Aligning Philosophical Perspectives and Public Administration: Ideational Public Governance Configurations

Abstract The core argument of this chapter is that a fuller understanding of administrative doctrines benefits from considering their ideational bases. Administrative doctrines can be defined as elements of knowledge with a prescriptive/normative thrust about how public administration ought to be organised. Examples of administrative doctrines include: the New Public Management; New Public Governance and Collaborative Governance; the Neo-Weberian State; Public Value governance and management; the Guardian State: and not least the base case of 'Old Public Administration'. We employ the notion of ideational public governance configuration to indicate the overall configuration of administrative doctrines and the ontological, epistemological, linguistic, ethical-moral and political-philosophical ideas which enable to conceptualise, understand, interpret and explain administrative doctrines. The notion of ideational public governance configuration is therefore a conceptual tool to mobilise philosophical thinking for unpacking and elucidating the ideational bases of our understanding of public administration.

Introduction and Rationale

This chapter explores a distinct direction of inquiry in connecting philosophy and public administration, namely, it addresses the issue of the alignment between administrative doctrines and their ideational bases. Administrative doctrines or public administration doctrines (hereafter referred to simply as 'PADS') are defined as elements of knowledge with a prescriptive-normative thrust about how public administration ought to be organised. Thus, 'Old Public Administration' and 'New Public management' (Barzelay, 2001; Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Hood, 1991) are both seen in this perspective as sets of administrative doctrines, as are 'Collaborative Governance' and the 'New Public Governance' (Osborne, 2006); the 'Neo-Weberian State' (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017); 'New Public Administration' (Frederickson, 1980) and 'New Public Service' (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015); 'Digital-Era Governance' (Dunleavy et al., 2006); 'Public Value Governance and Management' (Alford & O'Flynn, 2009; Benington, 2015; Benington & Moore, 2011; Bozeman, 2007; Bryson et al., 2015; Hartley et al., 2017; Meynhardt, 2009; Moore, 1995)—to mention some of the most prominent sets of administrative doctrines in an illustrative, but far from being exhaustive, fashion. Tons of ink have been poured about these reform doctrines, yet analyses of the philosophical underpinnings of such doctrines are less copious.

The contribution this chapter aims to make is providing an original and distinctive entry point to the study and practice of public administration doctrines. Our argument is that a fuller understanding of PADS benefits of considering their *ideational bases*, and that such ideational bases encompass ontological, epistemological, linguistic, ethical and political-philosophical perspectives. Ideational bases shape both the conceptual context of knowledge of PADS—that is, how scholars understand PADS: the underlying premises which ground scholarly work of knowledge generation in PADS—and the factual context of knowledge of PADS—that is, the beliefs systems and assumptions (as mental anticipations and perceptions) which shape the collective understandings of the ways in which public administrations operate and public policies occur. Understanding context is key to any progress and development of comparative public administration and public management (Pollitt, 2013): it is therefore argued that a systematic consideration of the ideational bases of administrative doctrines is a lynchpin for the theory of public administration, to which this book ultimately aims to contribute, through the

analysis of the connections between philosophical thought and public administration doctrines (the significance of mobilising philosophical thinking for bettering and refining our understanding of context in public administration is further discussed in Ongaro, 2026).

A better understanding of PADS demands that administrative doctrines are appreciated in the light of considerations of ontology, epistemology, semiology, values (axiology) and ethics, and political philosophy. We suggest that the label of *ideational public governance configuration* may be employed to indicate the overall configuration of a given set of administrative doctrines together with the ontological, epistemological, linguistic, ethical-moral, and political-philosophical ideas which enable to conceptualise, underpin, interpret and explain such administrative doctrines.

This chapter, therefore, aims at complementing the substantive state-of-art knowledge about PADS that the social sciences provide by delineating the contours of the ideational public governance configurations which enable a deeper understanding of administrative doctrines, by resorting to broader branches of knowledge, rooted in philosophical thought and cognate fields in the humanities. We conceive of ideational public governance configurations as combinations of foundational ideas about ontology, epistemology, semiology, ethics and morality, and political philosophy that enable an understanding of PADS in their broader ideational context. Philosophical thinking is therefore used broadly in this approach, and philosophy performs in general terms all the functions identified when applied to PA—enlightenment, critical, gap filling, integrative, normative—with an emphasis on the normative function, given philosophy in this framework enables and supports the broader and better understanding of the ideational bases of administrative doctrines, namely ideas which are inherently normative in thrust.

Two qualifications are required. First, ideational public governance configurations are multiple—that is, different ontological, epistemological, linguistic, ethical and axiological, political-philosophical positions and stances that align with given conceptions of how the public sector ought to be organised are possible. However, not all configurations are consistent; therefore, there will be only a limited, albeit potentially ample, number of configurations which are internally consistent and 'make sense', that is, that are not internally contradictory. For example, a Marxist political philosophy will presuppose an ontology of dialectical becoming, a usage of language emphasising transformation and change process (using

the gerundial form to highlight the inherent becoming of reality), and an ethics which places social class centre stage; any treatment of public policy and administration from a Marxist ideational public governance configuration will therefore require some extent of consistency with such ontological, epistemological, political-philosophical, ethical and linguistic assumptions. In other words, only a limited set of configurations are consistent (that is, certain administrative doctrines presuppose certain philosophical ideas). The framework of the ideational public governance configuration is used as conceptual tool to revisit the extent to which a given set of administrative doctrines [PADS-10] presupposes certain ideational contents (which we label through nine categories, as [1–9]), ultimately enabling the search for consistency,[1] through a dynamic, continuous process of alignment.

The second qualification is that the scholarly study of different configurations presupposes the adoption of a perspective of uncommitted ontology: that is to say, that the observer (the public administration scholar investigating administrative systems, the practitioner making administrative systems work) remains uncommitted about the actual existence of the entities that are being considered, in fact, '[W]hile committed ontology is concerned with the existence of those entities it discerns, uncommitted ontology remains agnostic about their existence' and '[U]ncommitted ontology focuses instead on the elucidation of the ontological presuppositions or assumptions of a particular author, theory or community' (Al-Amoudi & O'Mahoney, 2016, p. 16). In order to be able to critically analyse and appreciate different ideational public governance configurations, beholders have to 'relinquish' their own ontological beliefs (and related assumptions in the other domains of philosophical speculation) and assume an agnostic stance, which enables a dialogue amongst different perspectives.

