the administrator is not an author of acts but an *agent*, one who does things in the name of others ... the agent is not personally or morally responsible for the acts which are under the authority or the authorship of the collectivity ... and outwardly benevolent organizations can become latent collective forces of evil. (Hodgkinson, 1978, pp. 172–3)

We find these insights provided by Hodgkinson into the nexuses amongst human agency, responsibility, and organisational malevolence enlightening (echoing here issues of responsibility in organisations, and notably in the execution of evil in organisations – ‘the banality of evil’ – which are also raised in the section on the existentialist public administrator, earlier in this chapter).

Other pathologies of organisations include busy-ness and superficiality; pseudo-machismo and anti-intellectualism; the cult of leadership (till the emperor is shown to be in the proverbial underwear); the over-infusion of organisations with values (notably a characteristic of military organisations, which necessitate to counter their nature of agencies of naked power for the nation state).

What is enlightening of the approach worked out by Hodgkinson is that he takes as starting point philosophical conceptions of human nature, to then combine them with the findings of social sciences and notably managerial and organisational studies, in order to work out the implications for the value-laden problems of the performance of the administrator, that is, the ‘executive’ or ‘leadership’ role in organisations (Hodgkinson also dedicated later works to the study of leadership).

Hodgkinson’s work highlights a number of dimensions which are crucial to any attempt to link philosophical conceptions of human nature and the study of organisations: it highlights that values judgements are inherent in making decisions in public organisations (and private alike) and that decision-making is not and cannot be a value-free activity. This consideration points on one hand to the significance of moral philosophy for an understanding of the issue of individual and organisational responsibility, on the assumption that the human being belongs not just to the natural order, but also to the moral order (as out-

lined in the opening of this chapter in reference to Kant's moral philosophy). On the other hand, the consideration of decision-making as a value-charged activity also points to the issue of the motives of human behaviour as key drivers for understanding people in organisations; for example, in Chapter 7 we shall see the significance that pride takes as a driver of human behaviour in Machiavelli's thought, or the emphasis the Florentine writer places on the desire to enter History (with the capital 'H': entering History in order to be remembered forever) as a key driver for human beings when aspiring to the highest public office: the amoral, if not outright immoral, drivers of human nature.

The quest for models of human nature ('model of men') has been driving philosophical inquiry over the centuries, a stream of inquiry rife with contention which, in the end and after centuries of harshly debating, may have led to exhaustion – and outright scepticism – about the value and usefulness of working out 'a model of men', in Herbert Simon's memorable phrasing. It is interesting to point out that prominent social scientists have tended to refrain from entering the field of modelling human nature and rather prefer to restrain their claims to the level of the (working) assumptions underpinning a paradigm of research in the Kuhnian sense (Chapter 3): for example, Raymond Boudon gives his theorisation of 'ordinary rationality' – as opposed to Simon's bounded rationality and other rationalities theorised about – the ontological status not of a philosophical statement describing the essence of men, but rather of a postulate of the social sciences: 'My claim that the social actor should be treated as rational, in the sense of the Theory of Ordinary Rationality, is a *postulate for the social sciences*, not a philosophical statement describing the essence of men' (Boudon, 2011, p. 48, emphasis in original).

In this sense, the question arises whether social scientific 'motivation theories', which have been wrought out over the decades and represent an area of major inquiry in organisation studies, suffice at least to describe the observable behaviour of human beings in organisations, that is, whether debates on human nature can be boiled down to motivation theories for the purposes of understanding people's behaviour in (public) organisations, and for related purposes like designing 'adequate' compensation systems that reflect (to adopt a wording on which there seems to be some general agreement, at least terminological) the extrinsic, intrinsic and pro-social dimensions of people's motivation in organisations. We would argue, as is the case for other 'modern social scientific disciplines' employed for the study of PA, that here too there is a philosophical residue (see Chapter 1): whilst social psychology and organisation studies have in most respects 'settled down' and built their home as an autonomous science with their problem statement, research objectives, and consensus over the methods, and notably as part of it have set up what we refer to as 'motivation theory in organisations', the research topic of human motives

and what drives human behaviour (thereby including human behaviour unfolding in organisations as a part of it) cannot be stated in a totally uncontested way, and there is a ‘plus’ about the understanding of human behaviour that transcends what can be achieved by means of the application of the ‘scientific method’.

Indeed, as it often happens with core philosophical issues, we doubt that the thirst for knowledge about the ‘ultimate nature of human beings’ will ever be quenched, even more so when the area of inquiry is so ripe with implications for questions of such saliency like ‘how to best organise society and the realm of the political’. Moreover, to the extent a field of inquiry does not content itself with observing social phenomena (as could be the case for sociology) but is also about intervening on society for changing it and making it in some sense ‘better’ (as is the case for PA as public *management*), the intertwining of ‘is’ and ‘ought to be’ will inevitably call for grounding in philosophical arguments any claim that is being made about how to manage people in public organisations and administer public policies and public services.

## NOTES

1. It should here be noticed that the Kantian foundation of morality is *not* utopia, contra to what is claimed in Garofalo and Geuras, 2015. We discuss the normative and regulatory functions of utopias in Chapters 7 and 8, starting from the work of the author who first minted the very term: Thomas More.
2. Although the challenging question remains for philosophers and scientists adhering to the emergentist perspective to answer: in what regards is the notion of emergence ultimately distinguishable and novel compared to the notion of formal cause – the form or essence of a thing – and material cause as wrought out by Aristotle (Chapter 2)? In fact, in Aristotle’s line of argumentation there was no doubting that a thing – for example, a brain or a hand – was composed by smaller elements that materially constitute it (material cause), but that the same material elements in a different order are not the thing – a brain or a hand – because it is only in that order (which is the form or essence) that they are indeed. Emergentism may be a philosophical perspective attuned to accommodating the implicit world-view of the contemporary man/woman, who takes the discoveries of the modern natural sciences as a self-evident ‘starting point’ (something which obviously the ancient Greek did not), but whether the notion of emergence is a novel concept, or one which may displace the notion of essence or causal form, this is far from evident.
3. We have seen in Chapter 3 how our German philosopher aimed at incorporating all the epochs of human history and philosophical thought into progressively superior syntheses, placing his own philosophy at the top.
4. It seems they are also more complicated in the natural sciences and notably in physics, where developments over the 20th century have challenged many previously held assumptions. Quantum physics refers to ‘distribution of probability of presence’ of particles, whose combined ‘position plus movement’ can never be determined with a precision superior to the limit posed by the constant of Planck: the very notion of ‘presence’ seems to be shattered. Shifting from the extremely

small to the extremely big, Albert Einstein's theory of relativity poses a limit to the causal influence: an object 'present' can only influence those possible future events that are within the reach of the speed of the light departing from the object; beyond that limit, an object cannot wield an influence, cannot perform as a cause.

5. It goes without saying, in the presence of a necessitating cause, an effect will by definition follow of necessity – but the issue here is whether the totality of reality and history is ultimately governed by the category of necessity or by that of possibility.
6. Even if the inquiry eventually led the investigator to formulate propositions in the form of probabilistic causation, perhaps because nothing better could be found due to limits to our methods.
7. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-code/the-civil-service-code> (accessed 21 October 2019).

## 5. Political philosophy and public governance: the quest for justification in ‘common good’ and in ‘social contract’ arguments and their significance for the debate on the organisation of the public sector

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### INTRODUCTION

Following up on the previous chapter centred on issues of ontology, this chapter turns to explore political philosophical issues. We focus the issue of the *legitimacy* of public governance, which we consider to be a theme of central significance – a perennial issue, and yet possibly nowadays even further accentuated by the multiple ‘crises of legitimacy’ affecting various jurisdictions and redefining the relation between (public) administrators and those who are administered – and one distinctively philosophical (leaving to other books, by other authors, to explore other entry points for bridging political philosophy and PA – amongst these: the topic of comparative political regimes and PA, first introduced by Aristotle, the notion of regime change, whose initial conception may be ascribed to Polybius, and the relevance for PA of the political thought of key philosophers like Christian Wolff – see Chapter 2 – and Georg Hegel – Chapter 3).

This chapter then tackles the key question of ‘justification’ – that is, what grounds the legitimacy of a political system<sup>1</sup> – to then delve into how political philosophical thought may shed light on a number of contemporary debates in public governance and management about how the public sector and public services ‘ought to’ be organised.

The puzzle of ‘justification’ – what justifies a political order and makes it ‘just’ – is a very old issue in philosophy and poses formidable questions to whichever set of doctrines is proposed to change PA (which is not the entirety of a political system, but an important part of it). Justification, roughly speaking, is concerned with ‘giving reasons to value something’, notably to value

a political system, and the way in which PA is organised into it. Legitimacy is concerned with gaining the consent of the members on the very foundations of the polity under consideration, with being able to command loyalty to the political system from its participants. It is, in sum, one of the key public governance questions.

These are hugely problematic issues that have engaged political philosophers (and statesmen, and lawyers) over millennia. One additional problematic issue regards the specific meaning of the legitimacy of PA within the broader question of the legitimacy of the political system. On the one hand, legitimacy may be claimed to pertain to the political system as such, rather than to PA – PA as the organisation and processes of the public sector is to be seen as just a part or component of the broader political system. However, even going down this path of a narrower view of PA (an alternative and broader view is to conceive of PA to encompass more widely public governance systems and arenas), it may be argued that the functioning of the public sector and the reforms of it (administrative reforms, public management reforms, sectoral reforms) may have a distinct impact on the legitimacy of the political system: if reforms are attempts to ‘make the public sector in some sense work better’ (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004, p. 16), then it may be queried what ultimately ‘better’ means, which entails having a notion of what is ‘good’, and hence what are the implications of a ‘reformed public sector’ – and more broadly of reformed public governance – for the legitimacy of the overall political system. On the other hand, the legitimacy of PA in itself is a question in point: is legitimacy of PA derived from its subordinate status to politics (PA as subjected to political domination, as in a Weberian conception of bureaucracy, whose influence lingers well into our days and still retains a prominent position; see Rosser, 2018)? Is that the *only* criterion of legitimacy? Or should (highly problematic) concepts like that of public interest be evoked, as Herring (1936) does, and legitimacy of administrative action be derived from the fulfilment of the public interest and the effecting of public values (Bozeman, 2007; van Wart, 1998)?

Legitimacy is a central yet highly elusive concept for PA: Waldo makes the case that legitimacy is a historically contextualised state of administrative thinking and practice (Waldo, 1948/1984, 1971; for a highly valuable commentary, see Jordan, 2006). Albeit slippery to be defined, legitimacy is widely dealt with empirically by political scientists and public administrationists. At roughly the time the first edition of this book went to press, the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) and the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA) dedicated the twelfth edition of the ‘Transatlantic Dialogue’ conference series to the theme of legitimacy.<sup>2</sup> Determinants of legitimacy may be searched in such categories as ‘satisfaction’ by users of public services (van de Walle, 2018); trust (van de Walle and Bouckaert, 2003); performance, variously intended (Bouckaert and Hallighan, 2008; Rainey,

2003; van Ryzin, 2013; van Dooren et al., 2015); citizen engagement; equity in access to public services (Rutgers, 2008a); and social equality (for example, across generations with regard to who bears the costs of environmental protection, or in encounters with the state, Epp et al., 2014) – amongst others.

In this chapter, consistently with the general thrust of the book, we provide the reader with some, necessarily mostly introductory, examinations of the underlying philosophical grounding of legitimacy, that is, the political–philosophical issue of the quest for ‘justification’ (Bird, 2006) to then discuss applications to the issue of the legitimacy of PA within the broader political system. In the remainder of this chapter we outline a number of approaches to justification of a political system. Such approaches to justification can be grouped as follows: common good arguments, social contract arguments, the liberal proposal worked out by Rawls, and person-centred arguments (derived from the philosophical strand of personalism, see Chapter 3). We then make an attempt to tackle one, big question: how can legitimacy arguments found a theory of PA, or at least what linkages may tentatively be drawn between PA theories and underlying philosophical rationales for justification of the broader political system? And how can political–philosophical approaches to justification be employed to reckon doctrines about how the public sector should be organised and reformed? We confine our effort to an attempt to sketch some elements that may pave the way for continued, more systematic reflection and research on this major, but yet so far mostly overlooked, theme.

## ‘COMMON GOOD’ ARGUMENTS: PLATO’S CONCEPTION

One way of tackling the issue of justification is that of establishing whether the political order and public governance in a given jurisdiction advances the ‘common good’. The issue of the common good is a topic debated at least since the great philosopher Plato (see Chapter 2). A key issue discussed in his renowned work, *The Republic*, is the link existing between the ‘common’ and the ‘individual’ good. The history of the inquiry into the nature of the common good is the story of various efforts to confront and answer questions into the link between justice (in the sense of a just society) and considerations about the interests, happiness, well-being and overall enhancement of the lives of the people belonging to a community:

common-good arguments ... form a very broad church and have come in many shapes and sizes. Despite these many differences, however, they share a distinguishing feature. They all assume that the value of political arrangements and forms of collective organization, along with the beliefs about justice and other ethical ideals that hold them in place, must ultimately be explained in terms of their contribution to the well-being and happiness of *everyone* living within them ... in the words of

Plato ‘to determine which whole way of life would make living most worthwhile for each of us’ (1992 translation, p. 21). (Bird, 2006, p. 33, emphasis added)

In the remainder of this section it is discussed to some length the history of this important idea and how related key questions have been addressed, such as: how do we determine whether the life of someone else is enhanced in some relevant sense (which is the problem of the (in)commensurability of the well-being for different persons)? Compared to what? And how do we ensure that everyone’s interests are taken impartially into consideration? Like for most other fields of philosophy, the enduring merit of Plato is that of having asked the crucial questions – if not all of them, most of them. The first big question concerns the relation between the public and the private life. Nowadays, we are probably more accustomed – at least in Western societies – to separate the two: this is generally stated with sentences by and large formulated in such ways like: ‘in a liberal democratic society everybody has the right to live her or his own life, and none should prevent it, even if it is evident that somebody is making a mistake that would eventually harm her/him’. It is the idea that private life is an inner space separated (and protected) from somebody else’s influence, and notably from state’s influence. This might be called democratic justice, justice according to principles of liberal democracy that protect the individuals from external interferences. But the counter argument can be formulated as follows: ‘If I wrecked my life, what consolation is it that I did it “my way”? Doesn’t being implicated in our own failures only make our hells more hellish?’ (Bird, 2006, p. 38).

It is following this line of reasoning that Plato made the famous (some say infamous) argument that just selves and just societies are interlinked: that if a just society is one in which *everyone* lives well, then justice must have the property of enhancing the lives of all those who live it: justice – what justifies a political order and makes it just – is such that it enhances the lives of those that are socialised into it. It derives from this that such kind of justice would command the rational approval, hence the loyalty, of all those who belong to a political system informed by such kind of justice. But in order to realise such kind of justice, the inner world of the self and the outer public world cannot be separated, and justice becomes something that the individual possesses, not just a property of the political order. Connecting the self and the outer world entails that somebody – namely, for Plato, the philosopher – knows what is good for the self: an argument that attracted the darts of critics like Popper, who saw in Plato the theoriser of the totalitarian state – as well as the critique of ‘paternalism’ directed at Plato’s notion of common good (Popper contended that any society in which a superior – hence ultimately unchecked – authority imposes criteria of what is good for the entirety of the people will ultimately end up closing itself to the possibility of learning, adapting and remedial



action; he also argued that there is only one ‘open society’ which is formed by the interconnection of all the jurisdictions in the world which uphold this liberal, open-ended view of how to organise the political system, see Popper, 1963).

Plato indeed went down that route, and advanced a theory of the tripartite psyche (which is a way of addressing the second big question: in order to know what a just society is for us, we need to know who we are): each human being is for Plato endowed with three basic capacities and forms of action to which correspond three basic types of interests. At the first level there is the capacity to experience pleasure and pain, to which is associated the natural inclination to seek the former and avoid the latter – a first set of interests thus corresponds to this capacity, namely the satisfaction of certain physical needs and the removal of pain. At a second level, there is the capacity to throw yourself into projects – a second set of interests thus lies in recognition and appreciation by the others of our character, efforts and activities. At a third level, there is the capacity for intellectual curiosity, for investigating the world – a third set of interests thus lies in achieving knowledge and understanding.

This categorisation may well be challenged by more recent psychological theories about human needs (Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is a famous one and widely resorted to in management and public management studies; Maslow, 1943), but the basic philosophical argument made by Plato transcends the specific psychological model of the human being adopted. The argument is that for mobilising the capacities and being successful in promoting the well-being two requirements must be met. First, at the individual level all these capacities must be properly enacted and guided: this is a sort of politics of the self that requires reason (better in capital: Reason) to be in control of ourselves – it is virtuous behaviour that is required (Aristotle further developed this line of inquiry elaborating a full-fledged philosophy of virtues in *Nicomachean Ethics*). Second, Plato recognises the principle of social dependence: we all depend on each other for self-realisation, and yet the talents and skills for building a just society are not – for Plato – evenly distributed across the population (and this is the third big question that Plato set for the centuries to be discussed: to what extent are we ‘equal’ whilst being differently talented?). Thus, in order for a society to enhance the lives of all its members, given our interdependence, what is needed is that the political order reflects and incorporates into its very configuration the knowledge of what is good for the self: philosophical knowledge must shape the political order.

In order to achieve this goal, Plato drew a conclusion that has left the posterity perplexed: the suggestion that only intellectually gifted individuals should hold positions of political power. This is a disconcerting claim, and many would counter that intellectuals have not proven to be more capable than others in running the state and wielding political power in ways that have advanced

the good for all. As we hinted at earlier, the very idea of concentrating too much power over individuals may also be challenged – trusting the state or public officials to impart how to live may be a terrible idea (the liberal critique). Equally, it may be argued that trying to prevent somebody from making a mistake is itself a bad idea, because, as the popular adage also suggests, making mistakes may at times be the only way to learn and improve (and by the way this may well apply to philosophers as well, who should allegedly be on the transmitting side of knowledge: when is a philosopher so ‘intellectually mature’ to be trusted to make judgements that advance the good of all?).

These critiques touch the crucial point of the liberty of the individual and the equality in rights and duties even if we are differently talented. However, focusing only on these issues may lead to formulating critiques quite conventional for the sensitivity of our epoch and ultimately to lose sight of the depth of the argument wrought out by Plato. Plato’s argument is not so much about the subjection of individuals to a superior enlightened power (this could be Plato’s riposte to the famous accusations made by Popper), rather it is about the key issue that individuals are socially dependent and about the profound sense in which just individuals and a just society are interlinked:

[O]n Plato’s account, then, being ruled by reason and wisdom is not necessarily the same as being ruled by *one’s own* rational judgements. Rather, in many cases it requires a settled disposition to defer to the rational judgements of better-qualified others. So, even as it enhances the quality of individuals’ lives by inducing the required psychological dispositions, being properly ruled by reason is for Plato an inherently social achievement ... individuals are socially dependent in a strong sense. The achievement of their well-being depends crucially on the pattern of social forms surrounding them and the terms in which they are encouraged to participate in them. Properly understood, justice describes the conditions under which the terms on which individuals are encouraged to participate will tend to promote, rather than hinder, everyone’s well-being. It is in this sense a common good.<sup>3</sup> (Bird, 2006, pp. 42–43)

If we search for an example of the significance of this conception that heavily involves the way in which public services work, we may think of education: the future life of a child is crucially dependent on the rational judgement of better qualified others – parents and school teachers working jointly for the enhancement of the life of an adult-to-be. A child may well have the right to ‘live life in her/his own way’, and may well need to ‘learn from one’s own mistakes’, but the outcomes of living void of the guidance and care of qualified adults may be tragic: a child is socially dependent in the strongest sense on others for her/his future life to be a full, accomplished one.

This is an inherently perfectionist research agenda, which assumes ‘that Plato’s ideal of a well-lived life is the ultimate end for the sake of which social and political arrangements exist and relative to which they ought to be evalu-

ated' (Bird, 2006, p. 44), and that there is ultimately one human nature – the 'essence' of all human beings – possessing certain basic traits whose knowledge can be achieved, and the acquisition of such knowledge is a requirement for designing a better society where everyone can thrive.

Finally, it should be noted that other interpretations of Plato's thought emphasised the importance of treating Plato's claim about philosophers ruling society not so much in its literal sense (it is doubtful that Plato really considered its claim to be easy if at all possible to implement), but rather as a heuristic: a tool for critiquing extant governance arrangements by using as comparator the 'ideal' system of public governance if the philosophers were in the ruling posts.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, *The Republic* is interpreted as a utopia (we revisit this interpretation of Plato's work in a subsequent chapter when discussing utopian thinking taking the move from Thomas More's *Utopia*).

## UTILITARIANISM AS A VARIANT OF COMMON GOOD ARGUMENTS

Common good arguments rooted in the Platonic tradition have been critiqued on the ground they are based on 'paternalistic' considerations, whereby somebody who is allegedly 'wise' somehow determines what is 'just society' and 'just political order'. It is also as a reaction to this paternalistic element that it is possible to see a set of common good arguments rooted in a distinct (and distant) stream of thought: utilitarianism. In a utilitarian perspective, 'actions and practices are said to have "utility" to the extent that they bring about overall happiness, and "disutility" to the extent that they produce overall suffering' (Bird, 2006, p. 47). The basic idea in this approach is that if the effects of some policy or institution on the utilities of the individuals who stand to be affected by it can be calculated, then some form of 'aggregate utility' can also be derived, and this aggregate utility can be used as a measure of the common good – but in this perspective rather than evoking philosophers' wisdom, the assessment of what is good is made, literally, 'on an individual basis', leaving it to each individual to determine what is good for him/her.

It should immediately be pointed out that utilitarianism is not an advocacy of the selfish pursuit of one's own interest, but is universalist in thrust – it aims to provide a criterion for designing *any* good society and its political institutions; it is a political philosophy for the betterment of political systems which takes the individual utility as its methodological point of departure, but its aim is providing concepts for reforming public institutions for the betterment of the lives of all its members, and in this sense it belongs to the common good family of theories.

The notion of utilitarianism is associated with the works of Jeremy Bentham, James Mill and John Stuart Mill, great social reformers in 18th- and

19th-century England. Bentham is credited to have minted the notion of ‘utilitarianism’, although the phrase ‘the greatest happiness principle’ was probably not his coin. Bentham was also highly concerned with prison reform, and he is (in)famous for having invented the *panopticon* (a word from the ancient Greek roughly meaning: ‘all visible’): a design of prisons whereby a warden can see every cell every moment. The rationale for the panopticon is that being potentially under the gaze of the authorities at every single moment acts (critics say: forces) to redress wrong behaviours, earn early release and ultimately inculcate appropriate behaviours. Whether pervasive social control is ‘appropriate’ and ‘just’ means to this end has been subject of debate ever since (CCTV controls, which are nowadays widespread especially in urban areas, are claimed to perform a similar function; technological developments like facial recognition and the possibility to collect and analyse massive amounts of personal data make the formulation of the problem of the panopticon of great actuality).

James Mill put centre stage the pursuit of one’s own interest by individuals in social analysis: ‘Like Bentham, he began with the simple thought that all of us naturally attempt to pursue our own interest’, which poses a problem for good government since ‘any group of persons with the power to do good with such means [that is, public powers] has the power to do harm. The central problem of government is to reconcile the interests of the public with the interests of those who hold power’ (Ryan, 2012, p. 697). Bentham and James Mill made a number of contributions, influential not just on English liberalism but also on the disciplines of politics and economics alike. By introducing the idea of ‘maximisation of utility’ they put the bases for the systematic treatment by economists of the notion of utility, a task carried out in innumerable studies (and still counting) over the subsequent two centuries. By putting the pursuit of happiness in political thought centre stage, they revisited from a new angle the old issue uncovered by Plato: the problematic relationship between happiness and freedom. If maximisation of happiness is *the* goal, then what is left of liberty? This was the ground on which Jeremy Bentham refuted the criticisms to the panopticon: reducing individual liberty is not an issue if it leads to increased happiness because liberty is ultimately instrumental to happiness, and hence liberty can be given up if the prize is increasing happiness and avoiding misery. Can there be serious political dissent amongst citizens of a political community if all can be reduced to its lowest common denominator of maximising everybody’s utility?

Before we examine further these crucial issues, we must turn to the third protagonist: John Stuart Mill. His father James was a dedicated yet severe mentor to John: at the age of three, John had already been introduced to the literacy of ancient Greek, at the age of six it was the turn of Latin. Not unexpectedly, John grew up well equipped to deploy reason for the betterment of life, but distraught in terms of how to balance the relationship of well-being

with liberty, autonomy, vitality, human dignity. John advocated a broader notion of utility and investigated the manifold and complex relations between people's character and its political institutions, suggesting fitness between the two may be more important than abstract rational design: he was one of the first to hail Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* as a work of genius, and to realise how different institutions (and American institutions were very different from those of Victorian England) may fit the purpose of enhancing justice. The 'national character' becomes a vague but important factor weighed in by Mill, who picked from Hegel the distinction between the ethical rules a society actually follows and the rules it ought to follow, called 'critical morality'. The ethical rules actually followed form an important part of the national character to be taken into account in designing institutions. But the most relevant part is the answer to the 'ought to' question: according to authors like Ryan, '[T]he essence of Mill's utilitarianism was the claim that the true critical morality is the rules that would maximise human well-being if we all followed them' (Ryan, 2012, pp. 708–9). This is a 'thick' version of utilitarianism: utility here is not confined to the merely useful in the ordinary sense; rather it also encompasses the noble, the just, the beautiful, the right. It is the combination of all these that forms what Mill refers to as utility – which is to say that for John Stuart Mill utility explains the right, the beautiful, the just, the noble. This assertion might be heavily criticised (such was and is the case), but the idea Mill wanted to put forward is that what the right, the beautiful, the just, the noble have in common is that they positively contribute to happiness, and for Mill utility is made by all those things and courses of behaviour that lead to enhancing happiness.

Within this frame, institutions cannot do much to enhance our lives. What they can do is providing individuals with resources (education, security, and the like) that may enable the pursuit of happiness; in the words of Ryan (2012, p. 719), '[W]e cannot become freethinking, imaginative, bold, and interesting on order or under tutelage'. This is a task for each individual to pursue over her/his life, and the state cannot prevent self-harm, in the forms of living a wretched life or simply an inadequate life for lack of commitment to our own self-promotion, although institutions perform the important function of sheltering our individual pursuit of these ends from the others harming us or impeding us to thrive. Mill assigns the state and the political system a much less ambitious task than Plato or Aristotle did: a more negative, limited conception of the state pre-empting potential harm done by others on the individual; a conception to which we are nowadays accustomed to think of in terms of the 'liberal' state.

Mill adopted a broader notion of utility than other forms of utilitarianism, often more concentrated on pleasure and pain, considered as more amenable to measurement (but is it so?). 'Hedonistic' variants of utilitarianism, in fact,

tend to boil down to summation of pleasures and subtraction of pains in an attempt to gauge the effect that given interventions – the delivery of policy provisions and public services – may have on individuals' lives. However, it is questionable whether we can measure either pleasure or pain, and whether these two are commensurable and hence can be added (algebraically: summed or subtracted) in an equation conducive to the calculation of the utility of an individual. In attempts to overcome these apparently insurmountable hurdles, political philosophers like Singer have wrought out an alternative approach: to understand utility in terms of desire-fulfilment or preference-satisfaction (Singer, 1993). On this perspective, an individual is better off to the extent that her/his preferences or desires are satisfied. The advantage of this approach lies in that desires – differently from mental states like pleasure or pain which require fathoming into somebody's mind – may be made explicit and are measured in terms of 'satisfaction' or 'dissatisfaction', measurements that nowadays abound through widespread instruments like 'satisfaction questionnaires' as widely used in public services as they are in private ones. Sophisticated models have grown in this area, combining observation of attitudes as well as behaviours, factoring in expectations (expectancy–disconfirmation models, e.g. van Ryzin, 2013) and other factors. Such models have accrued to a very significant body of knowledge in terms of measurement tools for detecting the satisfaction of consumers of public services as well as in terms of analysis of mechanisms potentially conducive to increased satisfaction (for an excellent review, see van de Walle, 2018).

However, two key conceptual problems remain. The first one is whether levels of human 'fulfilment' can be measured at all and compared with each other in order to be able to somehow rank them. Ultimately, the issue seems to be boiled down to a dichotomy: either utility is somehow amenable to measurement and can somehow be 'scored', or it becomes ultimately impossible to use it as criterion for gauging the effects of political institutions and administrative arrangements on the promotion of well-being, and hence as justification for a political order and its administration, and as a criterion for the design of the reforms of it. In fact, designed reforms must have the property of being at least potentially capable of bringing about a state of affairs that is 'better' than the extant one: but how to reckon the betterment if the bottom line – utility – cannot be measured for comparative purposes?

One ingenious way to at least partly deal with this issue is the criterion, contrived by the Italian engineer and economist Vilfredo Pareto, named 'Pareto-efficiency' or 'Pareto-optimality'. It indicates an(y) allocation of resources whereby it is not possible to make any individual of the system better off without making at least one other individual worse off. Different formulations of the criterion have been worked out, but the key underlying idea in this approach is that 'utility' of different individuals do not get aggre-

gated: the criterion of Pareto efficiency enables to judge optimality without resorting to additions and subtractions of utilities of different individuals, which may be treated as incommensurable. The utilisation of the criterion of Pareto efficiency may be seen as one way for attempting to overcome the difficulties, inherent in the utilitarian perspective, of appraising aggregate utility. However, one critique to the criterion of Pareto efficiency came from 1998 Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen, who aimed at demonstrating that under plausible conditions, a system reaching Pareto efficiency may produce inequitable allocation of resources.

The second conceptual problem, however, still stands, basically in the terms set out by Plato and Aristotle: at another and more fundamental level ‘satisfaction of expectations’ is not synonymous with ‘well-being’ and ‘fulfilment’ of one’s life – bringing us in a sense ‘back to square one’ in terms of the fundamental limitations of utilitarian approaches. The problem lies in the extent to which ‘satisfaction’ may be likened to ‘well-being’, what the ancient Greek philosophers referred to as *eudaimonia* (fulfilment, living a full life) – a notion that may be deemed to mean much more than happiness in the sense of an aggregate of states of satisfaction.

But what if the idea of rooting in ‘justice’ and ‘the common good’ the justification of a political system is abandoned altogether, possibly because it is deemed impossible to attain, and perhaps even dangerous? Why not leave the floor to the individual in deciding what justifies a political regime (rather than the philosopher speechifying about the common good or the economist–mathematician calculating utility levels)? This is, boiled down to its very gist, the logic of contractarian perspectives to justification.

## SOCIAL CONTRACT PERSPECTIVES

A range of major philosophers, including Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, fall in the opposite camp to the one of ‘common good arguments’ – the camp of those who tend to reject the assumption that ‘justice’ and the pursuit of the common good may provide justification of the political order, and seek the foundation of political institutions in some form of agreement, consent and choice by the constituents of the political community: the ‘social contract’.

The ‘contract’ in this perspective is purely hypothetical, not historical, and the situation in which individuals interact before the state is instituted is called by these authors ‘state of nature’. In the state of nature, individuals are prone to harm themselves. In this perspective, therefore, the state as political institution is in the first instance the product of a certain kind of voluntary agreement amongst the individuals who submit to its authority, and the state comes to be conceived primarily as a mechanism of dispute resolution, to bring order

and ensure peaceful co-existence amongst individuals (each individual should willingly submit for the authority of the state to be founded, according to Rousseau who introduced in this line of argumentation the notion of ‘general will’).

Although some authors like Hobbes seem to argue that the state’s authority is unlimited, for other key authors state’s authority is conditional. Kant introduced the key idea that the question should be asked ‘could a rational person have contracted into a system that allowed a state to do this?’, and when the answer was negative, the authority of the state would end.<sup>5</sup>

Authors in this strand formulate the argument in bleaker terms than Kant as the option between the lesser of two evils: the State is the Leviathan, an almost almighty presence intruding into individuals’ lives, yet the establishment of the state is condition for overcoming a ‘state of nature’ of perennial violence amongst individuals, which is even worse (this position is famously associated with the philosopher Hobbes, see Chapter 2). It should further be noted that for important authors in this stream the notion of ‘natural rights’ provides the underpinnings for both setting some limits to state action that cannot be overcome (the state cannot infringe natural rights), and for guiding state action (the state should safeguard and promote natural rights).

The gist of social contract arguments is that the state and public institutions are ultimately founded not on knowledge of what our ‘real interests’ and ‘real well-being’ are (a kind of knowledge which, authors in this stream stress, is hard and probably outright impossible to attain), but rather on our will, in a deliberate (albeit hypothetical rather than historical) choice to surrender to the authority of the state in order to preserve certain conditions for our individual lives – primarily safety and security. It is a choice between these (gloomy) alternatives that grounds the legitimacy of the state: the absence of the state is deemed to bring about a much bleaker state of affairs than it is for individuals to enter the social contract and accept state authority.

What implications can be drawn for the field of PA, and what strands in PA thinking are grounded in social contractual arguments? Early philosophers in this strand were more concerned with the fundamental relations between the individual and the state, and the justification of the very existence of the state, than with the everyday interactions between the state administrative apparatus and its citizens. However, such interactions are nowadays a major focus of analysis, and several studies track the implications for the legitimacy of political institutions of everyday encounters with PA by different sections and groups within the political system. As an example, Epp et al. (2014) have investigated the differences between perceptions of stops by police in the black and the white communities in the US and argue that different frequency and modalities of execution of such stops may engender a sense of distrust in polit-



ical institution and ultimately rejection of their legitimacy, notably in certain age groups of the black population.

It is only more recently that political philosophers, notably John Rawls, have employed social contract arguments, especially those trailblazed by Rousseau, to develop an agenda to advance social equity that has been picked up by leading PA scholars like Frederickson for its specific implications for the field of PA – a theme which we develop in the next section.

The pendulum between common good arguments and social contract arguments is of course always swinging, and a range of criticisms have been moved to the contractualist approach too. As it has been argued, ‘the contractualist attempt to justify political institutions and arrangements without a systematic account of conditions of human flourishing [i.e. abstracting from any conception of well-being] are doomed to fail’ (Bird, 2006, p. 96), a line of reasoning which brings us full circle back to common good arguments. Are there alternatives to these two poles? Or should perhaps they be combined in some novel, creative form for providing an agenda for advancing justification and legitimacy of political institutions and PA? It is to attempts to tackle these questions that we now turn.

## RAWLS

In his seminal work *A Theory of Justice* (1971), John Rawls makes a major attempt to revisit Rousseau’s thought and combine a foundation of society, political institutions and governance in a social contract perspective with the setting of conditions enabling the flourishing of human well-being, at least in the sense of the achievement of what he called ‘social primary goods’: rights, liberties and opportunities, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect. Rawls rejects any utilitarian perspective and focuses on ‘fairness’. Rawls’s theory – although centred on the political system as a whole and not directly concerned with PA – has major implications for any debate on the ultimate justification of public administration and public governance.

Rawls conceives of the social contract as a hypothetical meeting – a thought experiment – in which members define the ‘foundation charter’ of their society, to which Rawls referred to as ‘the original position’. Rawls intended the original position as ‘a voluntary scheme, for it meets the principles which free and equal persons would assent to under circumstances that are fair’ (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 12).

Being an imaginary and hypothetical thought experiment, its design is within our control (Bird, 2006, p. 90). Rawls worked tirelessly over three decades to elaborate the conditions under which a societal and political system makes available to its citizens the social primary goods (Rawls, 1971/1999, 1993). One notable such condition is proceeding ‘behind the veil of ignorance’:

‘Rawls’s hypothetical contractors are deprived of any particular information about the society they are about to enter, about the precise social positions they occupy within that society, and about their own identifying attributes. The individuals in the original position deliberate behind a “veil of ignorance”’ (Bird, 2006, pp. 91–2). The purpose of adopting the criterion of deliberating behind the veil of ignorance is preventing individuals in the original position to advance specific interests and biases, based on their expected location in the society to be designed. In this way, the argument flows, individuals in the original position can be believed to select ‘correct’ principles of justice to allocate social primary goods because their choices would be taken from a fair and impartial standpoint from which to evaluate social institutions in terms of justice.

Rawls’ philosophy has profound significance for the issue of the ultimate justification of public administration and public governance arrangements, to which we return in the concluding section of this chapter.

## PERSONALISM AND COMMUNITARIANISM

An additional perspective can perhaps be suggested. It takes as point of departure the philosophy of personalism, introduced in Chapter 3, which is based on the works of philosophers such as Emmanuel Mounier and owes to the contributions of Neo-Scholastic philosophers like Maritain and phenomenologists like Scheler, who applied the phenomenological method to the investigation of the essences of moral values. Contemporary authors whose works echo some of the tenets of this approach include Taylor (1989, 1997).

Personalism propounds a return to a radical humanism, emphasising the flourishing of the totality of the human person as opposed to any reductionism. ‘Reductionist’ is for Mounier any philosophy that furnishes a one-sided depiction of the human being. A key tenet of personalism lies in the assertion that a person can fully flourish and develop her/himself when striving to become another and better person. As we highlighted in Chapter 3, ‘quality’ of public governance in this frame is not about ‘satisfaction’, it is not about satisfying needs or meeting expectations; rather, it is about the flourishing as a person, by conceiving of a person, any person, as a ‘project’ in the literal sense of ‘to throw ahead’: the throwing of oneself beyond the current state (a notion in common with existentialism), for the ultimate goal of transforming into a better person. This is a conception of the fulfilment of life not dissimilar to what Plato and Aristotle referred to as *eudaimonia*, but in this philosophical perspective it takes a more dynamic, transformational accent, emphasising the potentiality of any human being of transforming oneself.

It also places a strong emphasis on the relational, inter-personal dimension of human life: personalism adopts an inherently relational conception of the

human being. It is only in the relations with others and the belonging to multiple and multi-level communities of persons that the individual person can accomplish her/himself and fully develop its vocation. It is a relational rather than atomistic conception of the human being and human flourishing.

We ask if this philosophical perspective can lead to a third position – a tertium – between common good and social contract arguments, in a similar vein to Rawls' attempt but with a stronger emphasis on the relational dimension of human life as well as on the transformative potential of multi-level communities of people, from the family to humanity? Similarly, to common good arguments, personalism adopts an integral conception of human flourishing, and an ambitious one, inspired by ideals of perfection. It is in stark contrast with utilitarian notions, especially as manipulated by economists in classical economics. It comes closer to John Stuart Mill's 'broad' conception of utility, but only up to a point, because while utility is somehow a 'given' in utilitarianism, the flourishing of the person is in personalism the product of relational, interpersonal dynamics, a conception that is instead closer to Follett's thought. Moreover and relatedly, personalism demands a much greater role for politics than any utilitarian notion (which ultimately 'may not know what to do with politics', as Ryan (2012) puts it), although politics also play an ultimately subsidiary function in personalism, in the sense that the primacy belongs to the basic communities (family, associated life).

Differently from common good arguments, it is less aprioristic in defining what is good and just for the self, what enhances lives, because it is based on an inherently relational and transformational ontology – although an objection might be that such distinction is more a matter of grade than a fundamental difference, and along this line of reasoning this approach might be claimed to broadly fall into the broad family of the common good arguments for the justification of public governance.

Similar to social contract arguments, personalism takes as a starting point the freedom of the individual and the voluntary surrendering of part of one's liberty to submit to state authority only insofar as this is necessary to bring about order and individuals' safety beyond lower-level communities. Different to contractarian arguments, it conceives of inter-individual interactions not primarily as a menace, but rather as a constitutive datum of life and a condition of flourishing for any human being. It is by being embedded into communities that the human person may flourish. Personalism has in this sense also been qualified as a form of communitarianism.

