

BRINGING PHILOSOPHY INTO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: A RESEARCH AGENDA

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ABSTRACT

Philosophical knowledge may enable a deeper understanding of key issues of public governance, public administrative systems, and public services management. Bringing philosophical knowledge into public administration – far from representing a retreat in the Ivory Tower - is of the utmost practical significance. The paper aims at sketching the contours of a research agenda about how to develop research on public administration by bringing philosophical thought systematically into the field and by outlining four complementary paths to this purpose.

KEYWORDS: *Philosophical knowledge into PA, Public governance, Public administration systems*

1. INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The argument put forward in this paper is that philosophical knowledge may enable a deeper understanding of key issues of public governance, public administrative systems, and public services management. Bringing philosophical knowledge into public administration – far from representing a retreat in the Ivory Tower - is of the utmost practical significance. The paper aims at sketching the contours of a research agenda about how to develop research on public administration by bringing philosophical thought systematically into the field. Four complementary paths to this purpose are outlined.

To argue about the significance of bringing philosophical thought into this field, we may take the example of the *legitimacy* of a public governance arrangement. Legitimacy of public governance is a key issue in an epoch of crumbling certainties, and legitimacy in the eyes of citizens is a crucial enabler of ‘good’ public governance. This topic is studied from the perspective of the administrative sciences along two very important lines of inquiry: that of the level of *trust* by citizens in public governance arrangements, and that of the *satisfaction* of the users of public services (Van de Walle, 2018; van Ryzin, 2007). However these two lines of inquiry may not suffice in themselves unless a broader perspective is taken. Investigating the drivers of trust and satisfaction in citizen-users of public services is important, but at a more fundamental level, ‘satisfaction of expectations’ is not synonymous with ‘well-being’ and ‘fulfilment’ of one’s life: which is what most citizens ultimately, often desperately and unable to express it in ways other than protest and angst, crave for.

The crux of the issue lies in the gap between ‘satisfaction’ and ‘well-being’ in this deeper sense, that is, 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 satisfaction; that is, the question is the extent to which satisfaction cannot be likened to well-being (a point which is fully recognised by the scholars researching on these themes). The ultimate rationale for the legitimacy of a public governance arrangement lies in whether public governance as practised in a given jurisdiction may enable each and every member of its political community to improve her/his well-being in this deeper sense of the fulfilment of one’s life: this is (in a nutshell) the so-called *common good* argument, which was wrought out by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. Alternative philosophical

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arguments may be put forward to provide the ultimate justification of a public governance arrangement, like the theory of the social contract originated in Rousseau's thinking, or the theory of social justice propounded with unflinching and restless commitment and dedication over a lifetime by John Rawls (Rawls, 1997; for an overview on the issue of the search for legitimacy in public governance, see Bird, 2006). My main point here, in the brief space of a paper whose ultimate purpose is outlining a research agenda for bringing philosophy into the field of public administration, is not so much to take side on the issue of which philosophical stance may be preferable, but to convince the reader that the preliminary and more fundamental issue is that *any* meaningful discussion of the legitimacy of public governance may only be found when social sciences get married to philosophical understanding: when philosophical knowledge is brought into the picture.

The problem is that, however and unfortunately, there seems to be little systematic resorting to philosophical knowledge in the extant scientific and professional literatures in public governance, public administration and public management.

There are, of course, notable exceptions to this state of affairs. These include excellent works, a number of them focused on issues of epistemology, the branch of philosophy that deals with the bases and methods of knowledge (for an exemplar, see Riccucci, 2010). This is a theme of high importance, yet in itself it represents only a subset of the key philosophical themes of significance for public administration. Other works centre on issues of ethics, integrity and values in public administration (a stream of research developed by authors such as Gjalte de Graaf, Wolfgang Drechsler, George Frederickson, Leo Huberts, Michael Macaulay, Mark Rutgers, amongst others). An edited work that ploughs widely into the philosophical terrain is the edited volume by Lynch and Cruise (2006), collating contributions from a range of US scholars about the significance of the thought of certain selected individual philosophers for the field of public administration. These works are highly important, yet somehow they self-restrain to certain topics, or certain favourite authors, while shying away from other philosophical themes – ontological and political philosophical - which are of central significance for a foundational discourse of and for public administration.