Finally, it may be pointed out that the notion of ideational public governance configuration complements and completes a range of other notions widely employed in the field of PA and that are amenable to

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[1] Consilience is another term which might be employed here: Wilson (1998) introduced the term 'consilience' to indicate the linking of knowledge generated across disciplines to achieve common ground for explanations: ideational public governance configurations represent a framework to try and attain consilience across forms of knowledge in relation to administrative doctrines.

philosophical inquiry and appreciation: these notions are those of 'practice', 'model', 'paradigm', ideal-type' and 'utopia'—all notions that are of central importance for PA (Achten et al., 2016; Bouckaert, 2020a; Ongaro, 2020, chapter 8).

Ideational Public Governance Configuration: Analytical Framework and Building Blocks

The analytical framework employed to illustrate what an ideational public governance configuration is hinges around the notion of ideational alignment with administrative doctrines of an array of forms of knowledge and understanding which originate in nine main theoretical-disciplinary perspectives (see Fig. 4.1 for an illustration). Of these theoretical-disciplinary perspectives, four pertain to dimensions of ontology [indicated as ONTO-1 to ONTO-4]; two of political philosophy and theory [POLPHIL-8 and POLPHIL-9], the others pertain to epistemology [EPI-5], language analysis [LANG-6], ethics, morality and axiology [E-7]. They represent macro-areas of human knowledge, intended in the broadest sense and encompassing varied forms of knowledge, wisdom and understanding in the investigation of reality. They pertain to philosophy and philosophical thought, broadly intended, and its application to various realms of problems and research and policy questions: they represent philosophical perspectives to the study and practice of PADS (Ongaro, 2021, 2022a).

This analytical framework is intended for use both by the 'detached beholders', the scholars observing and studying administrative and public policy phenomena from the outside, and the 'engaged practitioners', the decision-makers aiming at changing with the purpose of improving (in some sense, and given their very own values, which are part and parcel of the ideational bases they use to frame administrative phenomena for purposes of action) the functioning of administrative systems. We are of course aware that both these profiles—the pure scholar and the engaged practitioner—are somewhat fictional, as most of the people in real flesh and bones involved in public policy and the functioning of administrative systems will be somewhere in-between the pure scholar and the engaged practitioner, but the message we intend to convey is that we consider the notion of ideational public governance configuration and the analytical framework to describe it that we introduce in this chapter to represent a useful conceptual tool both for theory-development and scholarship

> ➢ Ontology
>> ○ Reality in itself / what there is / Being and nature of things [ONTO-1]
>> ○ Conception of time and space/place [ONTO-2]
>> ○ Conception and understanding of human nature: the self / identity / model of man-human being [ONTO-3]
>> ○ Configuration and nature of society: social ontology - social structures and individual agency [ONTO-4]
> ➢ Epistemology and Logic: what we can know, how we can know [EPI-5]
> ➢ Language and discourse analysis: nouns (entities) or gerundial (becoming/process) [LANG-6]
> ➢ Ethics – values/axiology: public ethics / public values / integrity of public governance [E-7]
> ➢ Political Philosophy:
>> ○ Perspectives and approaches to the issue of the legitimacy of the political system and public governance [POLPHIL-8]
>> ○ Constitutional-political doctrines and conceptions of State and Citizen: Constitutional Liberalism and Liberal-democracy (Representative Democracy; Deliberative Democracy; Participatory Democracy); Libertarian Liberalism; Socialism (Social-Democracy); Communism-Marxism (Leninism, Maoism); Conservatism; Republicanism; Radical Democracy (Follett); Direct Democracy; New Authoritarianism – Fascism; Absolutism; Confucian Meritocracy; Confucian Democracy; … [POLPHIL-9]

ALIGN WITH

> ❖ Administrative Doctrines [PADS or PADS-10], such as: Old Public Administration; New Public Management; New Public Governance and Collaborative governance; New Public Service; New Public Administration; Digital Era Governance; Neo-Weberian State; Public Value Governance and Management; …

Fig. 4.1 Ideational public governance configuration: key components and alignment

(thereby encompassing both research and education and the teaching of philosophy for public administration, Ongaro, 2019, 2020—chapter 9—and 2022b) and for praxis and practice-orientated purposes. In short, both academics and practitioners will benefit of it, we think.

The basic framework of analysis of the ideational public governance configuration, outlining the ideational alignment of such areas of knowledge with administrative doctrines, is illustrated in Fig. 4.1.

The components of the framework are succinctly discussed in the remainder of this section. A number of 'actual' sets of administrative doctrines and the corresponding ideational public governance configurations are proposed and critically reviewed in the next section, in an illustrative way, in order to show how the notion of ideational public governance configuration can be utilised in the field of public administration.

Given space limitations, this chapter can only provide a bird's-eye view, done in an evocative manner by way of just listing and labelling such huge areas of intellectual inquiry and very briefly hinting to their main traits, and we refer the readers to the pertinent literature for any in-depth study they wish to pursue further (so the reader interested in the issue of the legitimacy of a political system and public governance will have to delve into the corresponding political philosophy literature; the reader interested in issues of public ethics will have to develop into the ethics literature and public ethics specifically, and so forth). In other words, these areas of intellection or ideational dimensions can only be evoked and labelled here, leaving it to the reader to unpack each of them depending on the intellectual-practical set of circumstances in which they are embedded, that is, the given 'here-and-now' of the concrete and specific administrative system they are studying or contributing to making it work (the two functions of studying and making something work not being necessarily mutually exclusive, rather intertwined).

The first four dimensions point to the significance of ontology for any field of study, and therefore also for PADS (Ongaro, 2020, chapter 4): these four dimensions bring to the fore the question of the nature of reality as such, and of the 'essence' of the entities that are being investigated. The labels ONTO-1 'Reality in itself' and ONTO-2 'Time and space-place' point to the significance of the ontological premises for any investigation into any specific field of reality: What is the nature of reality? Is it about being or becoming? Do entities exist in themselves or in relation to something else/ the other? What is time, are there different notions of time, what do these notions entail, and which one(s) should we employ for understanding and for changing the world and society? What is space and how does it shape the conditions for humans to think of entities and interact with them, and what is a 'place' and how does it shape social structures, social practices and social agency? The answers provided to these, and many other related fundamental questions shape any aspect of the way in which we understand and act upon social realities. Each student or practitioner of PADS will study and practise it by relying on their ontological views, that is, their vision of the world (often referred to with the German-language term of *Weltanschauung*, which has become technical terminology to express this concept), which is shaped by their answers (whether explicit or implicit) to the questions above.