However, before continuing with Mounier's personalism, it should be clarified that the notion of communitarianism can also be interpreted in radically different ways. One such interpretation is nationalist-orientated and inspired anti-liberalism. For this perspective, individual liberty must be tempered by responsibility towards the community, usually conceived of at the national

level, as the national community: responsibility is first of all towards our children and our parents (family), then towards our local community, and then towards our nation-state. One can think of Carl Schmitt's writings to this regard, in straight opposition to Kantian universalism, somewhat in line with Hegel's notion of the state as a necessary reality to shelter, nourish and foster national cultures. In this line of argumentation, responsibility is not towards indistinct, universal human beings and human rights, but rather towards those with whom ethnic, linguistic or cultural ties can be bonded. This is a radically different interpretation of community than the one developed by Mounier, and it stands in outright contrast with the notion of open society as conceived of by Karl Popper and the Kantian universalist foundation of morality. Mounier's personalism may be intended as an attempt to overcome the limits of the atomised individual of liberalism (at least of certain liberal interpretations of the individual), in order to account for the relational nature of the human being and the consideration that the full flourishing of the human beings occurs through relations to the others. However, personalism is also opposed to any notion of closed communities and in its ultimate thrust it is compatible with the notion of 'open society', the idea of one, universal society that is inherently open. Personalism gives rise to an open interpretation of community and communitarianism that profoundly differs from the Schmittian one, whereby community is defined by ethnic, religious or cultural–linguistic ties and bonds, which may take the form of the nation-state (nationalism) or ethnic-tribal or other bonds. Personalism is an approach to recognising the relational nature of human beings within a universalistic foundation of the dignity of each and every individual, and at the same time the multiple belongings of each human being to multiple communities, and the principle of responsibility towards each other that derives from it (in a vein similar to perspectives like the conception of responsibility elaborated by Paul Ricoeur).

## DOCTRINES ABOUT PUBLIC GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC MANAGEMENT REVISITED IN LIGHT OF THE JUSTIFICATION ARGUMENTS

Doctrines and practices of public governance and management reforms – such as the New Public Management (NPM) (Barzelay, 2001; Hood, 1991; Ferlie et al., 1996; Boston et al., 1996); the Public Governance approaches (Rhodes, 1997) and the 'New Public Governance' (Osborne, 2010) and the New Public Service (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2001/2015); the Neo-Weberian State (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004, 2000/2011); Digital Era Governance (Dunleavy et al., 2006); Democratic Governance (March and Olsen, 1995); and others – have been centre stage both in academic and practitioners' debates about the organisation of the public sector and its relation to society and to the public over the

past decades. However, to our knowledge, only rarely, and usually in quite fragmentary ways, have such doctrines been gauged on the bases of political philosophical approaches to justification and legitimacy. The question concerns the underpinning legitimacy criteria for the expected ‘results’ that certain doctrines for reforming PA promise to attain; in other words, what dimensions of performance do doctrines for reform uphold: what are the performance improvements that are predicated to occur on adopting those reforms, by the advocates of the reform doctrines considered.

In this section we sketch some initial, tentative analytical elements for revisiting these doctrines about the organisation of the public sector in light of the common good arguments as well as the social contract arguments, and their variants and alternatives.

Although the issue developed in this concluding section of the chapter can only be a bird’s-eye view, a number of interesting issues arise from revisiting (from the standpoint of century-old, foundational philosophical debates) such contemporary topics like the doctrines and practices about how to reform the public sector, and very tentative propositions may be brought to the fore.

A first tentative proposition is that utilitarianism may be posited to be at the root of much of the (NPM) movement and set of doctrines. We here define NPM as a set of doctrines about the organisation (in the broadest sense) of the public sector (following, for example, Barzelay, 2001; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011, Chapter 1). The NPM has been widely debated as a set of loosely coupled doctrines; one way of summing it, as Dunleavy and Hood put it (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994), is as ‘specialisation plus incentivisation plus marketization’, namely a preference for organisational specialisation (the unpacking of large public organisations into small, specialised ‘executive agencies’), incentivisation (the systematic usage of incentives linked to extensive and intensive measurement of performance, notably along the dimensions of the economy, efficiency and effectiveness), and the predilection for the use of market-type mechanisms over hierarchy or networks wherever possible in the restructure of public services. The customer-user of public services and her/his satisfaction becomes centre stage. The well-being of individuals tends to be boiled down to them being ‘satisfied’, with a premium often put on those dimensions of user satisfaction that are more amenable to some form of measurement. If this line of interpretation of the NPM holds, then Singer’s desire-fulfilment or preference-satisfaction approach to understanding utilitarianism (Singer, 1993) appears to be an apt interpretation of the underlying legitimacy criterion of the NPM.<sup>6</sup> A counter-claim might be that a thrust towards efficiency and efficiency-related values lies at the core of the NPM (Hood, 1991), an emphasis on doing more (or at least the same) with less, whereby rather than user’s satisfaction it is reducing the amount of resources employed for public purposes to drive NPM reforms. If this narrow interpretation of NPM were

adopted, then deeper issues of legitimacy might stop short, and some sort of agreement could be found around the basic idea that consuming less resources for producing the same output is 'better' than consuming more resources for the very same output and all else being equal; however, if NPM is interpreted more widely – as in our view it should be – as a theory of governing, then crucial questions about justification arise – concerns that have been widely discussed in the literature, but generally not in the terms of political philosophical justification (for an exception, Arellano-Gault, 2010). NPM-inspired recipes can hardly address the issue of how to improve lives in terms of fulfilment (living a full life, the *eudaimonia*); instead, they can claim to enable to engender some form of happiness in the sense of some aggregate of states of satisfaction. The question thus links to the broad issue of, first, whether 'satisfaction' suffices as criterion for justification; second, whether increased satisfaction has actually been achieved as an outcome of NPM reforms; and, third, whether losses along other dimensions which contend with satisfaction as legitimating criteria impinge on the legitimacy of NPM reforms and impair its outcomes.

To such challenging questions, NPM advocates may counter that such ambitious goals were never pursued by NPM proposers; rather, 'doing better with less' is the much more modest bar that reformers set for themselves; and 'better' in that frame was conceived as tantamount to 'having users of public services to be more satisfied'. However, at least to the extent the NPM has been intended as more than a set of prescriptions for some form of improvement of the public sector, but as a theory of governing *tout court*, then the inability to address the issue of how to improve the well-being of everyone in the political community raises some fundamental issues in terms of 'just' society and social justice. Advocates of the NPM may counter that this ingredient – social justice – was deliberately left out of the NPM recipe; however, this poses formidable questions about the ultimate justification of reshaping the state and public governance according to NPM doctrines.

Beyond the debates strictly placed under the label of the NPM, it appears that a large part of the burgeoning literature about performance in public services (performance measurement, management and governance; for a systematic review in comparative perspective, see Bouckaert and Halligan, 2008; van Dooren et al., 2015) tends to adopt utilitarianism as its implicit or, much more rarely, explicit philosophical premise. Debating on utilitarianism and its capacity to address fundamental questions of justification might thus be valuable addition to the performance in public services literature. Indeed, a major strand of scientific inquiry – Amartya Sen is a lead author here – aims at elaborating a wider array of indicators to capture the notions of 'human welfare' and 'well-being' beyond mono-dimensional (and hence necessarily more reductionist) interpretations of it – a strand of inquiry that not by chance can be located between economics and philosophy. Also related concepts like

those of capabilities – to capture freedom as a constitutive trait of humanity and the potential of what a human being can achieve beyond what somebody is observed to be factually doing – have been employed to further bridge utilitarianism with broader conceptions of fulfilment that are inherent in common good approaches.

There is at least one strand of thought in contemporary public governance and management which, however, may be reckoned to have deep links with Plato's original formulation of the common good argument rather than with utilitarianism: this is the 'public value' school of thought, initially associated primarily with Mark Moore and John Benington (Moore, 1995; Benington and Moore, 2011) and which has grown into a full-fledged stream of works (Alford et al., 2017; Hartley et al., 2017; Liddle, 2018), also by connecting with research on collaborative leadership and advantage (Crosby et al., 2017; Huxham and Vangen, 2005). The argument of this school, in a nutshell, is that where legislative mandates are weak, ambiguous or flexible, public managers have scope for taking strategic action to expand the wider public value of their organisations. Moore (1995) starts with a simple example/homily of a town librarian wondering about whether to expand the traditional scope of the library's services to meet the wider needs of local children who need more intensive support, and in essence whether to act as a social innovator or to remain within a narrower prescribed role. Public managers are here seen as stewards of public value more than as loyal/unimaginative (depending on one's view) agents of politicians. Here we find a link with the Platonic conception of 'just' society: public managers are called to act on the bases of their judgement about what is 'good' and 'just' for society, or at least that portion to which they can realistically reach out, and in this way they affect the lives of others; their wise judgement and action is a constituent of a more just society.

This attitude by public managers raises two issues. The first one is the compatibility of Plato's argument with the notion of the legal and political subordination of the bureaucracy to elected officials, whose legitimacy for office-holding in turn emanates not from superior wisdom, rather from consensus and consent: the basic idea of Weberian origin that the bureaucracy is subordinate to political organs (ultimately to elective organs, in democratic systems) and to the law (in turn ultimately enacted by elective organs – though elective organs too have to abide by the law). In sum, the criticism goes, this 'Platonic' notion of how bureaucrats ought to interpret their role impinges on democratic accountability and hinders the processes of holding the bureaucracy to account democratically. Indeed, the public value approach has been critiqued by political scientists (Rhodes and Wanna, 2007, 2008; but see Alford, 2008, for a rejoinder) exactly on this ground: for its blurring of the politics/administration divide.

The same authors also critiqued the public value approach on another, related but distinct, ground – that of the motivations of bureaucrats. The criticism is that the public value approach takes an overly optimistic view of the motivations of public managers as unselfish ‘platonic guardians’ (which is literally the expression used by Rhodes and Wanna, 2007, although the piece does not delve further into the lineage in Plato’s conception of common good of the public value approach) and as neutral promoters of the common good, rather than as a special interest group, with its own expansionist agenda.

A third critique may be stacked to the other two: this regards the extent to which knowledge is actually possessed by the bureaucracy to such an extent to make bureaucrats ‘better informed’ than other parties and hence ultimately more just in making their decisions. True that one particular form of knowledge, technical expertise, is one of the key criteria for the recruitment of tenured officials in modern bureaucracies, but it is not the only one (for example, political appointment is also a criterion – with some empirical studies finding it may be on the rise in a number of countries; see Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011, Chapter 4). More substantially, technical expertise is hardly even a remote proxy for the platonic ‘philosophical wisdom’ – although it is correct to qualify the statement by observing that nowadays hyper-complex societies surely require the provision of specialised, technical knowledge of a magnitude unthinkable in the epoch of Plato and Aristotle, and nowadays philosophical wisdom, much more than in the past, may also need to incorporate the findings of technical–scientific knowledge, although it is not defined by it.

It is philosophical wisdom – we may argue – that is the point of departure of a rejoinder to these critiques from a common good standpoint à la Plato. In Plato’s and notably in Aristotle’s conception, philosophical wisdom entails the practice of virtues – virtues are meant to shape the motives and behaviour of those who are virtuous. Philosophical wisdom is different from modern age scientific knowledge which is neutral in its applications and may be bent to both heavenly and hellish purposes. Wisdom is about understanding, an understanding that shapes the person and infuses its behaviours. ‘Real’ public servants across the world may have their special interests and advance their own agenda, but the common good argument asserts that philosophical wisdom is the guide to the common good, and power ought to be entrusted to those who wield wisdom, for our own well-being (we continue this line of reflection in a next chapter, in which we expand on virtue politics through a commentary to Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s famous frescoes *The Good Government*, where in the painting, Wisdom and Justice stand out as central virtues).

This leads to the final and most challenging critique for a Platonic conception of justice: how are those in power to be selected? This is the element in Plato’s argument that has aroused the toughest criticisms – up to the point of having been argued that Plato should be held intellectually responsible for



the totalitarianisms that have plagued the globe, notably in the 20th century, and slaughtered millions of innocent lives. Indeed, Plato's argument may be manipulated by unscrupulous cantors of non-democratic and illiberal regimes to justify political decisions in the name of a self-ascertained common good. However, a response to this is that common good arguments do not place any absolute power on administrators in general, and non-elected bureaucrats in particular – conscious that virtues are in short supply and wisdom is hardly an easy-to-apply criterion for selection of office holders. Rather, a common good argument would call for wisdom to guide public action for those taking responsibility in public office, and notably for public servants in the countless circumstances where legislative mandates are weak, ambiguous or flexible – under such circumstances, public managers have scope for acting for advancing the common good.

If we now turn to other movements and sets of doctrines for the amelioration of public services, we can notice that much more nuanced are instead some of the premises underlying the approaches in the literature on Public Governance and on Democratic Governance, as well as – though from partly different premises – on the Neo-Weberian State, although overall they may possibly be leaning towards common good arguments à la Plato or social justice arguments à la Rawls, rather than utilitarianism as for the NPM.

The philosophical movement of personalism may also be a source here. We observed that 'quality' of public governance in the frame of personalism is not about 'satisfaction', it is not about satisfying needs or meeting expectations, rather it is about the flourishing as person, by conceiving of any person as a project of life, which is ultimately accomplished by transforming oneself into 'a better person'. This is a conception of the fulfilment of life not dissimilar from what Plato and Aristotle referred to as *eudaimonia*. Public governance and public services can here be seen as one set of enablers: through education, through healthcare, through social care, through cultural services, and the like, a person is not just able to satisfy certain specific needs, rather s/he can ultimately become a better person. This occurs if the person is helped by the surrounding community – in this sense, personalism may have been a precursor of contemporary ideas about co-production, co-innovation and co-governance (Bovaird and Löffler, 2018; Torfing et al., 2012; Voorberg and Bekkers, 2018).

The one political philosopher whose thought has been tapped by prominent PA scholars for its potential implications for the field of PA is Rawls. Although his works are not directly about PA, scholars in the field have made references to Rawls's thinking and how developing on his political philosophy might provide the ground for a theory of PA. One such argument is worked out by Esquith (2006) by revisiting the work of PA scholars David Hart and, notably, George Frederickson, particularly *New Public Administration* (Frederickson,

1980) and related works (Frederickson, 1976; Frederickson and Hart, 1985; Hart, 1974). A starting point lies in considering that the principles guiding justice as fairness are not only ideal guides for constitutional and legislative decisions, but – in the perspective of the ‘modern public administration’ that Frederickson advocates – they should also inform the organisational structure and designated powers used in public administration, as well as the ethical standards of behaviour of public servants. In this perspective ...

[T]he new public administrator is not only guided by Rawlsian principles of justice and bound by a strong obligation to serve as a public administrator. The new public administrator must also be an active participant in a public dialogue that includes citizens themselves as well as legislators and other elected public officials about the need of citizens ... Frederickson does not discuss exactly how the original position could serve as a device for guiding moral arguments [but] what was needed [Frederickson argued] was a more fine-grained descriptive theory that distinguished between different public goods and services. (Esquith, 2006, pp. 537, 541)

... in order for public administrators to be better able to identify distributional effects and counter the inequality effects they might have. For example, it may occur that rules in PA designed strictly for purposes of increasing organisational efficiency and effectiveness may engender unintended distributional effects, especially to the detriment of future generations: stemming these effects is (ought to be) a concern for the public administrator inspired by Rawlsian conceptions of fairness.

This line of argumentation seems to suggest that public administrators ought to take an active role towards effecting the principles of social justice. How practically to settle disagreements about ‘the good of the public and matters of fundamental justice in the public domain among citizens’ is open to discussion but, as Esquith suggests (2006, p. 544), Frederickson and other PA scholars have made a call for the use of ‘free public reason’ to the internal theoretical debates in public administration, for a dialogue amongst reasons that are put forward to address the constitutional essentials of the political societies in which we live and that are offered in a fair-minded, civil and tolerant ways, with the ultimate purpose of contributing to the advancement of a theory of PA that stems from ‘method of public reflection and self-clarification’ – which is another way of describing the Rawlsian original position (see also Denhardt et al., 2013).

In passing – but this is itself a theme for a whole other book – it is noticed that constitutional thinking across Europe and beyond, with the emphasis given to equality principles in the constitutional arrangements of many countries, is a major source that can be tapped for advancements in the elaboration of a theory of PA inspired by Rawlsian political philosophy.

Finally, radical positions emphasising the ‘minimal state’ as the outcome of reforms (for a discussion, see Peters, 1996; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000) tend to forgo attempts to entrust a reformed state and its public officials to advance any form of common good and instead disparage the significance of any attempt to reform it, assuming the minimisation of the state might itself lead to the betterment of the lives of the members of the political community. How this should occur and whether betterment is intended for all the members of the political community or for only some – possibly ‘the fittest’ to survive in the environment – is open for discussion.

In conclusion, this chapter aimed at providing an initial overview of the foundational issues underlying public governance and any doctrines that have the ambition to suggest how the public sector and public services *ought to be* organised, as part of the broader political system. This question is pitched at the level of ideas, and the investigation into the legitimacy criteria underlying a certain approach concerns mostly the level of the public debate, the rhetoric of reforms and the formally enacted reform acts rather than the factual level of what happens on the ground as an effect of the implementation of reforms of PA inspired by a certain set of doctrines. Methods of investigation here can mainly be analyses of text and interpretation thereof (hermeneutics) – akin to research approaches widespread in the field of the humanities – as well as methods apt at capturing opinions of insiders (and the larger public where relevant) in a given area of public debate and public policy, where the policy area here is the policy of reform of PA.

The chapter has reviewed common good arguments and social contracts arguments, expanding the former to encompass utilitarianism and the latter to include Rawls’s account, and then further expanding to discuss whether personalism provides an at least partly alternative standpoint. The field of PA, we argue, would benefit from engaging in philosophical issues of justification and legitimacy of public governance, public administration and public services management.

## POSTSCRIPTUM: THE PROBLEMATIC LINK BETWEEN LEGITIMACY OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AND LEGITIMACY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

In this chapter we have made an attempt to analytically distinguish the legitimacy of the PA system in a given jurisdiction (Public Governance: its performance and its equity) from the legitimacy per se of the political system into which the PA system is embedded. We have dwelt on this point in the opening of this chapter, and it may be worth recalling the attention of the reader in conclusion. In fact, analytically distinguishing the legitimacy of the PA system in a given jurisdiction from the legitimacy per se of the political system into

which the PA system is embedded is only possible – if it is at all – to a certain extent: to another extent, legitimacy of PA is derived from the legitimacy of the political institutions into which it is embedded (of which it is a part<sup>7</sup>), and the two – political system and PA – are intimately interconnected, in such ways that changes to one affect the other (for example, a would-be ruler aspiring to abolish the guarantees of liberal democracy will effect ‘reforms’ aimed at targeting the decision-making autonomy of public servants and the public service in ways that are detrimental to fairness and equality of citizens before the law).

Our claim is *not* that the legitimacy of the administrative system should be disconnected from the legitimacy of the political system; our argument is not about de-coupling the two in substantive terms, but analytically distinguishing between the two for purposes of investigation and comparative study – across diverse jurisdictions – of issues of legitimacy of PA and the reform doctrines that over time get proposed to reshape it.

We argue this analytical distinction may be useful, and we hope to have shown it throughout this chapter by discussing common good, social contract, social justice and personalism philosophical perspectives to the understanding of legitimacy of PA. The issue for PA scholars is being able to examine the nexus between doctrines of reforms of the public sector and public governance, on one hand, and legitimacy, on the other hand, by detecting what is the underlying legitimising logic and what are the possible estimated empirical effects of a reform of public governance which may increase or decrease its legitimacy in a given jurisdiction, and to do it to a certain extent irrespectively of the distinct issue of the legitimacy of the political system of the jurisdiction in which they are applied, though the two issues remain in other crucial regards inter-linked. This way, a comparative research agenda on the impact of the reforms of the public sector can be made to progress, potentially worldwide in its remit as it is able to analytically separate the evaluation of the effects of reforms of PA from assessments of the legitimacy per se of the political system in which the administrative system is embedded.<sup>8</sup> We hope this approach may provide a fruitful research agenda for the evaluation of reforms of public governance and the doctrines which underpin them.

However, we also warn that PA is a normatively charged field of study and practice, and hence we also argue that the scholar-investigator will always have to re-connect the two dimensions: the legitimacy of the political system and the legitimacy of PA. In this sense, a scholar who believes in liberal-democracy (as does the author of this book) will always need to re-connect the two dimensions and eventually (normatively) assess a reform of PA for its broader effects on legitimacy encompassing both legitimacy of PA as such and legitimacy of the broader political system, from a liberal-democratic standpoint.

## NOTES

1. Another key political philosophical question is why a political community comes into existence in the first place, and relatedly what are the bonds tying people in a community, why they give allegiance to and accept to be ruled by common institutions in the first place. However, these questions are further away from PA, as administration presupposes a political community and its core institutions to be in place first, before an administration at the service of political institutions is developed and reformed over time. Hence for the purposes of this book the core question is the legitimacy of public governance and public administration and hence of the doctrines that are invoked to change them over time.
2. 12th ASPA–EGPA Transatlantic Dialogue ‘How to Increase the Legitimacy of Government in Times of Crisis?’, Ghent, Belgium, 8–11 June 2016.
3. Huge questions have been raised over the centuries about this notion of common good. Christian thinkers in a certain sense relativised the thrust towards the common good: they did so by introducing a superior order – the divine one. The question of the common good became entwined during the medieval age with the question of the underpinnings of the justification of the positive law regulating a worldly political order residing ultimately in divine law (the law revealed by God) and in natural law (the law inscribed by God into the creation). Augustine, in *The City of God*, famously distinguished between the two cities: the City of God and the earthly city, the latter being the earthly kingdom which exists to promote peace in this world, and about which he stated that ‘[whilst] the goods of this world are as nothing to the ultimate good of union with God, they are not to be despised [and] earthly success and failure have earthly causes’ (Ryan, 2012, p. 174). The enhancement of the self that can be achieved by means of a more just society is but a temporary achievement – nothing compared to the enhancement of the person that stems from belonging to the Communion of the Saints – and yet is in itself a good to be pursued. At the same time, its relative status warns against the political system preventing individuals from pursuing the most important goal of life, that is, the communion with God – and hence limits have to be imposed on state action. It is for this reason that Augustine’s *The City of God* is also claimed to have introduced some of the seeds of toleration in Western society. Although toleration came by exhaustion in Europe only over a millennium later, with the end of the religious wars of the 16th and 17th century, it has been argued that this distinction between a worldly and a heavenly city played a key role in establishing religious tolerance and toleration in the way in which it later developed in the Western world.
4. I am grateful to Wolfgang Drechsler for having pointed me to this line of interpretation, notably as declined by the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer.
5. To appreciate the logic of this argument, it may be contrasted with its opposite: Hegel’s conception whereby the essence of the state is the un-conditionality of our allegiance; the state is a necessity, in order to shelter the spiritual freedom that cultures promote – it is an instrument of the Absolute Spirit to develop itself through religion, art and philosophy.
6. A counter-claim might be that a thrust towards efficiency and efficiency-related values lies at the core of the NPM (Hood, 1991), an emphasis on doing more (or at least the same) with less, whereby rather than user’s satisfaction it is reducing the amount of resources employed for public purposes to drive NPM reforms.

7. An obvious major implication of this debate is the nexus between liberal-democracy and legitimacy: to what extent the legitimacy of a political system derives from its meeting the criteria that qualify it as liberal-democratic. Democracy (or absence thereof) is a property of the political system, with obvious huge implications for PA. The political philosophy literature identifies different forms of democracy: representative, deliberative, participatory, and direct – and huge debates surround the antecedents, features and effects of each of these forms, and their interconnections (and the extent to which they can be conceived of being complementary to each other, or at least partly displacing one another, e.g. direct democracy displacing representative democracy), and the extent to which it can be spoken of varied levels of quality of democracy, or the extent to which democracy is a binary value (either a political system is democratic or it is not).

To make a concrete example of how public sector reform doctrines have at times been explicitly tied to the issue of the democratic character of the political system in which PA is embedded, we can take the argument made by some key proponents of the notion of public value about its explicit and direct links with deliberative democracy and the notion of the public sphere (as conceived of in the life-long elaboration of these concepts by Habermas, 1987, 1996, whose thought has been introduced in Chapter 3). Hartley et al. have argued that one conception or approach to conceiving of public value is that ‘it connects public value with the contests, debates and dialogues in a democratic society which create and contribute to the public sphere – the space where public values are explored and contested and public value created’ (Hartley et al., 2017, p. 672). Interpreted this way, public value is defined as a ‘contested democratic practice’ (Benington, 2015, p. 29) and it is argued research using this conceptualisation of public value might focus on ‘examining whether and how public value is constructed and argued for by different agents and groups, in what organizational, institutional and social contexts, deploying what managerial, democratic or public arguments, on what basis, for what purposes, what individual or groups are included and excluded in discussions about public value in society, with what outcomes ... There is considerable scope to undertake empirical research on the value added or on value to the public sphere ... However, the notion of added value leads to the question of what counts as valuable, and behind that what is value, which is sometimes presented in terms of normative aspirations for a ‘good society’. While performance management scholars have examined activities and outputs from public organizations, there has been less research about the value created (or destroyed) in terms of legitimacy, trust, social justice and so on or on how public value is often co-produced with citizens and other partners and stakeholders’ (Hartley et al., 2017, p. 672). This excerpt clearly shows how the doctrine of public value has been elaborated in explicit reference to notions of democracy, and notably of deliberative democracy, as underpinning it, and with explicit consideration of criteria of advancing ‘legitimacy, trust and social justice’ as a way to gauge and assess normatively reforms of PA that are being proposed.

8. Interestingly, it can be observed this approach seems to be the one taken by the World Bank Governance Indicators (Worldwide Governance Indicators, WGIs), which aim at assessing certain aspects of the ‘quality of public governance’ irrespective of normative considerations about the broader political regime of the country being considered.

## 6. Philosophy of knowledge perspectives and the study of public administration

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### INTRODUCTION: METHODS, EPISTEMOLOGY AND LOGICS OF INQUIRY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

PA as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry draws from the social sciences and shares the common problems and quandaries of social scientific knowledge (Homans, 1967; Little, 1991). Importantly, the meaning of the term ‘explanation’ in the social sciences is always intended to refer both to the understanding of the causes of a given set of phenomena (causation) and the giving of meaning to a social phenomenon (Psillos, 2002; Platts, 1970; Salmon, 1998). Epistemological concerns have been the subject of many works in the PA field, and countless many more in the broader social sciences – it is here treated exclusively from the perspectives of the philosophical foundations, referring the reader to general works on the topic for the field of PA (Riccucci, 2010; van Thiel, 2013).

The specific contribution this book aims to make lies in revisiting logics of inquiry in public administration from the perspective of some broad philosophical themes. We have already indirectly dealt with issues of epistemology in PA throughout the whole book by discussing key philosophical traditions, each having important implications for the philosophy of knowledge: from neo-positivism to post-modernism, from critical realism to phenomenology, from historicism to pragmatism, and so on. We have also already encountered Popper’s philosophy of the social sciences and Kuhn’s notion of the competition of scientific paradigms and the related distinction between ‘normal science’, cumulative in nature within a dominant paradigm, and paradigmatic revolutions (see Chapter 3). The notion of competing paradigms probably represents the terms in which more often epistemological discussions are framed within the social sciences. However, it has been strongly argued that when it comes to PA, the field is characterised by multiplicity of paradigms, and indeed a babel of paradigms, rather than dominance of one paradigm and knowledge accumulation (Bauer, 2018; Raadschelders, 2005).

There is also a conventional wisdom that three approaches dominate the field: neo-positivism; social constructivism; and critical realism. In line with

other authors, we argue that this is a limited view and instead a multiplicity of approaches characterise the field, as this chapter indirectly illustrates by reviewing some implications for PA of a much wider range of philosophical streams. A wider range of traditions of inquiry and philosophies of knowledge is indeed detected by a major review of the field: Riccucci (2010) identifies six broad philosophies of science and research approaches in the social sciences that are of significance for PA studies, which the author places under the labels of empiricism, positivism, post-positivism, rationalism, interpretivism and post-modernism/critical theory (Riccucci, 2010, Chapter 4 in particular). In widely reviewing the field of PA, the author identifies and discusses key PA works located in each of these streams (Riccucci, 2010, Chapters 5 and 6). The book ends by arguing for heterogeneity of epistemic traditions being a key trait of the field of PA, and an inexhaustible source of richness to be tapped, not stemmed.<sup>1</sup>

A passage in Riccucci's book is worth noting and recalling here:

The intended purpose of this book is to engage reasonable-minded public administrationists in a dialogue on the importance of heterogeneity in epistemic traditions, and in general to deepen the field's understanding and acceptance of its epistemological scope. The field would be more consonant with the recognition that knowledge is derived from impressions on both the intellect and the senses. (Riccucci, 2010, pp. 2–3)

First, we subscribe to this call for the recognition of the heterogeneity in the traditions of inquiry active in the field of PA, and that the valuing of the contribution each of them can make is a more appropriate stance than engaging in warfare about the alleged superiority of any one of them.

Second, we'd like to pick up on the concluding sentence, where it's stated that 'knowledge is derived from ... both the intellect and the senses'. Taking the very large picture, from a broad philosophical standpoint it might indeed be argued that the multiplicity of approaches to the philosophy of knowledge might be clustered, at a quite lofty, very abstract and rarefied level, into two main intellectual traditions: rationalism and empiricism.

As we have seen, rationalism, in a very basic sense, is the philosophical stance that makes the assumption that ideas are, at least partly, innate, and hence that reason can proceed, at least to some extent, 'on its own' in knowing the world (see, in particular, in our succinct review, the philosophies of Plato, Plotinus, Spinoza, Leibniz and Wolff, in Chapter 2). In this scheme, the opposite camp to rationalism is empiricism, at least where this term is used to refer to approaches assuming that all ideas derive from the senses.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it seems that one line of cleavage in PA studies might ultimately lie in where one stands with reference to rationalism and what is entailed by it: the significance of a priori knowledge, mental 'experience', deductive reasoning. Whether these



are accepted as sources of knowledge proper alongside the knowledge that derives from the senses – or not (in the latter case it is only empirically driven knowledge that is granted the status of ‘proper’ knowledge) – might constitute a demarcation line between scholarly approaches in the field. Possibly, one implication of properly recognising heterogeneity of epistemic traditions in PA might then be framed as consisting in accepting knowledge contributed by scholars in the rationalism stream as proper and on par with empirically driven knowledge, whilst a way of perpetuating the cleavage might lie in discarding the rationalist strand, on one hand, or in overstating its clout up to shadowing the empiricist strand, on the other hand.

Kant’s philosophy is a way of integrating the two perspectives of rationalism and empiricism – although one which quashes key premises of both: differently from rationalism, Kantian philosophy rejects the possibility that a priori ideas are a form of knowledge, as they ‘only’ represent the preconditions for knowledge to occur: the a priori enables knowledge, but does not contain any knowledge itself (so for Kant the three key ideas of ‘self’, ‘world’ and ‘God’ are purely regulatory ideas): it is only judgements based (also) on experience that may generate knowledge. This assertion is of course contested by rationalists (we have seen in Chapter 3 how critics of Kant turned his system upside down just a few years after his passing away), and thence by rationalists in PA.

However, and very differently to radical empiricism and relativism, the subject of Kant *is* capable of knowing in a way that is inter-subjective (recognised by all subjects, that is by all human beings, indeed more than that: by all rational beings – though we should specify the term ‘inter-subjective’ was more systematically used by Hegel), hence rejecting any relativism, other than the very consideration that knowledge is relative to the subject of knowing, the subject – any rational being, any creature endowed with rationality – who is knowing.

In the sense thus specified, Kant’s philosophy can be taken as a starting point for a philosophy of knowledge for PA – as said, one that is being challenged in many ways from opposite sides, still a very useful and relevant starting point, because it purports to provide an underpinning to the possibility of knowledge which is universalistic in thrust.

One of these challenges to Kantian philosophy lies in the possibility to know the essences, a claim asserted by the phenomenological movement; for Kant, instead, the essences of things in themselves – the *nous* – were unknowable, and phenomena were not the door into ‘the things in themselves’, whilst for phenomenologists they are; it is to phenomenology and its application to PA to which we now turn.

## BETWEEN ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY: PHENOMENOLOGY AND REALIST PHENOMENOLOGY IN PA

The problem of ‘knowing the essences’ surfaced both in Chapter 4 when we discussed the ‘existentialist public administrator’ (it is in fact some form of in-depth knowledge and understanding of things that drives the urge for the ‘existentialist public administrator’ to ‘take responsibility’) and in the previous section where we recalled Kant’s framing of the problem of the limits of knowledge and the fundamental question of ‘what can we know’ (also evoked by Geert Bouckaert in his preface to this book). A philosophical movement that programmatically predicated the ‘return to the essences’ is phenomenology (see the dedicated section in Chapter 3). This philosophical perspective suggests that phenomena, rather than being the limit of knowledge (as in Kant), are conversely the door through which the things in themselves may get to be known by the conscience: in each and every experience, the conscience gets not just a fact, but an essence; knowledge occurs by means of intuition of the essences. Philosophical reflection provides the method for attaining this form of knowledge: it is the bracketing of judgement, known as *epoché*, that enables things to manifest themselves. In this perspective, phenomenology provides a powerful underpinning for the existentialist public administrator to act, by providing a ground for the judgements she/he makes. This comes with conditions as well: it is only the rigorous application of the method of bracketing of prior judgements that enables the kind of knowledge of essences advocated by phenomenology; knowledge which in turn can underpin making evaluative judgements for decision-making and action.

Within the phenomenological movement there is a substantial division about the foundation of such knowledge of the world. Recalling the distinction between idealist and realist phenomenology (Chapter 3), the key question is whether subjectivity as the phenomenological residue (what cannot be bracketed) constitutes the world in the sense that the world is established by the subject (idealist phenomenology), or whether the world is revealed to and been given meaning by the subject, but somehow the world pre-exists the subject (realist phenomenology). The interpretation of phenomenology more widespread and generally held in PA has been idealist phenomenology; indeed, it has possibly been misinterpreted as the only approach in phenomenology, and then as such upheld, or blamed, for its radical subjectivism. For the same reason it has been the target of the darts of Neo-Positivists, who indicted it for adding a ‘morass’ that allegedly impedes ‘scientific and factual’ knowledge, and for its radical subjectivism and hence inherent difficulties in providing criteria for assessing propositions (judgement criterion).

In our view, already expressed elsewhere (Ferlie and Ongaro, 2015, Chapter 9), the distinction between realist phenomenology and idealist phenomenology would help the debate, and realist phenomenology, as distinct from the idealist variant, could be employed and deployed for a highly valuable contribution to come to grips with foundational issues in the investigation of social systems, allowing for both better ‘knowing’ and better ‘understanding’ of them (where understanding is intended as the organising and making sense of what is known, also for practical usages). For example, when we study the processes of strategy formation in a public organisation, we benefit from collecting factual evidence, labelling and measuring it – but this is only part of the picture: we are also dealing with an understanding of what a strategic decision is and what it means for whoever is active in the forming of strategy to make consistent decisions over time capable of shaping the future of the organisation and affecting the professional life of all the people with a stake in that organisation. Realist phenomenology may to this regard provide a more solid foundation for evaluative judgements which, although being given meaning by subjective interpretation (value-laden, normative judgements calling for action), originate in a form of knowledge of the things, of the essences, which is beyond intersubjectivity and is anchored to the object, and hence is in this sense ‘objective’. Realist phenomenology may thus be a more solid underpinning for the engaged, caring existentialist public administrator (or publicly engaged citizen), who is then called to ‘manage strategically’ public services organisations for the bettering of the public services s/he cares for (at least this is our view, already expressed in Ferlie and Ongaro, 2015, Chapter 9).

Summing up, most of the works so far developed in the field of public administration tend to connect phenomenology almost exclusively to social constructivist approaches to the study of public administration (Waugh and Waugh, 2006; Morçöl, 2005), for the very reason that they – implicitly or explicitly – rely mainly if not exclusively on *idealist* phenomenology, thus ruling out other interpretations that connect phenomenology in its *realist* variant to critical realism in the social sciences and its applications to the field of public administration. We argue that realist phenomenology might be beneficial for the advancement of the knowledge and understanding of PA.

Moreover, interpretations that connect phenomenology to social constructivist approaches may possibly stretch phenomenology beyond its quarters, when they claim it may provide a foundation for social constructivist approaches to PA. As noticed in Chapter 3, it may be objected that phenomenology is neither ‘social’ (Husserl placed the absolute subject at the centre, rather than intersubjectivity) nor ‘constructed’ because in a phenomenological perspective the world may be ‘constituted’ by the subject (in the idealist perspective), but things can be known in their essence rather than being constructs – although admittedly this is far from unproblematic and is in many respects

a slippery distinction. A broader and indeed different perspective to the usage of phenomenology in PA, which encompasses its realist strand, may provide, we argue, a fruitful contribution to the field of PA (as well as possibly other fields across the social sciences and the applied professions).

Phenomenology still relies on a strong subject of knowing: the Kantian transcendental subject. This is a main target of public governance scholars rooted in ‘relativist’ perspectives (e.g. Catlaw and Treisman, 2014). It is to this strand – which constitutes an overall limited, but quite vocal, community in the field of PA – that we now turn.

## RELATIVISM AND POST-MODERNISM

Much of the late 19th- and 20th-century philosophy can also be characterised as a reaction and a critique to the Hegelian system and, with it, of the Kantian transcendental subject. This has led in an important part of the philosophical discourse to the dissolution of the Hegelian system and to a tight querying of the very possibility of grounding ethics and knowledge in the Kantian transcendental subject. Key authors whose work has directly or indirectly contributed to such outcomes include Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud, at times labelled the ‘masters of suspicion’, questioning whether the strong subject advocated by both Kant and Hegel (albeit in profoundly different terms) actually exists. Instead, it is argued, such strong subject might not really exist but be the product of underlying economic structures determining the form of social classes and their relationships, and the subject in this perspective is in effect only reproducing the system of beliefs of the class to which s/he belongs (Marx); or it may be that the subject is the epitome of psychological processes that underlie and bypass conscience (the psychoanalysis, founded by Freud,<sup>3</sup> revealed the existence of psychic activity beyond conscience: the subconscious and its influence on psychic processes); or the irrational, Dionysian dimension of the human might constitute the ultimate foundation of human life, leaving little or no room for morality ruling the behaviour of individuals.

Although the contribution to sociological and economic analysis of Marx or the relevance of psychoanalysis as an established discipline are unquestionable, the philosophical implications that have been drawn from the works of these authors have been in their turn subject to close critiques. Whether the existence of subconscious activity is proof of the dissolution of the subject and the impossibility of a transcendental metaphysics, either in the Kantian or in the classical metaphysics sense, is highly questionable; analogously, the influence of economic structures does not necessarily entail a deterministic kind of influence on the totality of the behaviour of the human subject (this critique can be found also in Marxist intellectuals like Gramsci), and the limits of irrationalism (the appeal to Dionysus made by Nietzsche) have also been vetted. In

sum, it is questionable that either modern (Leibnizian, Kantian and Hegelian) or classical metaphysics can be easily discarded. However, one of the bequests of authors like Marx, Nietzsche or Freud lies in having shaped an important part of the acquired wisdom in the contemporary philosophical debate, where the dissolution of the strong subject as theorised by Hegel and Kant is widely held as common wisdom. Later philosophical movements, like structuralism (Chapter 3), further contributed to the widely held assumption about the dissolution of the rational subject (in the case of structuralism, into underlying social structures), and a vast contribution to this conception was due to a range of French (indeed, Parisian) philosophers; in many respects, also the so-called Frankfurt School contributed to this process (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1979).

