1. Introduction and rationale

1.1 INTRODUCTION

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 usually focused on issues of epistemology (the bases and methods of knowledge) in PA (for an exemplar, see Riccucci, 2010) – a topic of high importance yet encompassing only a subset of the key philosophical themes of significance for public administration – 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 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 (2006a), 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 1.1 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 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 notable scientific journals: 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
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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)

What this passage pinpoints is 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.¹ From this
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 philosophical thought, a task that is carried out in two dedicated chapters (see later and also Table 1.1 for the plan 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 (Chapters 4–7; see also Table 1.1).

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
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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. Ricucci, 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 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. 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 4–7). Other approaches that may be employed in addressing the issue of the relationships between the field of PA and philosophical thoughts are discussed at the very end of this book (see Chapter 7 and notably Table 7.1).

It should be emphasised, however, 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 of the philosophical thought from Aristotle to Kant, from the pre-Socratics to the contemporary schools.

1.2 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, 2012):

- ‘What there is’: Metaphysics/Ontology and God
- ‘Who we are/who I am’: Soul and Mind
- ‘How to live’: Ethics and Morality (axiology)
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- ‘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, 2012, 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.5

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
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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.6 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.7 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.

1.3 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, 2017a, 2017b; Painter and Peters, 2010; Perry and Christensen, 2015; Pollitt, 2016; Raadschelders, 2005), however, that public administration can be defined as a subject matter, defined by its subject rather than as a discipline. It is considered to be ‘multidisciplinary’ 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 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 endeavor with a prime focus on studying government in order to produce insights to improve government practice’ (Bauer, 2017). It has also been qualified by its concern with the processes of preparation, promulgation/enactment and enforcement of the law (see Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011), 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 rather than charisma or tradition (Rosser, 2017). 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’ disciplinary study of government (e.g. Bauer, 2017), 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 – 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 (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.

Political science is the social scientific study of political systems and their interactions (the latter usually goes under the label of ‘international relations’, although the intensity of interactions occurring in political systems like the European Union can only partly be read through the lens of traditional international relations studies). 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 Chapter 4, after having presented the main philosophical schools in Chapters 2 and 3.

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 stand 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, 2017; 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 Tõnurist and Bækgaard (2017).

A central problem of all three of 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 (Chapter 4).

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 (2017) claim that: ‘[T]here is no debate over the fact 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’. 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, 2017). 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 addresses the contribution of positive law11 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.

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 Dukheim (Perri and Mars, 2008; Perri, 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
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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.

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., forthcoming; Tummers et al., 2016; Olsen et al., 2017 – and the establishment by the European Group for Public Administration of a Permanent Study Group dedicated to this theme; see also Dunlop and Radaelli, 2017, 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 (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, ‘PA is perhaps best seen as profession, as primarily interested in instrumental knowledge in the same sense like medicine or engineering are. The aim of PA would then be rather optimizing public administration in the widest sense, i.e. making the state work as legitimately, fairly, effectively and efficiently as possible’ (Bauer, 2017).

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?). 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.12

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 is engine and fuel for the efficacy of this effort, for achieving this overarching goal. 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.

1.4 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 largest 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 another book, 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.

1.5 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
Philosophy and public administration

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 long-standing 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 conscious-
ness 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 and soon started to
devote myself to researching public administration 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).
Of course I reviewed as widely as possible those publications in the public
administration field delving into philosophical foundations (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 challeng-
ing 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.

1.6 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 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 summarised in Table 1.1. 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 pointed out, 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 and epistemological 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 public governance. Chapter 6 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. Finally, Chapter 7 pulls the threads together and 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.
Table 1.1  Sequence of the book: a summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 1. Introduction and rationale</th>
<th>This chapter sets the scene and argues why philosophy and philosophical understanding is highly valuable for the field of public administration and public governance and management (in short: PA). Rationale and defining issues are discussed.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 2. Key streams in philosophical inquiry: a selection and succinct overview for the field of public administration – Part I</td>
<td>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 philosophers. Links with and implications for the field of PA are previewed, to be further developed in Chapters 4–6.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3. Key streams in philosophical inquiry: a selection and succinct overview for the field of public administration – Part II</td>
<td>The chapter examines modern and contemporary philosophical streams and furnishes an overview of how these may shed light on overlooked profiles of contemporary PA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4. Public administration doctrines and themes revisited from a philosophical perspective</td>
<td>This chapter systematically applies the results of Chapters 2 and 3 and discusses how the systematic 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 and epistemological issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas More: on virtues, realism, and utopian thinking in public administration</td>
<td>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 <em>The Good Government</em> by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, the masterpiece <em>The Prince</em> by Niccolò Machiavelli and <em>Utopia</em> by Thomas More are revisited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7. The search for consistency</td>
<td>This chapter pulls the threads together and examines the kind of contribution that philosophy may provide to PA, variously conceived of as scientific knowledge, an interpretivist venture, practical wisdom, or practical experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 relativise even some of the most astonishing, fascinating and at the same time threatening changes that technological innovation may bring about.
8. And bureaucracy is under conditions of political domination.
9. Intended broadly as being capable of integrating concepts and theories as developed in diverse disciplines, the capability of relating whole disciplines (Dogan, 1996).
10. ‘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).
11. ‘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.
12. 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.
13. 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.