Two other sets of set of fundamental questions derive from, and interconnect with, the aforementioned dimensions, and they too are

ontological in nature. The first set of questions concern the conceptions and understanding of human nature (the branch of philosophy sometimes referred to as the investigation of Soul and Mind): Who are we? How do we understand the nature of human beings and the meaning of 'being human'? How do we understand the 'self' and the 'other'? what 'model of man (human being) do we assume, and what does it mean in terms of understanding human behaviour and individual freedom, the motivations driving individual agency, their underlying logics? Such questions are closely connected to questions of ethics and morality (how to live well?) and of political philosophy (how to live well together?), but they can also be seen as a set of distinct questions and issues, more ontological in nature, which we label in our framework as ONTO-3 'Conception and understanding of human nature'.

The other set of questions—also ontological—concern the nature of 'social entities', that is, the very entities we are most interested in when studying society (public administration being part and parcel of society). Questions about the nature of social entities constitute our fourth dimension, which we have labelled: ONTO-4 'Configuration and nature of society'. The field of social ontology has only relatively recently acquired wider currency and become an area of active inquiry (at least in comparison with the ontological questions we have previously discussed, which have occupied the minds of philosophers over the millennia). Social ontology is a specialised field of ontology which is concerned with the nature and foundations of social entities, with 'the study of what sort of things exist in the social world and how they relate to each other' (Elder-Vass, 2010, p. 4). Some of its roots can be traced in the work of Émile Durkheim, who introduced the notion of a 'social fact' and the question of under what conditions a fact is 'social', most famously through his work on the causes leading certain individuals at certain moments of their life to commit suicide: by demonstrating the influence of social conditions on even such most individual act which is the decision of taking one's own life, Durkheim uncovered the 'reality' of social facts and their influence—that is, their causal power—on individuals' lives. Such entities like social groups, social conventions, customs and habits of a society, social norms, institutions and organisations, social practices, social processes and social structure can all be defined as 'social entities' and form the object of inquiry of social ontology, as a regional ontology, an ontology focused on a specific 'region' of reality. Administrative systems and public policies partake of society and can be seen as instances of social entities, and as

such they benefit from the findings of social ontology, and any under-standing of administrative systems and public policies is also underpinned in social ontology (Ongaro, 2020, pp. 133–138). Social ontology can therefore contribute to shed light on the foundations of our knowledge of PADS.

But how can we gain knowledge of reality and its entities? What can we know? These and similar questions constitute another set of fundamental philosophical questions which give rise to epistemology: the branch of philosophy which aims at ascertaining what we (human beings) can know, and how—in other words: what is 'rigorous' knowledge, that is, knowl-edge that is grounded and that is 'certain'. These questions are at the roots of the modern sciences, and therefore also of the social sciences, and are relatively more frequently discussed in social scientific research works than ontological questions usually are, notably in relation to issues of 'adequacy' of the research methods employed (e.g. Howell, 2012). Linked to this area of philosophy as well as to the next one (hence also operating as a bridge between the two) is the field of Logic. We refer to this fifth dimension of the ideational public governance configuration with the label EPI-5 'Epistemology'.

Language is key to human beings and to our possibility of thinking of reality and our own self. Language can for example reveal whether we think of reality in terms of entities (possibly revealed by the emphasis on the use of nouns rather than gerundial to describe reality) or as process and becoming (revealed by the use of the gerundial rather than nouns in the description of reality). An important philosophical strand, the analytic movement, spearheaded by scholars like Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein in the first half of the twentieth century and especially influ-ential in the Anglosphere and the English-speaking world, emphasises the analysis of language as key to any process of generation of knowledge which can uphold the highest standards of being rigorous. The related fields of semiology (the study of signs—the relationship of a meaning to a signifier—and of symbols) and linguistics (the scientific study of language) represent major theoretical-disciplinary perspectives whose significance for the field of PADS can hardly be overestimated. We label this sixth ideational dimension—philosophy of language and its related fields—as LANG-6 'Language and Discourse Analysis'.

Ethics—our seventh area, labelled E-7 'Ethics'—is another key philosophical-disciplinary perspective which is central to PADS. It also concerns issues of values in human decisions and behaviour, an area of

philosophical inquiry also known as axiology. In public life broadly and PADS specifically these profiles are considered by such fields of research and practice as public ethics and integrity of governance, and all those scholars investigating public values. These are an integral part and active areas of inquiry in the field of PADS (e.g. Chapman, 2003; de Graaf et al., 2016).

Political philosophy can contribute in many ways to shedding light on key issues in PADS. A first area we highlight here is the issue of the legitimacy of public governance. Legitimacy concerns the political-philosophical question of what justifies a political order and makes it just, thereby 'giving reasons' to its members to value it (Bird, 2006). Legitimacy is therefore concerned with gaining the consent of the members on the very foundation of the polity under consideration and, relatedly, with being able to command loyalty to the political system from its participants (Ongaro, 2020, p. 162). A key issue for the comparative study of PADS is whether the issue of legitimacy applies only to the political system as an indivisible whole (an example would be the claim that a liberal-democratic regime is legitimate per se, an authoritarian system is not), or whether we may consider that specific public governance and administrative arrangements within the political system can be analytically distinguished (i.e. focused for purpose of study and analysis), and it is therefore possible to analyse the legitimacy specifically of the public administrative system, or selected areas of it (like its policing service, or its public healthcare services, or its educational system, and the like), while 'bracketing' the issue of whether the broader political system per se may be deemed to be legitimate or not (Ongaro, 2020, pp. 183–184 in particular). Zacka (2022) has pointed out the rediscovery of the issue of the legitimacy of public administration as such, the articulation of standards of good government as distinct from good public policy, as a central endeavour for political philosophy applied to public administration. Legitimacy is foundational to public governance, and therefore, this represents a first major ideational area in which political philosophy contributes to PADS. We label this POLPHIL-8 'Perspectives and approaches to legitimacy of the political system and public governance and administration'.