The theme of the philosophical foundations of public administration might be seen as part of the larger debate on philosophical issues in public affairs broadly intended, to which books 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.

Closer to the field of public administration and public governance are 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 at most, and usually around specific issues, but never or very rarely in a systematic way.

Philosophical issues are, however, ubiquitous and underpin, often in unexplicit ways, almost any claim in the most serious research works in the field, as the above-mentioned example of the issue of the legitimacy of public governance – which is not reducible to the study of users satisfaction and citizens trust, however important these are - may illustrate. In a book-length work, I endeavour to provide the reader sympathetic to the need to bring philosophical thought into the study and the practice of public administration with a hopefully agile introductory work on how to do this (Ongaro, Edoardo. 2017. *Philosophy and Public Administration: An Introduction*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Elgar). This way, in all humbleness, I hope to contribute a small brick to the

much-needed bridge between the administrative sciences, on one hand, and the philosophy *in and for* public administration and public governance, on the other hand.

The paper discusses a wide range of themes: ontological, political philosophical, epistemological. It examines the contribution that philosophies like Kantian and neo-Kantian thinking, existentialism (notably with reference to the figure of the ‘existentialist public administrator’), structuralism, phenomenology, Marxism and Gramsci, historicism, neo-Scholastics and Thomism – amongst others – may contribute to public administration. The question of the legitimacy of public governance (hinted to in previous paragraphs) is elaborated, with applications to the issue of what is the implicit argument for legitimacy contained in fashionable (or that used to be fashionable) doctrines for the reform of the public sector like the New Public Management, the New Public Governance, the Neo-Weberian State, and others. These reform ‘ideologies’ have swept the globe and to a smaller or bigger extent reshaped the public sector of many countries, yet little attention has been paid to the logic of justification underpinning these ideas: a more systematic application of philosophical thought would have been beneficial to this regard.

The masterpieces of three authors – the painting *Il Buon Governo* (The Good Government) by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1290–1348), the political writing *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), and the path-making, genre-setting book *Utopia* by Thomas More (1478–1535) – are then used as entry points 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.

Reflections on the notion of ‘utopia’ and utopian thinking highlights the significance of teleological thinking for public administration: thinking in terms of objectives to be reached, and not just in the terms of the causes of the extant situation. It also elicits reflections on the notions of models, paradigms, and ideal-types (the last one famously introduced by Max Weber to provide a conceptual outline of the bureaucracy). It seems that over the past years the pendulum of the attention has shifted toward the quest for ‘good practices’, practices that work, and that this has occurred possibly to the detriment of thinking in terms also of notions such as that of model (alternative models of public governance), or even in terms of what are (if any) the paradigms of public administration in history (for example, the western public administration and the Confucian public administration represent two distinct paradigms – but little attention is being paid to what they may mean for contemporary public administration). And as said, ideal-typing is a ‘lost art’ which may be of extreme actuality, if we are to re-invent novel forms of public administration for the 21st century. And a firmer sense of the direction of travel may be gained also by means of utopian thinking: thinking of alternative realities which represent possible alternative futures, but also benchmarks against which to critically review the present situation – of course provided that utopian thinking is re-discovered in the critical spirit set out by More’s original work, and care is taken to avoid falling into the hells of dystopias.

In sum, 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 paper is devoted: outlining possible paths (pathways) for the development of research work aimed at bringing philosophical knowledge into public administration. In short: the core argument is that PA may benefit from adding to its constituent disciplines philosophy (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), and this paper 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 of public administration.