This was the breeding ground of the multifarious philosophical strand that goes under the label of post-modernism. The foundation of knowledge and morality in the rational, thinking subject (as in Kant's philosophy) or in the order of things in themselves (as in classical metaphysics) is in this philosophical movement rejected. What remains is 'relativism', both cognitive (which can be summarised in the statement: 'all beliefs are true for their holders') and moral (which relativises righteousness and moral values). It should immediately be noticed that the relativist perspective incessantly opens problems: if any possibility of knowing is ungrounded, and any foundation of what 'ought to be' is deemed to be simply impossible, then what is left is some form of intersubjective agreement, an agreed-upon discourse intended as a patchy aggregate of fragmentary knowledge (oases of knowledge, each with its own only internal justification and 'paradigm') whose traits remain undefined (knowledge is often conceived of as a process) and whose implications remain inherently frail (in terms of what is right and just). We examine this movement, notably its expression in the field of PA, in detail in the remainder of this section.

Before we delve into the works of authors in this stream, an important qualification is in order: works in this school are clearly pluralist in their thrust and engage with a variety of philosophical strands with great mastery. To put them all under a label – that of 'relativism/subjectivism'<sup>4</sup> – although capturing some important kind of common thread across the works, is a strained interpretation that may belittle and in a sense caricaturise their wide-scope, often provocative and stimulating, 'thinking-out-of-the-box' contribution to the field. The key authors in this school have made a contribution to a critical appreciation of public administration: they have opened new paths of inquiry by providing a critical and original viewpoint on PA themes. They, however, share common traits in terms of rejecting the rational subject of Kant or the knowability of the world through reason inherent in classical metaphysics. We discuss these traits after having introduced their work. We review, in a necessarily selective way, some of the most significant contributions in this stream.

A major contribution has been furnished by the works of Box (2005a, 2005b and 2007) and by Fox and Miller, and notably their joint work (Miller and Fox, 2007, which was dedicated to the memory of Fox who passed away in May 2004). Their book provides a very sharp, abrasive at times, critique of representative democracy by challenging the ‘orthodoxy’ of the majoritarian mode of democracy (pp. 4–5). According to such orthodoxy, the people are assumed to be aware of what they want and need, and choose a representative for elective office by comparing alternative packages offered by competing candidates and parties. In turn, once in office, laws are voted that reflect the people’s choice, and a vigilant populace pays enough attention to the governors’ choices to be able to judge the elected representatives as either successful or wanting. Finally, the outcome of the subsequent election will be decisively affected by the people’s judgement over the incumbent’s quality of the job done whilst in office. This is what they refer to as the ‘representative democratic accountability feedback loop’ or, in short, the loop model of democracy, that the book demolishes – technically: deconstructs – showing its allegedly mythical character.<sup>5</sup> Three main alternatives are then discussed: the neo-liberal response (which replaces people’s will with market mechanisms), the constitutional response (which substitutes the constitution and the effecting of constitutional principles for the electoral victors of the moment), and the communitarian response, or tendency (which ‘seeks to replace the loop with direct interface between administration and the citizenry’, p. 30).

Miller and Fox’s (2007) book then shifts from the *pars denstruens* (the critique to extant theories or ideologies of representative democracy) to the *pars construens*, the constructive part of the book, which in this case is primarily a frame for the deconstruction of reality through the notion of media-infused hyper-reality borrowed from communication studies (notably from Baudrillard). The book then works out the social construction of government, mainly patterned on Berger and Luckmann’s classical *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), although a key inspiration is also Anthony Giddens’s theory of structuration, which the authors espouse especially where it aims to ‘avoid ascribing to human constructions the immutability that makes institutions seem like granite mountain ranges’ (Giddens, 1984, p. 84; however, it may be reckoned that Giddens’s work is *not* social constructivist in thrust and effectively represents an alternative frame, with which the main social constructivist pattern of Fox and Miller’s book ends out to be blended). A key passage from Giddens (p. 2, cited in full by Miller and Fox, 2007, p. 84) is that:

One of my principle ambitions in the formulation of structuration theory is to out an end of these empire-building endeavors. The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the

individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time.

It may be noticed that although Giddens's approach is far afield of Hegel's all-embracing (empire-building) thrust, a theory of structuration does not necessarily lead to social constructivism (institutions are created by social action, and yet they may have a relative stability and endurance – 'objective' in its nature – without this entailing them to be conceived of as granite-like: a critical realist research agenda may well encompass among its inspirations Giddens's theory of structuration – see next section).

In Miller and Fox (2007), institutions become conceived of as 'habits', and the authors' analysis of their workings owes much to Michel Foucault's works, notably to the notion of governmentality (Foucault's coin), an instrumental-rationality, disciplinary knowledge-based approach to governing which, according to Foucault, arose in 16th century Europe. What we are left with in our understanding of institutions is the authors' exclusively idiographic accounts (as opposed to nomothetic – on the notion of idiographic and nomothetic, see the illustration of the thinking of Windelband in Chapter 3). The ideograph is the new unit of analysis suggested by Miller and Fox (2007, p. 120):

ideography is the arena of symbolization in which a democratic pluralism of discourse formations become possible. This discursive approach to a hopefully democratic public administration does, we think, imply a way to subtend incommensurability and neotribalism. But within incommensurability is the spark of difference; difference implies the collision of ideographs that can stop the action or redirect it.

Incommensurable, and yet potentially influential and mind-opening, narratives are what we are left with in our attempts to give shape to public governance, according to Miller and Fox.

The authors also very neatly take side in the dispute over the nature of the universals we have dwelt on in Chapter 2: as clearly stated by the authors, 'a constructivist epistemology/ontology is radically nominalist. The names that interactive human groups give things are ultimately arbitrary' (Miller and Fox, 2007, n.p.). A radical nominalism is the position that social constructivist, relativist epistemologies and ontologies should take. This point brings to the fore the actuality of the medieval debate over the nature of the universals: indeed, where we stand in that debate may be very closely linked to where we stand in conceiving of the social sciences in general and of public governance specifically. Realist positions in the conception of the universals appear hardly compatible with radical social constructivism, which tends to be aligned with a nominalist conception of the universals; and it appears the opposite may also hold: nominalist positions in the conception of universals are difficult to

reconcile with realist positions across the whole gamut (this important point is further discussed later in the chapter).

Farmer (1995, 2005, 2010) is another key author providing a major contribution to the strand of inquiry in the relativist and social constructivist tradition. His 2005 book is a fascinating, vertiginous tour through re-imagining public administration, ultimately mooring to 'post-traditional governance and bureaucracy'. The tour unfolds guided by the works of philosophers, artists and poets through three main themes: thinking as play; justice as seeking; and practice as art. Farmer 2010 is a powerful revisiting of what the author singles out as the five key elements or functions of PA: planning (what does planning mean?); management (what does management mean?); the underlying of PA (values, beliefs, ideologies, symbols and languages); the nature of the field of PA; and the role of imaginative creativity in PA (and one can find here similarities with Weick (1989) on the nature of theory and theory building we recalled in Chapter 3 when discussing alternatives to Popper's epistemology). The rediscovery of these five elements occurs through the perspective of a wide range of disciplines: business and management, economics, political science, critical theories, post-structural theories, psychoanalysis, neuroscience, feminist theories, an ethical perspective and a 'data perspective'.

Probably the most influential work is Farmer's earlier 1995 book. The starting point is the assumption that PA theory and facts are socially constituted and the public administration observer is an image co-creator. The book then challenges established ways of thinking through the analysis of the relationship between language and PA – in other words, through analysing the language of PA. The book eventually moors to proposing a post-modern account of PA, whereby 'play' replaces 'purpose', 'chance' replaces 'design', 'process/performance/happening' replaces 'finished work', 'signifier' replaces 'signified', 'irony' replaces 'metaphysics'(!), 'immanence' replaces 'transcendence' (although one may wonder whether it was necessary to invoke post-modernity to replace transcendence with immanence, given modernity is already about the displacing of transcendence from this world, as so lucidly pointed out by theologians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer). The challenge goes on with 'imagination' that should replace 'rationalisation', and with the upholding of deconstruction, intended as 'a reading that accepts that a sign in the text has no referents' (Farmer, 1995, p. 185; targets of Miller's deconstruction are Simon's grand narrative that equates good PA theory with objectivity, and better theory with more objectivity, p. 187; and that assumes that efficiency is a viable goal for public administration practice), de-territoriality, intended à la Deleuze (the removal of the coding or grid that is imposed on the study of issues or situations), and alterity, referring to the moral other – for Farmer the post-modern is characterised by openness to the other, values diversity, a basic stance of incredulity towards metanarratives, and a radical opposition



to the established order. Farmer's book represents a fascinating challenge of the constituted order in the study of PA, although at times it seems that it aims at a target that is manufactured to be the straw man, more than representing PA as it is studied and practised. From a methodological standpoint, the reader of Farmer might also wonder whether the logic of radical replacement of allegedly 'old' categories with new ones will ultimately lead to 'better' knowledge, better understanding and better practice of PA. All in all, it appears that post-modernity is in many respects a sort of moral stance, a radical – and radically critical – judgement of previous stances: and we are left wondering what provides the authoritativeness for such stances to topple other approaches from the pedestal of PA.

The work by Abel and Sementelli (2004) provides one of the most systematic elaborations and critical examinations of the – highly problematic – ontological groundings of approaches in the relativist school: it is for this reason that a critical review of their work may provide an example of the significance of spanning across philosophers and philosophies over the ages for a finer grained discussion of the foundations of contemporary public governance and administration. Abel and Sementelli (2004) make a strong claim about the ontological status of a theory of PA: they argue that the 'intersubjective experience of good governance' is the foundation of a theory of PA. Let's vet their argument. Starting with the consideration that administrative theory and practice are concerned with good governance, they argue that

... most agree that what counts as good governance depends upon a 'consensus attitude' toward governmental institutions and actors that is worked out by the citizenry through continued dialogue about competing attitudes, values and beliefs. Hence, good governance is a matter of intersubjective agreement upon how to characterize the experience one has of governmental institutions and actors. This intersubjective experience, though fluid and cognitively less certain than positivist ontology might anticipate, is nevertheless ontologically constituted and therefore the subject of 'first order' theory ... Hence, taking the intersubjective experience of good governance as its subject matter lends ontological status to empirical theory in public administration (it is thus theory) and provides an ontological grounding for normative critique. (Abel and Sementelli, 2004, p. 4)

By leveraging on this assumption, they argue that the apparently unbridgeable theory–practice gap in PA (which according to them neither the Enlightenment hope of applying theory to practice (of enlightening practice through knowledge) nor the Hegelian vision of theory merged to practice (through dialectical synthesis) have been able to overcome) can indeed be filled. The fragmentation in irreconcilable streams and the apparent inapplicability of theories to practice might thus be remedied. The authors aim to overcome the unsatisfactory indeterminacy of post-modernity. They argue that what they call 'evolutionary

critical theory' (drawing on the work of Thorstein Veblen) may be synergistic across traditional social science, institutionalist and hermeneutical approaches to PA: 'our thesis [is] that public administration *synergistically* employs the methodologies of traditional social science, institutionalism and hermeneutics by using a reconstructed critical theory as synergistic agent' (p. 160, emphasis in original). This approach allows identifying public administration's subject matter as the intersubjective experience of good governance, and 'since public administration's role is to foster the intersubjective experience of good governance, the discipline is responsible to society and the public as a whole, rather than to some particular political construct such as Congress or the presidency' (p. 9), which the authors argue to provide practical as well as theoretical legitimacy to public administration as a field.

It may be appropriate to dwell on the argument wrought out by Abel and Sementelli in light of a broader philosophical approach to show how the systematic employment of philosophical thought may be beneficial to PA, as a minimum to provide broader perspectives from which to vet the arguments under discussion. First, intersubjectivity is a notion central in the thought of one of the less relativist of philosophers, namely Hegel, whose philosophical system is predicated on the category of necessity of being (Chapter 3). Second, this is combined with a Darwinian argument: 'the theory–practice gap closes, since societies either adapt and change (adopting fitter institutions and processes), or stagnate and die' (Abel and Sementelli, 2004 p. 161); an argument which lies in between the Darwinian 'survival of the fittest'<sup>6</sup> and Hegelian necessity (what that is, necessarily is – see Chapter 3): in other words, the argument the authors put forward may perhaps overcome the frustration encountered by the Enlightenment hope of applying theory to practice when it comes to PA (for which theory appears so estranged), but it may be much closer than the authors reckon to the Hegelian vision of theory merged to practice (p. 11).

Dwelling a bit more on the ontological assumptions: 'we do not experience the world but only have experiences of it' (p. 36 and many other occurrences); a sentence which is prone to some ambiguity, for example when the consequence that 'our cognition cannot be of things in themselves [... and] As the world in itself cannot be confronted, any intersubjective experience of it must be either ontologically given (transcendentally or mundanely) or contingently accomplished by our historical and contextual practices' (p. 41). The authors go on to argue that the idea that intersubjectivity is given transcendentally is ultimately a matter of faith; and that socialisation arguments are not ultimately grounded, thus 'we are returned to the conclusion that intersubjectivity seems an irreducible and non-deducible "datum of *everyone's* lifeworld"'. Interestingly, in four pages the authors do away with ontological possibilities discussed over centuries, in most cases without even mentioning them, and ultimately after this brief tour end up relying on Husserl's idealistic phenom-

enology (plus some indirect reference to the Heidegger of *Being and Time*) as the philosophical foundation of intersubjectivity: Husserl is evoked to explain how the transcendental 'I' connects with the experience of other 'Is', how the experience of 'the other' enters the consciousness of the individual and constitutes part of the consciousness of the subject. This occurs after having dismissed the Kantian a priori categories of the mind as a leap of faith. This is interesting – even more so given the great intellectual rigour of the authors and the transparency of the flow of their argumentation, which engages with critiques with both total intellectual honesty and great competence. However, the questions remain: in what sense Kant's foundation of the possibility of knowledge in the mind is 'a leap of faith' (p. 44)? Indeed the argument in Kant (see Chapter 3 for a wider discussion) is that in order to have experiences (for example, of change) there has to be something permanent; this is not an object of experience, it is the unifying subject of experience that makes experience possible – in this sense, it is rather the opposite of an act of faith.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, why is Cartesian foundation through methodological doubt (*cogito ergo sum*) not even mentioned, given it is the starting point of modern philosophy that seeks in the self the foundation of ontological statements? Why is the perspective of rationalism (that ideas may at least partly be innate) ruled out? For example, the pre-established harmony of Leibniz is exactly an attempt to explain accord amongst the 'experiences' of units (monads in Leibniz's terminology) in the absence of any foundation of intersubjective interactions: why not considering Leibniz's explanation of intersubjectivity?<sup>8</sup> Here we confined to philosophers and philosophies that share the 'modernist' assumptions about the subject, or self, as the only possible starting point of philosophising (Aristotle has no problems in grounding intersubjectivity in the very knowability of the essence of things by human beings).

It is also interesting to draw some parallels between post-modern authors and the Sophists in ancient Greece. The Sophists conceived of philosophy as a continued critique of the commonly held wisdom, and produced an original body of philosophical thought, which produced ideas that were revolutionary at the time, such as that of the centrality of the subject in knowing and even in setting what is and what is not (Protagoras famously stated that 'man [*the human being*] is the measure of all things') or put forward radical challenges to human knowledge (like Gorgias's famous statement concerning the unknowability and incommunicability of being<sup>9</sup>). Nowadays the word 'Sophist' (usually in lowercase: sophist) carries a pejorative denotation, but this is not appropriate when considering sophism (and the associated giants of philosophy like the mentioned Protagoras and Gorgias) in its proper historical perspective. This philosophical movement<sup>10</sup> brought with it a powerful humanism as well as a critical, unorthodox for the time, imaginative and creative scepticism towards the then widely held common wisdom. There seem

to be striking similarities (alongside, it goes without saying, very important dissimilarities) between the poignant critiques to the society of their age made by the Sophists and many positions of contemporary 'post-modern' social constructivists – and this parallel should not be seen in any derogatory sense. If one reads public administration works in this tradition – like Jun (2006), Farmer (2005), Abel and Sementelli (2004), Box (2005a, 2007), Miller and Fox (2007) – can easily spot striking similarities: the praise for imaginative and creative thinking that unveils the hidden side of the functioning of public administration; the emphasis on relativism; the urge to bring about a dialectical bridging of manifold viewpoints as part and parcel of the scholarly work (the call for 'intersubjective agreements' in the absence of a proper knowledgeability of things). These 'calls' may be self-depicted as post-modern, but closely resemble arguments made well over two millennia ago in ancient Greece.

There are, however, also crucial dissimilarities. The ethical stance and thrust of the manifestos of the interpretive, social constructionist approach in public administration is directed towards the building of consensus enough for good governance and an ethical grounding of it (like in Abel and Sementelli, 2004). This is something that was of little concern – if at all – for the Sophists. However, we should not be oblivious of the big contextual differences: the Sophists were not perceived, nor did they see themselves, as a fatal threat to the survival and prosperity of their political community. In ancient Greece, the rift amongst and within city-states (known as 'polis', whose plural is poleis) did not undermine the fundamental political unity both within each city (often with less than 20,000 citizens – the rest being slaves who were void of most rights) and across the whole of the Hellas, that is, the entirety of the Greek poleis, which conceived of themselves as belonging to one common civilisation, the Greek civilisation, even if they were scattered throughout the Mediterranean sea and at times quite far away from the geographical borders of nowadays Greece (Sophists used to wander from one city to the other rather than belonging on a permanent basis to one community). This identity had also been strengthened notably in the face of the Persian menace and the fight for freedom that the Greek people undertook and that is epitomised at the victory of Marathon. By contrast, nowadays complex political systems are made up of millions of citizens, as well as migrants often without citizenship, and they are characterised by multiple cultures or subcultures and are often rife with divisions about the ultimate values. Nowadays political systems are, in a nutshell, hugely more heterogeneous than Ancient Greek city-states or even the whole of Hellas, and hence, for the philosophers of the time, the critique of the *mores*, the conventions and the widely accepted ways of thinking did not mean acting to undermine the ultimate cohesiveness of the homeland.<sup>11</sup> Building an ethical community – a community with an accepted ethical grounding and working notion of good governance – was not an issue in the ancient Greece that had

emerged as victorious in the wars against the Persians, whilst the concern for an ethical foundation and agreed-upon notion of good governance is indeed an issue in contemporary troubled political communities. Stripped of these differences, certain similarities are, however, striking: admittedly the Sophists had a weak vision both of governance and of knowledge – a sort of interpretivist lowest common denominator – and this is not that far from most relativist, post-modern thinking in public governance and administration. Indeed, their stance was very distant from Aristotle's view: and an analogous gulf may probably be found nowadays between social constructivists and critical realists, to whom we now turn.

We have delved at quite some length into the 'post-modern PA' stream of thought, which is quite visible in the field of PA,<sup>12</sup> whilst other philosophical approaches probably tend to be less vocal and remain under the surface, implicit in the scientific work of scholars in these schools but rarely up front and centre stage in their publications. The most important is probably critical realism, and it is to this that we now turn.

## POSITIVISM, NEO- AND POST-

We introduced positivism in Chapter 3. Positivism purports a primacy of 'scientific knowledge', devoid of any reference to metaphysical knowledge. Scientific knowledge, patterned on the natural sciences, is considered the only accessible form of knowledge, and the method(s) of the natural sciences is generally assumed as pattern for the social sciences as well. In this perspective, the (allegedly) self-evident, incontrovertible 'fact' acquires the status of the only solid foundation of knowledge. This total reliance on scientific knowledge is coupled with a very optimistic view of the benefits that can derive from progresses in such knowledge: a progressive vision of the impact that the accumulation of scientific knowledge may have on humankind and its capacity to overcome the problems that afflict it.

Nowadays we mostly refer to neo-positivism, a powerful revival in the 20th century of the 19th century initial positivism, which addressed some of the more naïve initial claims. A key promoter of this revival was the 'School of Vienna', led by such figures as Moritz Schlick (1882–1936) and Rudolf Carnap (1891–1970). Carnap developed highly influential analyses of the structure of language and his work is associated with the 'logical syntax of language', a systematic statement of the rules that govern a given language and the consequences that follow from those rules, according to the criterion whereby

[a] theory, a rule, a definition, or the like is to be called formal when no reference is made in it either to the meaning of the symbols (for examples, the words) or to the

sense of the expressions (e.g. the sentences), but simply and solely to the kinds and order of the symbols from which the expressions are constructed. (Carnap, 1937, n.p.)

The language of physics was to express a pattern in this respect. His work aimed at ‘purifying’ the usage of language for scientific purposes from imprecisions and abuses which in everyday language – and in philosophy – impeded the proper formulation of ‘verifiable propositions’, that is, propositions that express a potential state of fact, whose actuality or not can be verified empirically.

The struggle for a formal language met the challenge of conventionalists, as we have seen (Chapter 3), whilst the procedures for verification – how to verify a proposition – was and continues to be a major methodological problem, as even a very large number of ‘verifications’ cannot confirm a proposition, whilst just one falsification can decry it (see the critique by Popper of the principle of verification and the proposed replacement with the principle of falsification in Chapter 3). An important part of the second half of Carnap’s intellectual career was spent on examining the foundations of inductive logic.

The reason why we have dwelt on this philosopher is – connected to the purposes of this book – for his influence on Herbert Simon, a leading influence in PA and himself an acolyte of Rudolf Carnap and during his formative years in the profession heavily influenced by the neo-positivism of the exponents of the Vienna circle, many of whom had left Europe for the US to flee Nazi persecutions. In the School of Vienna variant, the influence of neo-positivism on Herbert Simon is apparent. Simon entered the PA field in the aftermaths of WWII and his impact has been likened to the explosion of a nuclear bomb (Ricucci, 2010), and the radioactive waste of the burst are still there in PA, although his later research work was mostly carried out in other disciplines, mainly in the fields of organisation science, cognitive psychology, economics (he won the Nobel Prize in economics in 1979), and the philosophy of the design sciences (the so-called ‘sciences of the artificial’).

The recurrent calls for purification and rigour in language and methods that enable the ‘testing’ of propositions rigorously controlling for auxiliary assumptions (for an early example, see Perry and Kraemer, 1986) and the rise in influence and impact of journals which put a strong premium on research pieces centred on ‘verifiable’ propositions (like the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*) can also be seen as the long wave of that explosion which had led to the lingering influence that neo-positivism has wielded on the field of PA, especially in the US and, more recently and in important respects by means of ‘importation’ from the US, in countries with large PA communities like South Korea. It can safely be stated that, since Simon, neo-positivism has been an enduring influence in the field of PA (see,

for example, Rainey, 2001). Notable representative examples – to mention but a few – include many of the works authored by George Boyne, Kenneth Meier, Laurence O’Toole and Stuart Bretschneider.

The lingering influence of positivist attitudes also takes an aesthetic hue, with an emphasis placed in works in this tradition for expressing concepts through mathematical formulas and for elaborating analyses in ways patterned on mathematical modelling.

It is also spoken of a post-positivism, with notable significance in PA (Ricucci, 2010, pp. 84–9). Like all ‘post-’ philosophies, it retains something but also rejects something else of the philosophy from which it originates. What is retained is the ‘objectivity’ of the facts somehow lying outside the subject. What is discarded is the almost fetishist allegiance to the ‘fact’, and the pretension that social sciences can ultimately be patterned on the natural sciences. Post-positivism also stems many of the excesses and overly optimistic claims about the progress of science and its implied utterly positive impact on mankind, or more limitedly and notably for the purposes of this book, any overly optimistic claim about the impact of scientific knowledge on the bettering of public governance and administration. Critical realism has been seen as the most notable manifestation of post-positivism (Ricucci, 2010, p. 84), although, as we have argued, besides representing the ‘overcoming’ of positivism it may also be interpreted as having roots in other, and older, philosophical approaches, which is why we prefer not to classify critical realism under the label of post-positivism but as a self-standing stream and approach (we discuss critical realism in a subsequent section).

## REVISITING THE CONTEMPORARY ‘POSITIVISM’ VS. ‘INTERPRETIVISM’ DEBATE FROM A BROADER PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

The roots of social constructivism/interpretivism may be found in 19th-century philosophical critiques to the strong knowing subject of Kant and the philosophical system of Hegel (Chapter 3), and the critiques of positivism. Nietzsche’s assertion that ‘there are no facts, but only interpretations’ is key to ‘weak thought’, and thence radical interpretivism, and to the nowadays widespread, up to the point of having asserted itself as common sense, relativism.

However, when seen from the perspective of the history of philosophy, the dichotomy between positivism (however neo- and post-) and interpretivism appears quite narrow, and indeed the interpretation of critical realism as an intermediate point between the two appears quite narrow. New realism (an exponent of which is the contemporary philosopher Maurizio Ferraris) and ‘minimal realism’ (asserting there exists as a minimum a ‘bottom line’ reality nobody can ‘talk her/his way around’, like the immediacy and evidence of

what basic health or education services provide to the life of every human being) are worthy lines of argumentation, but possibly too shy insofar as they search for an intermediate point between interpretivism and positivism, or to reject their extreme consequences (that reality ‘does not exist’ other than in the fragmented mirror of each individual, that the ‘fact’ is the ultimate reality), but entail an acceptance of the basic ‘playing field’ set up by the interpretivism–positivism dichotomy. Indeed they are but the latest embodiment of a long history of fundamental epistemological reflection that gets well beyond this simplistic dichotomy: the object of intellection – from classical metaphysics (see Aristotle’s ‘active intellect’) to Thomism and neo-Thomism, to Kant’s noumenon and neo-Kantism, to Hegel, the notion of object of intellection supersedes both the (in our view misleading) notion of the ‘pure fact’ and the (in our view equally misleading) notion of the ‘subject’s interpretation’ disjoined from any substantive object of intellection. It is in this line of argumentation that we now turn to critical realism.

## CRITICAL REALISM AND ITS FOUNDATIONS: BACK TO THE TRANSCENDENTALS AND ARISTOTLE’S FOUR CAUSES

Critical realism is an ontological–epistemological approach, whose roots can be found in the works of the philosopher Popper (see Chapter 3), and whose exponents include amongst others Archer (2003), Bhaskar (1975), Hartwig (2007). A contemporary leading exponent is Pawson and, in the field of public administration and management, some of the key proponents are Bouckaert, Pollitt and Talbot (Pawson, 2006; Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Pollitt and Dan, 2011; Talbot, 2005, 2010). Critical realism is grounded in the assumption that reality does not lie entirely in the subject, but it is ‘out there’ and somehow knowable as such, albeit with major limitations (a line of reflection originally in Xenophanes and then worked out systematically by such philosophers as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, see Chapter 2). The knowability of things, of the ‘object’, as opposed to reality lying exclusively in the subject and the way in which the subject constructs it, is a key tenet of critical realism (the root word for ‘real’ and ‘realism’ is the Latin *res*, which means ‘thing’). At the same time, this approach is sensitive to the role the subject performs in knowing, and (also) in this respect it represents a reaction to positivism and neo-positivism, which rather tend to confine the role of the subject to give pre-eminence to the ‘fact’ (see next section). However, reality is not an exclusive creation of the subject, but rather an objective ontology is centre stage in this perspective, as for example in this passage by Pawson referring to the nature of public programmes and how to analyse them: ‘The vital ingredients



of programme *ontology* are thus its “generative mechanisms” and its “contiguous context” (Pawson, 2002).

Pawson, to our knowledge, does not make explicit reference to where he stands in the philosophical ‘dispute over the universals’ recalled in the previous section when discussing the links between post-modern, relativist stances in PA and a nominalist position in the dispute over the nature of the universals (introduced and discussed in Chapter 2), but it seems quite appropriate to assume that critical realism is more aligned with the realist position in conceiving of the nature of the universals. Also, to continue to refer to theories already debated in the preceding section with reference to relativism and constructivism, it does not appear inappropriate to evoke the theory of structuration put forward by Giddens for a foundation of a critical realist stance.

Finally, although this may be deemed to be a highly contested claim, it may be argued that a critical realist perspective ultimately entails that the categories of being ‘are meaningful’, either grounded in the rational subject or in the object, that is, in things in themselves. These categories are what classical metaphysics and – with a different twist – Kant referred to as the ‘transcendentals’; they are (recalling here the Kantian frame of the categories of being<sup>13</sup> as outlined in the *Critique of Pure Reason* – see Chapter 2): Unity, Plurality and Totality (referring to the higher-level category of Quantity); Reality, Negation, Limitation (referring to the higher-level category of Quality); Substance and Accident, Cause and Effect, Reciprocity (referring to the higher-level category of ‘Relation’); possibility/impossibility, existence/non-existence, necessity/contingency (referring to the higher-level category of Modality). It is in fact almost inescapable that if propositions about things have a truth value, they have to rely on the categories of being: of what can be predicated of being, of the possible meanings or significations of being. These categories in turn may be founded (they may ultimately be grounded) either in the rational subject (the Kantian foundation of knowledge) or in the object, in the things in themselves (the foundation of knowledge in classical metaphysics). In sum, it seems there is some form of alignment or, better, continuity between classical metaphysical thinking and critical realism in the social sciences.

Following up on this, we argue further that in this perspective the category of relation, and notably the category of causality in the way it has been originally formulated by Aristotle, namely distinguishing four kinds of causes (see Chapter 2), (re-)becomes centre stage. Our argument is in line with recent calls in the social sciences for the rediscovery of the explanatory framework originally worked out by the philosopher of Stagira (Kurki, 2008; Pollitt, 2012).

These considerations are further discussed in Box 6.1.

## BOX 6.1 THE CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF ARISTOTLE'S FOUR CAUSES FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Aristotle identifies four types of causes: material, formal, efficient and final (see Chapter 2). The material cause is the material element of which a thing is made. The formal cause is the form or essence of a thing, what gives something the form that makes it be what it is. The efficient cause is what makes change happen, the forces for change. The final cause is the goal or end: the why, what is the reason why something is brought about. Nowadays social sciences tend to treat causality mainly in reference to the efficient cause in Aristotle's terminology, and to subsume the others into this category. For example, the motives or 'reasons why' a social actor is observed to behave according to a certain pattern are intended mainly in the terms of the drivers of a certain behaviour, which in turn produces an observable course of action, which – in conjunction with other 'factors' – makes something happen: the final goal or end tends to be placed outside of the scope of the 'observable', or outside the scope of investigation of the social sciences, and hence either disregarded or bent to become part of the 'efficient' cause.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, Aristotle had a broader view of causation: for him, cause (*archè* in Greek, which means primarily 'condition' or 'foundation' of something) concerns not just the process whereby something is brought about, but also its ultimate meaning and rationale (final cause, the teleology: why something is brought to being) as well as its inherent essence or form, the what it is of something. Ultimately, the efficient cause is but a part of the explanation of the causes of things. According to an approach informed by an Aristotelian thinking, the formal, material and final causes sit alongside the efficient cause. In order to 'explain' a phenomenon in this broader sense, it is required to attain an understanding of the nature of the object being studied (formal cause) as well as of both the material cause (intended, as we have seen, as enabler, as the potentiality of becoming something: 'matter' here is not intended as the *res extensa* of Descartes, rather as potentiality in the original sense of the word as used by Aristotle, whereby matter is what enables the process of individuation of universal ideas, is what, literally, makes an individual to be individuated, for example an individual human being to be a concrete individual and not just an image of the idea – in the Platonic sense – of human being), and the final cause, whose systematic adoption means that teleological thinking has a central place in the human-made world.

This larger array of causes is employed in critical realist accounts: Kurki (2008, pp. 210–34), researching in the field of international relations, argues that Aristotle’s typology is highly valuable for the kind of inquiry she sets forth for realistic accounts of social phenomena, and Pollitt (2012, pp. 42–3) revisits the system of the four causes for the field of public management. It is worth dwelling a moment on what these four causes may mean in the field of PA. The analysis of efficient causes is a very sensible starting point: to mention Pollitt’s example of a public service, to say that doctors performing an operation in order to save a road accident victim may ‘cause’ the saving of the patient’s life is appropriate, but it is only part of the picture. The prior material existence of a purpose-built operating theatre with suitable equipment, supporting staff and so on is also a cause of the rescue of a life: thus, material and social structures are part of the explanation (material and formal causes). As are the actors’ intentions and ultimate goals part and parcel of the explanation: the commitment of clinicians; the civic-ness of passers-by who didn’t scurry away but instead called Accident and Emergency to get the ambulance promptly; and, decades before, the decisions by policymakers to establish and develop a national health service. Indeed, Aristotle would probably go beyond the intentions of social actors and add to this the very care for life – its perpetuation and development – also inherent in living beings as a final cause. These intentions of social agents in the present moment as well as in a long-gone past that still produces its effects, and the very striving for perpetuating and promoting life by all living beings, which in human beings may also take the form of altruistic behaviours and the care for the anonymous fellowmen, are the final causes that are part and parcel of the explanation of the episode of the saving of a life in jeopardy after a road accident. As another example, the study of Epp et al. (2014) investigating the motives and dynamics of police stops carried out in the US is amenable to being treated according to Aristotle’s four causes. Two types of road police stops are considered: traffic safety stops and investigatory stops. The authors found that although in the former category there are no significant differences between socio-ethnic groups, for the latter category blacks have up to three times the probability of being stopped by police for investigation than white people (the study is set in the US). Although this institutionalised practice of investigatory stops may help prevent crimes, it begets a profound sense of discrimination in the black community, with significant impacts in terms of social inequality. There is a statistically significant difference in the perception of being treated fairly by blacks and whites, with impacts on the sense of belonging to the political community, and hence ultimately with profound effects on the way in which citizenship is lived and conceived of. In the terms of the four causes, the effecting of stops by the police is the efficient cause; the machinery

by means of which this occurs (institutionalised socio-technical practices – thereby including the material resources as well as the legal entitlement by the police to effect stops) is the material cause; the expected and unexpected objectives or ‘reasons’ being pursued (preventing crime, but also engendering a sentiment of discrimination) is the sphere of the final causes; the very nature of the phenomenon, the exercise of superordinate powers by the government as the monopolist of the use of force in the modern state, is the formal cause.

Asking the reader one more droplet of patience in following this journey into the contemporary significance of Aristotle’s thought for PA in particular and the social sciences in general, let’s consider another profile of Aristotle’s system of causation and the way in which it contrasts with, and may shed light over, contemporary approaches to causation. Let us consider for a moment modern-day Neo-Positivistic approaches favouring statistical methods and ultimately probabilistic causation – a distinction can in fact be drawn between deterministic and probabilistic causality. In deterministic causality, the presence of the cause, alone or in conjunction with others, by itself leads to the effect.<sup>15</sup> In probabilistic causality, ‘the distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions largely tends to disappear’ (King et al. 1994, p. 87): claims identify a causal variable and assert that this variable increases the probability of a given outcome; this claim cannot be translated into a claim about the necessary and sufficient conditions for the outcome (in the example reported by King and colleagues, the claim was about poor communication among superpowers during crisis increasing the likelihood of war). These tend to be applied not only to quantitative but also to qualitative phenomena.<sup>16</sup>

How does the very idea of ‘probabilistic causation’ fit with Aristotle’s system of the four causes? It is meat for the teeth of professional philosophers to delve into the problematics of this dimension of Aristotle’s thought on episteme and logic. We should add that our question is intended to be provocative, for eliciting reflections that may shed light on contemporary approaches in the social sciences rather than for anachronistic comparisons (the hindsight of centuries of philosophical thought and the dramatic changes brought about by the ‘modern’ sciences and contemporary social scientific inquiry make this exercise just this: a provocative reflection). However, this mental exercise may shed light on unexpected parallels with contemporary debates. It is doubtful the Greek philosopher would content himself with the search of some sort of correlations as an adequate explanation for ‘the causes of things’. Indeed, Aristotle had a very different approach from both Sophists’ scepticism about the possibilities of human knowledge and from a conception of causation as the search for some sort of ‘correlation’ detached from ‘explanation’ of the underlying causal mechanisms.<sup>17</sup>

Searching in an integrated way for the essence of things (the formal cause), as well as the teleology of things (the final cause), and not least for a rational understanding of the agent of change (the efficient cause), is a different research agenda from either of the two previously mentioned approaches. Aristotle did not content himself with 'weak' thought and patchy and fragmentary knowledge. In this respect, it does not appear too far of a stretch to consider that the fundamental thrust of contemporary realists and critical realists (à la Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Kurki, 2008 – and Christopher Pollitt or Geert Bouckaert in the field of PA) bears resemblances with Aristotle's fundamental thrust, and the contentions contemporary critical realists have with (especially) radical social constructivists displays close parallels with the contentions Aristotle, and Plato before him, had with the Sophists.

## THE CONTEMPORARY MEANING OF THE DISPUTE OVER THE UNIVERSALS

In Chapter 2 we already noted the enduring significance of the nature of universal concepts, a debate which concerns the issue of whether universal concepts are real and exist as (ideal) objects, or are real and the product of a procession of abstraction by reason, but only individuals are real in the proper sense, or are not real at all.

What are, then, deliberately engineered social systems for the running of a public organisation, like a strategic planning system, a management accounting and control system, a human resources management system, a total quality management system, and the like? Are they the same thing anywhere in the world (and any time), just intermingled with haphazard elements that blur the pure nature of the ideal object? This position may appear implicit in quite a number of pieces of scholarly inquiry: public management and administrative systems tend to be treated as 'objects' (of thought) virtually tantamount across contingencies, although performing differently or displaying different features depending on the circumstances.

Or are a strategic planning system, a management accounting and control system, a human resources management system, a total quality management system, and the like a mere *flatus vocis*, utterance of the voice: whoever talks or writes about such systems utters the same sounds or scribes the same graphical picture (if s/he is talking or producing a written piece in the same English language which nowadays is the *lingua franca*, vehicle language), but in the mind of each individual beholder different things are meant by the same sound or script. This has been stated quite explicitly by a number of scholars, notably

in the post-modernist school (Farmer, 2005; Abel and Sementelli, 2004; Miller and Fox, 2007).

But is it the whole story, or does a strategic planning system, a management accounting and control system, a human resources management system, a total quality management system, and the like mean (signify) something more? A moderate realist/critical realist would argue that what exists are individual strategic planning systems, human resources management systems, total quality management systems, and the like, but reason can distinguish, separate and, in a sense, abstract the characteristics that qualify and are in common to all these individual things belonging to the same genus or category (or class or set, to use modern logic terminology).

As discussed earlier (see in particular the section on post-modernism and relativism), the actuality of the medieval debate over the nature of the universals is witnessed by the observation that where we stand in that debate may be very closely linked to where we stand in conceiving of the social sciences in general and of public governance specifically. Importantly, it may be claimed that in multiple respects where a PA scholar stands in terms of her/his conception of the nature of the field of PA depends on her/his philosophical stance over the nature of universal concepts. This dispute is in many respects still raging nowadays.<sup>18</sup>

## NOTES

1. An argument that assumes and most welcomes, but in a sense goes beyond, the call for methodological pluralism, arguing for plurality of philosophies of inquiry lying at the heart of the field.
2. One notably radical empiricist position is that of the philosopher David Hume (see Chapter 2). Hume has been an influential figure for the social sciences, and one important concept he has introduced in the scholarly debate is the notion of beliefs formation, which is so central to contemporary cognitive and social psychology, and it is widely applied across the social sciences; the notion of beliefs formation makes an important contribution to the field of PA via representing a conceptual tool for theories of policy learning, on one hand (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018) and behavioural PA, on the other hand (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2017; Olsen et al., 2018).
3. Based on intuitions of philosophers like Leibniz, who first noticed how there is a wider range of perceptions than those that receive the attention of our vigilant conscience and that all impact on our psychic activity.
4. A clarification is required about the notions of ‘relativism’ and ‘subjectivism’, which are used in this section to refer to post-modernism (and in a later section to refer to one perspective in phenomenology applied to PA). The point is clearly made by Raadschelders (2005, pp. 622–3) and we borrow definitions from him: ‘relativism as used in this article includes both cognitive (i.e., all beliefs are true for their holders) and moral relativism (which relativizes rightness and moral values). While I use the concepts of subjectivism and relativism as related, they

are distinct concepts. The relativist observation that there are no “correct” answers is not subjectivist, for it does not refer to a particular time and context. The subjectivist observation that soft drugs ought to be legalized is not relativist, for it is an opinion that can find support with some and resistance among others in one time and context (i.e., country). Postmodernism has both subjectivist and relativist features.’