Another way in which PADS is linked to political theory relates to the constitutional doctrines which provide the ideational underpinnings and foundations for a political system and hence its administration and public policies. We label this POLPHIL-9 'Constitutional and political doctrines'. The history of humankind has seen a range of political regimes,

and notably since the eighteenth century CE onwards the problem of the constitutional foundation of a political system (which intertwines with the issue of its legitimacy recalled earlier) has been tackled by a variety of doctrines. By way of hinting to these, we can mention the following political doctrines: Constitutional Liberalism and Liberal-democracy (which combines Constitutional Liberalism with Representative Democracy—a treatment of the topic of bureaucracy in the framework of Liberal-democracy has recently been provided by Heath, 2020), and, as 'variants' or 'expansions and complements' of it, Deliberative Democracy (centred on the notion of the public sphere and the analysis of the conditions for democratic deliberation processes to occur in the public sphere) and Participatory Democracy (centred on citizen participation to political-public decision-making processes); Republicanism (hinging on the core tenet of civic participation); Conservatism (emphasising tradition and a preference for preserving extant institutions as the default option); Libertarian Liberalism (centred on a radical individualism); Socialism (Social-Democracy: combining Liberal Democracy with an emphasis on welfare and attenuating social and economic inequalities); Communism (with its varied strands including Marxism *stricto sensu*, Gramscian thinking, Leninism, Maoism); Radical Democracy (centred on small self-governing communities, *àla* Mary Parker Follett); Direct Democracy (emphasising direct decision-making, including through referendums and other means of consultation of 'the people'); New Authoritarianism—Fascism (emphasising natural social hierarchy and strong, centralised, unchecked leadership); Absolutism (emphasising the prerogative of the absolute sovereign—be it an individual person or a group—which gets to concentrate all authority whereby 'what the sovereign commands as law is law'); and so on. All these doctrines refer to the constitution and foundations of a political system, of which the administrative system is a constitutive component enabling its functioning. The incorporation of the study of constitutional and political doctrines into analyses of the functioning of PADS represents therefore a major contribution for the analysis of the ideational underpinnings of PADS.

Finally, our object of primary investigation and core concern (the 'dependent variable') is the administrative doctrines that shape the 'model' of public administration and management in a given jurisdiction, i.e. how the public sector 'ought to' be organised. We refer to these doctrines collectively as 'Administrative Doctrines', and as part of

the ideational public governance configuration they figure as its tenth element, therefore labelled: PADS-10.

Ideational Public Governance Configuration of the New Public Management, New Public Governance, the Neo-Weberian State and the Guardian State

This section develops an application of the ideational public governance configuration approach to a range of administrative doctrines which have over time become quite popular in the academic and practitioners' discourse about how to reconfigure public administration. What follows is a brief and very much bird's-eye overview of administrative doctrines with the purpose of illustrating how to apply the approach of the ideational public governance configurations. A more in-depth overview and critical review would require a comprehensive literature analysis which, alongside being almost impossible to undertake as a solo effort, it would also occupy an entire volume on its own, and it is therefore beyond the scope of this book chapter. If, however, such an analysis or range of interconnected analyses of administrative doctrines were to be elicited by this work, it would be a most welcome outcome that this book aims to bring about.

The more limited goal of this section is simply to furnish some introductory armchair reflections about the form that public governance ideational configurations may take. This is, as mentioned, a bird's-eye view which focuses very high-level, abstract and, indeed, under-specified sets of doctrines, captured here in their more general terms. More well-specified doctrines are better amenable to being analysed in relation to their specific ideational bases. However, PADS which are commonly debated in the field of public administration are quite often under-specified—often, though not always, evoked in rather vague and underdetermined fashion—hence the analysis of ideational bases can only correspondingly be schematic, stylised and highly simplified rather than articulate, fleshed-out in the details and nuances, and in-depth.

The remainder of this section examines the ideational public governance configurations of the following administrative doctrines: New Public Management; New Public Governance and Collaborative Governance; Neo-Weberian State and Public Value; and the recently introduced Guardian State. Others could (and indeed should) have been examined,

but reasons of limited space (and also the very rationale for this section, which is to be illustrative, definitely not exhaustive, in showing how to apply the construct of ideational public governance configuration) require to limit the sets of PADS being considered in this section. Preliminarily, we outline the contours of the ideational public governance configuration of the so-called Old Public Administration.

An Ideational Public Governance Configuration of Old Public Administration

The idea of an 'old' public administration, a sort of *ancient regime*, a relatively stable and uncontested state of affairs about how public administration ought to be configured and the public sector be run is mostly fictional. Yet it can be a useful fiction a suitable starting point for our narrative[2] to assume that, before the reforms of the public sector started, roughly, in the 1980s with the New Public Management and followed by successive reform waves inspired by different doctrines, there was a time when public administration was configured (at least at the ideational level, if possibly not factually) roughly along the lines of a Weberian bureaucracy set up to administer a growing welfare state, and that this model of public administration was either actually implemented, typically in the western part of the world (with distinctive twists depending on the history and context of the given country/jurisdiction), or anyway this was the model to which to tend to. In a number of respects, in fact, working under the assumption that the Weberian state is the starting point in relation to which all PADS have been developed, either by reaction (e.g. the NPM), or by evolution (e.g. the Neo-Weberian State, which deliberately and explicitly picks up key traits of the Weberian administration) contains more than a grain of truth and it may provide an apt entry point for our analysis.

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[2] Simplistic or outright wrong as this assumption may be: that is, lumping all non-western countries together under the label of 'developing countries' and, on their way to development, assuming they had to mimic western countries in all respects—like capitalist economy and liberal democracy—and that this process also included adopting 'western-global public' administration as their model of reference for how the public sector should be organised. This is obviously a simplistic or plain wrong storyline (or a discussion, see Drechsler, 2020), but such narrative has wielded huge influence in the past and can in this sense be utilised as a useful starting point.

What are then the underlying ideational bases of Old Public Administration? Starting with the constitutional-political doctrines (POLPHIL-9), we can say that most constitutional-political doctrines are in principle compatible with a (stylised) Weberian public administration; however, not all of them are: direct democracy, for example, is hardly compatible with OPA.