2. OUTLINE OF A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR BRINGING PHILOSOPHY INTO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: FOUR POSSIBLE PATH(WAY)S

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 advance our knowledge of the field. We call these approaches:

- *Research Development 1: Mapping Backwards* – it is based on surveying the field of public administration to detect and unearth the underpinning philosophical stances in the public administration scholarship
- *Research Development 2: Going Foundational* – it is centred on proposing new conceptions of public governance and administration by taking the move from an explicit ontology (working out one’s own philosophy of PA)
- *Research Development 3: Revisiting Selectively* – by focusing key topics of contemporary significance for PA and inquiring into them from a philosophical standpoint
- *Research Development 4: Philosophising Systematically* – applying in as much a systematic way as possible philosophical thought to public administration towards building up the edifice of philosophy for PA

These approaches are illustrated in turn. The first approach, which we label ‘*Research Development 1: Mapping Backwards*’, consists of surveying the field of public administration, e.g. revisiting the extant public administration literature with the purpose of detecting and mapping the implicit or explicit philosophical underpinnings contained in the current public administration literature. To illustrate in more operational terms, this could occur by scouting the publications appearing in the forty-seven scientific journals currently ranked according to the ISI-Thomson index under the category ‘Public Administration’ and querying, with a pre-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 the researcher in the field of public administration. To refer to the example with which we opened this paper, an application of this approach would lie in questioning what are the legitimacy underpinnings – the justification that makes public governance ‘legitimate’, be them 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 - 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. We argue 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 (I am following here a line of analysis wrought out in Ongaro, 2017, chapter 4, pp140-144). It is another non-truant question that may be asked to query what conception of time underpins and is (implicitly) employed in public administration scholarly work? The French philosopher Henry Bergson famously introduced the distinction between the ‘spatialized’ time of physics and time as duration, the latter being *the* time of life for Bergson. In the Bergsonian perspective, the past is conserved and kept in its entirety into the present: time is the tissue of which each living being is made; time is also the tissue of which the universe as a whole is made, although not inanimate portions of it (Bergson, 2005). Life for Bergson 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 –something which may very likely resonate as familiar to researchers adopting methods like ethno-methodology, or more widely scholars employing techniques fit for reaching out in a more holistic way to administrative phenomena. Such distinction, and indeed

sharp contrast, between the ‘spatialized time’ of social phenomena when they are studied ‘from the outside’ and the lived time as duration when plunging into social phenomena and investigating them ‘inside out’, has been echoed across the social sciences: e.g. in communications studies, see Kember and Zylinska, 2012, who explicitly refer to the Bergsonian conception of time to make sense of the lived time of people navigating on – and living immersed in – the new social media.

However, the conceptual power of this notion – i.e. of distinguishing between different conceptions of time - has so far not been fully appreciated and deployed (or at least so it seems to me) in studies of change and continuity in public administration and governance. At a very minimum, 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 the administrative sciences. More often - it seems to me – the notion of time adopted is not problematized. Given that it is tautological to state that the time of life is the one practitioners experience in acting (administering), it may then be queried, on the level of the foundational, ontological issue of the conception of time that is being adopted, what kind of fit currently exists between the knowledge supplied by the public administration scholarly community –very often (it seems to me) working with a notion of time as spatialized - and the demand for employable knowledge by those practising public administration (i.e., living it in their very life). Part of the often evoked ‘misfit between research and practice’ may possibly lie also in the very underlying conception of time employed by either community (scholars on one hand, practitioners on the other hand), though for completeness of the assessment it should be added that 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; a similar sensitivity to a processual notion of time are the works by Asquer, 2012; Barzelay and Gallego, 2006; Mele, 2010; Mele and Ongaro, 2014; Ongaro, 2006; Pettigrew, 1990, amongst others).

We have dwelt at quite some length on the example of the implications of the ontological conception of time to illustrate this first approach, or research strategy, to bringing philosophical notions into public administration, and revisiting in this perspective the extant scientific or grey literature, 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 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-explored or outright ignored.