5. The critique of the democratic loop is a topic widely debated in political science (recently Achen and Bartels, 2016), although much less often with a focus on drawing implications for the theory and practice of PA, as Fox and Miller set out to do.
6. Darwin only introduced the notion of ‘survival of the fittest’ in the fifth edition of *On the Origin of the Species*, and generally left the answer quite open to the issue of what determines certain genetic mutations to thrive and reproduce.
7. Hegel went much farther in cutting the knot by postulating the creative activity of the mind occurring on a cosmic scale rather than at the level of individual consciousness, and hence our possibility for knowledge is indeed the result of reason having created the world, and Reason (in capital) created the world for the very reason that Reason itself is an episode in the life of the all-embracing Spirit.
8. Similarly, it appears as a minimum overstated the claim (2004, p. 171) that ‘Eaton [e.g. 1923 – our note] arguably made one of the first reasonable efforts to examine knowledge outside of the teleological boundaries created by being a critical realist, neorealist, or idealist ... particularly if we consider that knowledge might be a knowledge of appearances, not realities themselves (!). In addition, he argues that truth is based on agreement (!)’ (our exclamation marks): we are struck by invoking Eaton (not the most known of philosophers) for a decisive solution to millennia-old debates: the argument that ‘knowledge might be knowledge of appearances, not realities’ is nothing new (what’s the difference between this claim and the sceptical philosophy of the Hellenistic period? And isn’t Kantian categorisation a reaction to Hume’s radical empiricisms, exactly to limit knowledge to phenomena (the absolute in Kant can be gained by human beings only through the adherence to moral tenets and the aesthetic experience of sublime)? And for Hegel realities are in the mind exactly because he (claims to) overcome the Kantian notion of ‘noumena’, of the things in themselves as the unknown. And as regards the claim that ‘truth is based on agreement’, Sophists were arguing in a similar vein over two millennia ago – indeed they also drew some self-interested implications and asked for compensation for teaching the sons of the wealthy how to argue effectively to convince the multitudes to agree on what is convenient for themselves – a good reminder of the dangers of rejecting any criterion of truth. In sum, providing an ontological grounding to constructivist approaches to PA (and beyond) is a very problematic task, and a task that has not yet been accomplished (if ever it will be – something we strongly doubt).
9. Indeed, Gorgias even stated that ‘nothing is’, arguing that either the being is, or the non-being is, or both the being and the non-being are: but the non-being is not – by definition – whilst the being either is eternal or generated, or both. If it’s eternal, it’s infinite, but the infinite is in no place, and hence it is not. If it’s generated, either it’s been generated by the non-being or by the being; but the non-being cannot generate anything, and the being, if it is being, should already be and hence only nothingness is – indeed an example of a Sophistic argument.
10. Not to be confused with the – linked – subsequent philosophical movement of the scepticism that thrived during the Hellenistic period.

11. Admittedly this is mostly a notion produced by later epochs – like the *patrie* of the French revolution – albeit a strong sense of a common civilisation is generally considered to be a defining feature of ancient Greece.
12. We have discussed the works of Fox and Miller, Farmer, and Abel and Sementelli because they are highly representative of this stream of thought, but it should be noted there are many other important works in this strand, to which we cannot do justice for reasons of brevity.
13. Aristotle, who first fully theorised the ‘categories of being’, identified the following ones: substance; quality; quantity; relationship; acting or action; ‘passion’ (in the – etymological – sense of being subjected to something, of receiving the effect of an action as opposed to acting); place; time. These are the main categories; Aristotle also additionally mentioned ‘having’ and ‘lying’, but these are seldom used elsewhere by Aristotle, and reference is usually made to the first eight.
14. One standard social science definition of ‘causal effect’ is as ‘the difference between the systematic component of observations made when the explanatory variable takes one value and the systematic component of comparable observations when the explanatory variable takes on another value’ (King et al., 1994, pp. 81–2). In King et al.’s approach, the explanatory variables are referred to as the ‘causal variables’ (revealingly also called the ‘treatment variables’: their status hinges upon the manipulator rather than enjoying the status of cause by themselves) and are distinguished from the control variables. This definition is close to the notion of efficient cause in Aristotle’s framework, whilst the other causes, and notably both the final cause and the formal cause, tend to disappear from the horizon of the investigator.
15. It is further distinguished between necessary and sufficient conditions: a necessary condition, or cause, must be present for the effect to manifest itself, but by itself is not enough and other conditions must be present as well; a sufficient condition means that its presence by itself determines the ensuing of the effect.
16. This is the core argument of King et al. (1994, p. 87). We also recall here the definition of ‘causal effect’ put forward by King et al. as ‘the difference between the systematic component of observations made when the explanatory variable takes one value and the systematic component of comparable observations when the explanatory variable takes on another value’ (King et al., 1994, pp. 81–2).
17. It goes without saying, many research works resorting to the notion of probabilistic causation do attempt to provide explanations for the social phenomena and do not limit themselves to asserting a probabilistic link – the reference here is to those that refrain from such attempts and content themselves with having established some sort of correlation.
18. Bhaskar (1975), a leading scholar in realism, and Elder-Vass (2010, pp. 44–7 in particular) develop a similar line of argumentation and, in our view, they address the same issue outlined by the dispute over the nature of universals albeit with a different terminology, thence reinforcing our claim about the vivid actuality of this issue.



## 7. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas More: on virtues, realism and utopian thinking in public administration

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### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we present the masterpieces of three authors – Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1290–1348), Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), Thomas More (1478–1535) – as entry point to discuss three themes of major significance for PA: the role of virtues (of governors and citizens alike) in public governance, the meaning of realism (about power, about the human nature) in politics and PA, and the significance and potential of utopian thinking for PA.

Why these authors, and what are their enduring messages? The selection of thinkers is a very subjective choice by the author of this book, although not a casual one. Continuing our journey through philosophical thinking and PA through the study of these works may enable us to touch on three key, yet profoundly different, perspectives that continue to shed light on politics at large and PA in particular, even if five centuries and more separate us from the time when they were wrought out.

Starting from utopian thinking, scholars of public administration may probably associate the word and be more familiar with the notion of ideal-type, as minted by Weber (1978/1922). Ideal-types (to which we return later in the chapter) are pure forms *within* the world; More's utopia is a whole world 'other'. However, its otherness does not prevent, but rather enables the critique of this world and as such becomes a tool for a constructive critique, a means capable of driving behaviours towards perfection, or at least improvement, in this world. Teleological thinking may be a source of betterment: this is one key message conveyed by the masterpiece *Utopia* written by Thomas More and published first in Leuven, Belgium, in 1516.

By contrast, Machiavelli's masterpiece, *The Prince*, is about this earthly world, where power and violence are upfront – irrespective of any moral judgement we may formulate. Lorenzetti's *Allegory and Effects of Good and Bad Government* (a painting rather than a book in this case) is about this world,

albeit a world in which the things as they are and the things as they *ought to be* are intimately connected: Lorenzetti's masterpiece is about the two destinies of this world when, respectively, the exercise of virtues is upfront or it is the dominance of vices to take roots in public governance; the former is a destiny of 'good government' and its effects on the fulfilment of the lives of its inhabitants; the latter is a story of bad government and its detrimental effects.

In this chapter we first ponder on Lorenzetti's masterpiece and its enduring teachings about the function that virtues and virtuous behaviour perform. We then turn to the 'realism' taught us – in quite crude, disenchanted terms – by Machiavelli. Finally, we mull over the meaning and possible usages of utopias for contemporary PA. The final part of the chapter discusses the insights from these works in light of concepts and notions to which the contemporary PA discourse is more accustomed, like that of ideal-type (a notion first worked out by Max Weber).

There are two preliminary important caveats for the reader, before plunging into works that date back centuries from now. The first caveat is that the notion of the separation between politics and administration, the (highly contested) Wilsonian notion of the distinction between a political sphere and the sphere of administration, and the conception of the legal–rational bureaucracy as the most rational form of political domination of Weberian ascendant (nicely summed up and discussed, for example, by Rosser, 2018), are late 19th and 20th century conceptions that are utterly absent from the horizon of the works of the three selected authors. Politics and administration are totally intermingled in these works (but maybe this is also the case nowadays?), and the reader is asked to adjust her/his lenses to accommodate this perspective. As a second caveat, the reader should be alerted to the fact that rather than focusing on the huge influence these authors have wielded over subsequent (successive) philosophers, philosophies, the social sciences and social practices (a daunting task undertaken by many scholars whose works fill the libraries), this chapter aims at providing a journey 'back to the source', to the original writing (or painting) of these fascinating thinkers. For reasons of brevity we do not delve at any length into their time and historical–political context (there are books for this: see Ryan, 2012); instead, we focus on their most famous work, their masterpiece. And eventually we will rediscover the continued significance of the messages contained in these masterpieces for contemporary PA.

## AMBROGIO LORENZETTI, *THE GOOD GOVERNMENT* AND THE ROLE OF VIRTUES FOR PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

We start from the set of murals painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Hall of the Nine Governors (the 'City Hall') of the Italian city of Siena between

1338 and 1339. It is the first piece in the history of Italian art to have a civic theme. Lorenzetti was the most famous painter active at the time in the then self-governing republic of Siena. He was highly trained in philosophy (Argan, 1969, p. 34) and was intimately acquainted with the Aristotelian–Thomistic philosophy and political philosophy (see Chapter 2), which in manifold respects his masterpiece represents through artistic means. The work is a series of frescoes – very well conserved thanks to restoration works in the final part of the 20th century – entitled *Allegory and Effects of Good and Bad Government* (we will refer to it in short as *The Good Government* in the remainder when generally referring to the entirety of the four frescoes). The paintings occupy three of the four walls of the town hall, whilst sunlight is let into the room through the fourth wall.

The first of the four paintings is the *Allegory of Good Government* (see Figure 7.1). Some translate this to ‘Good Governance’ because the Italian (or the Latin) language does not provide for a distinction like the one the English language enables between ‘government’ and ‘governance’. We prefer the translation ‘government’ here, for reasons discussed in this section, but acknowledge that both carry explanatory value. (Ongaro and van Thiel, with the invaluable aid of over a dozen colleagues, have recently conducted an analysis on the ‘words of public governance and management’ and the ways in which certain key English words are utilised in the national PA discourses in various European languages; Ongaro and van Thiel, 2018a.) The other painting is entitled and represents the *Effects of Good Government in the City and the Countryside*: it is a very large painting – ca. 14 metres – about equally split into the two parts of the effects of good government in the city and the countryside respectively; the last fresco is the *Allegory of Bad Government* (allegory and effects on the city and the countryside). The *Allegory of Good Government* is dominated by virtues, on top of which are the theological virtues (those that are made possible by the Faith in Christ) and then the cardinal (or ‘human’) virtues, placed alongside justice and the symbol of the Municipality (in Italian language translated as *Comune*, a word whose root is ‘common’ or ‘community’), whilst at the bottom are represented the army and the citizens: the people of the Republic of Siena in times of war and peace. ‘Divine Sapience’ is at the apex and ‘Justice’ stretched towards it, as if it were straining to draw from its source. Concord stems from justice in the form of ropes joined together by angels and passed to the first citizen. Various virtues are represented throughout. A peaceful and thriving city life is represented in the *Effects of Good Government in the City*, and a prosperous and secure countryside is depicted in the *Effects of Good Government in the Countryside*. Finally, the *Allegory of Bad Government* and the *Effects of Bad Government on the City and Countryside* are depicted one next to the other, forming the fourth main fresco. The representation of vices dominates the *Allegory of Bad*

*Government.* The landscape takes on an ethical dimension in Lorenzetti: it is not the undifferentiated space made of dull matter of Descartes (Chapter 2), it is rather a man-shaped place, a place made better or worse by the value-imbued choices taken by the citizens: space too is either virtuous or vicious.

Before we delve into the significance of this work for contemporary PA, we should address a preliminary methodological question: can we use artistic works, and notably works from the past, for advancing our knowledge and understanding of PA? What is the philosophical foundation of using a work of art, in the case a work of visual art (a series or cycle of paintings) dating back about seven centuries, to advance knowledge and understanding of contemporary PA? Following Drechsler, we argue that we can, because:

[T]his is superbly explained by none other than Hans-Georg Gadamer: ‘art is the overcoming of the past. All is presence in art. It becomes presence’ (Gadamer, 1997: 25). This is so because art is only ‘there’ during ‘the act’ – interpretation, in the sense of engagement, is what makes the work of art. This is a-temporal; if we look seriously at, and engage with Lorenzetti’s fresco – ... it becomes alive at that moment, and on a level that is neither merely aesthetic nor purely intellectual or historical. (Drechsler, 2001a: 7/8)

A related way of arguing about the significance of art flows from Martin Heidegger’s conception of every work of art, every masterpiece as a whole world, where the unveiling of Being occurs through the engagement of the beholder with the masterpiece.

Works of art may be verbal (like in poetry) or non-verbal, like in the figurative arts. Not all knowledge is verbal; indeed, an essential part of knowledge and understanding is inherently non-verbal,<sup>1</sup> and possibly PA has drawn too little from non-verbal knowledge (although, just to mention familiar examples in the cognate field of private management, Mintzberg et al. (2009) widely use graphic, non-verbal communication as a form of expression of knowledge). Hence, an understanding of public governance and public administration may be enriched and enhanced by engaging with artworks, and notably also non-verbal artworks.

In recent times, this approach has been advocated and efficaciously propounded by scholars like Wolfgang Drechsler<sup>2</sup> and Gjalte de Graaf. Through the works of Drechsler and de Graaf, debating Lorenzetti’s masterpiece has become a mainstay in the PA literature (Drechsler, 2001a; de Graaf and van Asperen, 2018). Drechsler and de Graaf use Lorenzetti’s frescoes not as an illustration, but as the core of the argument (Drechsler, 2001a). De Graaf’s main research question is:

How can Lorenzetti’s frescoes of Good Governance inspire our modern-day conception of good governance? [and] In the search for insight into the concept of

good governance, our goal is to see whether the frescoes can help us develop a fresh perspective on what makes governance, *good* governance. We use the hermeneutics of art. (de Graaf and van Asperen, 2018, pp. 40–8)

In further elaborating on the possibility of using art in PA scholarly work:

Following this line of thought, under the right circumstances the analysis of a work of art can lead to inspired insights. In art history, images – paintings, statues, prints or miniatures – do not serve as illustrations of ‘how it used to be.’ On the contrary, the image, its context, and its intended audience(s) are the points of departure which, combined with other archival, literary, and visual sources, *expose* the concepts and practices of its day, both intentionally and unintentionally. Works of art show ways of looking at the world that might seem strange to modern eyes. They offer an unfamiliar view, and that is exactly why they can be inspiring. In the case of Lorenzetti’s fresco on good governance, the discussion should involve both art historians and public administration scholars. Only when an argument integrates a thought – through interpretation of iconographic detail and a vision which goes beyond the purely historical, does it become a serious discussion about the inspirational power of imagery. (de Graaf and van Asperen, 2018, pp. 408–9)

What teachings can therefore be drawn from a contemporary reading of *The Good Government* for the purposes of advancing contemporary PA – by inspiring and generating understanding?<sup>3</sup>

Key virtues in the Christian tradition, both ‘civic’ and ‘human’ *tout court*, are *Prudentia* (Prudence), *Fortitudo* (Fortitude), *Magnanimitas* (Magnanimity), *Temperantia* (Temperance), and these are deeply linked to *Iustitia* (Justice) and *Pax* (Peace) and *Concordia*, which can be translated as Harmony or, possibly better in the context of this work, Unity or Concord (the Latin etymology of concord being: the hearts lying together, the togetherness of hearts). The key ‘argument’ (expressed in visual form) of the Good Government is that the common good can be achieved only when these virtues are practised, notably by the governors (the painting is in the ‘Room of the Nine’, the meeting room where the nine governors of the Republic of Siena of the time met and deliberated on the governing of the city, in their duty of office taken up on a rotating basis). The judgement of the author has been left open about how much the practice of virtues by the citizens is also decisive for the positive effects of good government to manifest themselves (as it seems to be suggested by the fact the rope that is passed from the Justice realm via *Concordia* by the citizens ties the hand of Good Government that holds the sceptre<sup>4</sup>), or whether ‘virtuous government’ may remedy the lack of public engagement and commitment to the common cause by the citizens – although evidently Lorenzetti is concentrated on the effects of governmental action, and hence on the practice of virtues by governors. For this reason, the represented virtues are primarily intended as the governors’ virtues: the very location of the murals in the City

Hall is testimony to this meaning. However, the people of Siena are widely represented throughout, and hence virtues might well be interpreted as being in equal measure citizens' and governors' virtues – a message that echoes ancient Greek philosophers on the constitutive linkages between individuals' virtues and civic virtues, and hence on virtues of all citizens,<sup>5</sup> as well as echoing modern and contemporary republican thinking on the requirement of citizens practising civic virtues and exercising their 'positive freedom' and partake to the common sorts of the political community.

The qualification of 'good' government may also be noted – not 'best', 'excellent', 'cool' or whatever other superlative tends to be fashionable nowadays. 'Good' is inherently a non-comparative concept, which is not 'better' than somebody else's government or 'best': the practice of virtues leads to the common good across places and times, although the magnitude of the effects may be variable depending on the relative wealth of the country, the proclivities and talents of its citizens, and the like.

The depiction is also about 'government', not governance. This may be due simply to the consideration that as a matter of fact the distinction between government and governance is not expressible through two distinct words in either Latin or the Italian language (this also applies to 14th century Italian), but the emphasis on the well-functioning army (typically an area where, it may be argued, governmental direct action does matter) as a condition for the secure development of the political community is testimony that the emphasis is at least on par on governmental action as it is on the broader good governance.

Logical connections may be drawn amongst the virtues. It is primarily from Wisdom and Justice that stem the conditions leading to the common good and a thriving political community. However, once this status is provisionally achieved, in order to maintain and protect it over time Fortitude is required, to maintain incorrupt behaviours and ultimately protect the common good from enemies arising both from the outside and from within the community. In fact, unity in the community is highly valued and upheld, also by physically placing it centre stage in the painting: this is indication of the significance attributed to the virtue of Concord. The significance of concord may be better appreciated in light of an interpretation of the world-famous *Palio di Siena*, the competition that every year sees all the districts of Siena, or *contrada* as they are called, in a horse race in the municipal square, Piazza del Campo (an architectural masterpiece; see Figure 7.2). This is a heart-felt competition, very far from fair play, and the jockey is either extolled if he wins or lampooned by district-fellows, even ostracised, if he fails to win (ostracism, at least symbolically if nowadays not physically, happens to all jockeys,<sup>6</sup> but the winner – because second place is no consolation – and only the allure of being the idol and icon of the *contrada* drives youngsters to train as jockeys in defiance of the likelihood to become forever labelled as 'loser'). This race dates back to about

one century before Lorenzetti painted his famous fresco, and it can be stated that the spirit and the inner dynamics of life in Siena as they manifested themselves in the Palio were surely well-known to him (although other historians disagree as to the significance of the Palio as we know it today during the times of Lorenzetti; Drechsler, 2001a). How to keep the city of Siena united in the presence of so intensely felt local, district-level identities, and in spite of such harsh competition between its constituencies? The key message stemming from the painting – which would sound like music to the ears of ideologists of federalism and federal politics in the larger sense – is that the autonomy of local units, their self-organisation, their role as provider of ‘welfare-related’ services, and last but not least their capacity to generate what in contemporary terms (and to mention a famous study whose field evidence comes from Italy; see Putnam et al., 1993) is labelled ‘social capital’ are highly valuable things – subject to only one, yet crucial, condition: that they do not undermine the overall unity of the superior political order, the city itself. Hence, the prominent place given to the virtue of unity, or concord, in the painting. Indeed, you win absolutely nothing at the Palio: it is an identity-building exercise, but also an opportunity to channel rivalry into games, rather than having divisions to seriously undermine the substantive unity of the city.



Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lorenzetti\\_amb.\\_good\\_government169\\_det.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lorenzetti_amb._good_government169_det.jpg) (accessed in 2017).

Figure 7.1 *Allegory of the Good Government*

A final question may appropriately be asked: who pays (Drechsler, 2015a)? In much more recent times the Italian banking sector ran into trouble due to the hypertrophy and expansionist appetites of one of its largest banks, and *the* oldest bank not just of Italy but of the entire world: this is the historical bank of Siena (named *Monte dei Paschi di Siena*). The reason of this recent-times near bankruptcy lay also in the greedy behaviour of those in charge at the time, at least some of them: vice replaced virtue, notably replaced the fourth of the cardinal (main) virtues: temperance. Commerce and services, thriving at the time in Siena, contribute to the well-being of the political community by bringing wealth, the much-needed wealth that pays for public welfare and services as well – but these arts require to be practised under the guidance of the virtue of temperance, without ever giving in to greed: a rule of behaviour, which of course equally if not primarily applies to those in charge of ruling the city.



Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Siena5.jpg> (accessed 17 April 2020).

Figure 7.2 *Piazza del Campo, Siena, Italy*

Alongside cardinal virtues, Lorenzetti's frescoes also give much emphasis to the so-called 'theological' or biblical virtues. Before concluding, it is worth dwelling on the consideration of the significance of theological virtues in the



Allegory. We leave the floor to de Graaf, who aptly noticed and elaborated on this point:

As a departure from other public administration studies on images of good governance (with the notable exception of Drechsler, 2001), we begin here with an analysis from the art historian's perspective. A careful examination of that part of the fresco that depicts the Allegory of Good Governance reveals that there are some elements in the fresco that have so far received little attention in secondary literature, despite the extensive scholarly awareness of the fresco. These underexposed aspects are the biblical virtues of faith, hope and charity. Today these virtues are often ignored in governance studies that mention the frescoes (e.g. Hendrik and Drosterij, 2012; Drechsler, 2001; Liebling, 2010), probably because they don't fit current views of what good governance entails. In the literature of art history, they have been noted, but have been branded as 'less central' than the other virtues, 'somewhat removed from the main scene' (Rubinstein, 1958: 180). Even those scholars who have recognized the important position of the biblical virtues more fully (e.g. Von Thadden, 1951) have not tried to establish why these were incorporated at a time when faith, hope and charity had not previously been components of the imagery of good governance ... In our view, the biblical virtues are more vital to the fresco than generally recognized in art history (or public administration or political science) studies. Every last element in the fresco has been carefully chosen and there is no reason to assume that the biblical virtues were incorporated without thinking them through thoroughly: Lorenzetti incorporated them for a reason ... The biblical virtues deserve careful consideration here, too, because they offer a different and supplementary view, not just of the fresco itself, but also of what was regarded as good governance. (de Graaf and van Asperen, 2018, pp. 409–10)

Representing good government was not unique to Lorenzetti's frescoes. But Siena was different from kingdoms and empires where the ruler was entrusted absolute power: Siena was a city state, an innovative form of administration in which at least a portion of the population, the aristocratic families, were actively engaged in government, notably through a mechanism or rotation into high office. Power had become more impersonal, it was not embodied by one person, the emperor or king, but rather transferred to institutions. These institutions, however, were to be run by human beings, on whose virtuosity of behaviour the well-being of the community depended. For this reason:

In order to depict good (and bad) governance, Ambrogio Lorenzetti adapted the traditional ruler portrait to represent a group of people instead of only one person (Rubinstein, 1958: 181). As in traditional ruler portraits, an enthroned male figure is surrounded by female personifications of the virtues that were associated with good governance. But unlike former and contemporary ruler portraits the male figure is not an historical person, nor a living ruler; he has divine features reminiscent of images of Christ ruling the world as Saviour (Skinner, 1999: 11–14). In short, Lorenzetti was depicting a personification of the Good Ruler, a secularized counterpart of the heavenly king ... He is both a figure of authority and a visualization of

that community to which the governors should subordinate their own interests. He is both ruler and servant. (de Graaf and van Asperen, 2018, pp. 410–11)

And how does the behaviour of the ruler relate to the biblical virtues? The nexus is for Lorenzetti constitutive, in fact:

Lorenzetti depicts the three theological virtues [Faith, Hope, Charity]. Lorenzetti gives them pride of place with charity at the top according to St Paul's ranking: 'And now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity.' (I Cor. 13.13) ... But what, then, does charity entail to merit such an important place in Lorenzetti's fresco and to suggest that it is a significant element in good governance? Today, charity is mostly regarded as the love of one's fellow man. Charitable acts are directed towards fellow human beings. In Augustinian times, however, the virtue of charity was regarded as the love of one's neighbour, but also as the love of God (Augustine, *Narrationes in Psalmos*, *Patrologia Latina* XXXVI.260: 'Amor Dei, amor proximi, caritas dicitur'). Without the love of God, it is impossible to love one's neighbour, and the other way around. These are two inseparable sides of one coin. Augustine regarded charity as the virtue to uplift mankind and reflect man's closeness to God, because the love of man was a reflection of God's love of mankind. Christ had offered himself for the sake of human beings. Only the grace of God's love makes it possible for human beings to love. By loving one's neighbour, a person could imitate Christ and get as close to God as humanly possible. The virtuous life thus transcends earthly boundaries; it conducts the soul to God, where it longs to be, as Augustine argues (Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, esp. ch. 6, PL 41, cols. 757–760). In Lorenzetti's fresco, charity is not only depicted as the most important Christian virtue, as Paul had emphasized, but the most important virtue of a Christian ruler ... Guided by charity, both the love of God and the love of mankind, inextricably connected as warp and weft of one fabric, the governors could elevate the commune and all her members and bring them closer to God. This ideal, heavenly, state is anticipated in charity's upturned gaze. Depicted at the top of the pyramid of virtues, she is the link between God and men. What is the purpose of it all? What would be the outcome if those involved in government let themselves be inspired by the picture of the ideal that Lorenzetti painted for them? In the middle of the fresco, between divine justice and the Good Ruler, Lorenzetti added the personification of peace which is the effect or outcome of good governance. The preservation of harmony and peace was certainly considered the most important task for the nine who presided over the commune of Siena. At the beginning of the oath of office taken by the nine they swore to 'provide that the commune and people of the magnificent city of Siena are, and are preserved, in good peace and concord' (Waley, 1991: 47; Bowsky, 1981: 55). In his allegory, Lorenzetti shows the council members how to contribute to this peaceful state. The presence of peace underlines that his is not just a guidebook containing rules that the governors of the city state should follow in order to be 'good,' but he is providing an image of 'good governance' that incorporates both its prerequisites and its effects. To sum up, good governance results from virtuous governors who place charity before everything else. From charity all other virtues follow and without charity the other virtues are meaningless. The love of God and the love of men that make governors a reflection of the supreme judge are both essential to the achievement of peace on earth, of an earthly paradise. (de Graaf and van Asperen, 2018, p. 413)

In sum, de Graaf's and Drechsler's arguments are about tying together ontology, behaviours and effects: good virtues lead to good government and governance, which manifest themselves in the well-being of the community; conversely, vices lead to poor, even wicked, governance. Within this frame, de Graaf's argument emphasises the actuality of benevolence and altruism, and their roots in the virtue of charity (in a Christian perspective). This topic might seem afield in PA, but it is not: 'PA scholars like Frederickson and Hart (1985; also Frederickson, 1980, 1997; Hart, 1974) argue for an ethic of civic humanism centered on the virtue of benevolence' (Esquith, 2006, p. 537). To make their case, and referring to contemporary democracy in the US, Frederickson and Hart (as aptly summed up by Esquith, 2006, pp. 538–9):

[U]sing the striking comparison between Nazi bureaucrats and Danish civil servants during World War II, they argued that while the former had lost any feeling of moral responsibility to a regime that was a corrupt charade, the Danes under Nazi occupation continued to feel a 'profound commitment to the democratic values of their nation and genuine love of the people' ... Therefore ... The 'special relationship' that must exist between public servants and citizens in a democracy is founded upon the conscious knowledge of the citizens that they are loved by the bureaucracy.

This position (which in a number of respects comes close to that of the 'existentialist public administrator', see Chapter 4) predicates of public administrators to interpret the fundamental 'regime values' of the country and to always gauge the way in which they are carrying out the policies they are enjoined to effect against these values – suggesting that ultimately the 'glue' that enables public administrators to effect those values is benevolence. The centrality of charity for 'good governance' is both a contemporary concern and a theme of active investigation. It is a mainstay in politics and PA that has long been recognised, not least by Lorenzetti's masterpiece.

Finally, it may be claimed that virtue-inspired government and governance has only the sky as its limit: it is literally about striving to achieve 'perfection'. The thrust towards perfection is inherent in the virtue discourse and present since Plato's and Aristotle's philosophical speculation on the just society. The masterpieces all around in Siena and elsewhere across Italy, in public spaces and churches, acted as powerful reminders – to Ambrogio Lorenzetti and also to his fellow citizens – of a common, diffuse effort to strive towards perfection and the divine that was driving the minds and hearts of the peoples of Italy during a period in which signories and city-states were flourishing across the peninsula (paving the way to the Italian Renaissance).

The roots of virtue politics – and virtue administration – are commonly ascribed to Aristotle. Aristotle distinguished between moral virtues (in which reason tempers emotions and passions and finds the proper balance of the opposite poles to steer the behaviour of humans as 'rational animals') and

intellectual virtues (in which reason pursues its own goal: contemplating truth and being; and thus the human being as ‘rational animal’ fulfils itself by achieving contemplation), arguing that both are necessary for a happy life – where happiness is fundamentally intended as the fulfilment of our very human nature (the notion of *eudaimonia* discussed in the previous chapter). In this perspective, practical and contemplative wisdom figure prominently in the painting: in contemplating the eternal Being (in capital), human beings partake of the very eternity of Being. It is a philosophical tenet that would be widely taken up during the Renaissance.

Continuing a tradition dating back to the ancient age,<sup>7</sup> virtues are centre stage in medieval thought as the basis of any good government, harmonised with Christian values and derived in a deductive fashion (from the Bible or by means of reasoning). In the late Middle Ages, theological and cardinal virtues come to be flanked by more mundane virtues (like *liberalitas*, *magnificentia*, *majestas* – liberality, magnificence, majesty – in *De Principe Liber* by Giovanni Pontano), and in this expanded conception continue throughout the Renaissance to be centre stage: the centrality of the practice of virtues and wisdom is reasserted in works like Erasmus’s *The Education of a Christian Prince*.

It is during the Renaissance, however, that some form of divorce between the virtue discourse and ‘realism’ starts to creep in: Renaissance writers asked questions that would be treated later in an unconventional (at the time) way by Machiavelli: is it better for the prince to be beloved or feared? Are ‘public’ virtues distinct from ‘private’ virtues? (as argued by Francesco Patrizi in *De Regno et Regis Institutione Libri IX*). It is in this cultural climate of questioning the virtue narrative that Machiavelli would sharply distinguish moral virtues from political virtues, as we shall see.

The debate in the Renaissance in Italy was also about whether virtues hold an ‘absolute’, unconditional merit in producing ‘good effects’ or whether and to what extent they need to combine with the ‘appropriate’ constitutional form of the state (e.g. republic or principality)? Put shortly, the question was about what matters more: the virtues of the prince (the governors in general), or the constitutional form? Questions like these laid the ground for the birth of ‘modern’ political science, and, on a more mundane and everyday level, they are still echoed throughout manifold strands of the contemporary social scientific literature, for example over the relative bearing of ‘leadership’ versus ‘organisational design’ – although the roots of these debates in Renaissance thinking are seldom recognised, and such oblivion is hardly beneficial to the social scientific contemporary discourse.

The contemporary reader will find the virtue debate very much broader and ‘loftier’ than the one s/he is accustomed to, which is more often framed in terms of ‘public values’ and ‘value systems’ in the public sector (see Bozeman,

2007; Frederickson, 1997). Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) have produced a detailed inventory of values in the public sector. The ‘public values’ discourse is partly close to virtue discourses in the classic, medieval and Renaissance sense, which continues on to our days – but contemporary social scientific research has added an attention to the empirical implications of practising values (virtues) in the contemporary, hyper complex administrative and societal systems. Authors have pointed to public value conflicts (e.g. between procedural values and performance values, see de Graaf, 2014; the special issue edited by van der Wal et al. 2011; van der Wal and de Graaf, 2010) and the problem of prioritising values and clusters of values (Rutgers, 2008a, 2008b; Jørgensen and Rutgers, 2015). Van Wart (1998) highlights certain properties of value systems in the public sector: they are especially complex, they derive from multiple sources – individual, professional, organisational, legal, public interest; they also serve as instruments to accommodate multiple interests; they change over time; they are subject to competition and they are contested. These ways of conceiving of public values is surely more attuned to the ears of the contemporary reader in their being drawn from different sources and ‘bespoke’ to different target groups and goals – but it may miss important teachings of the virtue discourse as has been practised during the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

One of the many reasons why such is the case is that, with the encounter of modern age, virtue philosophy also (re-)encountered hedonism, relativism and the centrality of individual subjective preferences, perspectives that are at odds with the virtue discourse. Interestingly, hedonism was also the main target of Aristotle’s discourse, thus perhaps suggesting that in the terrain of the foundation of what is ‘proper’ behaviour for the promotion of the well-being of a community it is hard to set the debate on entirely new ground, and much of the foundations have been laid over the past two-and-a-half millennia. It is true, however, that in the encounter with the modern age, virtue philosophy has also met novel challenges: one is the analysis of (unintended) social consequences, like in Adam Smith’s classical argument about the pursuit of private interest serving the needs of people better than public virtues – although it is hard to imagine Lorenzetti contenting himself with the statement of fact that the butcher maximising her/his interest may serve her/his country fellows better than the virtuous governor. Instead, Lorenzetti would remind us of the bad effects to be expected if greed dominates citizens’ lives. However, it is unquestionable that social scientific investigations shedding light on such realities as ‘unintended consequences of purposive social action’, the influence of economic structures on social behaviour (as in both Marxian and some neo-liberal, economic trends), and the like, may have a displacing effect on the virtue discourse, and that somehow such discourse has lost the upper hand over the past few centuries, and is struggling to recover the centre of the stage.

A state of affairs that the author of this book thinks is a major loss: for public discourse, for the well-being of public communities, and for the field of PA.

There are, of course major attempts at incorporating the virtue discourse into contemporary social scientific research on public ethics, by such authors as Lawton, van der Wal, Hubert (see recently Lawton et al., 2016). Some authors make explicit reference to the virtue discourse and its place in contemporary public administration and management (Lynch and Lynch, 2006). The public ethics discourse has taken multiple directions: from public service ethos to the status and significance of code of conducts or the meaning of the oath of office; from individual behaviours to integrity systems, coupling ethical concerns and a systems theory approach, in order to analyse and ‘manage’ integrity in the public services, and so forth (Macaulay, 2018).

Possibly the one application of the virtue debate that is of highest contemporary visibility and resonance in the public debates is the one on (anti-) corruption: what behaviours should be effected for contrasting corruption in the public sector? Suggested remedies range from additional regulation and enhanced oversight to enforce the rules; to economics-based analysis of ‘convenience’ of corruptive/corrupt behaviours to try to design systems that provide disincentives to corrupt behaviours; to social-psychology approaches pointing out value-formation processes and critical junctures in the professional life when values held by the individual may shift; to the influence the organisational environment wields on values and behaviours. Such social scientific, analysis-based recipes are of utmost importance for describing social phenomena and identifying causal links and chains that lead to more (or less) desirable outcomes, thus potentially enabling remedial interventions. However, the masterpiece of Lorenzetti – and broadly the millennia-old reflection of virtues in government – act in this frame as a powerful reminder of the importance of not losing sight of the broader perspective: good government and good governance require more than properly engineered systems (e.g. for combating corruption, for ensuring compliance with the laws, for instilling ‘appropriate’ behaviours in public servants, etc.), however important they may be (and they are extremely important). Wisdom and justice, temperance and prudence, and charity, remain of overarching significance for the advancement of the well-being and for political communities that enable and nourish the fulfilment of lives.

Two final remarks conclude this section. First, a note to distinguish between public values ‘in the plural’ – the subject of the virtue discourse developed throughout this section – and public value ‘in the singular’. Public value in the singular concerns the ‘outcome’ of public organisations, the ‘results’ or impacts generated and delivered to the (variously denominated) citizens, users, customers, clients and the like. It brings with it issues of how to ‘measure’ the outputs of public organisations and their impact: the valuing process and

encompassing whom in such process. *Public value* is probably nowadays most famously associated with an attempt to measure the impact of public action on public needs, collectively identified and selected through democratic means, put forward by Mark Moore (1995). Various authors have worked on this and related themes, notably in the Benington and Moore (2011) edited work, who also emphasise the collective good of future generations, an attention which resonates widely in the virtue discourse, as already discussed in Chapter 5; notable works in the public value stream of inquiry include Alford et al. (2017); Hartley et al. (2017); and Talbot (2010, 2011). Interestingly, the very notion of public value is in this stream of scientific inquiry defined in both ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ terms: public value is defined as ‘what the public values’ as well as ‘what is objectively of value’. In the first perspective, a subjective take on the question ‘what is public value?’ is adopted by answering ‘what the public values’ (Benington and Moore, 2011, pp. 42–3) and by deploying the distinction between market value and use value, asserting the position that the public value approach resorts to the notion of use value: what is the value of usage for somebody, not how much somebody would be ready to pay for it (also on the grounds that public services are generally delivered in non-market contexts, without a selling price). Second and complementarily, an objective take on the question ‘what is public value?’ is taken by answering that public value is ‘what adds value to the public sphere’ (see pp. 43–6), stressing that public value is not concerned only with individual interests and some sort of aggregation thereof, but also and crucially with the wider public interest and the longer-term public good, including the needs of the generations to come. It is especially in this second meaning that the notion of public value becomes broader than the measure of the individual outcomes (as are the notions of ‘use value’ alongside the one of market value). Also, in revisiting Moore’s 1995 work, it is not only public managers to be creator of public value, rather a wide range of stakeholders. Key notions here are those of *co-production* and *co-creation*: so for example, car-sharing arrangements may create public value by providing both effective transportation services (what the public values) and benefits to the environment, and thence also to the future generations (what adds value to the public sphere), and this occurs by having local public authorities and residents working together to co-produce the service of car-sharing, and preliminarily to that, to co-create the governance arrangement of car-sharing, by contriving the best form the delivery of the service can take.

Attempts have been hinted at suggesting how to bridge the public value debate with public values and indeed public virtues (an interpretation of the public value creation approach associated to Moore is that ‘at the core he sought to understand what citizens expect from public managers and how the pursuit of virtue is incorporated in executive activities’, see Liddle, 2018, p. 969<sup>8</sup>). This appears to be an important and promising path of inquiry.

In concluding this section it is required, from a social scientific standpoint, to pinpoint the nexus between social action and the virtue discourse. Following the analysis developed by Virtanen (2018) about the ontological–logical structure of practical situations in administration, we may question what is the link between the virtue discourse as predicated across the epochs – from Aristotle to the Stoics during the Hellenistic epoch, to the Middle Ages and Renaissance and onto our times – and social action and administrative behaviour as we are more accustomed to intending it, after the seminal works of the fathers of contemporary PA like Max Weber and Herbert Simon. Condensing the issue into a question: how do virtues – to the extent they are a ‘property’ of the person who exercises and practises them – transform into social action and ultimately engender social effects? We can, in the space available here, only take the very large brush and sketch a few elements that may be useful to tackle this big question.

Social action is a key, defining notion for the discipline of sociology as well as across the social sciences, including PA, which has as one of its main foci the understanding of administrative action and administrative behaviour. Max Weber (1978/1922, p. 4) defines social action as follows: ‘We shall speak of “action” insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behaviour – be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is “social” insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course.’

Intentionality plays a key role in this perspective, as does the assumption of instrumental rationality whereby the actor chooses a means in order to achieve an end. To the extent the actor’s behaviour follows his or her understanding about which course of action contributes to the achievement of the end, the action becomes evidently understandable. It is intentionality about what ends to pursue combined with the rational selection of means conducive to the valued end that explain the actor’s behaviour. Only in instances where the actor does not follow his or her beliefs and knowledge about effective action, do we need a causal explanation: the observed deviation from rational-instrumental action may be attributed to such factors as ‘misunderstanding, strategic errors, logical fallacies, personal temperament, or considerations outside the realm of strategy’ (Weber, 1978, p. 21).