As to the issue of the legitimacy of public administration (POLPHIL-8), doctrines underpinning OPA assume that legitimacy of public administration is a given and it is hardly in question. Indeed, most of the doctrines which emerged since the 1980s are a response to a (real or perceived) loss of legitimacy of the public sector, variously depicted (rightly or wrongly) as inefficient, inadequate, wasteful, unresponsive and so forth—a rhetoric that, on the rise since the 1980s, has transformed the technical term of 'bureaucracy' and the derivative 'bureaucratic' into a word with a negative connotation in the eyes of the public at large (although the reference to bureaucracy in a derogatory term very much pre-dates the 1980s, this and the next decade saw a rise of an anti-bureaucracy rhetoric in public discourse and common parlance). Doctrines of reform of public administration (like the ones we discuss in the next sub-sections) have been promoted and propounded as ways for the public sector to recover an allegedly lost legitimacy in the eyes of the public—so their narratives went on. Reform narratives have pinned their pretension to regain legitimacy for the public sector by making it 'work better and cost less' on a range of political-philosophical premises: the philosophy of utilitarianism can be seen to lie at the roots of many of the claims of the NPM (Ongaro, 2020, pp. 177–179); Platonic 'common good' arguments can be interpreted as lying at the roots of Public Value governance and management doctrines (not by chance a critique to PV theory has come in the forms of criticism to conceiving of public managers as 'Platonic guardians', see Rhodes & Wanna, 2007 and 2008, and for a rejoinder, Alford, 2008); at times palingenetic views have been propounded to mark the revolutionary character of digital governance; and so forth. Doctrines about OPA, on the contrary, are quite silent on the issue of the legitimacy of public administration: they rather assume it as a given. Perhaps, if a theory of legitimacy is at all adopted in OPA, it is a Hegelian one, whereby the state, and its public administration, is legitimate in its own right: it is a pure and simple necessity, something that necessarily is and does not need to justify its existence and functioning (provided the state is the rational state which is the condition of individual freedom and is predicated on it, see chapter 2).

Likewise, the public ethics (E-7) philosophical stance underpinning OPA can be interpreted as centred on a rather unproblematic assumption about public servants and citizens fulfilling their respective duties, in relation to the workings of public organisations and citizen-public administration interactions. The citizen is a user of public services with no special or additional roles to perform other than complying with the regulation set up to administer the public services. The citizen in this perspective is not yet a 'customer', a 'co-producer', a 'co-creator' and so forth, as envisaged by later successive waves of PADS—it does not perform multiple roles: the citizen simply uses public services, and does so in compliance with the way in which they are administered to her/him.

As to the language of OPA, it is likely to be articulated in nouns rather than verbs (LANG-6): to be centred on entities that make up the configuration of the public sector and the citizen-public administration interactions. The use of the gerundial to describe the functioning of public administration in terms of processes, suggesting transformation and dynamism, rather concerns PADS that emerged later on, often in contrast to OPA, which is a set of doctrines implicitly suggesting stability rather than movement or change, a language of entities (the term entity deriving from the Latin *ens*, which means 'to be', the things that are, that exist) rather than processes (which would entail a language of becoming, rather than one of being).

A realist epistemology (EPI-5) whereby things—which exist outside of the subject knowing them—can be known with some degree of certainty and 'objectivity' can be seen as the default and unproblematised epistemological stance here. Likewise, the underpinning social ontology (ONTO-4) can be assumed by default to be a realist one.

As regards assumptions about human nature (ONTO-3), these—not problematised, at least in our fictional, stylised depiction of OPA doctrines—hinge around a robust sense of responsibilities and obligations informing public servants discharging their duties, and citizens complying with theirs. No special traits driving people to strive to maximise one's own utility, like in NPM's depictions of public servants and citizens; or to perform heroically beyond the assigned duties to rise to the call of co-producing public services or co-creating solutions to public problems, like in the New Public Governance, are predicated of the social actors active in OPA. Individual agency and social structures/structural conditioning are not especially problematised in this perspective.

Finally, a Newtonian-Galilean conception of time and space (ONTO-2) is likely to underpin OPA: the problematics of simultaneity being brought about by the information revolution and more explicitly considered by, e.g. the PADS of Digital Era Governance (Dunleavy et al., 2006) or other sets of doctrines, are, almost by definition, not part of OPA. Finally, a traditional 'realist' ontology (things—a mind-independent reality of some sort—exist in themselves 'out there', at least to some extent irrespective of the knowing subject), centred on entities rather than processes, may be assumed as default ontology in OPA (ONTO-1), reflected in the entity-oriented language we have already seen—although ontological issues are likely not problematised in this set of doctrines, and OPA may be compatible with a wide range of ontologies (it does not require specific ontological commitments, or those can be minimal at most).

An ideational Public Governance Configuration of the New Public Management

The NPM is a (loose) set of administrative doctrines which has been dissected from multiple angles, at least since the seminal article by Hood (1991). Effectively summed up as 'Specialisation plus Incentivisation plus Marketisation' in another seminal paper (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994), it has its theoretical roots in the strand of economic theory of the Public Choice (whose roots are in Downs, 1965, and developments in Dunleavy, 1991 and Niskanen, 1973, 1994) coupled with a vaguely defined aspiration of 'business-like government', driven by the alleged superiority of the management methods and techniques in vogue in the private sector.

Its ideological inspiration has been associated to Neo-Liberalism (Roberts, 2011), hence it makes sense to look for its inspirational political doctrines (POLPHIL-9) in this stream of thought first of all. Neo-Liberalism is a set of political doctrines predicated on rolling back the state and placing an emphasis on limiting state regulation of economic activities. It seems to be closely connected to an earlier strand of thought: the Libertarian strand of Liberalism, which may be especially fit for the NPM, given its emphasis on consumer choice, a negative conception of freedom centred on removing obstacles to expand the range of options available to a self-determining individual. In short, while the NPM is compatible with a highly varied range of constitutional-political doctrines, Libertarian Liberalism seems to be especially dovetailing a number of key features of the NPM.

From the perspective of the advocates of the NPM (a dwindling cohort nowadays than during its heyday in the 1990s), the very legitimacy of the state gets questioned, and the legitimacy of the public sector can only be restored of it can deliver 'value for money' (POLPHIL-8). While the notion of value for money has been used in a technical sense as a declension of cost-benefit analysis of public programmes—'Value for Money' was indeed the name given to a UK government framework to assess prospective public programmes and projects—the underlying ideational basis is one in which the state and the public sector are hardly legitimate per se, rather it is what and how they deliver—the outputs and outcomes of public programmes—or indeed at times what they do not deliver—the rolling back of the state in order to reduce the taxpayers' burden—that provides legitimacy to public action (a radical critique of the legitimacy argument implicitly aligned to the NPM has been developed by Cordelli, 2020, who has criticised the 'privatised state', namely the state systematically contracting out the running of key public functions like the management of prisons, or welfare offices, or security and warfare—which can be seen as a possible product of a form of application of NPM administrative doctrines—as fundamentally lacking legitimacy, at least from a liberal constitutionalist standpoint). Public sector legitimacy within the NPM is meant as being always conditional on the level of performance of the public sector: hetero determined rather than intrinsic.