A possible second line of development in bringing philosophy to the fore into public administration we have called ‘*Research Development 2 - Going Foundational*’. In this perspective, philosophy and 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 could also be labelled ‘*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. An example is the work by Stout and Love (2018), who have wrought out an outright ‘manifesto for integrative governance’, predicated on process philosophy 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. Even when the ontological point of departure is diverse (as is the case for me with regard to the authors’ ontology, from which mine is profoundly different), by making the philosophical foundations of the proposed argument explicit, books in this approach

enable the most fruitful of dialogues to unfold amongst scholars and practitioners, thus powerfully contributing to the development of the field of public governance and administration.

A third approach, which we call '*Research Development 3: Revisiting Selectively*', starts from the actuality and 'burning issues' in contemporary public administration, and thence aims at bringing philosophy into public administration. It focuses key topics of contemporary significance for the field, and inquires 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, but rather in carrying out the (often scathing) 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, a book which revisits a previous joint work and is dedicated to the memory of Fox who passed away in May 2004), provide a very sharp, abrasive at traits, 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 offices 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 would 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. 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).

As shown by the example, this approach is less concerned with reviewing the social scientific literature as it is to shed light on issue of contemporary significance and actuality – like in the example to argue about fundamental flaws in representative democracy (and its implications for public accountability, a key theme in the field of public administration). Indeed, this – at traits abrasive – approach might be employed to demystify a number of 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 public administration.

A fourth approach, the one which we have labelled '*Research Development 4: Philosophising Systematically*' is the one closest to the overall thrust of my book '*Philosophy and Public Administration; An Introduction*' (Ongaro, 2017).

The starting point 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 public administration, in a truly major interdisciplinary effort. 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 public administration, it too 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'. 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 public administration and the charting of it: philosophical thought is then deployed for critically revisiting and rethinking contemporary public administration themes and issues.

The main actors in this approach are scholars of public administration (public administrationists), not scholars of philosophy: the former map the field of public administration and have to identify the areas where philosophical thought may usefully be tapped; the latter provide the knowledge resources and methodological rigour in how philosophical debate at the highest academic standards is conducted, for application to the field of public administration.

3. OTHER IMPLICATIONS: THE TEACHING OF PHILOSOPHY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAMMES

If the argument about the significance of bringing philosophical thought into the field of public administration holds, then implications ensue also at the level of the teaching of public administration programmes, notably a number of practical questions about the specifics of the place and contents of the subject ‘philosophy for public administration’ in public administration educational and training programmes. These questions include: what should be the place of philosophy in public administration curricula (at what levels of higher education -whether undergraduate, post-graduate, PhD, and executive education)? What contents should be included? And in what relations should the teaching of philosophy for public administration be developed in relation to more standard contents of the modules typically taught in a PA programme? And, in the classical last but not least, through what means, in terms of teaching methods and approaches, should philosophy for public administration be taught?

I try to address these questions in full in a dedicated journal article (Ongaro, forthcoming), to which I refer the reader. The short answer to the above questions may be summed up as follows. First, that philosophy for public administration may be introduced at all levels, thereby including the undergraduate one, with the extent to which philosophy is being taught at secondary school in a given country being an important influencing factor, as obviously where philosophy is a central subject in the curriculum entails prospective students at university/college level are endowed with a better background knowledge. However, it should be kept in focus that what is required for a public administration programme is not the widest-reaching philosophical education, rather it is the application of philosophical concepts to public administration themes, and this can be taught within the format of a university module: a wider philosophical background in students may be a plus and in sense represent the optimal precondition for the learning of philosophy for public administration, but it is not a requirement *per se*. Indeed, in my recently published book (Ongaro, 2017) it is provided in its first part a systematic introduction to (western) philosophy, to then turn to apply such body of knowledge and understanding to public administration, all of this contained in one single text of average length for a university book. Along the same line of reasoning, philosophy for public administration may be developed in postgraduate programmes – like Master of Public Administration – as well as research degrees and, significantly, also in executive education/continuing professional development programmes.