If we interpret intentionality in the virtue perspective, the virtuous governor or citizen will have her or his value judgements inspired and shaped by virtues and the pursuit of perfection, and the course of action that follows will mainly lie in the selection of the instrumentally more apt behaviours, out of the range of the alternatives available to the limited rationality of the decision-maker, that allow fulfilling virtuous behaviours – virtuous in both their judgements about values and their factual judgements. Crucially, these alternatives will be reviewed in light of the inspiration stemming from the practice of the



virtues: is the provisionally chosen course of action inspired by prudence? Is it informed by criteria of justice? Is it enlightened by a wise understanding of the situation? The task of the social sciences, and notably the field of PA in our case, in this perspective lies in explaining deviation from rational action and behaviour, either due to a fault of instrumental rationality, whereby the selected means turned out to be inadequate for the task because of misunderstanding, lack of knowledge, fallacies, or else; or due to deviation from virtuous intentionality, whereby value judgements turned out to be flawed – fault ultimately being detected by the perverse effects the ensuing course of action begets, as in the second part of Lorenzetti's painting where the effects of bad government are illustrated. Bad effects may be due to a fault in factual judgements (instrumental rationality) as well as in value judgements (intentionality), and the two are intermingled in the virtue perspective. Virtues inspire value as well as factual judgements, and the two are in a sense 'kept together' by the practice of virtues.

A sharp distinction between value judgements and factual judgements is instead drawn by Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon and nowadays permeates the social sciences and PA. For Simon, value judgement is about 'ought to dos' – what should be done or made to exist; and 'you can't get an "ought," by any manner of careful reasoning, solely from a set of pure "is's'" (Simon 1947/1997, p. 68). Value judgements and factual judgements belong to two distinct dimensions, and the analysis of one (factual judgements, the remit of social science) can commence only when the other (value judgements) ends. Does this statement hold from the viewpoint of the virtues perspective? Can the virtue discourse be sub-divided between factual judgements (instrumental rationality) and value judgements in so sharp a way as Simon has claimed? Very tentatively, perhaps it may be put forward that the virtue perspective goes the opposite way: it rather strives to integrate the two kinds of judgement, or at least it has an overarching thrust towards keeping the two forms of judgement together: the 'oughts' and the 'is's' are inextricably linked. Is this one reason why 'modern' social sciences (at least in the notion generally accepted by the followers of Simon) and millennia-old virtue discourses seem not to be able to communicate with each other? Is this the root of the chasm, the gulf between the two (and between the followers of Simon and those of Dwight Waldo, whose work might be interpreted as in closer continuity with the millennia-old 'public virtues' discourse)? Those are crucial questions, and huge ones – to be much more fully tackled by other books, by other authors – but revisiting the works of virtue philosophers, and painters like Lorenzetti, represents firm ground on which to stand for tackling such questions.

There is another major challenge to the virtues discourse: it comes not (only) from distinguishing the realm of 'values' from the realm of 'facts', but instead it questions the extent to which virtues inspire behaviours. The realism critique

of the virtue discourses is a warning about the meanness of human nature and the ensuing impracticability of virtues, particularly when it comes to public behaviour, at least as much as it is a warning about the risks of overlooking instrumental rationality when virtues are placed centre stage. The intellectual work of Niccolò Machiavelli is an all-rounded manifestation of such questioning of the virtues discourse: it is to his foundational work we now turn.

## NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI AND REALISM

Machiavelli is a sharp critic of the sustainability and expediency of the exercise of ethical virtues for the cause of building and safeguarding states. Niccolò Machiavelli<sup>9</sup> was born on 3 March 1469 in Florence and passed away on 21 June 1527. He was appointed secretary of the Republic of Florence in 1498 and lasted until 1512, when the republic fell and Florence re-became a Principality with the Medici family re-instated in power. He since never returned to public office, notwithstanding many attempts pursued with sheer determination. It was in the aftermath of having been toppled from office that he conceived his masterpiece, *Il Principe – The Prince*, which takes the form of a letter addressed to the new ruler of Florence, Lorenzo de' Medici, having the purpose of providing him with advice for the most effective exercise of his role. Implicitly, *The Prince* is also a plea to be re-instated in office.

In his attempt to re-gain access to office, Machiavelli was less effective than his contemporary and country fellow Francesco Guicciardini, like him genius of the art of government, who after serving in the Republic of Florence later managed to serve in roles in the re-instated principality of Florence under the Medici family and for the Holy See. Machiavelli and Guicciardini represent one of the first examples, indeed exemplars, of the 'technician', the person whose skills and ingenuity in the art of the state and the possession of technical knowledge is put at the service of different political masters, always with the intent of perfecting, or at least improving, the workings of the state.<sup>10</sup> The two main works of Machiavelli are *The Prince* and *Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio (Discourses on Livy)*. The latter, mostly complete before *The Prince*, are reflections on the lessons that can be drawn from the works of the Roman historian Titus Livius (Livy), and notably on how to run a republic. It is not unlikely that Machiavelli conceived of the *Discourses on Livy* as a work whose utility also lay in preparing the politico-administrative elite in the event of a successful re-instatement of the republican form in Florence (his links with the cultural environment of the Orti Oricellari, an elite circle aiming at re-instating the republic in Florence, are well documented). *Discourses on Livy* tackle the problem of how to make an already existent state work: it is about the qualities a people must possess in order for its state and political community to thrive in an insecure and perilous world. *The Prince* (written, for the

most part, at breakneck speed in 1513, just after having lost his post at the helm of the administration of the Florentine Republic of 1498–1512) is a reflection on the qualities that an individual, the Prince, must possess to gain and maintain power under different political regimes. It is intended as a textbook about how to set up a state and the role and function of the Prince as demiurge of the process. The backdrop of this is the prefiguring of the Italian state, beyond the many conflicting and weak principalities that populated the landscape of Italy in the 16th century, and that were under the de facto domination of the kingdoms of France and Spain. Ultimately, the inspiration and motivation of *The Prince* is idealistic and patriotic,<sup>11</sup> inspired by the dream of the unity of Italy (which would materialise only three-and-a-half centuries after Machiavelli), and yet the content aims at being value-neutral: to teach the art of getting to power and maintaining it, and practising those qualities and behaviours that are required to achieve such goals. Within the setting of the problem of how to establish a new state, Machiavelli addresses the specific questions of ‘how to get to power?’ and ‘how to keep power?’.

*The Prince* is articulated in thirty-six chapters, through which the argument unfolds as follows. Chapters I–XI outline a typology of principalities: they may be inherited or new acquisitions, self-standing or parts of wider domains, acquired by means of armies – owned or mercenary – or conquered by virtue or by chance. The one Machiavelli is most interested in is the brand new principality, as such would be a unified Italy under a prince. As we have hinted at, the main thrust and overarching motivation in writing *The Prince* and dedicating it to Lorenzo de’ Medici lies in the fact that the Medici family was in power both in Florence and in Rome, and hence presenting a window of opportunity for the two most substantial powers in central Italy to coalesce and ‘rescue’ Italy from warfare, to ultimately re-unify it. Machiavelli was inspired in this vision by the consideration that the glories of ancient Rome, whose empire stretched across a huge expanse from the Middle-East encompassing the entirety of the Mediterranean basin to reach out to territories like nowadays England, first lay in a unified Italy under its control.

Chapters XII–XIV discuss the respective merits of mercenary versus own militias: the main argument here is that own militias – a proper state army – is a prerequisite for maintaining power. Chapters XV–XIX vet the virtues and behaviour proper for a prince: a well-specified definition of virtue is here adopted, far away from the notion of virtues depicted by Lorenzetti: virtuous behaviours are those that are useful for ruling the state – an instrumental notion of virtue in stark contrast with the medieval virtues discourse and any notion of harmony between moral behaviour and political behaviour. For Machiavelli, immoral patterns of action, like cruelty in deeds and deceit in words, may be functional to the goal of ruling the state, and in this sense may be considered as ‘virtues’. This was not something unknown to rulers before

him, but Machiavelli was the first to formulate the functionality of immoral behaviours for the purposes of ruling the state in both lucid and crude terms. Chapters XX–XXIII provide a range of precepts on appropriate behaviours for the prince vis-à-vis his advisors, courtiers, flatterers, and so on – putting a strong accent on the importance for the prince to avert flatterers. Chapter XXIV gauges the responsibility of the extant Italian princes and the reasons why they lost control of their states.

Chapter XXV is a most famous chapter. It contains a reflection on the relative influence of virtue and chance in shaping the course of human events: what is the clout of human action in shaping the course of things, as opposed to chance ruling events and the fortunes of the world? Machiavelli famously stated that ‘fortune is the arbiter of half our actions, but that it lets us control roughly the other half’, by which he meant that the outcomes of our intentional (social) actions are for a half determined by chance, but for the other half are shaped by our actions. He then sways in the way in which fortune is depicted; at times it is seen as a natural force, like the flooding of a river, which cannot be controlled when it bursts, but it can be controlled when the river is not in flood, provided men are industrious and savvy enough to take the proper precautions. It is, therefore, only idleness in taking precautions that makes chance have such a great say in the course of human events. Other times, however, Machiavelli appears more akin to conceive of fortune as a sort of *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the time or the set of circumstances in which the social actors operate. In this second perspective, it is the fit between the circumstances, on the one hand, and the temperament, natural inclinations and qualities, skills and mode of operation that is more congenial to somebody, on the other hand, that determines whether he or she will be successful. Certain epochs or sets of circumstances are more appropriate for prudent, reflective people; others require impetuous personality and audacity to be tamed. Whether we are born in a time that fits our natural inclination or not is a matter of chance, and it affects our fortunes in the pursuit of power. The chapter ends with a statement that it is more often the impetuous and audacious that win power, formulated through the famous (or infamous, for the sexist thrust of the prose, which does cause our eyebrows to lift) assertion that

fortune is a woman, and if you wish to control her, it is necessary to treat her roughly. And it is clear that she is more inclined to yield to men who are impetuous than to those who are calculating. Since fortune is a woman, she is always well disposed towards young men, because they are less cautious and more aggressive, and treat her more boldly. (*The Prince*, Chapter XXV)

The final chapter, XXVI, is a passionate exhortation to free Italy (this chapter was written and added some years later, as was the dedication in the preface of the book to Lorenzo de' Medici).

Some key philosophical issues and quite strong assertions emerge with vigour from the works of Machiavelli. First, a negative assessment of human nature. The reckoning of the viciousness of human nature is in Machiavelli to be recognised as a 'matter of fact', something which whoever is involved in the business of the state must take into account for formulating more pertinent judgements. These judgements about the meanness of human nature apply to the political and administrative spheres as well: it is a lesson of pessimism about the motives and the behaviour of those who pursue a career in the public sphere, as well as about the motives and behaviours of citizens, those whom certain approaches in public governance and management pretend to be 'involved', engaged', 'committed', as well as disciplined and rational users of public services. This trait of human nature becomes in Machiavelli a datum, a matter of fact to simply accept: an approach that denotes a 'social-scientific' attitude towards political phenomena, which is why some credit Machiavelli as the founder of political science.

Second, a 'principle of realism' whereby facts have to be considered and treated in their own terms, as they present themselves and not as we wish or desire them to be, and hence a conception of politics as 'the science of the state', the body of applied knowledge functional to the establishment, development and 'maintenance in operation' of the state. This is a notion from which it is not difficult to derive that behaviours that are 'proper' are those functional to these overarching goals, and behaviours that are 'improper' are those that are dysfunctional to these goals – even when such behaviours are morally or ethically 'good'. There is here a sharp distinction and disjunction of 'honour' (meaning in the context of the epoch: moral, honest – *honestum* in Latin) and expediency (useful, *utile*), of what is honourable and what is expedient: a departure here from contemporary 15th/16th century works and treatises for governors and princes that were collations of moral and ethical virtues. Moreover, 'even more unnerving is his seeming uninterest in seeking a justification beyond political success ... Machiavelli's insistence on the tension between the demands of morality and the demands of political practice is more than plausible, but it is unnerving because he left that tension visibly unresolved' (Ryan, 2012, p. 358).

As a footnote, it arises from this picture that the simplistic statements made by duplicitous politicians citing Machiavelli as excuse for the light-hearted undertaking of behaviours of dubious morality find no ground in Machiavelli's original work (whom they are very unlikely to have ever read). Nowhere in Machiavelli's work can be found the sentence 'the end is justification for the means' (in itself quite a stupid statement: a means is a means to an end by defi-

nitition); rather, the reader is left brooding on this unresolved tension between the logic of morality and the logic of expediency, the latter being the one that seems to hold the keys to the course of action that in this earthly world leads to grabbing and keeping power.

Third, grabbing power and achieving glory (which Machiavelli intended as ‘entering History’, in capital letter) is the key driver of human behaviour for Machiavelli, or at least for that portion of human beings who are keen to enter the political arena. For Machiavelli, ‘power’ and ‘glory’ are the unquestioned ultimate goals and criteria driving value judgements for ‘politicians’ – not improving public services or fulfilling ethical values, not even just the pursuit of the extraction of some advantages. The extraction of advantage as overarching goal – utility maximisation – is generally predicated by theories rooted in economics like the public choice theory (in this regard, whilst Niskanen’s (1971, 1973) model of the bureaucrat as budget maximiser still bore some resemblance to power maximisation, Dunleavy’s (1991) sophisticated bureau-shaping represents in a sense a departure: hiding and lurking in the shadow, exploiting information asymmetries to extract benefits is the behaviour of bureaucrats depicted here). Machiavelli reminds us that although there are those who adopt such courses of action when holding public office, there are also others in the political arena who more simply aim for the maximum of power and glory, for entering History; and this is a dimension of human action we need to cope with, and include in any understanding of public governance dynamics.

A fourth key theme in Machiavelli is the place that violence occupies in politics (and in PA): indeed, ‘the readiness to say that political success demanded an unflinching willingness to violate every moral precept appropriate to private life as sharply as Machiavelli did was novel in Christian Europe’ (Ryan, 2012, p. 358). Machiavelli brought to the fore violence in politics to an extent that was not unknown, but it was unspoken before him, it was something tacitly known (the ancient Romans didn’t care much – at all – about the violation of their neighbours’ human rights when they expanded their territory) but never made explicit, at least not as explicit as Machiavelli did, as in the famous (infamous from a moral viewpoint) statement: ‘men should either be caressed or crushed, because they can avenge slight injuries, but not those that are very severe’.

Fifth, Machiavelli reminds us of the role of chance in human affairs: something that perhaps large swathes of contemporary social sciences tend to underestimate, possibly espousing at least implicitly a logic of determinism (even in its ‘probabilistic variant’) in the form: from X will follow Y under conditions Z. Chance is tamed under statistical treatment as ‘noise’ or ‘unexplained variance’. But in most complex phenomena where social action occurs chance does play a role, as some of the most perceptive scholars remind us.

(For the role provided for chance – chance events as catalysts or hindrances to reform – see Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011, Chapter 2) in their model of public management reform; for the usage of the notion of potential as distinct from the actuality of what happened in a given set of circumstances to account for ‘success’ or ‘failure’ in the analysis and extrapolation of practices in public management, see Bardach (1994, 1998); as aptly noticed by Bardach, successful cases perhaps happened by chance, but the same chance might not be replicated elsewhere – or vice versa a practice may have potential and be worthy of replication elsewhere, but things simply went wrong on that occasion, literally, ‘by chance’: which does not entail to dismiss the potential a practice may have.)

Sixth, Machiavelli makes a strong assertion about the immutability of human nature. Machiavelli, throughout the two works *The Prince* and *Discourse on Livy*, amasses evidence that such is the case when comparing ancient episodes with his contemporary 15th/16th century Italy. From this, for Machiavelli, also derives the meaningfulness of learning from the ‘successes’ of the ancient Romans, both the republic and the empire, in their colossal state-building exercise (to which *Discourse on Livy* is dedicated). The immutability of human nature over time is for him the grounding of the very possibility of learning from the past, which in social phenomena would otherwise become pointless. We return to this point in the next chapter.

Finally, trivial as it may sound, Machiavelli reminds us that enlightened governors and administrators must, as a minimum, get to power and keep it for a sufficiently long time span before they are able to exercise the noble and sought-after reforms of public governance and public services for the betterment of citizens’ lives.

## THOMAS MORE AND UTOPIA

A radically different approach to the question of how to better public governance comes from the tradition of utopian thinking. The very usage of the word is to be credited to Thomas More’s *Utopia*. This masterpiece was written in Latin mostly in 1515, although a part possibly could have been drafted earlier in 1510, during a summer spent in Antwerp in the company of Peter Giles, an acolyte of Erasmus of Rotterdam, the great humanist and close friend of More. Its full title is *De Optimo Reipublicae Statu deque Nova Insula Utopia* (‘On the Optimal State of a Republic and the New Island of Utopia’), and the first English translation dates in 1551 by Ralph Robinson, followed ‘with more literary skill’ by Gilbert Burnet in 1684, the version to which we refer here (but see also among others the version edited by George Logan, Robert Adams and Clarence Miller and published by Cambridge University Press, 1995). It was

first published in Leuven in 1516, then in Paris (1517) and Basel (1518), but its publication in England occurred only after the passing away of More.

The term 'utopia' is derived from the Greek *ou-topia*, which means 'no place' nowhere; additionally, as wittingly noted, 'More exploits the punning ambiguity inherent in its similarity (*especially if read in the English language pronunciation, our note*) to *eutopia*, or "the good place"' (Ryan, 2012, p. 312, emphasis added). Although the mint is Thomas More's, there are illustrious predecessors to Utopia in the literary strand of utopian thinking, indeed as far back to Plato's *The Republic*, already encountered in the discussion of the common good foundations of governance, a work which was one of the powerful inspiration of Utopia. More's *Utopia* is explicitly inspired by Plato's *The Republic*, and indeed intellectually dedicated to the Greek giant of philosophy. *The Republic* is also a discussion about the significance of entrusting government to philosophers (or at least to governors well trained in philosophy). The main characters in the work, who are the same Thomas More and Raphael Hythloday, debate at length about Plato's recommendation (both characters display awareness of the same scepticism that Plato had about the feasibility of his own suggestion that philosophers be governors). Thomas More can, however, be credited to have been the first to have not just coined the term 'utopia' but deployed in full this conceptual tool. He was followed suit by other literates, including Tommaso (Fr Tomaso, born Giandomenico) Campanella who authored *La Città del Sole* (The City of the Sun, 1602).

The character of Raphael Hythloday in the plot is assigned the role of the person who, whilst travelling across the world, eventually moored in the island of Utopia and became acquainted with their mores and governance practices; he then reports to the same Thomas More what he discovered of this political system so altogether different from any other.

The book illustrates the governance arrangement of Utopia: the distribution of authority and procedures of appointment of the magistrates; the configuration of its towns, and the capital Amaurot in particular; the organisation of labour of Utopians (the inhabitants of Utopia) and their trade arrangements; their manners of life (some of them scary to the eyes of modern people, and not just them: for example the practice that family life is in common, whereby men never leave their house and women join them when they get married; or the compulsory permission to travel, which has to be granted by public authorities if a citizen wants to travel across the island, although the author immediately adds that 'if any man has a mind to visit his friends that live in some other town, or desires to travel and see the rest of the country, he obtains leave very easily ...' (p. 42)). The way in which Utopians deal with neighbours and manage war (the 'foreign and defence' policy of Utopia) is also discussed at length, as is their religion, and notably how they apply (with some qualifications) a regime of religious tolerance, wholeheartedly praised in



Utopia. The significance of More's intellectual stance on religious toleration can only be reinforced by later events: Thomas More was beheaded by King Henry VIII and died a Catholic martyr for not forfeiting the Catholic faith and remaining loyal to the principle of the primacy of Papal authority. The utopia of religious tolerance, which had no place during More's lifetime, however, would eventually win the hearts, minds and constitutions of the peoples and the states all over Europe.

What is the 'usage' or 'function' of Utopias in PA? In Utopia, public governance enables the full-fledged development of all citizens, placing utopian approach firmly in the camp of common good notions of justification of public governance. In this line of teleological thinking, utopias may be seen as performing the function of driving behaviours towards 'perfection' and escaping decadence in the form of path-dependency sub-optimality.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, utopias may be interpreted as 'guiding ideas' or regulatory ideas suffused with a normative tone: utopias enter policymaking, thereby including in modern times the reform of public governance, the state and public administration, as an ideational source.<sup>13</sup> Utopias may perform a normative function about what could be done for bettering public governance. They do so because of the other function utopias perform: the function of a critique of the extant state of affairs by providing a comparator in the form of a world other, from which to critically revisit the extant governance arrangements of this world, of the given political system which is being examined (in the case of More's utopia, the governance arrangements under critique were those of early 16th-century England, which More depicts and harshly criticises in the first part of the book). The two functions performed by utopias – normative and critical – are complementary and mutually co-existing, with one enabling the other. One way of interpreting this link is to consider utopias as an alternative, holistic vision of public governance, which may be used for critique of extant governance arrangements, and then, based on value judgements and evaluation, a utopia may be used as a set of (more or less loosely connected) guiding ideas for purposefully changing the extant governance arrangements.

It is, in our view, important to emphasise that utopias may be seen as eliciting critical reasoning, and hence performing a maieutic function. Almost all aspects of the functioning of More's island of Utopia, far from being uncritically accepted, are questioned in his book. Later interpretations of utopian thinking (see recently Erickson, 2015; Jacoby, 2005) distinguish between blueprint utopias (fixed models of what perfect governance looks like) and iconoclastic utopias (sketched models that stimulate critical thinking beyond contingencies and escaping path dependency traps by acting as stimulus for critique of the extant arrangements). This conceptual tool has been employed for distinguishing 'good' and 'bad' utopias: in this reading, Plato's Republic is categorised as blueprint utopia, a fixed model which ultimately demands to be

effected as it is, to be superimposed on pre-existing governance arrangements, which are for disposal. Iconoclastic utopias are instead aimed at eliciting dialogue and future-orientation, a forward-looking attitude that may enable 'thinking out of the box' and escaping path-dependency and repetition of the extant sub-optimal solutions; iconoclastic utopias are ultimately a tool for eliciting critical reasoning. Whether Plato's Republic falls under the blueprint rubric, and whether and to what extent a neat distinction may be made between these two kinds of utopias, is for the specialists to debate. However, there is no part of the story narrated in Utopia that falls neatly into the iconoclastic category: the inhabitants of Utopia cannot travel without permission and everyone is acutely conscious of being after the eye of everyone else.<sup>14</sup> After Orwell's *1984*, mutual surveillance means to us Big Brother, and restrictions to liberty 'seem to us much too high a price to pay, even for the peace and security it offers' (Ryan, 2012, pp. 318–19). We cannot know what More might have thought of this, but we may well reckon that an inherent risk of drift towards blueprint thinking is inherent in any utopian approach and, in this sense, the thought-eliciting work of More is a reminder of the ubiquitous risk that utopias become totalitarian by their very nature (a number of the features of More's Utopia do display totalitarian traits).

Indeed, the dystopias that have been put into effect over the 20th century have led to all sorts of slaughters and horrors against the most basic human rights. It is against this backdrop that poignant critiques of utopian thinking have to be set. Such critiques were famously expressed by the likes of Hannah Arendt (1971), Isaiah Berlin (1991), and Karl Popper (1963), who all saw in Plato's Republic – the ancestor of all utopias – the germ of totalitarianism and made the Republic the ultimate target of all the critiques to utopian thinking, deemed responsible of having inspired earthly hells, like Nazi death camps, the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge, the Soviet gulags, or the Maoist counter-revolutionary campaigns.

It may be claimed that it is mainly for this reason – the tragic evidence of utopian thinking leading to hell on earth – that utopian thinking has been side-lined and replaced by 'incremental' thinking, the kind of 'practice-that-work'-based thinking which is nowadays internationally dominant. But what about the original Utopia as More conceived of it? Can it be indicted as the source of dystopian thinking that followed? A large debate has arisen on More's work, and my foray into the topic is but a sympathetic one that will stress the facets of the original More's Utopia which, from this slant, seem to indicate that antibodies and remedial indications to pre-empt dystopias were already in his book. Other and more expert authors may well argue against this sympathetic view of Utopian thinking as it originates from More's Utopia; no doubt, though, the irony that suffuses More's Utopia and its comic element present throughout clearly point to its iconoclastic nature,

critical of the laws and practices of the time – early 16th-century England. This seems to be the prevalent thrust (the first part of the book is entirely devoted to running a harsh critique of England's economic and political arrangements of the time, which are vetted, perused and heavily criticised in the book before the two fictional characters start discussing the arrangements of the island of Utopia). To build the argument for More's Utopia incorporating antibodies against dystopian outcomes, it should further be noticed another trait of More's Utopia: its realism. For example, More expounds in detail on how Utopians defend themselves from non-Utopian neighbours: Utopians have engaged with ethical and moral issues and found arrangements that attempt to strike a balance between such contradictions, but leave it open to different solutions. Importantly, Utopia is what a famously entitled book call 'the learning organisation' (Senge, 1990/2006): Utopia is said to have learnt from past encounters, notably with the ancient Egyptians and the ancient Romans, and have updated its institutions as a result of these exchanges.

In sum, utopias are, at least potentially, useful and beneficial if they are realist, dynamic and open to critiques. They are useful if they deal with real problems and outline solutions that are, at least to a significant extent, within the realm of what is possible, or might become possible under relatively realistic conditions (e.g. about certain technological developments). Utopias are also likely to lend themselves to positive usages if they are dynamic: they allow for change over time in responding to problems, rather than prescribing a fixed solution to extant problems. Finally, utopias are useful contrivances if they are open to critiques: More's book ends by commenting on the likes and dislikes of how the island of Utopia works. They are, in sum, sources of learning for imagining new ways forward for the open society (à la Popper), rather than blueprints for the superimposition of allegedly 'best' institutions. The dialogue between the two main characters of the book sways between conflicting poles on many important issues that are continuously brought to the fore, with light touch, irony and humour (in a passage of exquisite irony, the reader is made aware that in Utopia only kids play with that strange, glowing metal which is called gold; adults refrain from such childish play because they devote themselves to the important things in life – work, family, study – and not to the ludicrous activity of pursuing the acquisition of the strange yellow metal – a practice which incidentally also enabled the island of Utopia to accumulate so much gold as to be able to bribe the armies of their enemies before they attack Utopia, and hence over millennia they had almost always entirely avoided war!). And irony and humour, alongside being inherent traits of English character, are surely effective antidotes towards dystopias, which usually tend to treat themselves very seriously.

There is, however, another antidote to utopias turning into dystopias that might be suggested: it is that utopias are better when they are in the plural,

more than one, offering different perspectives to engage with the big issue of how to improve public governance and administration in worldly contexts. Plurality of utopias is better than having just one utopia. This is the argument put forward by a symposium in *Administrative Theory and Praxis* (2015, issue 37(2); see Surak, 2015), where ‘Polytopian philosophy approach’ is the chosen label for arguing in favour of plurality of utopias (see also Stanisevski, 2015): multiple narratives, open narratives, eliciting critical thinking from different angles.

Wrapping up on the story developed throughout this chapter, the masterpieces of three key authors, made centuries ago, provide three perspectives that all bear enduring significance for PA. The ‘call to realism’, thereby encompassing the gloomiest aspects about human nature and the courses of behaviour we might expect of public officials and citizens alike, made by Machiavelli over five centuries ago is still a powerful reminder to social scientists and food-for-thought nourishing the scientific and critical study of political and public life. The call to get beyond the extant circumstances and contingencies, made by the utopian thinking triggered by More’s masterpiece, still pushes scholars and policymakers alike to the continued rediscovery of the reversed perspective that consists in taking the move from the point of destination, rather than the extant circumstances, and then applying a logic of ‘backwards mapping’ to chart the route that may lead to the betterment of public governance, thus avoiding the pitfalls of getting stuck in path dependency. The image of the effects of public virtues and the good government, set forever in the frescoes of the City Hall of Siena by Lorenzetti, urges whoever is involved in the public service to rediscover the significance of virtues in public life. Together, they furnish a repertoire of conceptual tools from which to tap for the betterment of the study and practice of PA.

## NOTES

1. I am grateful to Elke Löffler and Tony Bovaird for having drawn my attention to this.
2. Drechsler’s keynote speech at the IASIA Annual Conference in Paris centred on Lorenzetti’s masterpiece and was supported only by visual slides, with no text added to the presentation: the meta-message was indeed that the community of students of public governance and administration does have to rediscover non-verbal knowledge, and non-verbal communication as part and parcel of its methods of inquiry. The text of the speech is available in the e-journal *Development in Administration* (Drechsler, 2015a).
3. We here follow mainly Drechsler’s reading of *Il Buon Governo* (Drechsler, 2001a, 2015a) and de Graaf for the interpretation of the role of theological virtues for ‘good governance’.
4. I am grateful to Wolfgang Drechsler for pointing this aspect of the painting to me.

5. Although scale may play a role here because Athens' polis was a very small community in terms of size. Notably only a portion of the population enjoyed the status of 'citizens' and most were 'slaves', even after the important constitutional reforms introduced by Solon in the 6th century BC and Cleisthenes in the early 5th century BC, which paved the way to the zenith of the 'democratic Athens' that has been admired over the millennia. Siena at the time also encompassed a small population, at least by comparison with modern jurisdictions regulating the lives of millions of people.
6. Although it should be noted most jockeys are not local (I'm grateful to Wolfgang Drechsler for having pointed out this aspect).
7. The ancient age saw a number of authors elaborating on virtue politics (most famously, Cicero's *De Republica* – 'On the Republic' – a thorough examination of how virtues sustain the prosperity of the political community).
8. However, it should also be noticed that '[R]esearch on public value is highly contested territory, and prominent scholars have critiqued Moore's early definition on its normative and empirical reasoning; its loose definition of public management; the inability to understand the regulatory activity of states or power relationships between state officials and other agents; primacy afforded to entrepreneurial managers in shaping policies; down-grading of party politics; deference to private sector management models that fail to deal with accountability and democratic politics, and more significantly how limited its utility is in Westminster models of government where there is a sharper distinction between politicians and public servants (Rhodes and Wanna, 2007). Rhodes and Wanna were then challenged for mis-representing Moore's early work on public value, for misunderstanding the complexities of policy making and for drawing on "outdated text book theories of separation of politics and administration" (Alford, 2008)' (Liddle, 2018, p. 969).
9. We refer mainly to Guglielmino and Grosser (1987) for the biographical information on Machiavelli.
10. Critiques of amorality have been addressed to both Guicciardini and Machiavelli, but these may be partly misplaced. We discuss Machiavelli's thought in greater length, here noticing about Guicciardini that he was a fervent promoter of the republic and a democratic form of government. However, through his vicissitudes and changing fortunes, he also matured a disenchanting consciousness of the corrupt nature of human beings – in Judeo-Christian terms: of the fall of mankind – and the likelihood of immoral behaviours and fallacious judgements; he then developed an acute sense of the necessity of proper constitutional arrangements to at least partly offset this state of affairs. For this reason, he opted for also putting his technical expertise to the service of non-republican forms of government, conceiving of the bettering of the functioning of the state as something worth pursuing, even when the configuration of the state did not reflect his preferred constitutional regime.
11. Although this may be a sweetened interpretation of Machiavelli: an alternative interpretation is that his thrust was simply – and ruthlessly – to discover the 'laws of power' to the benefit of the Prince: how the Prince can grab and hang on to power. Whether the ultimate motivation of the pursuit of power is the achievement of lofty ideals or, rather, purely and simply the enjoyment that comes with power and with entering History (in capital) is more conjectural than in Machiavelli's writing.
12. I'm indebted to Geert Bouckaert for this way of conceiving of utopias in PA.

13. One additional clarification is appropriate. Utopian thinking is *not* moral law nor foundation of morality; these are two distinct dimensions. Kantian thinking as expressed in *The Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) is *not* Utopia. The logic of the Kantian categorical imperative lies in urging the rational human being to behave as if categorical imperatives were universal laws of behaviour, and to adhere to such laws even if fully effecting such laws (that is, perfection in moral behaviour) is not attainable in this world. This logic of straining towards perfection in the individual conduct though conscious of its unreachability lies on an altogether different plane than the logic of the iconoclastic usage of utopias for purposes of critique of society and extant governance arrangements (for this reason we disagree with Garofalo and Geuras, 2015, pp. 81–6: whilst integrating moral thinking with utopian thinking may be lofty goal, placing Kantian foundation of morality – the ‘kingdom of ends’ – under the label of utopia and utopian thinking is misplaced). The misunderstanding may originate in the consideration that both categorical imperatives and utopias have in common the feature of not being realisable in full in this world, but similarities end here. Kantian ideals have a regulatory function that orients practical action towards perfection, they establish the conditions for the possibility of practical human action to be regulated by perfection, and they furnish a measure against which to gauge the distance of actual action: even if ideals do not enjoy the status of real entities as such, they are not chimeras, they are the conditions for practical human action to occur; they are the ‘ought to’ that constitutes human action as the action of a rational subject. Reason needs a measure of perfection in its own order to judge concrete behaviour and guide it. Regulatory ideals are transcendental, that is they are beyond experience because experience by itself cannot guide what ‘ought to’ be. Utopias are the outcome of an imaginative process, but they are not an ideal. And they are conceived and crafted on the basis of knowledge acquired through experience (in More’s case, 16th-century England). Moreover, categorical imperatives guide individual behaviours; utopias concern the governance of whole socio-political systems.
14. A feature that seems to anticipate Jeremy Bentham’s famous *Panopticon*.

## 8. Utopias, ideal-types, paradigms, models and ‘good practices’: repertoire of conceptual tools for public administration?

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### INTRODUCTION

We have concluded the previous chapter with More’s masterpiece which introduced the notion of utopia and utopian thinking as a way of practising teleological thinking in the study of public governance. In Aristotle’s framework of the four causes (introduced in Chapter 2 and examined for application to PA in Chapter 6), this approach entails starting the analysis from the final cause – that is, the goal or end, the reason why something is brought about – to then turn to the other causes, like the material cause (what enables a thing to be transformed from a potentiality into actuality) and the efficient cause (the forces that bring about change). A utopian approach also entails taking as incipit of the analysis the potentiality (what might be, but does not yet exist in actuality), rather than actuality (what exists here and now).

At the opposite pole we can find the notion of a *practice that works*, a practice (too often and erroneously qualified as ‘best’ in much of the grey literature and consultancy papers) which exists in actuality and is predicated to produce certain effects, at least in the given context where it is operating. ‘Best practices’ or ‘good practices’, as they are often called, exist in actuality rather than in potentiality like utopias, and the starting point is the efficient cause: the causal mechanism which brings about the effect the practice produces. Conceptually, ‘practices’ can be seen to lie at the opposite pole than utopias: practices exist in actuality (here and now), utopias exist as potentials; practices are characterised primarily by a logic of efficient cause, utopias by a logic of final cause.

We can also consider there are other conceptual tools that enjoy currency in PA that are located at intermediate points in-between utopias and practices (see Figure 8.1). These are the notions of: *model*, *ideal-type*, and *paradigm* (definitions are provided later in the chapter as the concepts are introduced and examined in turn). In this chapter, we revisit these five notions – utopias, paradigms,

ideal-types, models and practices – and their usages in PA in an integrated way. We argue that the combined use of these notions may be beneficial to the progress of PA, and we observe that over time in the PA debate attention may shift and the emphasis may be placed on one or the other of these notions to the risk of overlooking the others: we hope that revisiting in a joint way these conceptual tools for PA may enable scholars and practitioners to resort more systematically to the whole gamut, and to employ these conceptual tools in a complementary and integrated way for tackling complex public governance problems. We start from the notion of utopia and its possible usages in PA.

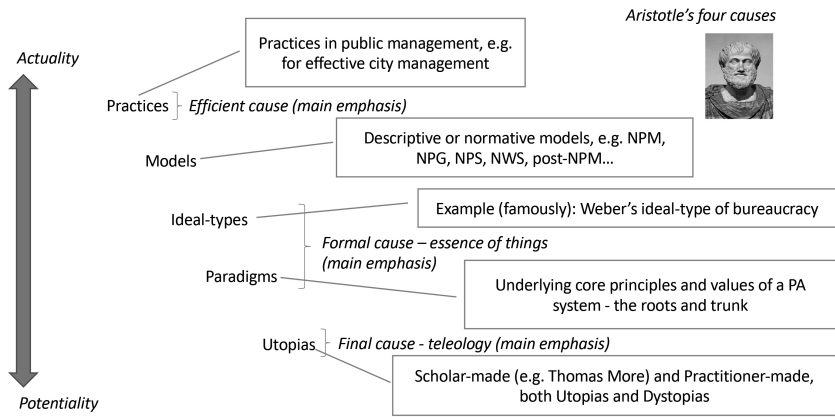


Figure 8.1 Gamut of conceptual tools and Aristotle's four causes

## UTILISING THE NOTION OF UTOPIA IN PA

Is utopian thinking utilised in contemporary PA discourse? It is hard to answer such a question because it would demand wide-scope textual analysis of public discourses, and compellingly defining what exactly could be placed under the label of 'Utopian thinking'. However, a tentative, possibly provocative, statement put forward in this book is that, with a few notable exceptions (one definitely being the contribution by Bouckaert, 2020, aimed at reviving Utopian thinking in and for PA, also drawing on Achten et al., 2016; see also Jacoby, 2005), utopian thinking is limitedly used as a systematic conceptual tool for the critique and reforming of PA, and yet, at the same time, both utopias and dystopias surface copiously in contemporary PA debates.

Some of these utopias/dystopias are worked out by practitioners. As noticed by a practitioner intervening on the debate on the usage of utopias in PA, one recurrent utopia is the 'smart', small (mid-sized) city, socially inclusive, highly innovative and well-administered (Lucas, 2015). Interestingly, if we look at



a network of (self-asserted) 'forward-looking' cities which was promoted between the end of the 1990s and the debut of the 2000s by the Bertelsmann Foundation (a German-based foundation active in supporting applied research in the field of public governance and management) and called 'The Cities of Tomorrow',<sup>1</sup> it is worth noticing almost all of them were medium-sized cities. Since the 2010s, the main rhetoric revolves around the appealing label of 'smart cities'. It may be worth considering whether these notions of 'the cities of tomorrow' and the 'smart cities' are all utopias (dystopias?) floating around in disguised forms.

If the 'mid-sized smart city' might be an example of a *practitioner*-made utopia, two more categories may be envisaged:<sup>2</sup> *scholar*-made utopias (and dystopias); and *institutions*-made utopias (dystopias). In both cases, unfortunately, dystopias may be more abundant than utopias. Starting from scholarly-made utopias/dystopias, one may think of 'governance without government': this might obviously be just a catchy slogan mainly coined to convey a strong message, but to the extent that government is imagined to be useless to good governance, it may swiftly translate into a utopia or, for those who think public administrative apparatuses and governmental action are necessary to good governance, in a dystopia. Certain depictions of the citizens as 'honest plus smart plus engaged', the citizen 'maker of good governance' also appear to display rather more the trait of blueprint utopia easily morphing into dystopia than providing an appropriate characterisation of real citizens (as perhaps shown by the rise of populism in the 2010s in the Western world and beyond). It may be noticed that these utopian/dystopian representations are far from the carefully crafted governance arrangements adopted by More's Island of Utopia to regulate the relationship between government and citizens.

Other examples of scholarly-made utopias are more thoroughly crafted and also more explicit in adopting utopian thinking as a conceptual tool. Garofalo and Geuras (2015) identify a number of utopias including 'a covenant between practitioners and scholars', which 'encompasses the hopes and concerns of public administration scholars and practitioners about their lack of connection with one another ... in which they collaborate to frame and resolve management and organizational problems' (Garofalo and Geuras, 2015, p. 86, drawing on Posner, 2009). This utopia is iconoclastic in its thrust to enable the critique of current ways of mutual engagement between practitioners and academics conceived as a means to identifying ways forward to better bridge PA scholars and practitioners.