It may be problematic and highly controversial to align a public ethics philosophy (E-7) to the NPM. Some works have considered the NPM to be detrimental to the public service ethos, to be potentially harmful and lead to a depletion of ethical behaviour, due to its emphasis on incentives, market-type competition-oriented rewards and other mechanisms leveraging extrinsic motivation drivers. At the same time, it may be argued a strong public ethics to be assumed in the NPM, exactly to ensure that the very emphasis on incentives, competition and so forth—all centred on the logic of reward and utility maximisation—do not lead the public system morally adrift. Not just the public servant but the citizen-customer as well is assumed to enter utility-maximising and satisfaction-maximising logics and mechanisms, while at the same time refraining from gaming the system to her/his own advantage. A robust ethics of duties seems to be assumed in NPM doctrines, without it being nurtured by the system. Utilitarianism and sense of duty are assumed to, somehow, simply co-exist.

As to language and discourse (LANG-6) underpinning this set of doctrines, NPM doctrines may be more closely aligned to a rhetoric of process and action: verbs conjugated in the gerundial form rather than nouns. Underlying epistemologies (EPI-5) may be varied; Neo-Positivism, with its influence on factual knowledge and verifiable propositions, can be ideationally closely aligned to NPM.

In terms of social ontology (ONTO-4), NPM doctrines can be more easily aligned to methodological individualism, with its emphasis on explaining social facts with direct reference to the action of individuals. As to human nature (ONTO-3), it tends to be read through an ontology of the Homo Economicus: the rational choice, utility maximiser social agent of the neo-classical economics, whose roots can be traced to the philosophy of utilitarianism, which lies at the roots of many of the claims of the NPM (Ongaro, 2020, pp. 177–179). Individual agency is important, yet social structures may also prove highly influential, with a thrust of the NPM to design institutions which may leverage on structural conditioning to create 'rules of the game' for individual agency to pursue self-regarding, maximising behaviours.

Finally, and like for OPA, a Newtonian-Galilean conception of time and space (ONTO-2) can align ideationally to the NPM. Neo-positivism or a traditional realist or a critical realist ontology may be deemed as broadly compatible with the NPM (ONTO-1).

An ideational Public Governance Configuration of the New Public Governance and Collaborative Governance

The burgeoning strand of literature of the so-called Collaborative Governance and the set of doctrines ascribed to the New Public Governance—introduced more directly in contrast to the NPM—can be seen as both a post- and an anti-NPM set of administrative doctrines. Key tenets in this approach—although these are also distinct streams of literature and strands in their own right—are the literature on the co-production of public services and, more recently, on the co-creation of solutions to public affairs problems. The emphasis in this strand is on the notion of *public governance* (Peters & Pierre, 2000); indeed, this very set of doctrines contains a range of nuances of meaning which are conveyed through the English-language word of *governance* which may not have an exact correspondent in other languages (see Ongaro & van Thiel, 2018b). Citizens-users of public services take up multiple roles and agency in

this set of doctrines: they perform as co-producers of public services or co-creators of innovative solutions to public affairs problems; they wield agency in shaping public decision-making.

A range of constitutional-philosophical doctrines may align with the NPG/CG, albeit with qualifications, and definitely not all (POLPHIL-9). Constitutional Liberalism and Liberal Democracy is broadly aligned with it (indeed, NPG/CG is often seen as a way of revitalising it), but certain strands of Liberal Democracy get especially emphasised, notably deliberative and especially participatory democracy, while others are rather seen as pre-requisite but incomplete on their own (notably, Representative Democracy). Traditional Republicanism with its emphasis on civic participation can be seen as broadly aligned with NPG/CG. Radical Democracy (à la Mary Parker Follett) can be seen as closely related: indeed, Follett's thought may constitute an intellectual source for at least some strands of NPG/CG. Direct Democracy with its emphasis on self-governing and direct participation to public decision-making may also be seen as broadly aligned potentially, yet the literature on NPG/CG hardly makes mention of it (to our knowledge). On the other hand, Libertarian Liberalism, with its emphasis on leaving the individual alone and keeping the state out of her/his life as much as possible, is hardly compatible with NPG/CG. Socialism (Social Democracy) is also aligned with NPG/CG. Much less aligned is Communism, in all its variants, at least to the extent that the state takes on a central role in governing society. Equally incompatible with the core tenets of NPG/CG are the political doctrines of Fascism and Absolutism, with their emphasis on the individual leader or the collective dominant group taking control of all public affairs and administering it in a top-down, authoritarian fashion: the state here manages public services, but hardly entrusts its subjects to act on par with the bureaucracy in the delivery of such services, let alone in their governance and decision-making processes.

While different from—if not outright opposed to—the NPM in terms of contents and substantive orientation, the NPG shares with the NPM a similar thrust in terms of legitimacy of public administration and administrative action not being a given, rather being in urgent need of recovery, by reforming the public sector: legitimacy (POLPHIL-8) becomes problematic and contested in the NPG as it is in the NPM. However, the NPM and the NPG sharply differ in POL-9 as one of the underpinnings of NPM can be found in Libertarian Liberalism and a vision of

citizens (in the sociological sense) not being asked to engage in co-producing and even less so in co-creating, rather to exercise their rights as customers. Conversely, NPG and Collaborative Governance, notably in the co-production and especially co-creation focus (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Torfing et al., 2024) are underpinned by a political philosophy of Participatory Democracy and, possibly, by traditional Republicanism as a political philosophy notably where it emphasises civic participation and engagement by citizens.

In terms of public ethos and the ethics (E-7) underpinning the NPG, the demand posed on public administrators and citizens alike is quite significant: a quasi-heroic ethos is predicated of the social actors engaged in making forms of collaborative governance, co-creation and co-production happen—a staunch commitment to devoting oneself to creating or sustaining the common good. The notion of supererogatory action may prove highly meaningful here (Biancu & Ongaro, 2025). Supererogatory actions and attitudes are considered morally positive and yet beyond the call of duty: they are not required nor demandable—they are not object of obligation. According to illustrious philosophers like Thomas Aquinas, they belong to the sphere of the counsels rather than the commandments, and counsels are morally superior to commandments: if the latter concern what is good, the former concern a better good. We would argue that both the public administrator and the citizen alike as conceived of in the NPG/CG are—mostly implicitly—seen as acting beyond the'mere' call of duty: the ethics of supererogatory applies to them.