We can now turn to the question of the substantive contents to be given prominence in bringing philosophical knowledge into public administration programmes. Two main approaches may be sketched. The first lies in focusing selected branches of philosophy, identified as the “most pertinent” for the purposes of shedding light on aspects of public administration, or at least as those thematically closest to the topics and issues traditionally debated in public administration. Examples of such branches could be: epistemology, which then becomes epistemology of research methods for public administration; 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 (most notably ontology), and aims at discussing in their full breadth key philosophers and philosophies, to then apply these bodies of knowledge to public administration. This means, e.g., teaching topics like: the existentialist public administrator and what the philosophy of existentialism can say about public administration; or the relationship between Marxism, the role of power distribution in both political and administrative processes, the enduring influence of political parties for public governance, and public administration; or the potential of philosophical historicism for shedding light on public administration, notably its longer-term internal modification and evolution; and so on.

Another question regards the combination of learning methods (and teaching team: one teacher or two, one more versed in public administration and the other in philosophy?) most appropriate for the teaching of philosophy for public administration. Roughly speaking, one initial distinction may be between an approach emphasising discussions and ‘case studies’ and other interactive methods to introduce philosophical problematics, on one hand, and an approach placing frontal teaching at the centre, and then complementing it with more discursive methods, on the other hand. Some of the pros of interactive methods lie in that they may stimulate reflection upon and 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, and hence introductory elements may be indispensable (however, the great Greek Philosopher Socrates taught philosophy only by means of conversation and questioning, showing the potency of such an approach). Conversely and complementarily, an upside of frontal teaching may lie 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 public administration students exposed to these contents.

Thus, approaches to introducing a body of philosophical knowledge for public administration into public administration taught programmes at all levels require a combination of choices delineating alternative strategies to develop the teaching of philosophy for public administration. First, whether to set up a brand new module or rather empower already existing modules (whether the introduction module or dedicated modules e.g. on public ethics). Advantages of the latter approach are that they build on already existing contents – and it may well be that across the varied modules on offer in schools of public affairs, public administration and public policy there is at least on occasions an already extant body of contents that to a smaller or larger extent tap philosophical knowledge and applies it to public administration. This approach might potentiate and make the connection with philosophical contents more upfront and explicit. Conversely, the choice of setting up a module entirely dedicated to the teaching of philosophy for public administration may be ultimately more potent. And give a competitive advantage to the institutions that introduce it as they can differentiate their offer in a highly distinctive way. In both the case that a distinctive module is introduced and the case of potentiating philosophical contents in already existing modules, the choice of teaching methods is a crucial one, though possibly also an easier one. It seems 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. Indeed, if the teaching of philosophy for public administration develops in the future, scholars in the field with a background in philosophy may gain a competitive advantage and become more and more sought after by Public Administration Departments and Schools.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, this paper makes the argument for systematically bringing philosophical knowledge into the field of public administration. It specifically outlines the contours of a possible agenda to develop research on public administration by bringing philosophical thought systematically into the field.

Four complementary paths to this purpose are outlined, to which we have referred as ‘*Mapping Backwards*’ (due to this approach taking the move from surveying the field of public administration

and then proceeding ‘backwards’ to detect and unearth underpinning philosophical stances ‘buried’, often very implicitly, in the public administration scholarship); ‘*Going Foundational*’ (as authors in this approach aims at providing novel foundations centred on new conceptions of public governance and administration by taking the move from an explicit ontology); ‘*Revisiting Selectively*’ (as this approach targets key topics of contemporary significance for PA to investigate them from a philosophical standpoint); and ‘*Philosophising Systematically*’ (as the gist of this approach lies in applying in as much a systematic way as possible philosophical thought to public administration towards building up the edifice of philosophy for PA – in a certain sense scholars operating in this approach do engage with the activity of philosophical speculation, although in a rather instrumental sense, by transferring philosophical knowledge into the specific field of public administration). We also highlight that philosophy for public administration is relevant not just on the side of the production of knowledge, but also in the transfer and diffusion of knowledge, that is, in the teaching of public administration programmes. And, in the most classical of the ‘last but not least’, bringing philosophical knowledge into the field may also enable scholars and practitioners alike in public administration to engage more, and more effectively, into contemporary public debates on the future of public governance – a most urgent of needs in this first part of the 21st century.

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