There are, fortunately, a number of examples of scholarly-made utopias that point to constructive usages of utopian thinking as conceptual tool for critical analysis and forward-looking thinking. These include at least some of the contributions to envisioning the future of PA that came out of the Minnowbrook conferences (for the first Minnowbrook, see Marini, 1971; for

the third Minnowbrook held in 2008, see O'Leary et al. 2010, amongst others), and ambitious research programmes like the 'European Perspectives on Public Administration' (EPPA): the Humboldt Foundation-sponsored project of the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA) led by Geert Bouckaert and Werner Jann (Bouckaert and Jann, 2020), which also developed probably one of the best wrought out and most self-conscious usages of the notion of utopia and utopian thinking in and for PA (Bouckaert, 2020).<sup>3</sup>

Turning to institution-made utopias, one obvious, and major, example are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. One might also wonder whether such ambitious charts of principles and goals are useful or useless utopias. The first set of the United Nations 'Millennium Development Goals' that were to be achieved by 2015 looked in a number of respects like a blueprint, which did not always allow for learning and adaptability, which did not cope with inherent contradictions or trade-offs, and which were hardly usable to consider critically the local circumstances as the point of departure for improvement and development. So, were those goals a useless utopia? Possibly but not necessarily. The 2015 version of the goals, the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals to be attained by 2030, may represent a different story. In fact, a more optimistic view sees them as one of the most ambitious collective undertakings of humankind ever attempted (to achieve a better world), underpinned by multilateralism and by a vision of humanity taking its destiny in its hands collectively (very much in line with Kant's framing of multilateralism as a condition for the attainment of conditions of peace in the world, as in Kant, 1795/2013, 'On Perpetual Peace'); and significantly, Sustainable Development Goals have been approved by all UN Member States. Seen in this way, the Sustainable Development Goals can be interpreted as positive utopias: a way of both challenging the current state of affairs in the world and of envisioning a world which is other from the extant one, a way of thinking teleologically starting from the ultimate goals to attain rather than the extant circumstances. In this sense, they might be interpreted as positive utopias, and not just as a form of 'Management by Objectives' (dys) toplan list. As part of these utopias, Sustainable Development Goal number 16 concerning the development of strong and resilient public institutions enabling peace and justice might be interpreted as a collectively endorsed utopia inspiring PA scholars and practitioners alike to envisage paths for the betterment of PA.

There is a link, but also a clear distinction, between foresight and utopian thinking. Strategic and policy foresight and other forward-looking exercises developed by public institutions (as may be the case with think tanks or policy units, at times outside government but influential over it, at times embedded into the very administration of the core government, as it happens in some countries, or the supranational polity of the European Union: for example the

European Political Strategy Centre of the European Commission, or the policy lab of the Joint Research Centre, again of the European Commission, which produces foresight studies and scenarios on the future of government and of citizen-government relations) are ultimately driven by an attempt at forecasting, at anticipating futures with diverse grades of likelihood and resemblance to the present. Utopian thinking deliberately breaks all the bridges with the extant state of affairs to enable *re*-thinking, a thinking afresh of how government and society could be organised.

From the perspective of the notion of utopia, we can revisit three other most famous concepts used in the field of PA as well as across the social and natural sciences: these are the notions of ideal-type, paradigm, and models – these notions have a huge history and range of usages: consistently with the purposes of the book, we confine this revisiting of the three notions to the application to the field of PA.

## REVISITING THE NOTIONS OF IDEAL-TYPE, PARADIGM, AND MODEL

Given the significance for the PA debate, it may be worth distinguishing utopias from the notion of 'ideal-type', famously associated with the work of Max Weber. Interestingly, Weber mentions that ideal-types are in a sense a utopia:

It [the ideal type] is not a *description* of reality but it aims to give unambiguous means of expression to such a description ... An ideal-type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified *analytical* construct (*Gedankenbild*). In its conceptual purity, this mental construct (*Gedankenbild*) cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is a *utopia*. (Weber, 1949, p. 90, emphasis added)

It should be noticed that here 'ideal' does not mean 'normative/prescriptive' (that is, something that ought to be achieved), it simply means that it is mental, and in its conceptual purity, this mental construct cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is in this specific sense that Weber referred to it as *utopia*.

Ideal-types are culturally meaningful, value-laden representations of social phenomena, but yet, different to the utopias as delineated in the previous section of this chapter, ideal-types are not whole worlds 'other' from this world; rather, they keep their umbilical cord with the social phenomena, of which they represent a unified analytical construct. The ideal-type is not a description of reality but it aims to give unambiguous means of expression

to such a description: its usefulness lies in that ideal-types can be used as yardsticks – investigators can arrive at interpretative understanding of a concrete empirical observation by comparing its differences with the initially constructed yardstick. Weber famously theorised the ideal-type of ‘bureaucracy under legal domination’ (that is, where legitimacy lies in the supremacy of the law, rather than in charisma or tradition).

The process of ideal-typing is a matter of imagining and contrasting the worked out analytical construct with experience: ‘It is a matter here of constructing relationships which our imagination accepts as plausibly motivated and hence as “objectively possible” and which appear as *adequate* from the nomological standpoint’ (Weber, 1949, p. 92, emphasis added). It has to do with generic patterns (behaviour and structure) of culturally significant features (that are necessary for understanding causal relationships, and are significant for the social scientist or a larger social-cultural group), which are given a unique meaning (these are indicated as the genetic features that make the ideal-type unique: an ideal-type is a unique ‘creature’ in the realm of the ideal). In this sense, Ideal-typing may be claimed to be an approach to theory building. The ideal-type is based on logical coherence, at logical and value (axiological) level, which entails that the set of values upheld by the social scientist must be made explicit to the reader.<sup>4</sup>

As aptly summed up by Stout (2010), in order to engineer the ideal-type method, first a specific social phenomenon of interest must be identified. Second, a culturally significant organising characteristic must be chosen and specified as the frame of reference. Third, the generic elements essential for identifying causal relationships must be identified; the set should be culturally significant, as comprehensive as possible, and the manner in which these elements are thought to be related must be explicated in a logical manner. Fourth, mutually exclusive meanings of each element must be interpreted so that the genetic character of the ideal-type is clear. These meanings must also be logical and coherent in their relationships with one another and plausible in comparison to experience (Stout, 2013).

The art of working out new ideal-types might be deemed to be a lost art rather than something into which contemporary PA scholars are engaging, but Stout and Love systematically resort to the use of ideal-typing to work out their ideal-type of ‘integrative governance’ as a synthesis of four primary governance approaches (Stout and Love, 2019, pp. 46–9 in particular). Their work is thus an example both of ideal-typing as a practised and contemporary art in public governance, and of a book-manifesto which makes explicit the philosophical foundations of the proposed argument, indeed in which philosophical knowledge underpins and informs the argument: an example of philosophy of public administration, in the framework worked out in Chapter 1 (incidentally it may be noticed my ontology is different from the authors’, yet this consid-

eration does not detract anything from my appreciation for writing one of the rare books in recent times proposing a philosophy of public administration).

Both ideal-types and utopias may be used for framing empirics and gaining insights, although ideal-types are more geared to theory building while utopias are also meant to arouse passions and social action for change towards a different state of affairs than the extant one; utopias are a radical way of utilising teleological thinking. Both are rather context-insensitive, but ideal-types are amenable to mental experimentation of what would happen when placed in context 'A' or context 'B', while utopias set their own context, and replace the real ones. Utopias totally reverse the logic of path dependency; they embody the converse of historical institutionalism.

Both utopias and ideal-types are to be distinguished from the notions of 'model' and of 'paradigm'. A model can be defined as a selective reduction of reality in order to highlight key relations and connections for purposes of understanding and highlighting key causal relations as well as for guiding action. Models are ubiquitous in the study of PA; at times they aim at providing description, explanation and interpretation of administrative phenomena; other times they take up a normative and prescriptive thrust and aim at providing guidance for change and reform of public administration and management. The 'New Public Management' (Hood, 1991), the 'New Public Service' (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2001/2015), the 'New Public Governance' (Osborne, 2006, 2010), the 'Digital Era Governance' (Dunleavy et al., 2006), the Neo-Weberian State (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000/2011), the 'stewardship model' patterned on a revisited conception of the traditional British public administration (Rhodes, 2016), and so on, may be labelled as models (more or less internally consistent), with differential emphases and either leaning towards the descriptive and explanatory (descriptive-analytical models), or towards the prescriptive and normative (prescriptive models). Modelling, when it takes a normative thrust, is for action: it is a form of bracketing wider aspects of reality to focus action on those aspects that are causally more directly linked to the expected outcomes to be attained, purposefully forgetting that reality is more complex than what the model depicts (the main problem here lies in the fact that the forgotten part of reality sooner or later strikes back). When models also take up a normative dimension, they can be likened functionally to ideal-types and utopias in that they can be used as yardsticks for the critical analysis of the present situation in view of the pursuit of a travel – a reform trajectory – towards a more desirable destination (the obvious problem applies – desirable for whom? – which brings us back to the issue of the legitimacy of a governance system discussed in Chapter 5).

The notion of paradigm is pitched at a different level: a paradigm can be defined as a coherent pattern of core ideas and premises (assumptions or hypotheses) that governs scientific inquiry in the discipline at a given time:

these are scientific paradigms (Kuhn, 1962; Riccucci, 2010). The notion of paradigm may also take a normative and prescriptive thrust, and thence in PA paradigms can be defined as sets of core tenets about how to organise the public sector. Drechsler has called attention to the significance of three main paradigms in PA, from a historical viewpoint: the Western PA paradigm (itself highly composite, and as a very minimum it should be distinguished Anglo-American PA from continental European ‘Weberian’ PA), the Confucian PA paradigm, and the Islamic PA paradigm. Over more recent centuries the (highly composite and varied) Western paradigm of PA has spread widely across the world, and in many respects it has been either coercively forced upon far-flung countries (‘far’ as seen from Western Europe, of course), or more or less willingly adopted by a number of countries because of its alleged qualities and attributes (one can think here of the Meiji revolution/restoration in 19th-century Japan, or post-WWII processes of Westernisation of institutions and administration in South Korea). However, at least from a historical perspective, it is possible to observe that in the history of PA there have been at least two paradigms distinct and possibly ‘alternative’ to the Western one: the Confucian PA paradigm and the Islamic PA paradigm (the reader can find more on paradigms in PA and their usage in the postscript by Wolfgang Drechsler at the end of this book).

The border between ‘model’ and ‘paradigm’ may be not so easy to draw in practice. Some authors use the notions of paradigm to work out what they refer to as the contemporary ‘public governance paradigms’ (Andersen et al., 2020) to outline the features of doctrines about the reform of PA that we have in this book placed under the label of models (namely: New Public Management, Neo-Weberian State, Digital Era Governance, Public Value Management, and New Public Governance). Interestingly, they refer to public governance paradigms as ‘quasi-paradigms’: they retain the property of having a core of propositions (like a paradigm) and then a set of declensions of these core propositions can be made to flesh out the implications drawn from the core tenets. They are defined as ‘relatively coherent and comprehensive norms and ideas about how to govern, organize and lead the public administration’ and operationalised along five dimensions, defined as follows (Andersen et al., 2020): the extent of centralised control (the degree of recommended centralised control in the vertical chain of command); the emphasis placed on horizontal coordination (the degree of recommended horizontal interagency coordination and collaboration); the extent of use of value articulation (the degree to which public governance should be based on the articulation of public values); the extent to which it is resorted to the use of incentives (the degree to which public governance should be based on conditional positive and negative incentives); and the extent to which societal involvement is resorted to (the degree to which

private for-profit or non-profit actors, including citizens, should be involved in public governance). According to the authors, these quasi-paradigms

[are not] paradigms in the Kuhnian sense of the term. However, we agree with Dunleavy and Margetts (2013) that public governance paradigms behave like ordinary paradigms in two important respects. First, they tend to have two levels, with an overall macro-level theory based on a few propositions that pull together and give direction to a wider range of supplementary concepts, detailed recommendations and preferred methods. Second, they develop in response to the problems of their predecessor, enter a period of relatively successful 'normal governance' and are problematized by the accumulation of problems to which they cannot provide an appropriate response. These resemblances to Kuhnian-type scientific paradigms serve to justify the notion of public governance paradigms. (Andersen et al., 2020, n.p.)

The introduction of the notion of 'quasi-paradigm' points to the consideration that the border between what constitutes a paradigm, on one hand, and what constitutes a model, on the other hand, may be porous, and intermediate concepts may be usefully wrought out and employed.

## PRACTICES: GOOD AND BEST

Utopias, ideal-types, paradigms and models have crucial significance for the field of PA. However, words like utopias, ideal-types, paradigms and models have been looked at with suspicion in more recent times, partly as a sensible reaction to the failures of utopian-inspired social designs as well as (on a smaller scale) the apparent lack in fulfilling the expectations raised by models of PA reform like the New Public Management and a spate of others which followed suit. It is also partly as a reaction to reform models having been deemed to have fallen short of the expectations they raised that international organisations like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which was very active in spreading 'global models of public management reform' during the 1990s, seem to have more recently orientated themselves towards the opposite approach, namely: the search for 'practices that work', which are often in practitioners' discourse called 'best practices'.

It seems that nowadays the practices approach – the extrapolation-based approach – is the prevailing one, notably in practitioners' discourse; its core tenet can be summarised as: 'rather than looking for new models (paradigms, ideal-types, utopias), we must search for practices that work and extrapolate them for replication (properly adapted) elsewhere'. There is much more than meets the eye, however, and the logic of best practices may be both seductive and highly misleading: first, truly 'best' practices are (very) rare and, second,

the process of extrapolation and transfer of a practice (better: of the mechanisms that, incorporated into the practice, enable it to achieve certain results in the extant situation) to a target domain in order to replicate the results elsewhere is a major, complex process that may also lead to unexpected consequences (Bardach, 1994 and 1998, Chapter 2; Barzelay, 2007; Bretschneider et al., 2005; Ferlie and Ongaro, 2015, Chapter 8). It is for these reasons that many academics have claimed it better to conceive of the search for ‘good’ or ‘smart’ practices, rather than allegedly ‘best’ ones, that is, the search for practices that work well enough and can be replicated elsewhere, provided context and contextual influences are appropriately taken into account (Behn, 1991; Bardach, 1998; Barzelay, 2007; Ferlie and Ongaro, 2015).

The practices approach is appealing to practitioners, notably for its apparent sensibleness and ‘pragmatism’. However, even when taking into account the warning against the seductions of naïve interpretations of the logic of ‘best’ practices, the practice approach may soon reach its limits. This occurs for a deeper reason: a practice-driven focus is unlikely to be equipped with the intellectual resources for escaping the traps of path-dependency. The practice agenda is inherently likely to be drawn into the scouting of the nearby terrain, and lose sight of the possible alternative views about PA and how the public sector could – and should – be organised. An approach self-confined to detecting practices that work and not complemented by the other approaches is unable to provide breakthrough solutions, or to furnish guidance on how to organise public governance that can anticipate major economic, societal or environmental changes (Pollitt, 2016b).

## TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED APPROACH: UTOPIAS, IDEAL-TYPES, PARADIGMS, MODELS, AND PRACTICES AS REPERTOIRE OF CONCEPTUAL TOOLS FOR THE BETTERMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The history of public governance and public administration has been made by the combined usage of different, complementary approaches; in this sense, nowadays partly neglected approaches like the usage of models, paradigms, ideal-types and utopias bear continued significance for the field of PA, as does the approach of practices extrapolation which seems to enjoy wide currency at the time the second edition of this book is being completed.

We might indeed see the whole gamut of these approaches as amenable to being ordered in function of the emphasis on either of the four causes first outlined by Aristotle (see Chapters 2 and 6). Those who ascribe to the Aristotelian approach stress that it is the *joint* application of the four causes to enable a full understanding of the phenomenon investigated. However, different agendas of



research and epistemic approaches may place a different emphasis on either of the causes. We argue that the logic of the extrapolation of practices is primarily grounded in an emphasis on the efficient (and the material) cause. Conversely, utopias and to a certain extent ideal-types, paradigms and models embody teleological reasoning and take the final cause as the starting point of the inquiry. Finally, all these approaches are concerned with the formal cause (if you subscribe to the Aristotelian approach); however, we would put forward the tentative claim whereby the 'teleological' approaches – utopias and to a certain extent paradigm and ideal-types – strive to more directly define the 'nature' of the object they conceive and work out, that is, they are more interested with the formal cause (the essence or nature of the entity), whilst practice-based approaches are more focused on the apparent properties of the entity with an inherent orientation to disregard issues of 'essence' and 'form' (formal cause) as deemed to be ultimately of limited 'pertinence' and 'usefulness'.

We can hence now return to Figure 8.1, where we present utopias, paradigms, ideal-types, models, and practices as a range of conceptual tools which may also be seen in a combined way as a function of, first, the extent to which they take the move from actuality (what exists here and now) or potentiality (what may be brought to exist, but does not exist in actuality: it is not *entelechy*, in Aristotle's terminology, see Chapter 2); and, second, from the relative emphasis on either of the four causes that is placed when utilising these notions. Utopian approaches clearly take the move from the final cause, to then turn to tackling the issue of 'how to get there', that is, the enablers (material cause) and the forces (efficient cause) that may lead the system towards the end-goal (to the extent it is desirable – not dystopian – and taking into account that utopias perform more of an iconoclastic function as critique of the present state of affairs to identify ways forward than as a blueprint).

Approaches centred on learning from practices and extrapolating practices from one context for adaptation to another one take the move from the efficient cause (what is the mechanism that brings about the effect observed in the practice) and the material cause (what provides the conditions and enables something to happen).

The formal cause – what is the nature or essence of the object of investigation – is the starting point in modelling, ideal-typing and conceiving of paradigms, with an emphasis on 'what brings about certain effects' in modelling (efficient and material causes), and at least implicitly an emphasis on what the ultimate goal is (final cause) in ideal-types and paradigms.

## NOTES

1. The network was later dissolved, and the Bertelsmann Foundation initiative is not to be confused with the homonymous EU programme.

2. I'm indebted to Geert Bouckaert for this way of categorising utopias/dystopias.
3. Reference is specifically made to the 'European Perspectives for Public Administration: Futures Seminar' at KULeuven, Leuven, Belgium, 20–21 October 2016, held on the occasion of the Leuven city festival '500 YEARS UTOPIA' dedicated to Thomas More's *Utopia* published in 1516 in Leuven.
4. A lesson brilliantly taken up by the works of the Italian scholar Masini (1979), when he built up a theory of *azienda* which, although formally not inspired to ideal-typing as outlined by Weber, seems to contain many defining traits of it; in a similar vein on profiling the notion of the public sector as a system of interrelated organisations, see Borgonovi (1984).

## 9. Elements (fragments) for the philosophical foundations of a theory of public administration

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### INTRODUCTION

This book has reviewed (Western) philosophical thought in Chapters 2 and 3 and proposed a range of applications to the study and practice of PA, with an emphasis on ontological issues in Chapter 4 and on the political philosophy of PA, around the key issue of legitimacy, in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 revisited epistemological issues from a philosophical standpoint, while in Chapter 7 a number of key themes in PA have been delved into through an intellectual tour of three authors – Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas More – and their masterpieces, that elicit an enduring intellectual fascination and provide an inexhaustible source of inspiration. Chapter 8 then went on to discuss the usage of a range of conceptual tools – from ‘good enough’ practices to utopias, paradigms, ideal types and models – for PA.

As we noticed in Chapter 1, this book has taken the opposite perspective than other reviews of the field of PA interested in a philosophical approach: rather than starting from the organisation of the field of PA and then pointing to how different philosophical streams might be employed to discuss one or the other sub-areas of the field, this book has taken as starting point the history of philosophical thought and the ‘big’ authors and schools in philosophy, to then revisit how these philosophical schools of thought might be applied to shed a different light on PA debates and streams of inquiry. In this chapter, we initially revert to a more conventional approach and we start from a mapping of the field of PA along four intellectual traditions, to then discuss how broad philosophical perspectives may be employed to further our understanding of these intellectual traditions in PA. In doing so, we work out a set of tentative propositions for sketching an initial draft of a ‘theory of PA change’, a reflection – inchoate and open to contributions and integrations from different intellectual standpoints – on the ideational basis of PA, on how revisiting the intellectual foundations of PA might lead to approaches on how to change public governance. Finally, in the next chapter we will pull the threads and

discuss how to advance researching the topic of ‘philosophy for PA’, and how to integrate philosophy for PA into the teaching of PA in university programmes, at all levels from undergraduate to PhD level and executive education.

What are intellectual traditions in PA? In a number of works, Raadschelders (2005, 2008, 2011) has suggested that four intellectual traditions – defined as broad approaches under which most theories in use can be categorised – can be identified in PA. According to this classification, PA can be conceived of as practical wisdom, as practical experience, as scientific knowledge, or as an interpretivist venture. Alternative classifications and conceptualisations may be proposed: we pluck this one for its capacity to capture some important traits of PA, and because it has become quite conventional. The first question we here address is how the philosophical perspectives introduced throughout the book can contribute to these four traditions: how we can review each of these traditions from the multiple philosophical perspectives reported throughout the book. The four intellectual traditions outlined by Raadschelders as characterising PA scholarship,<sup>1</sup> at least in the Western world, are the following:

- *PA as practical wisdom*: it is the oldest approach to PA that relies on an understanding of government ‘through moral reasoning and logical arguments applicable to the widest possible range of phenomena, and through reflection, interpretation, and comparison of time and context in an interdisciplinary manner’ (Raadschelders, 2008, p. 941); we argue the role of philosophy is constitutive and integral to this intellectual tradition.
- *PA as practical experience*: it is an approach

interested in instruments and techniques to help day-to-day administration and hands-on experiential learning. It has a heritage that goes back to the late Middle Ages [the forming of the nation states in Europe, ndr] and has its contemporary representatives in Fayol (1987), Gulick and Urwick (1937), Taylor (1997), and all those scholars who develop and test theories on the basis of case studies. (Raadschelders, 2005, p. 606)

Philosophical thought is ubiquitous in this approach, also given PA in this strand is not straitjacketed into the strict boundaries of a well-defined, independent science, but quite the opposite: practical reasoning is porous to a multitude of ontological, ethical and epistemological issues, which a philosophical perspective may aid to unveil.

- *PA as scientific knowledge* is characterised by the pursuit of scientific knowledge. This approach tends to adopt a ‘narrow’ definition of science, patterned on the natural sciences, striving towards the ideal of a science of administration to become like a natural science, that is, with an identifiable and clearly demarcated set of theories, concepts and methods. Simon is its

ultimate advocate. It is closely associated to positivism and neo-positivism (see Chapters 3 and 6). Philosophy beyond the positivist/neo-positivist stream can shed light on the strengths as well as the limits of these philosophical schools and act as a powerful reminder of the at times quite narrow boundaries of this approach.

- *Relativism and the post-modernist vision of PA*: differently from the other three intellectual traditions, which are open to incorporate different philosophical perspectives and are quite lay in their basic stance, the relativist stream is more closely aligned with being a specific philosophy of administration, drawing on a specific strand of philosophical thought (post-modernism, see Chapter 3) and applying it consistently to PA. A feature of this tradition is that

its advocates emphasize that truth varies from individual to individual, that human values are contradictory, and that there is no 'right' answer (Hardy, 1999). This approach emerges in public administration in the 1990s, with Farmer (1995) and Fox and Miller (1996) as representative authors of an *affirmative postmodernism* that wishes to augment the scientific approach with attention for interpretations, values, judgment, feelings, and emotions. (Raadschelders, 2005, p. 606, emphasis in original)

The argument made by Raadschelders and colleagues (notably in a 2005 symposium in *Administrative Theory & Practice*) is that scholars in each of these traditions tend to emphasise, and at the extreme to see exclusively, some aspects or facets of PA, to the detriment of the others:

[when] scholars survey a study, Positivists will notice 'scientific' disorder (i.e., lack of unity in theories and methods); practice oriented scholars will lament the lack of usable knowledge (i.e., lack of attention for applicability); those who work in the practical wisdom approach argue that there is too little reflective understanding (e.g., attention for, e.g., history and philosophy); postmodernists point to the lack of attention for interpretation and the relativity of truth claims. Each hammers away at improving respectively these theories and methods, applicability, reflective understanding, and interpretation. But it comes at the price of losing sight of how their activity helps that other goal of scholarly pursuit: to enhance the comprehensive understanding of government. (Raadschleders, 2005, p. 623)

There are understandable reasons why this happens: the growth of 'government' across the world over the 20th century has placed demands for specialised knowledge about the functioning of government to be attained. Intra- and inter-disciplinary specialisation serves the experts – and with the growth of specialised knowledge begotten by the experts, a wider and wider range of theories with diverse underlying paradigmatic and methodological premises has mushroomed. In sum, it is more and more difficult for any individual beholder of PA phenomena to be trained in such a way as to be able to master all four the

perspectives. The educational and professional background, and the demands placed for publication in journals or books, tend to make scholarly pieces combining all four the perspectives almost impossible to write – and to get published. As a result, integration or at least connection of knowledge to arrive at a better understanding of government in the real world is seriously hindered.

However, considerations about the challenges of bridging research traditions in PA shouldn't lead to giving up such ambition. We agree with Raadschelders's (2005) core argument and advocacy of dialogue and interchange as remedial action. The starting point is the diagnosis that PA proceeds with different methods and epistemological premises, which make scholars operate in silos, and as a consequence findings are not made to contribute and cross-fertilise each other. Indeed, the overall thrust of Raadschelders (2005, p. 602) is to furnish 'metaframeworks and metalanguages on the basis of which compartmentalized knowledge about government can be linked better' and we generally side with him in evoking practical wisdom as a basis to perform the bridging function:

practical wisdom in a broader and more contemporary sense considers the merits of the four approaches for understanding and/or even explaining government. This expanded practical wisdom not only accepts but actively explores the merits of the four approaches ... In no way is this statement to be understood as a resignation to the solid advances of scientific knowledge, to the experiential learning generated through practical experience, to the historical configurations of practical wisdom in the narrow sense, or to the reasonable doubts expressed by affirmative postmodernists. Practical wisdom in the broader sense is common sense, since it emphasizes the need for discourse between advocates of the idealtypical approaches ... It is a middle-of-the-road wisdom worthy of Aristotle that embraces the qualities of each approach and seeks complementarity rather than exclusiveness. (Raadschelders, 2005, p. 621)

However, the core question and argument here is another and it is complementary to the one set forth by Raadschelders: it is that within and across these intellectual traditions, philosophy sheds light on interpreting the results of research work conducted within each stream, inspires different perspectives to researching PA in these traditions, and ultimately helps the pursuit of the advocated bridging function.

We discuss from this broad philosophical perspective these four intellectual traditions in reverse order, starting from the one which introduces the biggest challenge to the possibility of grand narratives and consistency of knowledge and understanding, namely the relativist/interpretivist strand, to then turn to PA as scientific knowledge (in some respects nowadays mainstream in PA), to finally discuss the two perspectives that put centre stage the dimensions of PA as 'art and profession' (and that seem to maintain the highest porosity

with philosophical thought): PA as practical knowledge, and PA as practical wisdom.

## REVISITING THE INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS IN PA

We have delved at length into the *relativist and post-modernist vision of PA* in Chapter 6. We have emphasised the plural approaches detectable within this tradition, and the manifold contributions it has made, thanks to the works of such authors as Miller and Fox (2007), Farmer, (1995, 2005, 2010), Abel and Sementelli (2004), amongst others (see also Bogason, 2001).

In the relativist tradition a strong interpretivist approach is taken, integrative ideals are discarded as unattainable, and inter-subjective agreement on what constitutes ‘good governance’ is deemed to be the maximum achievable, out of a conception whereby fragmentary knowledge is the broad picture: ‘understanding is regarded as a potentially unlimited range of “interpretations” about some aspect of “reality” through intuition, selective judgement, feelings, imagination, creativity and play and through uncovering and/or deconstructing diversity of values, cultures, traditions, and styles of life in a nondisciplinary manner’ (Raadschelders, 2008, p. 941).

These works are important contributions, nicely crafted, a continuous reminder of the limits of both received wisdom and supposedly ‘scientific’ claims, and a call to never relinquish a critical stance. However, research in this tradition begs the fundamental question: is fragmented knowledge the only kind of knowledge that is attainable in PA? Is groundlessness and indeterminacy all we are left with? There is an important strand in philosophical thought – named in different ways, and yet often referred to as post-modernism (perhaps better qualified as post-industrialism, see the works of Lyotard, e.g. 1984) which has brought about the argument about the incredulity of the contemporary man (woman) towards meta-narratives (a strand that includes such authors as Lyotard (e.g. 1984), Derrida, Baudrillard (1975, 1983), Foucault (e.g. 1980, 1982), amongst others – see Chapter 3). The big narratives that have developed over the human history about God, the world and human nature are seen with suspicion and ultimately incredulity by the ‘post-modern’ man (woman). Indeed, fragmentation is extolled as the breeding ground of novel and ingenious thinking, almost a primordial soup for creativity. When applied to the field of public governance and administration, this condition of the post-modern man becomes the incubator of opportunities for exploring possibilities of transforming PA in novel and unexpected ways:

I expect that postmodern thought can be reconstructed into a force that transforms traditional institutional practices into pragmatic and culturally based alternatives by reasserting the critical roles of individuals in organizations, the inclusive aspect of

discourse analysis, the importance of plurality and difference, and the significance of citizen participation in the process of making public institutions more democratic. (Jun, 2006, pp. 54–5; see also Jun, 1994)

The question, of course, is whether these worthwhile goals can only be achieved by preliminarily tearing down the whole edifice of Western philosophy because this – the critique goes – necessarily leads to an instrumental rationality emphasising technique/technical knowledge over human flourishing. But is it so? Is instrumental rationality emphasising technical knowledge over human flourishing the (only and necessary) outcome of Western thought? This line of argumentation resembles in many respects Heidegger's critique of Western philosophical thought. However, the German philosopher did not end up with post-modern thinking (although later post-modern thinkers traced back links of post-modernism to Heidegger's thought); instead he advocated a return to the pre-Socratics in order to let Being reveal itself beyond the subject's will of power which, he argued, is implicit in the 'vision of ideas' of Plato: ultimately, the revealing of Being itself is the altogether different outcome of Heidegger's critique of instrumental rationality, at sidereal distance from the post-modernist inter-subjective agreement. More generally, is the outcome of Western philosophical thought the assertion of the primacy of instrumental rationality, or is this but *one* of the outcomes of Western philosophy, and there is much more to it, which can nourish human flourishing, if only the contribution of Western philosophy is appropriately gauged and tapped (from Plato to the Renaissance, from Augustine to Bergson)? In sum, the relativist and post-modernist vision of PA starts from a quite narrow set of assumptions, and adopts one and only one philosophical stance, which represents only a small part of Western philosophical thought. This focus on one hand provides consistency to this vision of PA, but on the other hand it may be a limiting factor.

Prominent scholars in public administration (see, for example, Stillman, 1991/1999, drawing also on the foundational work of Dwight Waldo) have argued for the possibility to achieve an *understanding* of change and continuity in the theory and practice of PA: this suggests that the ambition towards big narratives – ones that go beyond the relativist and post-modernist vision – is present in the scholarly community of the public administrationists, as well as in the practice community of the public administrators. Probably the 'biggest' narratives can be found in the PA as practical wisdom approach. Before delving into that tradition as well as the PA as the practical experience tradition, we first turn to what seems to be more and more the 'standard' in social sciences: the PA as scientific knowledge approach.

*PA as scientific knowledge* is an approach that tends to adopt a 'narrow' definition of science, patterned on the natural sciences as they emerged in the 16th and 17th century in Europe. The ideal to which this approach aspires is



that of a 'science of administration' that may become like a natural science, characterised by identifiable and clearly demarcated sets of theories, concepts, and methods and conscious that although

laws or lawlike generalizations cannot be found in every sphere of social life, science represents at the very least a pursuit of knowledge by means of a common method (Gill & Meier, 2000). Scientists of administration are focused on developing a formal object or focus of the study, and they concentrate on developing a coherent and consistent epistemological and methodological approach ... Scientific knowledge is concerned with the development of knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself. This implies that determining whether academic knowledge is relevant to practice is a matter outside the realm of the scientist and his/her academic specialization (Simon, 1966, p. 35). (Raadschelders, 2005, pp. 610–11)

There is in this approach a strong influence of positivism via, especially, neo-positivism and the seminal work of Herbert Simon (see Chapters 3 and 6).

A simple browsing of the main journals in the field may suggest this approach is in certain respects 'mainstreaming' in the field of PA: its clout seems to have enlarged over the past twenty years or so, possibly also because of recruitment criteria in universities which, patterned on disciplines like economics, have widely spilled over into the PA scholarship. It certainly does have a core group of fierce advocates within the field of PA who, at least implicitly, are quite confrontational in their stance:

Some believe that this approach to knowledge is superior to any other approach. A small but strong group of scholars in public administration hold that the study of public administration has not tried hard enough to develop a scientific approach (e.g., Dubnick, 1999) ... Positivists regard scholars working according to a different approach and/or with an objective that goes beyond science (such as, e.g., application or understanding) as pseudo scientists. That is, positivists hold to a narrower, natural science ideal for public administration ... Those who identify with the scientific approach are most insistent upon the notion of a hierarchy of knowledge where theoretical physics represents the pinnacle and 'opinion' the bottom. Positivists regard the social sciences as being close to the bottom. (Raadschelders, 2005, p. 612)

This approach has multiple merits. Scholars working in this approach have generated valuable insights and made it possible to work out theories or models that have contributed to the advancement of the field of PA (one can think of the development of the theory of 'Public Service Motivation'), whichever way one measures 'progress' in science.<sup>2</sup> Positivism forced scholars in the field to raise the bar in rigour of conceptualisation and research design, and to search for proof of the assertions made that demand the most solid procedures in the description of the phenomenon of interest. It has been, and is, in sum, a powerful force pushing towards higher standard of inquiry in the field.

The limits of positivism and neo-positivism as brought into the field of PA are probably the same of this philosophical school at large, widely debated (see Chapter 3). First, in positivism there is a strong assertion that, ultimately, the methods of the natural sciences are the model for the social sciences as well. A foundational question for this approach, therefore, is how far the methods of the natural sciences travel easily into the realms of the social sciences: the extent to which they do may indeed demarcate a limit to the efficacy of natural sciences-derived methods (see for a crucial counter-argument the demarcation between the natural sciences and the sciences of the spirit delineated by Dilthey, Chapter 3).

Second, the very progresses in physics – the pinnacle of knowledge and ‘science’ according to this approach – seems to have shattered a number of the assumptions about the objectivity of the ‘facts’ upon which 19th-century positivism heavily relied (a review of these critiques with an eye on PA is reported in Drechsler, 2011 and 2019). Albeit for different reasons, both the theory of relativity at the macro-level of the cosmic scale and the particle physics at the micro-level have granted the subject, the beholder of the phenomenon under investigation, an influence on the very process and outcome of generation of scientific knowledge.<sup>3</sup> The subject determines what can be observed and how it is observed. A critic of the PA as scientific knowledge school might well claim that if this assertion holds in physics, much more so is the case in the social sciences and in an applied field like PA, which deals not with stars and particles but with the man-made world of public institutions and processes.

Third, in the early Positivist thinkers, induction (as developed especially by John Stuart Mill) was upheld as the form that knowing takes. This claim was to be seen in the context of the harsh polemic against Aristotelian syllogism and its inherently deductive structure. As more widely reported in Chapter 3, Popper developed a harsh critique of induction in knowledge. For Popper, knowledge instead takes the form of the testing of a theory, and theories may originate from anywhere (not least, metaphysical assumptions). This may lead to a third limit of positivism, at least in its early formulations: an exclusive reliance on induction as the form of knowledge. As noticed in Chapter 3, the debate is far from being over, and it may well be said that contemporary research work in Neo-Positivist strands takes on board methodological pluralism on this crucial point, accompanied by more and more sophisticated techniques for both theory generation from data and theory testing against empirical evidence.

Conventionalism has brought about a fourth major challenge to positivism: the ‘theories built on facts’ statue of Positivist flavour are drained off the pedestal by the methodological critiques of the authors in this movement. For Mach, theories do not have, and do not need to have, an intrinsic validity in terms of detecting the causes: they are just functional relations capable of

predicting certain phenomena; they are adequate conventions (see more widely in Chapter 3 the section on conventionalism and Popper). Poincaré highlighted how more theories, contradictory amongst themselves, may co-exist in explaining different phenomena, or even in explaining different aspects or properties of the same phenomenon. However, this may no longer be a major limit for research in this tradition: it may well be said that these critiques have now been mainstreamed in the natural as well as the social sciences and these alongside other notions of philosophy of the science worked out by conventionalism have become widely accepted by scholars carrying out their research work in the field of PA specifically. Indeed, conventionalism may be said to have placed *relevance* above rigour in the natural sciences, or at least to have stricken a different balance which puts them *on par*: and if this is significant for the natural sciences, more so for the social sciences and even more so for the field of PA (Drechsler, 2019). These and other developments have nowadays entered the toolkit of social scientists at large, and PA scholars specifically, and have enriched the repertoire and epistemological pluralism of the ‘PA as scientific knowledge’ approach.

A fifth challenge to this school has been brought about by those philosophical perspectives emphasising the ultimately fallacious conception of the very notion of ‘time’ employed in research work (see the philosophies of Heidegger and Bergson, Chapter 3), a critique which has been picked up by eminent sociologists (e.g. Abbott, 1992a, 1992b). From this philosophical perspective, the very initial assumption, apparently self-evident, usually formulated as ‘at  $t = 0$ ’, may be flawed.

In concluding on this tradition of research and inquiry, it should be noticed that other approaches to PA diverse from neo-positivism, more or less explicitly evade the relatively strict boundaries defining what is ‘scientific’ by adopting an expanded definition of science. It is a definition closer to the notion conveyed by the German term *Wissenschaft*, which refers to a wider ‘branch of knowledge’, including ‘science’ in its contemporary and more restricted meaning together with various other intellectual traditions (Raadschelders, 2008, p. 925). Science as *Wissenschaft* is an approach that encompasses a systematic consideration for values and meanings in the study of social phenomena (Gadamer, 1960/1975; Weber, 1978/1922, 1949). It is this notion that helps understand both the conception of PA as practical experience and the vision of PA as practical wisdom.

In relation to *PA as practical experience*, the roots of this approach can be traced back to the first writings on administrative practices and administrative arrangements, in ancient Greece with the works of Plato and Aristotle (see Chapter 2).<sup>4</sup> In Europe, it is around the 12th/13th century, with centralisation processes starting to unfold in what will later become the European nation states, that administrative arrangements become the subject of some attention

(see Brannon, 2006, for the case of England). Closer to our time, in a more systematic way this approach developed originally in the German principalities and then the unified state of Germany and in France, and the practical knowledge accumulated in the process of building these two states then became extolled as exemplar for the US administrative state (famously in Woodrow Wilson's seminal article, 1887), for Japan (administrative arrangements having been part and parcel of the 'Meiji restoration' which aimed at importing Western technologies and practices to 'modernise' the Japanese society, economy and the state) and later on almost anywhere else where the building of substantive amounts of administrative capacity became a political priority. These developments are known in France as the *sciences administratives* (administrative sciences)<sup>5</sup> and in Germany under the label of *Cameralism* (a key author in the German cameralist tradition is J.H.G. von Justi). However, an important strand of historiography tracks the early development of the science and theory of PA in Germany back to the thought of Christian Wolff in the 18th century (Drechsler, 2001b; see also Jann, 2003) and to the developments in the 19th century Hegelian tradition of the notion of *Staatswissenschaften*, in the strand of thought represented by Lorenz von Stein, a stream of thought drawing from Hegel to provide a philosophy of PA.<sup>6</sup>

The continuation of this approach in the 20th century can be found in training programmes offered to practitioners by training agencies, universities, research institutions and 'national schools of public administration' – organisations generally endowed with strong local connections that have as a core area of their business to develop practical tools and to transmit applied knowledge bespoke to the needs of public officials. In the second half of the 20th century, notable national schools of administration, like the well-known *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* in France, became institutional venues for the generation and transmission of practical knowledge to public officials, a task nowadays also often accomplished by schools of public policy (like the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in the US) and, since the end of the 20th century, schools of public management (like the SDA Bocconi School of Management in Italy). It is worth noticing that in this intellectual tradition of PA, practitioners can exercise influence over the academic work and, to some extent, affect academic research agendas.