As to the language of NPG/CG doctrines (LANG-6), we may expect the language to be in verbs in the gerundial form, emphasising the process through which a solution is being attained (co-created) or a service is being (co-)produced. In terms of underlying epistemology (EPI-5), experiential learning, generating knowledge through acting and experimenting, the lived experience of people engaging into forms of collaborative governance can be as important, if not more, than 'objective', observational knowledge in neo-positivist fashion.

The theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984) and approaches balancing social agency and social conditioning (Archer, 2012) can provide a closely aligned social ontology (ONTO-4). Human nature (ONTO-3), in the perspective of CG/NPG, is deemed to have a natural inclination to the good, benevolent rather than malevolent, generous more than selfish, other-regarding more than self-regarding, virtuous more than vicious.

Human beings are conceived of as free, they are seen as protagonists of their life, but freedom here is not the Libertarian-individualist variant conceived of as the removal of the obstacles that impede the individual to pursue its preferences, rather it is the relational notion of freedom: human beings are seen here eminently as persons, they are free insofar as they relate to each other, they tie their own life and destiny to that of the others, they conceive of themselves as part (and builder) of a community. The 'co-'element, the togetherness that is implied in the process of co-creation as well as of co-production, as well as of collaboration, are premised on an ontology of human nature as centred on a relation conception of person and freedom (Ongaro et al., 2025b). Social structures are influential but individual agency, and notably co-agency of freely interacting individuals, albeit within structural conditioning, takes the lead in this perspective.

Also the conception of space/place and time (ONTO-2) may shift in the perspective of NPG/CG doctrines: time may not anymore be the spatialised time of physics, rather it is the lived time of experience, à la Henry Bergson (1913/1989—on the application of Bergson's thinking to public administration problems, see Ongaro, 2020, pp. 119–123 in particular). Space is the (social) place of human encounters and interactions, where individual liberties meet and connect to each other. Even the very underpinning ontology (ONTO-1) may be different to those associated to the previous sets of doctrines: the very notion of creation in co-creation may be used in the common parlance to mean 'bringing about something', but may also be intended as referring to a different ontological underpinning, an ontology of becoming in which the capacity of human beings to give rise to things that do not exist (at least in the relative sense, as in the absolute sense it is only God who may be attributed the power to create *ex nihilo*, out of nothingness) underpins this set of doctrines.

An ideational Public Governance Configuration of the Neo-Weberian State integrated with Public Value Governance and Management

The 'Neo-Weberian State' (NWS) is a widely debated set of administrative doctrines which has been introduced in the contemporary public administration discourse by Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert (2004/2017) and qualified, by one of the very authors who coined the notion in

the contemporary public administration literature, both as a model and as an ideal type (Bouckaert, 2023).

The Weberian elements in the NWS include a reaffirmation of: (a) the role of the state as the main facilitator of solutions to the new problems posed by globalisation, demographic trends, environmental threat and technological change; (b) the role of representative democracy (central, regional and local) as the legitimating element within the state apparatus; (c) the role of administrative law, suitably modernised, in preserving principles pertaining to the state-citizen relationship (including equality before the law, legal security and the availability of specialised legal scrutiny of state actions); as well as d) the idea of a distinctive status, culture and (to some extent) terms and conditions of the public service (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017, p. 121).

Before we review the 'neo' elements of the NWS, we recall here another major set of administrative doctrines, namely Public Value (PV). We follow an approach which proposes to integrate the NWS and PV into one composite framework (Ongaro, 2024), varied according to whether the NWS is considered as a model or an ideal type, and whether PV is conceived of as centred around laying out a structure of practical reasoning to guide public managers in engaging in processes of addition of PV through their agential action undertaken within public service settings (à la Moore, 1995, 2013), or whether it is seen as the outcome of a process of deliberation, by which 'what constitutes value is established dialectically [thereby allowing] for contest, and for diversities of values and identities, within a negotiated understanding of what it means to be part of the wider 'public' sphere, at that time and place' (Benington 2011, p. 43; also Benington, 2015). Within this framework and focusing notably the conception of the NWS as an ideal-type and PV as addition of value through actions by public managers, the 'neo' elements of the NWS integrated with PV can be defined as follows:

> a) the shift from an internal orientation towards bureaucratic rules to an external orientation towards meeting citizens' needs actively pursued by entrepreneurial public managers orientated to the creation of Public Value; b) the supplementation (not replacement) of the role of representative democracy by a range of devices for consultation with the direct representation of citizens' views, thereby including a range of tools and heuristics to detect the public values in the political community and gauge and measure the creation of Public Value; c) a modernization of the relevant laws, in the

management of resources within government, to encourage a greater orientation on the achievement of results rather than merely the following of correct procedure, thereby enabling or at least facilitating public managers value-creating entrepreneurship; d) a professionalization of the civil service, so that 'bureaucrats' become not simply experts in the law relevant to their sphere of activity, but also they get closer to professional managers, oriented to meeting the needs of their users, and knowledge of the law in the relevant area is only one of a broader range of skills required of a public official, an integral part of which lies in laying out a structure of practical reasoning to enable and guide public managers to the creation of Public Value. In the integration of the NWS as an ideal-type with PV conceived of as addition of value through actions by public managers, the resultant is a further qualified NWS ideal-type, in which PV as a (quasi-) paradigm 'infuses' the NWS and provides additions to it that ultimately produce a more nuanced and articulate ideal-type of the NWS. (Ongaro, 2024, pp. 839–840)

Jointly with the abovementioned Weberian elements, the 'neo' elements summed up in the above quote outline the doctrinal contents of the NWS—PV.

In terms of underlying political philosophy (POLPHIL-9), the NWS-PV is quite selective: it is purposefully meant to be a set of administrative doctrines thought of for the purpose of preserving and strengthening Liberal Democracy, in all its variants. It is, however, at odds with Libertarian Liberalism. It is not thought for, nor compatible with, Radical Democracy and Direct Democracy either. It can fully accommodate Social Democracy, but not Communism in any variant, nor Fascism, nor forms of Absolutism, nor any other non-liberal conception of political regime.

It adopts an intermediate position when it comes to the issue of legitimacy of administrative action (POLPHIL-8). It shares with OPA the same basic assumption whereby the state is legitimate in itself (in this being Hegelian in thrust), and yet it recognises that the public sector has to recover the trust of the people it administers and serves, and the 'neo' elements of the NWS are premised on as well as aimed at attaining such legitimacy, which is therefore considered as problematic, and recovering trust and legitimacy through reforming the public sector is seen as an overarching goal and rationale for the NWS.