In this approach to PA there is an emphasis on providing practitioners with the appropriate tools for administering and managing. Embodying applied knowledge into utilisable tools is a distinctive focus of this school – a bit like the way engineers incorporate their multiple bodies of knowledge into a gizmo, a functioning machine that serves practical purposes. As method, case studies are considered to be a key instrument for generating and transmitting this 'practical' knowledge, linking theoretical knowledge and circumstantiated decision-making. Also core in this perspective is advancing the 'best practices

in public management' agenda: detecting 'practices that work', understanding the socio-technical mechanisms making them produce desirable outcomes, extrapolating those mechanism for replication elsewhere is a central thrust of PA as practical knowledge (some of the most sophisticated critical works in this tradition emphasise the opportuneness of abandoning the misleading term of 'best' to qualify such practices – which might more appropriately be referred to as 'good enough' practices, as we have widely discussed in Chapter 8 – and rather focus the problematics of how to extrapolate the mechanisms that make a practice produce certain effects under given context conditions in order to be able to replicate them elsewhere; see Bardach, 1994, 1998, 2004; Barzelay, 2007; Barzelay and Campbell, 2003; Ferlie and Ongaro, 2015, Chapter 8; Ongaro, 2006).

Authors that may be ascribed to this intellectual tradition include Taylor (1911), Gulick and Urwick in the US and Fayol in France. Contemporary exponents include, for example, John Bryson, whose lifelong research agenda on conceptualising and developing strategic planning for public and not-for-profit organisations conceives of strategic planning as a form of practical reasoning (Bryson, 2018), and Kettl (2002) in the US, and Borgonovi et al. (2008), Drumaux and Goethals (2007), Joyce (2000, 2012), amongst many others, in Europe. In recent times, authors in this tradition qualify the field more often as public 'management' rather than 'administration'.

Although this tradition is inherently multidisciplinary, drawing from different disciplines in a partly unstructured, ad hoc way, a qualification is required in that the discipline of management tends to have a pre-eminent role and be a main source of theories, case examples and imagery in this intellectual tradition. In a sophisticated work, Barzelay (2019) qualifies it explicitly as public management and elaborates a conception of PA as public management as a design-oriented professional discipline, drawing on a synthesis between the notion of the sciences of the artificial as wrought out by Herbert Simon (1996) and the Harvard tradition of professional management, notably including case-method teaching.

Philosophical thought is ubiquitous in this approach, given the reticence of authors in this strand to draw strict boundaries to the field and to set up the home of PA as an independent science, with its own well-defined problems, concepts and methods, as in the previous approach. Quite the opposite, practical reasoning lies at the heart of this approach, which is porous to a multitude of ontological, ethical and epistemological issues that a philosophical perspective may aid to unveil. Examples of key issues in practical reasoning that are of high philosophical bearing include: the nature and extent of individual agency that is predicated of the agents or actors that are purported to 'act on the problem' and ultimately fix it (for example, improving a given public service or certain public governance arrangements for engaging citizens into

collective decision processes: what kind of freedom do actors have? What kind of 'agency' are they endowed with?); the assumptions about the immutability of human nature and its implications for the very ontological possibility of drawing lessons from past experiences (this is a central tenet of Machiavelli's thought, see Chapter 7);<sup>7</sup> the foundations of morality claims that guide practical behaviour in its normative, 'ought to' dimension (as in Kant's perspective outlined in his second critique, the critique of practical reason, see Chapters 3 and 4); and so on.

The intellectual tradition of PA as practical experience emphasises the significance of learning from cases: what a philosophical perspective may bring to scholars working within this approach is a set of conceptual tools for tackling the longstanding issue of what we can learn from history, that is, past 'cases' and 'episodes of history', for addressing contemporary pressing problems. Machiavelli's works, not just *The Prince* but also the *Discourses on Livy*, are imperishable testimonies of the deeper issues entangled in the exercise of learning from the past (Chapter 7). The Jesuit Fathers over the 17th and 18th centuries worked out a sophisticated method, named 'casuistry', to treat morally charged, value-laden problematics of individual and collective free choice under the mutable circumstances of life. Analogical reasoning, as originally worked out in Medieval Europe, is an enduring point of reference for the problem of applying knowledge acquired in one domain to another domain and set of circumstances (see Chapter 2).

Philosophical thought, which is so centre stage in the approach to PA as practical knowledge, is even more quintessential in the fourth intellectual tradition in PA, to which we now turn. *PA as practical wisdom* can be effectively defined by the three fundamental questions it tackles:

- (1) Where are we going?; (2) Is it desirable to go there?; (3) What can we do to get there? (Flyvbjerg, 2001). To answer these questions, a ruler must understand the social context in which he decides to take action; understand the nature of the actual and desired relation between ruler and ruled; and have some command over knowledge about government. (Raadschelders, 2008, p. 929)

To the extent there is a 'science' of government in this tradition, this is intended in the broad sense of a branch of knowledge as *Wissenschaft*. It is an understanding close to Weber's conception of the social science as necessarily subjective (guided by the researcher's value-driven selection of the 'relevant phenomena' out of the virtually infinite world of social phenomena) and producing a value-laden knowledge, descriptive-analytical as well as normative. It should be noticed that the notion of science as *Wissenschaft* does not at all entail that this kind of knowledge is less theory-intensive than when science is intended in a stricter sense (like in the PA as scientific knowledge perspective),

or that the process of generation of such knowledge is less demanding in terms of rigour and researcher's discipline.

It is also the oldest approach:

This approach has a heritage that goes back to Aristotle who regards *phronesis* as the necessary characteristic to any leader whether of households or of states (Aristotle, 1976, p. 209). *Phronesis* is usually translated as practical wisdom, practical common sense, and/or prudence. The latter translation is interesting for prudence is derived from a Latin word which means 'far-seeing'. (Raadschelders, 2005, p. 606)

It explicitly relies upon philosophical understanding, political theory, and historical and comparative content and embraces moral reasoning, judgement, and interpretation (Raadschelders 2008, p. 932). Tellingly, the virtue of Prudence sits in the place of Honour as core virtue for good government in the first Lorenzetti fresco (Chapter 7).

Works – masterpieces – in this approach may be found throughout the centuries (one may think of Erasmus's *The Education of a Christian Prince*).<sup>8</sup> Modern representatives include Frederickson (1980; also Frederickson and Smith, 2002), Hood (1998), Pollitt (2003, 2016a), Stillman (1991/1999), Waldo (1948/1984) and Weber (1946). Christopher Hood in *The Art of the State* (1998) uses cultural anthropology as the main theoretical source to then weave the overall argument into a broader philosophical tissue.

This tradition embodies an approach that upholds a conception of PA far away from the notion of science as patterned on the natural sciences. Quite at the opposite, it conceives of PA as a field whose problems *cannot* be unproblematically stated, concepts are *not* uncontroversially standardised, and consensus for the methodology of solution is largely absent, hence not as a science setting up home independently of philosophy, but rather PA is, in a number of respects, still a branch of philosophy. If PA is ultimately closer to philosophy than is the case for other fields of the social sciences, which have 'set up home' as almost independent sciences, then the role of philosophy is constitutive for this approach: philosophy is the reference body of knowledge in this field.

One area in which this is manifest is the philosophical debate over virtues. There is a long tradition astride between political philosophy and ethics that reflects on the governors' and the citizens' virtues required for addressing the three questions introduced as the outset: where are we going? Should we go there? And if so, how to get there? Ancient, medieval, Renaissance are epochs that bequeathed the posterity with classical texts on the role of virtues and wisdom for governing. Chapter 7 provides luminous examples, from the role of virtues in governing as outlined by Lorenzetti in his most famous painting *The Good Government* to the savvy advice on the skills required of the Prince delineated by Machiavelli. Philosophy of the soul and mind, political philoso-

phy, philosophy of cultures and the kindred discipline of cultural anthropology are amongst the other bodies of knowledge whereby philosophy constitutively contributes to give shape to PA as practical wisdom.

Each of the approaches may acquire a more or less relevant position in the academy and in the practice of PA, depending on a range of circumstances. Differences across regions of the world are notable: European handbooks (recently, Ongaro and van Thiel, 2018b) seem to show that public administration continues to have a holistic identity in Europe and its scholars are much less confrontational than their American brethren, possibly because of the more explicit acceptance of the interdisciplinarity of the field. In Eastern Asia, where the Confucian paradigm has historically had a dominant position, or the Islamic world, the traditions of PA as practical knowledge and practical wisdom have probably been historically prevailing (Drechsler, 2015b), although in more recent times contacts with the West, especially with the US scholarship, have brought to the fore the perspective of PA as scientific knowledge and, to a lesser extent, may have led to read traditional PA debates through the relativist/interpretivist tradition.

There remains a question to which Raadschelders provides an articulate answer: to whom are these approaches useful? One way of answering is that:

Practical wisdom is of pedagogical value since it provides a broad and interdisciplinary basis of knowledge upon which the contemporary role and position of government in society can be assessed. Hence, it is useful to (under) graduate students, public servants in elected and appointed positions, as well as citizens. However, it is also useful to the pure scientist, someone who should not avoid thinking about the potential social consequences of theory. Given the need for applicable skills, practical experience is attractive to policy- and decision-makers from the lower to the higher levels. Some are specialists and some are generalists, but all are managers who must match means to ends and costs to benefits. This approach is equally useful in the classroom since it brings the real world of government closer to the student through cases and examples. Scientific knowledge is of course important to researchers pursuing science: it also provides an important approach in the classroom, but perhaps less so at the undergraduate level and more so at the graduate (especially doctoral) level. The practitioner may find some use for scientific knowledge, but it is up to that practitioner, and not the scientist, to see how it can be applied to the real world (Simon, 1969, p. 34). Finally, relativist perspectives are important if only because academics and practitioners must be willing to question the value and challenge the strength of convictions and orthodoxies. (Raadschelders, 2008, p. 941)

## TOWARDS THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION OF A THEORY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION CHANGE?

In this section we make use of the notion of intellectual traditions in PA for an ambitious purpose: sketching a possible overarching frame of a philosoph-



ically informed ‘theory’ of PA change. Kattel, in a book review of the first edition of this book, notices that:

[F]rom welfare economics to public choice to cost–benefit analysis, economics has provided what can be called a substantive theory of change for public administration ... Noticeably, public administration as a scholarly field has been unable to provide its own take on the theory of change, at least none that has taken hold of practitioners’ imagination as economic theories have. Perhaps the most profound efforts stem from the late Christopher Pollitt, his two ... books (2008 and 2012) mapping space, technology and time as key drivers of change in public administration ... in these footsteps now follows [the first edition of this book, which] seeks to open a new and enormous source of ideas for discussing theories of change in public organisations. (Kattel, 2018, pp. 137–8)

What Kattel suggests is that from the systematic application of philosophical ideas to the field of PA can, at least potentially, stem a range of theories for PA change. In what sense do we speak in this context of *theory*? Consistently with the overall perspective of this work, and with our interpretation of Kattel’s suggestive exhortation to the PA scholarly community, we use the term theory as being about ‘the causes of things’ in the broadest sense and consequently we refer not just to the efficient causes, but also to the final causes, the goals or ends which provide sense to human action, the teleology of things; and we also consider the nature of the object of investigation, the essence of things and hence the meanings of things, as part of the (admittedly very broad and partly unconventional in contemporary social sciences) notion of theory we aim to employ here: in sum, we refer to Aristotle’s four causes as a comprehensive system to resort to for a theory of PA change (see Chapters 2, 6 and 8). Continuing along this line of reasoning, we might also ask in what sense are we evoking in this context a theory of and for *change*? In a sense this is tautological because theories are about explanations of the causes of certain outcomes, and hence of change or the absence thereof (stability), by definition. However, it is in a slightly more specific sense that we talk of a theory of change in this frame. In fact, while from the treasure trove of philosophical ideas virtually all kinds of theories can be derived (to then be elaborated and tested through scientific methods, to the extent they are amenable to being tested with the standard scientific methods), we would like here to emphasise that bringing philosophical thought into PA may infuse the field of PA with ideas about a radically diverse public administration than what can be observed (see e.g. the section on Thomas More’s Utopia in Chapter 7, and the discussion of utopias as conceptual tools in Chapter 8 of this book and in Bouckaert, 2020), or a diverse conception of decision-making in public organisations (i.e. one in which wisdom and ethicality are explored through the language of virtues, and this is done also by means of visual rather than just verbal media, like

in Lorenzetti's frescoes: see Chapter 7) and thence, ultimately, that different visions of PA may take shape out of these intellectual exercises, producing causally informed alternative visions of PA. In short, bringing new and diverse ideas drawn from various strands of philosophical thought may inform theories of PA change. In other words, working out a theory of PA change out of philosophical reflections on intellectual traditions in PA means bringing to the fore the ideational component of change, moving from the consideration that change may stem also from novel ideas and novel ways of seeing things, and that ideas about meanings and ends may matter as much as ideas about methods and tools.

Equipped with these conceptual tools, in this section we pursue two aims, both ambitious yet located at two different levels: first, we aim to work out some potential implications of revisiting the claims of each intellectual tradition in PA in the light of core philosophical perspectives, thus hopefully contributing to 'enlighten' certain implications of conceiving of PA and researching and practising it within one or the other of these traditions; second, based on delving into some of the philosophical underpinnings of these intellectual traditions, we aim to put forward some tentative propositions about how possible paths forward for the advancements of PA may be brought about, within each intellectual tradition as well as by bridging traditions. It is this second bit of the analysis that fits the criteria required to make the contribution of philosophical thought to PA bring about the ideational bases of a 'theory of and for PA change', in the sense alluded to by Kattel. Thence, in this sense revisiting intellectual traditions in PA from the perspective of their varied and differentiated philosophical underpinnings, and reflecting over how philosophical thought may contribute to profiling the premises and the implications of PA intellectual traditions, may contribute some 'bits and pieces' – to which we refer as 'fragments' – towards forging a 'theory of PA change (in the sense specified above), a theory that is explanatory in the sense of shedding light on both meanings and causes – where by cause we refer to all four of the causes in Aristotle's classical classification (efficient, material, formal and final cause, Chapters 2 and 6). Ultimately, along this path we hope to be able to elicit a debate which may lead to envisioning alternative possible ways of conceiving of PA, and hence lead to the sketch a theory of and for PA change. This 'theory of PA change' will then have to be fleshed out through knowledge provided by the many disciplines of PA (see Chapter 1), and it will have to be effected through the skills developed in the civil services all over the world, by performing both the 'art' and the 'profession' of PA (Chapter 1).

Consistently with the overall thrust of this book – which aims at discussing philosophy *for* PA, and not to propose this author's philosophy *of* PA – we will not go down this path to work out our very own theory of PA change, rather in this book we outline the contours of the path (pathway) that can be walked

by resorting to the treasure trove of philosophical ideas for outlining theories of PA change – elaborating specific ‘philosophies of PA’ is a task for other books, by other authors.<sup>9</sup>

Table 9.1 reports the effort to work out some potential implications of revisiting the claims of each intellectual tradition in PA in the light of core philosophical perspectives, offering a very schematic (and necessarily oversimplified) framing of some interconnections between key issues of ontology, political philosophy and epistemology and key tenets of each intellectual tradition. These are mostly to be intended as entry points to reflect critically on how traditions in PA look when seen from a thick philosophical perspective, as would be looked at from scholars professionally trained and educated in philosophy. The subsequent tentative propositions illustrate the attempt to delineate some fragments of a theory of and for PA change: they are to be intended as working propositions, to be employed and critically appropriated by whoever – scholar or practitioner – engages into the elaboration of a philosophy-driven (or at least philosophically-inspired) theory of PA change.

A couple of considerations immediately arise from the consideration of the philosophical underpinnings of the four intellectual traditions in PA as outlined in Table 9.1 – not before having recalled to the attention of the reader once more the consideration that the contents of Table 9.1 are necessarily oversimplified, and even more importantly that this whole exercise is to some extent deliberately provocative, in order to elicit a critical consideration of the intellectual perspectives that most scholars and most practitioners implicitly adopt in their thinking of PA. The first consideration is that the table clearly shows that it is not just political philosophy to be an intellectual source domain for PA, rather ontological and epistemological considerations are centre stage; this consideration reinforces the central message of this book about the significance of systematically and comprehensively applying philosophical thought across some of its main areas to the field of PA. The second consideration is that the framework of analysis we propose aims at unearthing at least some facets of how philosophical thought, articulated along the lines of the themes identified in the previous chapters from 4 to 8, may be employed for supplementing the four intellectual traditions in PA, in view of sketching some contours of a theory of PA change.

Based on these considerations, what follows is an initial sketch of the framework – a work-in-progress – of how these conceptual elements might provide ideational bases underpinning an envisioning of paths for thinking differently – conceiving differently – of PA: an intellectual exercise which may pave the way for fresh (re-)thinking of how PA is studied and how PA could or should be conceived of, and hence re-organised. Tentative propositions on certain implications that may be drawn from considering philosophical underpinnings of the four intellectual traditions for delineating the contours of a theory of PA

Table 9.1 *Philosophical underpinnings in intellectual traditions in public administration – a schematic framing*

	PA as Practical Wisdom	PA as Practical Experience	PA as Scientific Knowledge	Relativist/post-modernist vision of PA
<i>Ontology – nature of being/ categories of being/ transcendentals (necessity or possibility, potentiality and actuality)</i>	Ontological considerations inform the understanding of PA and the making of decisions in public governance – the reflection on what is possible (to change) and what is necessitated (impossible to change) is centre stage (wisdom as awareness of what can be changed and what cannot)	An ontology of potentiality (what <i>might</i> happen) and possibility (what happened might also not have happened/what will happen depends on us) underpins the drive to make use of experiential knowledge for effecting change	Some epistemologies in this approach may adopt an ontology of necessity (what happened necessarily happened) and be unable to treat potentiality (what <i>might</i> happen/might have happened is excluded as an object of inquiry)	A subjectivist ontology as the (explicit and vocal) basic stance – nature and categories of being deemed outside of reach of human mind
<i>Ontology –human nature and motivations of human behaviour – ontology of the subject of knowledge (what can we know?) and the subject of moral judgement (what must we do?)</i>	A strong assumption about the capacity of the human subject to know and to make moral judgements is assumed – aspiration to betterment/ reachability of perfection through the practice of virtues – awareness of dark/evil side of human nature	Optimism about human capacity to attain ‘enough knowledge’ to fix practical problems (though generally less ‘grandiose’ conception of human nature than PA as Practical Wisdom)	Optimism about human capacity to attain ‘enough knowledge’, more agnostic (implicitly indifferent position?) about whether public administrators have the moral posture to successfully cope with the lure of temptations or engage with wicked issue	Pessimism about human capacity to attain knowledge; ‘optimism of the will’ to overcome the ‘pessimism of the reason’ in attempting to build consensus on what is ‘better public governance’

	<b>PA as Practical Wisdom</b>	<b>PA as Practical Experience</b>	<b>PA as Scientific Knowledge</b>	<b>Relativist/post-modernist vision of PA</b>
<i>Ontology – social ontology (social structures, agency, power, institutions, and culture)</i>	Broad vision whereby social structures, individual agency, institutions and culture combine to shape the political system and society	Nature of social ontology rarely problematised. Relative influence of individual agency, institutions, culture, and analysis of power rarely problematised; however, emphasis on the capacity of the individual to deploy experiential learning for problem-solving	Nature of social ontology rarely problematised. Relative influence of individual agency, institutions, culture, and analysis of power varies depending on social-scientific strand (rational choice, behaviourism, institutionalism ...)	Assumption widely held that social structures only exist within the individual human being. Possible emphasis on conditioning influence of social structures, in the track of thought of Foucault.
<i>Ontology – conception of time and space</i>	Conceptions of time and space get problematised, e.g.: - Time as the unfolding of Being (historicism, Hegel) - Time as the unveiling of Being (Heidegger) - Time as the lived time of the human psyche (Bergson) - Space as Lorenzetti's ethical place of the manifestation of virtues and vices	Conceptions of time and space mostly assumed from common-sense experience and non-controversial/non-problematised	Conceptions of time and space mostly	Space and time as socially constructed
<i>Ontology – the existentialist ontology of human being as caring (for the others and the world)</i>	A possible intellectual source	A mostly implicit assumption	A mostly irrelevant notion	An intellectual source, especially in interpretivist/social constructivist interpretations

	<b>PA as Practical Wisdom</b>	<b>PA as Practical Experience</b>	<b>PA as Scientific Knowledge</b>	<b>Relativist/post-modernist vision of PA</b>
<i>Political Philosophy/Legitimacy of Public Governance</i>	A central concern in this tradition. All philosophical approaches to the issue of legitimacy centre stage (common good, social contract, social justice, personalism)	Mostly in the background	A concern only to the extent it can be empirically investigated (e.g. studies on citizens' trust, citizens' satisfaction with public institutions)	A key concern
<i>Epistemology – realism, relativism, positivism</i>	Realism	Mostly Agnostic – realism by default	Positivism (mostly)	Relativism
<i>Epistemology – rationalism and empiricism</i>	Both (rationalism central)	Both (mostly empiricism)	Empiricism	Critical of both – emphasis on limits to what can be known
<i>Epistemology – (realist) phenomenology</i>	Phenomenology may be a relevant approach	Phenomenology may be relevant (implicit, non-problematised)	Phenomenology mostly discarded as non-scientific	(Possibly) Idealist phenomenology
<i>Epistemology – the nature of universal concepts</i>	Moderate realism	Likely moderate realism (implicit, non-problematised)	Mostly non-problematised	Nominalism
<i>Conceptual Tools – the usage of the notions of practices, models, paradigms, ideal-types, utopias</i>	Paradigms (culture) and teleological thinking (utopias) are centre stage	Emphasis on practices and on normative models (tools for effecting change)	Emphasis on explanatory models (as conducive to the aimed at 'scientific theories')	Conceptual tools used for critical purposes. Deconstruction of concepts
<i>Conceptual tools – the four causes (material, efficient, formal, final)</i>	Comprehensive usages of the four causes, emphasis on formal and final cause	Emphasis on material and efficient cause	Emphasis on efficient causation	(renouncing the search for causes)

change may then be put forward. They are presented in the remainder of this section.

*Proposition 1: An ontology of possibility pertains primarily to the intellectual traditions of PA as Practical Wisdom and PA as Practical Experience; it is mainly in these traditions that the treatment of potentiality and the demarcation between what is necessitated and what is possible is problematised and upheld, therefore enabling research into the usage of the notion of potential in PA.*

This tentative proposition stems from reflection on categories of being, notably of potentiality and actuality (Chapter 4) and the transcendental disjunction whereby something is either possible or necessary (on the notion of transcendental, see Chapter 2), in each intellectual tradition.

*Implications for a theory of PA change:* Eugene Bardach and other scholars have argued about the usefulness of including and treating potentials in PA; notably, he considered the problem of what can be learnt from a ‘practice’ that ‘could have worked well’ due to its inherent mechanism, even if in the observed case it did not factually work well due to chance events hindering the deployment of its potential (Bardach, 1994; the issue is also discussed in Ferlie and Ongaro, 2015, Chapter 8). Avenues for further research in PA might be opened and developed through more systematically resorting to the notions of potentiality and contingency.

*Proposition 2: Assumptions about the capacity to know (what can we know?) and to make moral judgements (what must we do?) of the human subject vary widely across the intellectual traditions in PA.*

These variations reflect the varied philosophical stances in contemporary society, and the proposition is based on pondering the prevailing underpinning conception of human nature in each intellectual tradition. There might have been a partial neglect in the field of PA in engaging upfront with issues about the moral posture of public administrators, though public ethics and integrity systems are key foci of inquiry.

*Implications for a theory of PA change* include re-engaging into a wider debate about underlying assumptions on the human subject of knowledge and moral judgement (a useful starting point being the implications of Kantian philosophy for PA, introduced in Chapters 4 and 6) as the subject of social agency in PA.

*Proposition 3: Issues of social ontology are rarely problematised in PA as Practical Experience and PA as Scientific Knowledge, while they get problematised and underpin PA as Practical Wisdom and the Relativist Vision of PA.*

We have noticed in Chapter 4 how the philosophical stream of structuralism and more recent developments in social ontology may drive a resurgence in the consideration of social structures in explanations in PA.

*Implications for theory of PA change* include bringing the analysis of social structures more systematically into the frameworks employed in PA research.

*Proposition 4: Underlying ontological conceptions of the nature of time and space-place are rarely problematised in PA as Practical Experience and PA as Scientific Knowledge, while they get problematised and underpin PA as Practical Wisdom and the Relativist Vision of PA.*

We have discussed quite at length in Chapter 4 how different notions of time and conceptions of the dynamics of History may shape the interpretation of research findings in PA.

*Implications for a theory of PA change* include opening up a wider range of interpretations of research findings in PA – much in the line of the conception of ‘explanation’ not just as the process of identifying the causes of something but also as the process of attributing meaning to something (see Chapter 1).

*Proposition 5: The perspective of the Existentialist Public Administrator is a possible (undertapped?) intellectual source in PA as Practical Wisdom and PA as Practical Experience, and a vivid one in the Relativist Vision of PA.*

This intellectual perspective, while probably nowadays out of fashion as a full-fledged conception of the profile of the public administrator, may represent a stimulating perspective through which to critically revisit notions of the public leader, the public administrator and the public manager, as well as understandings of public accountability.

*Implications for a theory of PA change* include broadening the range of perspectives from which to delineate the figure of the public administrator and how decisions are made in public organisations and the public services, and to critically revisit notions of public accountability.

*Proposition 6: The topic of the legitimacy of public governance figures in each intellectual tradition, albeit with varied salience.*

We have elaborated in Chapter 5 an approach to revisit and critically assess the legitimacy of PA reform doctrines.

*Implications for a theory of PA change* include broadening the range of the meta-criteria employed for assessing doctrines for reforming the public sector, thence contributing to the scholarly and policy debate on how to reform public governance and public management (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017).



*Proposition 7: The different Intellectual traditions are underpinned by diverse epistemologies – critical realism, (neo- and post-)positivism, relativism and radical social constructionism – and by a diverse stance about whether to integrate rationalism or prioritise almost exclusively empiricism as dominant philosophy of science.*

These issues of epistemology have been widely dissected in Chapter 6.

*Implications for theory of PA change* include the recognition of the heterogeneity of epistemic traditions to be a key trait of the field of PA and conceiving of this heterogeneity as an inexhaustible source of richness for the field, to be tapped, not stemmed: the beneficial cross-fertilisation brought about by integrating epistemic traditions in investigating PA topics – argued for by various authors (Raadschelders, 2011; Riccucci, 2010) – may nourish novel and original approaches to PA theory and change. One example of this may lie in integrating methods of inquiry drawn from phenomenology into large PA research programmes and projects.

*Proposition 8: The different Intellectual traditions are underpinned by diverse stances vis-à-vis the problem of the nature of universal concepts.*

The problem of the nature of universal concepts is introduced in Chapter 2, and its significance for PA examined in Chapter 6, where we noticed an alignment between where the investigator stands in conceiving of the nature of universal concepts and her/his epistemology of the social sciences in general and of public governance specifically; notably, realist positions in the conception of the universals appear hardly compatible with radical social constructivism, which tends to be aligned with a nominalist conception of the universals; and nominalist positions in the conception of universals are difficult to reconcile with realist positions in epistemology, which tend to be aligned with moderate realism in the conception of the universals.

*Implications for theory of PA change* include recognising a possible risk area here, that is, the forming or the deepening of a cleavage between researchers endorsing a realist position and those endorsing a nominalist one – with possibly a large mid-terrain represented by a large majority of scholars who do not problematise the issue (possibly most of them implicitly assuming moderate realism as the default position).

*Proposition 9: The usage of conceptual tools from utopias to practices (that is: practices, models, paradigms, ideal-types, and utopias) varies significantly across each intellectual tradition.*

We have devoted Chapter 8 to a full review and examination of the notions of practices, models, paradigms, ideal-types, and utopias and their application to the field of PA, providing an interpretation of these as complementary tools, whose integrated usage may benefit the field.

*Implications for theory of PA change* include rediscovering the ‘lost arts’ of ideal-typing and of thinking beyond path-dependency (teleological-utopian thinking), as well as abstracting to the level of guiding ideas and principles through contrasting alternative PA paradigms, thus widening the repertoire of the conceptual tools and theoretical approaches deployed in the study and the practice of PA.

*Proposition 10: The relative emphasis on either of Aristotle’s four causes varies significantly across each intellectual tradition.*

The four causes wrought out by Aristotle as a framework for explaining the causes of things are examined in Chapter 2 and discussed at multiple points throughout the book in relation to their application to the field of PA (notably in Chapter 6).

*Implications for theory of PA change* include the recognition of the worthiness of rediscovering and deploying the full range of the system of the four causes in PA and broadly in the social sciences – although it is recognised that this argument, put forward by a number of scholars in PA and the social sciences at large (Kurki, 2008; Pollitt, 2012) may be contested depending on the epistemological stance of the researcher.

Summing up on the terrain traversed in this chapter, we have revisited the notion of the intellectual traditions in PA elaborated by Raadschelders (2005, 2008, 2011) in light of the multiple philosophical perspectives reported throughout this book. We have done this in the pursuit of two aims. The first one has been to work out implications that can be drawn from revisiting the claims of each intellectual tradition in PA in the light of core philosophical perspectives, thus hopefully contributing to ‘enlighten’ certain implications of conceiving of PA and researching and practising it within one or the other of these traditions. The second goal has been to work out some tentative propositions that may constitute an attempt to lay out some initial, possible and tentative, tesseræ – to which we have earlier referred to more pertinently as ‘fragments’ – of a mosaic for sketching the ideational bases of a ‘theory of PA change’.

## NOTES

1. The four intellectual traditions are qualified by the proposer as ideal-types.

2. Popper suggested six ‘unsystematic’ criteria whereby it may be claimed that a theory ‘T2’ represents a form of progress over ‘T1’: (1) T2 makes more precise claims than T1, and such claims pass more rigorous tests than T1; (2) T2 takes into account and explains more facts than T1 does; (3) T2 describes or explains facts in more detail than T1; (4) T2 has overcome tests that T1 has not; (5) T2 has suggested new experimental controls that were not taken into consideration before T2 was first formulated, and it has passed these tests; (6) T2 has unified or at least connected problems that before T2 was formulated were not connected or unified (reported in Reale and Antiseri, 1988, vol. 3, p. 748).
3. The principle of indeterminacy of Heisenberg is ‘A principle in quantum mechanics holding that increasing the accuracy of measurement of one observable quantity increases the uncertainty with which another conjugate quantity may be known’ (from the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, 2009, Houghton Mifflin Company). In short, the perturbation introduced by the subject who measures properties of particles in quantum mechanics determines a situation whereby the more precisely the position (as an example of a property) of the particle is known, the less precisely the speed vector (direction and speed of movement, as an example of a conjugate quantity) of the particle is knowable. The Schrödinger equation (the integral of the distribution of the probability of presence of the particle applied to the whole universe) leaves us with only one ‘certainty’: that the particle is somewhere in the universe(!) (the integral, in fact, equals 1).
4. Parallels can be found in developments notably in China, in the writings of Confucius in the 6th and 5th centuries and the development of administration from about the 4th century BC, about the time when government became subject of philosophical reflection also in India (with the writings attributed to Kautilya).
5. The International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS), in its French denomination *Institut International des Sciences Administratives*, is a Brussels-based international governmental organisation set up by a number of countries during the 1930s and still very active nowadays. It owes its name to the then consolidating discipline of the ‘administrative sciences’ as were intended and referred to in the French tradition.
6. I am grateful to Wolfgang Drechsler for pointing out these articulations.
7. Catlaw and Treisman (2014) question whether ‘man’ is still the subject of administration and work out three challenges to why this could not be the case any more in the future. These challenges leave the author of this book very perplexed, but yet such challenges vividly illustrate the significance of debating foundational philosophical claims for the field of PA.
8. It may be noticed, however, that one of Erasmus’s concerns was about the legitimacy of the absolute rule by the Prince that is legitimated by wisdom, and modern-day believers in democratic values might find themselves uneasy with such a stance that pursues wisdom ultimately for the justification of absolute rule.
9. Nor is the purpose of this book to examine how ideas generated in intellectual circles (and notably in the PA scholarly community) trickle down to the policy circuits and policy sub-systems which may translate these ideas into public policy: the topic has been treated in innumerable other books. In this book we focus on the substance and the contours of some of these ideas per se.

## 10. Researching and teaching philosophy for public administration

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### INTRODUCTION

This final chapter addresses the key issue of ‘what next?’ after having introduced and worked out a philosophical perspective to PA, and it tackles two key issues: first, how to advance the researching of philosophy for PA; second, how to introduce philosophy for PA into the teaching and learning of PA, that is, into teaching curricula at higher education level. The chapter then turns to briefly discuss the challenges posed by new technologies and the new media to PA and indicates how taking a broad philosophical perspective may be a vantage point to look at these challenges. Finally, the chapter wraps up on the journey made and returns to the main argument of this book: the enduring contribution that philosophical thought may provide to PA.

### RESEARCHING PHILOSOPHY FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

We have argued throughout the book, and notably in Chapter 9, that philosophical thought may better equip public administrators and scholars of PA alike to face the challenges of the 21st century. Bringing philosophy into public administration (better: bringing back philosophy into public administration, as it originally was in scholars like Weber or Waldo) may trigger and enable new paths of research. It is to this task that the present section is devoted: outlining possible paths (pathways) for the development of research work aimed at bringing philosophical knowledge into public administration.

The core argument throughout this book is that PA may benefit from adding philosophy to its constituent disciplines (although strictly speaking philosophy is not a ‘discipline’ in the sense modern disciplines are, rather it is a body of knowledge and understanding about reality as such, built upon the attempts made by philosophers over the millennia to gain a better comprehension of reality – as discussed in Chapter 1). This section outlines some ways in which research work can be carried out to bring more systematically philosophical knowledge into PA, and hence improve our understanding of the field.

Based on the conceptualisation introduced in Chapter 1, we identify four approaches, or ‘strategies’, to more systematically bring philosophical knowledge and understanding into the field of public administration and public governance, with the ultimate purpose to inform research developments and advance knowledge of the field. We call these approaches:

- *Mapping Backwards from PA towards philosophy* – it is based on surveying the field of public administration to detect and unearth the underpinning philosophical stances in the PA scholarship.
- *Going Foundational* – it is centred on proposing new conceptions of public governance and administration by taking the move from an explicit ontology or political philosophy: it coincides with working out one’s own philosophical foundations upon which to build up new perspectives to PA: it is *philosophy of PA* as delineated in Chapter 1.
- *Revisiting Selectively* – by focusing key topics of contemporary significance for PA and inquiring into them from a philosophical standpoint – it is an approach somehow in-between philosophy of PA and philosophy for PA.
- *Philosophising Systematically*: applying in as much a systematic way as possible philosophical thought to PA with the purpose of building up the edifice of *philosophy for PA* (this is the overarching approach and thrust of this book).

These approaches are elaborated and illustrated in turn. As noticed in Chapter 1, this book must be placed in the fourth approach – *Philosophising Systematically / Developing Philosophy for PA* – where its overall thrust lies. However, hopefully, the review of philosophical thought for PA carried out throughout the pages of this book may also be helpful to those engaged in any of the other three approaches that we here delineate, and which we review first, before returning to the ‘philosophy for PA’ approach of the present book.

The first approach, which we label ‘*Mapping Backwards*’, consists of surveying the field of PA, for example by reviewing strands of literature according to the topic or the geographical area (so, ‘European’, or ‘US’, or ‘Chinese’ PA research), with the purpose of detecting and mapping the implicit or explicit philosophical underpinnings contained in the PA debates. To illustrate in more operational terms, this could occur by scouting the publications appearing in the scientific journals currently ranked in the ISI-Thomson index under the category ‘Public Administration’ and querying, with a defined grid which may then interactively evolve, certain key implicit philosophical assumptions contained in the publications. The rationale of this approach is to unveil and make it more explicit the very often implicit assumptions that guide researchers in the field of PA.

To make an example that draws from the topic discussed in Chapter 5, an application of this approach would lie in questioning what are the legitimacy underpinnings of propounded reform models like the New Public Management, the New Public Governance, the Neo-Weberian State, the Stewardship model, the New Public Service, or any other body of doctrines about how the public sector *ought to* be organised, that has been proposed and codified in the literature; that is, to discuss the justification that makes a reform of public governance ‘legitimate’, be it in terms of the common good approach originally worked out by Plato, or the social contract arguments in the line of Rousseau and other ‘liberal’ philosophers, or the philosophy of social justice promoted by Rawls. We have argued in Chapter 5 that asking these questions is not otiose: quite conversely, such questions may enlighten the public governance and public management reform discourse. As another example, it may be considered the implications for public administration studies of revisiting certain foundational issues lying in the very notion of ‘time’ as it has been debated in philosophical thought (see Chapter 4).

This first approach, or research strategy, to bringing philosophical notions into PA thus lies in revisiting the extant scientific or grey literature in PA to shed light on otherwise overlooked aspects and implications of the ways in which administrative phenomena are studied, and interpretations and meanings are given. A wide range of other ontological issues might, in a similar way, be introduced into the picture: these issues range from the conception of the human nature to ontological notions of ‘social structures’ or of ‘essence’ of things, and so forth. This way, philosophical thought may be brought into the framework of analysis and enable exploring profiles so far under-investigated or outright ignored.

A possible second line of development in bringing philosophy to the fore into public administration is what we have called ‘*Going Foundational*’. In this perspective, philosophy and the philosophical stance become the starting point, and new conceptions of public governance or the public administrative dimension are proposed by taking the move from philosophical stances and ontologies. This approach is the ‘Philosophy *of* PA approach’, in the sense that scholars engaged in this intellectual path aim at working out their own philosophical interpretation of public governance, or of certain aspects or dimensions of it (we have examined the difference between philosophy *for* PA and philosophy *of* PA in Chapter 1). An example is the work by Stout and Love (2019), who have wrought out an outright ‘manifesto for integrative governance’, predicated on process philosophy *à la* Whitehead and a distinctive form of panentheism, that is, on a full-fledged ontology and *Weltanschauung*, a conception of the world.

This approach may beget most welcome additions to the field by nourishing the debate, through bringing into the scholarly and the public discussion fresh

novel conceptions of contemporary public governance and administration. It also has the virtue of bringing philosophical conceptions to the fore and indeed upfront, by taking ontological considerations as the starting point, rather than confining them to the background. By making the philosophical foundations of the proposed argument explicit, books in this approach can enable the most fruitful of dialogues to unfold amongst scholars and practitioners, irrespective of whether the ontological point of departure of the authors is similar or dissimilar (the latter is the case for the author of this book, whose ontology is different from that of Stout and Love), thus powerfully contributing to the development of the field of public governance and administration.