In terms of ethical foundations (E-7), there may be an inherent tension between the Weberian component premised on demanding of public administrators to perform their duty 'and nothing more', and

the managerial and PV component demanding of public managers to go beyond the 'mere' call of duty—to act in a supererogatory perspective, as is the case of the NPG / CG, to 'go the extra mile' for the ultimate purpose of creating Public Value and restoring the trust of the people in the system.

As to the language of the NWS-PV discourse and rhetoric (LANG-6), this is likely to be a balance of nouns and verbs, of entities and processes, of being (in the Weberian component) and becoming (in the managerial and PV component). Its epistemology (EPI-5) can combine a realist epistemology with more interpretive ones, and in terms of social ontology (ONTO-4) it can accommodate a range of perspectives in terms of balance between social structures influences and individual agency. The model of human being (ONTO-3) is one which combines the sense of duty expected of the traditional bureaucrat with the (supererogatory in thrust) orientation to performing beyond the call of duty, possibly underpinned by a natural inclination to the good and a conception of human beings—or at least those human being who (self-select and) choose to commit to living their professional life in the public service—as other-regarding more than self-regarding. Also the foundational conceptions of time-space/place and being (ONTO-1 and ONTO-2) may be seen as combining—in perhaps not an easy equilibrium—a more 'traditional' realist ontology with a conception of time as the lived time of experience (Bergson, 1913/1989) and space as the social place of human encounters and interactions, where individual creativity may unfold and bring about the creation of public value.

An ideational Public Governance Configuration of the Guardian State

In an attempt to rethink the role of the bureaucracy as defender of Liberal Democracy, Yesilkagit et al. (2024) have wrought out a set of conditions conducive to making the (core) civil service to perform as a guardrail to prevent liberal-democratic regimes to slide into any other form of political regime (so-called democratic backsliding). They call it the 'Guardian State'. In this framework, the bureaucracy is tasked with a higher-order competence to protect the liberal-democratic constitution should this be menaced, thereby elevating public administration to the status of a 'fourth branch of the state', alongside Montesquieu's traditional separation of public powers along the executive, legislative and judiciary divide. The authors then outline the features the civil service must possess to be able

to discharge this higher-order function, if circumstances arise, including the ways in which the recruitment, selection and training occurs, in order to socialise civil servants into this core mandate by educating and training civil servants not only to develop skills to deliver public policies, but also to enable them to detect and counter challenges to the liberal-democratic constitution, and they outline a training and educational path for civil servants in which public ethics and political philosophy become core components, in an institutional framework of higher level of bureaucratic autonomy.

It is a bit of a stretch to liken the Guardian state to a full-fledged set of administrative doctrines, when in effect this contribution has at its core one specific preoccupation (albeit a gargantuanly important one), namely delineating the characteristics the civil service must possess to be able to prevent democratic backsliding and preserve liberal democracy (where it is already in place), should this be threatened. We therefore single out for analytical purposes only the political-philosophical under-pinnings (POLPHIL-8 and POLPHIL-9) of this partial and focused set of administrative doctrines, hinging around the one preoccupation of preventing liberal democracies to undergo democratic backsliding, as these are constitutive of this governance configuration. In terms of constitutional-political doctrines (POLPHIL-9), the Guardian State is by definition compatible only with Liberal Democracy, albeit in all its variants, thereby encompassing also Libertarian Liberalism, alongside Social Democracy meant as a set of doctrines emphasising social justice with the framework of Liberal Democracy. The Guardian State is, by definition, antithetical—contrived exactly for the purpose of contrasting—all authoritarian forms of political system, and indeed broadly all non-liberal political regimes. It is also hardly compatible with forms of radical Democracy or Direct Democracy. Legitimacy of the public sector and administrative action is a given for the Guardian state (POLPHIL-8); indeed the 'reform' of the public sector which is argued for by this set of administrative doctrines aims exactly at 'locking in' the liberal-democratic political regime as being legitimate in and by itself.

By way of concluding reflection on this ideational public governance configuration, it may be observed that in a number of important regards, the Neo-Weberian State (previous section) and the Guardian State could be combined, resulting in the NWS with—however—a different role for the bureaucracy in regard to its role, which gets to be redefined to escape subordination to political institutions (*pace* Weber!) insofar

as it comes to protecting the state itself: a conception of the bureaucracy as itself a political institution and a 'branch' of the state on par with the others, by having the bureaucracy to embody and protect the liberal-democratic state also from itself. In performing such function of protecting the liberal-democratic states from internal, domestic forces pushing for democratic backsliding (though it may be noticed in many factual instances such domestic forces pushing in the direction of democratic backsliding get supported by the deliberate interference of external non-democratic or outright anti-democratic states and other foreign actors), the bureaucracy is granted constitutionally protected prerogatives.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter provides a map to navigate the broader and multi-layered ideational context into which public administration research, discourse and practices are embedded. It does so by pointing out nine ideational dimensions and suggesting conceiving of administrative doctrines as best understood when seen as embedded into the ten-fold ideational public governance configuration which constantly and dynamically shapes the ways in which public administration is thought of in the given 'here and now', at any given moment and place where human beings live their lives in 'administered societies'.

We have illustrated the notion by examining five ideational public governance configurations, taken because of their significance in contemporary debates and which are amply debated, but ultimately in only an illustrative fashion to discuss the application of the notion of ideational public governance configurations, as more administrative doctrines have currency, or will have in the future.

The key message we propose and offer for consideration to the reader in this chapter is that the adoption of a broad philosophical perspective to understand and frame the ideational bases of PADS may be an apt way to both enlarge and better underpin the comparative knowledge of public administration. Administrative doctrines are a form of knowledge which is normative in thrust, whereby knowledge about how things are gets deployed to prompt and compel change towards how things ought to be, a desired end-state about the functioning of public administration and the configuration of the public sector at large. This chapter suggests the use of the notion of ideational public governance configuration to indicate the overall configuration of administrative doctrines

(with their inherent normative-prescriptive thrust) together with the ideas—ontological, epistemological, linguistic, ethical-moral and political philosophical—which enable to underpin, conceptualise, interpret and explain administrative doctrines. The notion of ideational public governance configuration is therefore a conceptual tool, informed by the adoption of a philosophical perspective, for unpacking and elucidating the ideational bases of our understanding of public administration as well as addressing normative-prescriptive issues about how the public sector ought to be organised.

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