A third approach to bring philosophy into PA, which we call '*Revisiting Selectively*', starts from the actuality and 'burning issues' in contemporary PA, and thence aims at bringing philosophy into public administration. It focuses key topics of contemporary significance for the field, and queries into them from a philosophical standpoint. The main difference with the first approach outlined above lies in the focus: the emphasis in this third approach does not lie in reviewing the scientific literature in the field of public governance and administration to 'uncover' the unexpressed philosophical underpinnings of the authors who contributed to the literature (like in the first approach), but rather in carrying out a critique of salient issues in the public debate – a trait which makes this approach in some regards akin to the so-called 'critical theory' approach. For example, Fox and Miller, notably in their joint work (Miller and Fox, 2007 – already reviewed in Chapter 6), provide a very sharp, abrasive at times, critique of representative democracy by challenging the 'orthodoxy' of the majoritarian mode of democracy, to then discuss three main alternatives: the neo-liberal response (which replaces people's will with market mechanisms), the constitutional response (which substitutes the constitution and the effecting of constitutional principles for the electoral victors of the moment), and the communitarian response, or tendency (which 'seeks to replace the loop with direct interface between administration and the citizenry', Miller and Fox, 2007, p. 30). As shown by this example, this approach is less concerned with reviewing the social scientific literature as it stands in order to shed light on issues of contemporary significance and actuality – like, as in the example, to argue about fundamental flaws in representative democracy (and its implications for public accountability, a key theme in the field of PA). Indeed, this approach – which as practised at times shows quite abrasive traits – might be employed to demystify a number of oft-held assumptions, or at least to critically revisit a number of topics in the field: from the mechanisms at work in public accountability to the problematic links between 'populism', popular mandate, and the moral dilemmas of the accountable public administrator and public manager, and so forth. In sum, this represents a valuable

third strategy for advancing a research agenda aimed at bringing philosophical thought and critique into the field of PA.

A fourth approach, the one which we have labelled '*Philosophising Systematically*' is the one closest to the overall thrust of the present book (see also Whetsell, 2018). The point of departure here is the body of philosophical thought as it has been codified in the academia and vetted by scholars over the decades and centuries. This body of knowledge, understanding and wisdom is then applied in as much a systematic way as possible to the field of PA. Different strands of philosophical inquiry are systematically referred to, in turn, to explore the potential of each of them to shed light on one or the other aspect or profile of the field of PA, conceived of in mostly academic terms, as the body of knowledge that is being produced, accumulated (to the extent it is cumulative in nature) and reproduced in Public Administration Departments in the academia. The main thrust of this collective effort is directed towards building up the edifice of 'philosophy *for* public administration', where the preposition 'for' indicates the fundamental thrust of this approach, which lies in employing philosophical speculation to enlighten facets of the study and the practice of public administration, and by means of it finding new viewpoints on administrative themes and issues. As recalled at the outset, the starting point is indeed the body of philosophical thought produced over the centuries through philosophical speculation; however, the basic requisite lies in knowledge of the field of PA and the charting of it: philosophical thought is then deployed for critically revisiting and rethinking contemporary PA themes and issues – as this book has attempted to do (see in particular Chapter 9). The main actors in this approach are scholars of PA, not scholars of philosophy: the former map the field of PA and identify the areas where philosophical thought may usefully be tapped; the latter provide the wells of knowledge as well as the methodological rigour in how philosophical debate at the highest academic standards is conducted, for application to the field of PA.

These approaches concern the problem of how to advance knowledge in PA by bringing philosophy back into it: they are about knowledge generation. We now turn to the problem of knowledge transmission: the teaching of philosophy in PA programmes.

## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAMMES<sup>1</sup>

In the previous section we worked out a research agenda for integrating philosophical knowledge into PA. This section argues that philosophy as an academic field of knowledge should be incorporated also – and equally importantly – into the teaching of PA, and that this may occur at all levels of tertiary and lifelong education. The rationale for this is the argument, developed



throughout the book, that philosophical knowledge provides a distinctive and constitutive contribution for an improved understanding of PA, alongside and beyond the specific bodies of knowledge furnished by the disciplines that constitute the field of PA (like management, law, organisation science, political science, sociology, social psychology, or economics – see Chapter 1).

In order to systematically include the teaching of philosophy for PA in educational and training programmes, a range of practical questions about the place and contents of the subject ‘philosophy for PA’ require being addressed:

- *Questions about positioning*: what could and should be the place of philosophy in PA curricula? At what level should philosophy be taught, that is, should it be confined to the upper levels, like masters and PhD, or be present also at undergraduate level? And should it be confined to longer programmes (one year or more), or should it also be included in shorter programmes for public administrators, like executive education courses for top managers?
- *Questions about contents and tools*: what could and should be the key contents of philosophy for PA that are being taught? How to choose the core topics when constraints about the configuration of the educational programme require selection and prioritisation? What are available teaching tools (books, handbooks, other readings, and the like) which may support the teaching of philosophy for PA?
- *Questions of consistency*: what should and could be the relations of philosophy for PA with the other courses being taught in a PA programme?
- *Questions of methods*: what teaching methods should be employed to teach philosophy for PA?

We address these questions in turn. First, the positioning of themes of philosophy for PA in the curriculum/syllabus of a PA programme. There are three basic options here. The first one consists of introducing topics of philosophy for PA within already established modules in PA programmes; such courses could be – where present – modules of public ethics and public values, or modules of epistemology and research methods in the social sciences. The main risk with this approach is that the introduction of topics of philosophy for PA may easily come to be perceived as just a marginal addition, or be interpreted in a biased and narrow way, for example, if it is introduced in a module of research methods, students might get the perception that philosophy coincides with epistemology, which is instead but one branch of philosophy. The second option consists of introducing philosophy for PA as part and parcel of the introductory courses of the BSc/MSc in PA or MPA or PhD programme, that is, those courses typically devoted to introducing PA as a subject and a field of study to students whose background may be highly varied. The third

option could be to set up a distinct module of Philosophy for PA alongside other more conventional modules in the syllabus. All three options have pros and cons, though the second and third ones appear more promising in terms of bringing philosophy for PA more centre stage in the overall learning experience of the students.

A related question concerns the level – undergraduate, postgraduate, or research/PhD – at which it may be deemed more appropriate to introduce the study of philosophy for PA. There is no univocal answer to this question, as it may depend on a range of other contextual factors, not least the extent to which philosophy is being taught at secondary school in a given country. To mention two examples at the opposite poles, philosophy is extensively studied in Italy's secondary school, in which at least 40 per cent of the student population attaining the highest level of secondary education – the 'academic-orientated' share of the student population amongst which most pupils continue to university degrees – are exposed to three years of study of philosophy, in most instances prepared by the five-year study of Latin, and for part of them also ancient Greek – both languages being extremely significant for the study of (Western) philosophy. At the opposite pole, philosophy is virtually not taught in Britain's secondary school, hence any development of it at tertiary education level would require introducing the students to the basics of philosophy before delving deeper into the matter. In this regard, introducing the study of philosophy for PA at undergraduate level might be easier in those countries where philosophy is systematically being taught at secondary school, whilst it might be more uphill an undertaking where it is not.

We would further argue that elements of philosophy for PA may be of significance also beyond the more structured and longer university undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, and that it is highly significant also in executive education courses. This might appear like a puzzling statement, since executive education is considered to be the 'practical' form of education *par excellence*, thence the expectation that philosophical thought, with its speculative nature, is not amenable to being taught in these courses. Quite the contrary: as we have seen in Chapter 2, it was the philosopher Aristotle who first introduced the very notion of 'practical reasoning' (notably in his writings in the *Nicomachean Ethics*) and who outlined the meaning and the contours of practical reasoning. Aristotle also wrought out the difference between the contemplative reason and the calculative reason, the latter being the one which weighs the means in function of the ends to be attained. Thus, we argue that philosophy for PA is of significance also for executive education programmes, and philosophical notions may resonate very well with the lived experience of PA practitioners and spark thoughtful discussions and illuminate the dilemmas and the quandaries that the street-level bureaucrat and the public managers have to face in managing public organisation and public services (Parker, 2019).

Shifting to the second set of questions about the contents to be taught, the main question is what could and should be the key contents of philosophy for PA? And the complementary question is what extant tools are available that can provide the practical support for enabling the teaching of philosophy in PA programmes? The most immediate (and admittedly very parochial) answer to the latter question is – of course – that this very book aims to be a tool and to provide the repertoire of readings required for introducing philosophy for PA to a university-level audience, and to do so in one, compact textbook, that while referring to a wide range of scientific works in both the realm of philosophy and the domain of PA studies for the readers willing to further deepen the topic, also aims at synthesising the main elements and provide easy-to-access guidance to introducing philosophy for PA for both students and teachers. It goes without saying, the other many works encountered and discussed throughout this book could provide valuable entries, like the Lynch and Cruise (2006) edited volume we discussed in Chapter 1 and recalled throughout this book. A number of books examine specific profiles of philosophical thought applied to PA, like epistemology (for an exemplar, see Riccucci, 2010). Dedicated chapters apply philosophical analysis to public administration, notably the foundations of administrative action (Virtanen, 2018). Contributions appearing in two notable scientific journals: *Administrative Theory and Praxis* and *Public Voices* provide another entry point. Some sparse yet relevant papers in mainstream PA journals also contribute like the de Graaf and van Asperen, 2018, article which discusses the use of images and the art with philosophical contents, for the study of PA, and then examines in detail Lorenzetti's masterpiece, *The Good Government*, which we have commented on in Chapter 7.

Having dealt with the question about tools, we can now turn to the main question of the substantive contents to be given prominence in bringing philosophical knowledge into PA programmes. Two main approaches may be outlined. The first lies in focusing on selected branches of philosophy, identified as the 'most pertinent' for the purposes of shedding light on aspects of PA, or at least as those thematically closest to the topics and issues traditionally debated in PA. Examples of such branches could be: epistemology, which then becomes epistemology of research methods for PA; or public ethics and notably the ethics of public officials; or political philosophy, with a focus on the role of public administration in political and policy processes and structures. The second approach centres on philosophy as such, and aims at discussing in their full breadth key philosophers and philosophies, to then apply these bodies of knowledge to PA. The second approach is basically what this book attempts to do throughout all chapters, and notably from Chapter 4 to Chapter 8, on the assumption that this more systematic approach is also the most potent one, since it can enable at its utmost the 'mind-opening' benefits that derive from philosophical thought applied to PA, and that may instil in

students the kind of critical reasoning that is becoming more and more important for the performance of the job of public administrator in times in which certainties are crumbling and issues that appeared settled re-emerge in all their thorny complexity. However, it is only fair to say that both approaches have their pros and cons: ultimately, what matters is the alignment of the contents of philosophy for PA with the other contents and modules of the PA programme, and on top of this the alignment and consistency with the learning objectives and the broader pedagogical concerns underpinning the PA programme.

This consideration brings us to consider the question of consistency, the consistency of the topics of philosophy for PA that are chosen for being taught with the other themes and more broadly learning objectives of the programme. This is in a sense the most challenging question, but also one which we can only limitedly discuss in the framework of this book as the answer, obviously, depends on the specific features of the teaching programme under consideration, and the related learning objectives it pursues. What could be said from the standpoint of this book is that philosophical thought may also act as an integrative force, a way of linking together the diverse thematic areas of PA, by showing the deeper interconnections across disciplines and topics; for example, the issue of human liberty and individual agency is a cross-cutting issue to many social sciences, thereby encompassing those social sciences constituting PA as the interdisciplinary study of government – see Chapter 1 – as well as for vetting real-life issues of decision-making by public administrators and managers: thence, any improved understanding of this central topic can contribute to a better and more integrated understanding of a range of related issues, scattered throughout the courses of the PA programme.

The final set of questions are those about teaching methods and approaches. What combination of learning methods is most appropriate for the teaching of philosophy for PA? And, relatedly, what would be the most appropriate teaching team for such contents? One teacher versed in both, or two teachers, one more versed in PA and the other in philosophy? Starting from methods, one initial distinction, however crude, may be drawn between an approach emphasising class discussions and ‘case studies’ and other interactive methods to introduce philosophical problematics,<sup>2</sup> on one hand, and an approach placing frontal teaching at the centre, and then complementing it with more interactive methods, on the other hand. Some of the pros of interactive methods lie in that they may stimulate reflection upon the topic and a sense of ownership by learners, while amongst the cons it may be counted that the starting point of students in terms of knowledge of philosophy may be low in many countries (e.g. because students are not trained in philosophy), and hence introductory elements presented through frontal teaching may be indispensable. Indeed, an upside of frontal teaching lies in its capacity to provide students with an introduction and overview of the main topics, a learning requirement likely to be in

large demand amongst PA students exposed to these contents. Thus, it seems to us a conclusion that may be drawn on this point is that a combination of frontal teaching and more interactive learning methods may be optimal, with different degrees and combinations of the two methods as a function of the overall learning objectives of the programme, and also of the didactical expertise and skills available – Solomonic as this conclusion may look like. (And it goes without saying our considerations apply equally when the programme is delivered through distance learning methods, in which ‘frontal teaching’ and ‘interactive learning methods’ are incorporated into the employed distance learning means.)

To conclude, this section addresses a range of issues involved if the teaching of philosophy for PA is included in PA programmes, at all levels of higher education, from undergraduate to research degrees, as well as in lifelong learning. We argue that the integration of philosophical knowledge may enable students of PA programmes to acquire a more critical stance towards the various disciplines that contribute to PA as the interdisciplinary study of government (Raadschelders, 2005), by means of shedding light on the ‘philosophical residue’ contained in each of them – from law to economics, from political science to management (Chapter 1). The inclusion of philosophy in PA education and training may better equip present and prospective public administrators to decipher the complexity of the current world and interconnect better and deeper the varied contributions – valuable but by their very nature fragmentary – provided by the different disciplines that underpin PA (law, economics, political science, management, sociology, social psychology, etc.), for the ultimate purpose of the betterment of public governance, public policies and the public services. Philosophy may also provide a distinctive contribution in shedding light on otherwise under-explored profiles of PA, notably when it comes to addressing issues of value-based judgements enabling the making of decisions in executive roles: an issue of relevance for executives in all sorts of organisations – public or private (Hodgkinson, 1978) – and yet possibly of special significance for public administrators.

## THE CHALLENGES BROUGHT ABOUT BY TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Philosophical thought may also shed light on the huge impact of new technologies on PA, like any other aspect of human life: one may think here of Heidegger’s reflections on how technology affects the relationship between humankind and the revealing (the hiding, for Heidegger) of Being. We briefly hint here at two developments: genetics and the Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) and the related development of new media and the social media.

Developments in genetics seem to open up the possibility for individualised treatments, up to the point that some PA scholars have evoked the perspective of transhumanism, referring to ‘the question of whether new biotechnologies enable humans to overcome the determinism of their biological inheritance and actively participate in its expression’ (Catlaw and Treisman, 2014, p. 441). Brought to the extreme, post-humanism claims the possibility of the death of death. Whether this is feasible in any meaningful sense is an issue for medicine and medical knowledge (conversations I had with medics noticed how individualised treatments for postponing the death of an individual would require systematic and continued interventions on the person’s body, a treatment which would more resemble the cruellest of tortures than the enjoyment of some form of immortality). But it is not only an issue for the field of medicine. Is the death of death compatible with the second principle of thermodynamics (‘the most metaphysical of physical laws’, see Bergson, 2005) whereby every closed system increases the level of dis-order over time (although life may also be seen as an attempt to locally counter this universal tendency, see Bergson, 1907)? At a more strictly metaphysical level it may be questioned whether the perspective of the death of death is compatible with any philosophy of becoming? And from an existentialist perspective, it may be asked: wouldn’t this attempt to overcome death by technological means make death even more constitutive of existence (in an approach à la Heidegger, see also Waterlot, 2019)? The existentialist interpretation of anguish as the experience of nothingness would also lead to interpretation of such experiences as revealing the irreducible, constitutive openness of existence to being through death.

Philosophical arguments may be brought to show the impossibility – and the absurdity – of the claim of the death of death. However, leaps in postponing death cannot be ruled out, opening up scenarios that bring us well beyond the kind of ‘ageing population’ phenomenon we are experiencing (itself so much underestimated by policymakers and public managers, see Pollitt, 2016b). How can the field of PA re-imagine itself and its future developments, the study and practice of PA, against the backdrop of such scenarios? Scientific and philosophical imagination should be brought to the fore to cope with such challenges.

To hint at another example, we may heed the changes brought about by the impressive – and often appropriately qualified as disruptive – changes driven by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), which go under the label of ‘digital government’, which has grown into a full-fledged field of inquiry in PA (think of the applications of Artificial Intelligence – AI – and algorithmic governance), and the tumultuous development of the new media and the social media, especially now that social media and new media are being mainstreamed in PA studies (Criado et al., 2013; Mergel, 2013). What modifications may social media induce in life, in its social dimension and

its biological dimensions (the prosthetic function of new media, see Kember and Zylinska, 2012)? Has the Internet brought about a revolution in communication as did the shift from the oral to the written form of communication, or the invention of the press? If so, what new possibilities are opened for the investigation of reality by the human mind? What are the implications of the hyper-reality in which we live in terms of the way it reshapes the public space? What is the significance of philosophical knowledge and the *forma mentis* that the study of philosophy brings with it for ‘navigating’ the ocean of information made available by the Internet? And specifically, what are its implications for the study and practice of PA? What public functions will be utterly transformed by the dis-intermediating potential of Internet-based technologies and reshaped by algorithmic governance and artificial intelligence, and how can the tapping of collective intelligence be enabled by Internet-based technologies? And what do these transformations mean for the practice of PA? these questions lead us to the issue of how a broad philosophical perspective can better equip and enable us to understand e-governance and e-government ‘in perspective’ and ‘in context’.

These are questions and issues – tackled by innumerable contemporary studies in the humanities and the social sciences (from the field of communications studies to the field of social medicine) – that only rarely and indirectly surface in the ‘core’ PA scholarly literature, but yet they are likely to matter a lot for years to come.

A broad philosophical perspective might be part and parcel of the conceptual repertoire required of the PA scholar and practitioner alike to tackle the daunting task of coping with such huge challenges and issues.

## CODA AND OUTLOOK

This book makes the argument for the significance of the systematic application of philosophical thinking to the field of PA, and it advocates the contribution philosophy may bring to PA in terms of inspiration and enlightenment. In doing so, it also suggests the possibility to engage in ‘big narratives’ about public governance and administration – that is, about our possibility of both understanding and knowing continuity and change in the fundamental characters of public governance and administration. Indeed, this book urges the PA scholarly and practitioners community to engage in ‘big narratives’ about public governance and administration – that is, in big narratives enabled by the possibility that we have to attain knowledge and understanding about the fundamental characters of public governance and public administration. We thus argue that those engaged in the study and the practice of PA should not content themselves with ‘zooming in’ on specific problems and issues to be

investigated with relatively well-specified methods; instead, the big picture should be aimed at – by scholars and practitioners alike.

This book also advocates the search for consistency across the various findings of the research work. Scientists like the biologist Edward Wilson have urged scholars to strive for unity of the knowledge generated in different disciplines and fields (Wilson, 1998), a struggle for consistency<sup>3</sup> of the various findings, insights, forms of knowledge and understandings of reality; and this call has not been without echoes in PA (see Talbot, 2010). This is a thrust which, we notice, is at the heart of most of the philosophical endeavours we have encountered throughout this book, at least since Plato and Aristotle. This book stems also from the effort to achieve – however tentatively and in a patchy way – some form of enhanced consistency within the field of PA and between PA and the field of philosophy. It stretches well-beyond the comfort zone of contemporary PA scholars (surely of this PA scholar) in order to try to reach out and indicate a direction of travel which – it is deemed – is of utmost importance for the field of PA.

To briefly review in conclusion the journey undertaken, throughout the book, and notably in Chapters 4 to 8, we have delved into key themes stemming from the application of philosophical thought to PA. Notably, in Chapter 4 we reviewed some possible applications and implications for the field of PA of such philosophical streams as: structuralism and themes in social ontology; Neo-Marxism and the thought of Antonio Gramsci; existentialism and the profiling of the existentialist public administrator and citizen; historicism. Other philosophical perspectives fraught with implications for PA that are discussed in Chapter 4 include metaphysical contingency and ontologies of possibility (as opposed to ontologies of necessity), for their significance on the ways in which notions like ‘potential’, ‘possibility’ and ‘chance’ are treated in the social sciences at large and in PA specifically;<sup>4</sup> and the possible implications of philosophical speculation about the very notion of time for the ways in which PA is studied. Last, but by no means least, we delved into the enduring significance of the Kantian foundation of the transcendental rational subject, and on issues about human nature, which are foundational to PA.

In Chapter 5 we turned to the issue of justification of a(ny) governance system, debating the two overarching perspectives of the ‘common good’ and the ‘social contract’ for the grounding of public governance, and the promises and limits of the Rawlsian and the personalist approaches as ways to supplement and complement the two dominant perspectives. We then applied these perspectives to the issue of the legitimacy underpinnings of public sector reform doctrines.

In Chapter 6 we examined philosophical-epistemological issues, thereby also revisiting interpretivist, (neo- and post-)positivist, and realist approaches to the study of PA. The contemporary meaning for PA studies of the dispute



over the nature of universal concepts has also been reviewed, noticing how in multiple respects where a PA scholar stands in terms of her/his conception of the nature of the field of PA depends on her/his philosophical stance over the nature of universal concepts: a dispute that lingers from the medieval time into our contemporary epoch and continues to be relevant and of extreme actuality.

In Chapter 7 the enduring significance of the virtue discourse in public governance has been re-proposed by means of the power of the art (Ambrogio Lorenzetti's masterpiece *The Good Government*) and its capacity to create a 'world other', yet inspirational for us. The notion of alternative worlds has also brought us back to the original conception of utopia and utopian thinking as worked out by Thomas More. We then reviewed the conceptual weaponry that public administrationists are endowed with by expanding the repertoire of tools to encompass paradigms and ideal-types. We were then brought back with our feet well planted on earth by Machiavelli's lucid scrutiny of human nature, which also puts to the centre of the stage the theme of the immutability of human nature. We have also been reminded by Machiavelli that renouncing the 'assumption' of the immutability of human nature has ground-shaking implications – and that Machiavelli in his studies found confirmations of this assumption. His work stands as a continued challenge for those who assume the opposite hypothesis (mutability of human nature) to put forward a demonstration of it, and deal with its implications.

In Chapter 8 we revisited in a comprehensive way the notions of: 'practice'; 'model'; 'paradigm'; 'ideal-type'; and 'utopia' and discussed how these represent powerful conceptual tools for the study and practice of PA, notably when seen in an integrated way.

Finally, in the previous chapter, intellectual traditions of PA have been revisited in light of their broader philosophical underpinnings by showing how each tradition relies on, and taps from, a range of philosophical perspectives. We have thus set the relativist/post-modernist tradition against the faltering of both the Hegelian system and the Kantian foundation of the human being as *the* rational subject, and discussed the limits of going too far in the opposite direction and too easily dismissing the inheritance of Western philosophy. We then discussed the tradition of 'PA as scientific knowledge' against the backdrop of the philosophical streams of positivism and neo-positivism, as well as conventionalism and Popperian notions of scientific knowledge. In the perspective of PA as practical wisdom, we noticed how philosophical thought is quintessential to it and has accompanied this tradition over the millennia. In the tradition of PA as practical experience, we have noticed how practical reasoning is porous to a multitude of ontological, ethical and epistemological issues, which a philosophical perspective may aid to unveil.

In applying philosophical thinking to PA, we have adopted a broad conception of PA as being, in a combined and integrated way: a science (an interdis-

ciplinary field, in which a variety of social sciences are applied in a combined way); an art (as administering is inherently a human activity with an artistic, ‘craftsmanship-like’ component); a profession (indeed a range of professions interconnected by the obligations and rights that come with the exercise of public functions and the delivery of public services); and a form of humanism (administering as a value-laden human activity, a conception very much in the line of Waldo’s conception of PA).

Ultimately, to the extent PA is science, we conceive of science as *episteme* – rigour – and as *wissenschaft* – a field of intellectual inquiry which draws from the social sciences (and also from other bodies of knowledge) and that shares with them the common problems and quandaries of scientific knowledge. Yet the nature of PA as also and in an integrated way an art, a profession and a form of humanism is part and parcel of its nature, and hence PA is a field of intellectual inquiry which taps also from the humanities, as well as from the (often tacit and uncoded) forms of knowledge that are embodied in an art and a profession.

In conclusion, this book has engaged with the daunting task of providing an introduction to the complex and multifaceted interconnections between fundamental philosophical issues and the field of PA, and it has pointed to some facets of its enduring quest for philosophical foundations. It is our hope to have been able to profile some lines of application of philosophical streams of inquiry to themes of relevance for contemporary PA. The significance of spanning across philosophers and philosophies over the ages and going back in time – rather than confining to the most recent strands – for a deeper understanding of philosophical issues in PA has been highlighted during this journey through philosophical thought. Paths for finer grained examinations and critical discussions of contemporary public governance and administration and its foundations in philosophical argumentation have been pointed out. We hope these paths – pathways – will be taken up by the PA scholarly and practitioners’ community, and that philosophy – the body of philosophical knowledge and understanding engendered by philosophical speculation over the millennia – will be recognised more and more as a reference of central significance for the development of the field of PA.

## NOTES

1. In this section we elaborate from the article Ongaro, E. (2019) ‘The teaching of Philosophy for Public Administration Programmes’ published in *Teaching Public Administration*.
2. The approach of case studies is in philosophy technically called casuistry when applied to moral philosophy: casuistry is a method elaborated by the Jesuit Fathers and to which modern-day case study techniques owe more than is usually recognised.

3. Wilson has introduced the term 'consilience' to indicate the linking of knowledge generated across disciplines to achieve common ground for explanations. Wilson adopted the term 'because its rarity has preserved its precision' (1998, p. 6). Wilson upholds a strong vision of the possible unity of knowledge, mostly patterned on the ways in which the natural sciences may (allegedly) achieve it. We uphold a vision which is at the same time even more ambitious and much less so. It is even more ambitious in the sense that it relies on philosophy as unifying perspective; it is less ambitious in the sense that we aim for exchange of knowledge and bridging of understanding rather than unity. It is also for these reasons that we prefer to stick to the term 'consistency'.
4. The warning formulated by Thompson is that ontological shifts in emphasis can be an effective method of theory generation, but also a source of confusion when they turn into ontological drifts out of alignment (Thompson, 2011).

# Postscript to the second edition: philosophy in and of public administration today, global-Western and non-Western

**Wolfgang Drechsler**

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I had concluded the first version of these reflections, the postscript to the first edition, by stating that Edoardo Ongaro's book on *Philosophy and Public Administration* (PA) came at a crucial time, and that it filled the gap of a missing book – modestly yet assuredly, with style and competence. It addresses, indeed, one of the most crucial issues of PA today, and that is the one of bringing the philosophical discourse into the picture – and well into the centre of it. I hoped that the research agenda it proposes, the filling-in of the lacunae in the matrices displayed in the first chapter, would be accomplished by PA scholars soon enough, and that it would enable and encourage the establishment of courses in, or at least covering, the subject of Philosophy and PA. Our discipline, but more crucially our administered world, as I said, would be better for it, both in equity and in performance.

And while some of these changes may still be in progress, the facts that, so soon after the first, there will be this second edition; that a very impressive set of translations is in the works; and that the reviews and general professional discussions of Ongaro's arguments have been positive indeed, render it quite unnecessary to repeat here in all detail why there was such a need. I will therefore focus, in and for this second edition, on a few supplementary, complementary thoughts, and my placing the book into context, from the first one that might still be interesting given the current situation. I have retained the original text wherever possible and amended it wherever needed.

Edoardo Ongaro's book entered the stage at an auspicious moment for such an enterprise, and with not only impressive but also crucial credentials. His many publications, in more empirical, mainstream PA, paved the way for the scholarly community to more readily accept this work as the product of 'one of us'; the very fact that he has served for six-years and the maximum allowed length of the two full terms as the President of the European Group of Public Administration (EGPA), which today is not only the leading learned PA society in Europe, but also one of the, if not arguably the, first such organ-

isation globally, gave it considerable weight. Having edited a very comprehensive *Handbook of Public Administration and Management in Europe* (with Sandra van Thiel), he has one of the best perspectives on what is going on in European PA at the moment, and who does what. Maybe this should not matter in an academic context, but of course it does – inevitably, who says something and to whom is part of what is being said, often as crucially so and sometimes more than the plain text itself.

The book is an introduction and a beginning, as the author keeps underlining – and wisely so, not out of false modesty, but because this is the appropriate frame, even in its now substantially amended and developed format, the result of the discourse about and with the first edition. But Philosophy and PA is a huge field, not only because of the contents itself, but also due to the many traditions of Philosophy, which can and does lead to serious infighting – many Continental philosophers would claim that Analytical philosophers are no philosophers at all, and vice versa even more so. Ongaro is able to bridge that gap almost effortlessly, and he allows adherents of all traditions to have a say and an impact. Schooled in the Continental tradition, he now works in a scholarly environment that is part of the other dominant tradition (the Italian higher education institution where he grew up scientifically is also very friendly to Anglo–American thought). His versatility and erudition, unusual for a 21st-century PA scholar, in many languages, including the ancient ones, make such an approach possible.

By taking a *pars pro toto* approach, Ongaro can classically focus on the long lines, the broad brushstrokes and the long run – but without sacrificing details by also presenting specific thinkers close up. Since he is very explicit about it, a general synthesis – to which we however now come closer – is not lacking, but its absence is part of the story, and the result should be palatable to many. The effect is that it becomes obvious where the lacunae are – both in what this book does not cover and what contemporary scholarship into Philosophy and PA is lacking. There is quantitatively not that much of this, but there is some rather good work, such as Norma Riccucci's and Jos Raadschelders's, which Ongaro extensively takes up – but he goes beyond them in scope, as regards both types and roles of Philosophy in and of PA. This is why this book is at the same time an introductory text for students and a research programme for scholars.

And this is really important – the discipline of PA, which is often without foundation today, needs to assert itself for its own and society's sake, but how to do so without an introductory textbook – which we now have. How many students will graduate with a Master's degree in PA without ever having seriously considered what Aristotle and Hegel have to say about public service? (How many will not even have read Max Weber's short passage on what really constitutes Weberianism in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922)?)

Prima facie, this seems like a very European perspective, as compared to the apparently so polytechnical, purely quantitative, mistaking-evidence-as-proof American PA. Of course anything on Philosophy and PA will be European before, say, the 1690s, that is, before the earliest beginnings of any PA thought in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which was seminally independent from England and thus from Europe. But in fact, as ever so often, this is not the case – while some of the more doctrinaire American journals (including top-ranked ones) will not allow scholarly discussions about Philosophy and PA, it is actually in the American special-interest journals, conferences, working groups and panels where one finds more, if still very little, about the topic, rather than in Old (let alone New!) Europe. So far, virtually all attempts to discuss, in a structured way, Philosophy and PA in Europe have failed. It may be worth considering why, but the fact remains, for the moment at least – although the discussion about Ongaro's book has surely pushed this debate forward in a very constructive way.

In the last paragraph, I said that 'of course, anything on Philosophy and PA before, say, the 1690s will inevitably be European'. This remark is as stupid as it is blind, *of course* – unless one takes the position that there is one global way of doing PA, that PA is not contextual, and that indeed what is now global PA is without alternative, like engineering or plumbing. This view, which would be considered massively offensive and indeed absurd in many other social science disciplines, still holds sway in PA, and much of consultancy and advice by international organisations to non-Western countries is based on it. But if PA is the implementation of public policy, there must be different ways that all are legitimate – as Aristotle points out in *Politics*. Global PA = Good PA = Western PA = Modern PA is, put this way, as bizarre as it is autistic, but the fact is that the alternative way of thinking, that is, recognising that there is such a thing as Non-Western PA (NWP), is only slowly (re-)surfacing and entering the mainstream PA discourse.

The current book is largely global-Western– but it is consciously so. If consciously done, this is fully legitimate; what is intellectually and ethically terrible, and really not up to scratch for the 21st century anymore, are works on global PA (or political science, political philosophy, etc.) that are really not global but Western – carrying the White Man's Burden into the new millennium, as it were. But there are no areas left in the world, including the carrier countries of NWP, which are not 'contaminated' by global-Western PA, which has a very wide, internally contradictory scope anyway (e.g. the anti-state destructionism of NPM versus state-affirming, citizen-focused approaches such as the Neo-Weberian State). Therefore, what underpins global-Western PA is also interesting for NWP students, and so is this book.

It is here where an addition to and enlargement of the current book might be possible as further steps or volumes. Carefully considering NWP alternatives

to the global-Western mainstream has the dual effect of both qualifying and illuminating the latter, making it possible to have a more thorough and more relevant approach to global-Western PA, potentially enabling scholars and practitioners to reposition themselves regarding more appropriate advice and reform. Alas, however, there is very little left as regards currently working, successful forms of NWPA. I would argue that much of the sorry state of PA reform in some non-Western countries is related to this – countries were not allowed to develop their own strengths based on their own traditions, but were told to adopt Western formats, or else (that is, otherwise they would not receive vital funding). But on the level of Philosophy and PA as treated in this book, there actually is a rich, multifaceted, and indeed exciting fundus of NWPA, some in dialogue with Western Philosophy, some quite independent, and both highly relevant.

Just to mention the two perhaps most important NWPA traditions still alive today, that is, those that form genuine challenges to the universalism of the global-Western approach. The first that comes to mind is the Islamic one. This is the main NWPA tradition bordering, and thus challenging, the West, and one that is often perceived, once again, as based on a threatening ideology. It calls out the non-connectedness of religion and PA as a choice (and a wrong one), not something ‘given’, and it is something the West might have to react to beyond facilely insisting that it should not be so. Much of Islamic state thought, however, has developed in close conjunction with the Greek philosophers, and institutional Islamic *PA* is usually ‘moderate’. In PA itself, the non-delegatability of responsibility that is prominent, for example in the Nizam-ul-Mulk, or the highly sophisticated and philosophically grounded Ottoman PA with its insistence that – yes – the welfare of many is worth the sacrifice of the few; with its legacy of ‘creative low-level discrimination’ to preserve social peace; with its emphasis on good-enough governance (better much less taxes received than levied than no taxes at all), arguably derived from Islam’s rapid expansion; and with a civil service that in many ways was ‘super-Weberian’, may serve as illustrations.

But it surely is Confucian PA that is the main philosophical challenge, the intellectual ‘other’ to the Western paradigm, not least because it was earlier and because it did and does work so well. The fact that it is problematic for some to call it ‘Confucian’ rather than ‘Classical Chinese’ PA already indicates some pitfalls here because we have Confucian PA not only in Mainland China but also in Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam and Singapore; historically also – and quite philosophically grounded – in pre-Meiji, Edo Japan. The idea of a state that is an extension of, rather than a juxtaposition to, the family; the unquestioned supremacy of the bureaucracy even in fine arts and culture; dealing with human flaws such as nepotism and other forms of corruption institutionally rather than by demanding that the human person changes;

and the focus on performance, so strongly so that an originally legitimate government can be removed even by force if it does not deliver, are aspects that underline both otherness and parallelism. And while Neo-Confucian philosophy of PA (Neo-Confucianism was the state ideology of Imperial China from the 800s until its demise) is independent from Western thought, New Confucian Philosophy is not, but it is also quite distant from PA – not surprising for a philosophical direction that emerged precisely as a reaction to the fall of a state and its management in the first years of the 20th century.

I hasten to say that these traditions are, by and large, not much taught in their carrier countries today either, at least not in PA – the top PA schools in, say, Turkey, China and so on are only gradually adding their own traditions to their curricula, if at all, and if they include any Philosophy as connected to PA, in general, it is global-Western. NWPA is still an uphill-battle approach even in the non-Western countries, but the philosophical enrichment and the potential as described *supra* remain, for all sides, and it appears that this at least – to mix metaphors – is a train that is going into the right direction.

Speaking about performance, Geert Bouckaert has occasionally differentiated between two aspects of good PA: Equity and Performance. This simple dichotomy has always struck me as heuristically the most helpful one for conceptualising what good PA actually is. It is already a great advance if, in the context of NWPA for instance, we recognise that top marks in the two categories do not automatically go together (they often do, but it is crucial to realise that ‘often’ is very different from ‘always’). The shallowness of the current PA discourse is perhaps best indicated by the fact that we have no theory, no texts, no classes, no discussion of intentionally bad PA in the sense that either universalist or even local norms are consciously broken – and/or delivery is not done! – in order, for example, to keep a regime in power that is mostly interested in just that, for its own selfish reasons. These are courses of action that typically are enmeshed with self-justifications, of course: cynical exploitative tyrannies self-asserting themselves as such are rare. PA, as we saw, is also derivative to a considerable extent – it implements public policies – and the question is whether, in the face of a given government with exploitative attributes, it is up to PA to say whether that regime should be successfully administered, or rather subverted. The independence of a classical Weberian PA vis-à-vis the government, often seen as a disadvantage, turns into an advantage once a regime considered ‘bad’ comes along – just as NPM, as ‘reactionary modernism’, is not coincidentally often so appreciated by authoritarian regimes. But how can we even hope to address such basic issues of PA without recourse to Philosophy?

In this context the derivativeness of PA has a theoretically positive side as well. In Philosophy as a scholarly discipline, as in the Humanities in general and in some of the less-applied social sciences, there is a ‘wussiness’,



over-conceptualisation and scholastic production of ethical–theoretical quagmires that make it much more complicated than it has to be to have a meaningful discourse. This, in PA, is not the case – it errs on the other side. For instance, NWPA, to the extent that it exists, has, almost elegantly, bypassed the self-serving fashion of the ‘Orientalism’ discourse (not the original question as raised, but the exclusivity-mongering use of it by tertiary adherents of the concept for their own interest). This means that in several respects, the PA discourse is, or can be, better than the one in contemporary Philosophy itself – less introverted and more fruitful.

Along the same lines, the necessary connection that PA as a scholarly discipline has to practice, a feature that is certainly more pronounced than for many of the other social sciences, is not non-philosophical, but quite the opposite; it is potentially a pre-condition for good Philosophy, as not only Aristotle and Kant, but also Plato and Hegel emphasised again and again – if it is not true in practice, the corresponding theory must be abandoned as well. The inherent, necessary practicality of PA has been questioned most recently by approaches prescribing more modelling, more ‘theory-driven’, open- and (apparently) big-data- or even AI-based, economics-imitating approaches that would like to see, also in PA, less relevance and more rigour (which, as Albert Einstein said in his 1921 Prussian Academy of Science lecture, are indeed enemies of each other), but at the core of PA lies a theory–practice balance and intimate connection, as long as the theory is and can indeed be connected to practice.

Beyond this, and as a final thought, the change of the way of life, indeed of the human person and of how they identify and conceive of themselves, through the Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) revolution is the main issue for PA in our time. It is also a ‘fashion’ and a hype – and appropriately so; ‘believe the hype’ – to which funded science and higher education are always extremely sensitive. With its technical propensity, ICT marginalises different approaches to PA even more – but in fact, ICT-based PA in its current stage needs Philosophy, if anything, more, not less. The crucial changes and shifts ICT creates are best addressed outside of e-Governance itself (which is often e-PA), which cannot – and usually does not even want to – pull itself out of the mire of Philosophy by its own hair. In fact, e-Governance is usually even more removed from Philosophy than PA, assuming both a millennial, indeed crusading rhetoric and a set of highly emotional value assumptions that are so internally inconsistent that they are only bearable if cognitive dissonance becomes a principle – privacy, openness, tolerance, safety, self-determinedness, control, uniformity, participation, agency, and so on, do collide, and it is difficult to see how one could balance them or at least sort them out without Philosophy.

Altogether, reflection on PA on a much wider and deeper level than that of the unquestioned assumptions remains both more necessary and more urgent

today than it has been for a while. We live in an administered world; the reality humans inhabit is to a considerable extent an administered one. To be aware of its foundations is crucial in a time when what we thought were the foundations of our life together all of a sudden break away, both in a technical sense and in a philosophical one, and a technical approach simply is insufficient for coping with, let alone for managing or even for ordering, reality for the *polis* in the times to come. I am, once again, very glad that Edoardo Ongaro's book has already so impressively contributed to this, and I am certain the success of the first edition of this book will be replicated by its translations addressing new and different audiences, and even further increased by this second edition.

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