

*Philosophy and Public Administration: An Introduction*, by Edoardo Ongaro  
Turo Virtanen\*

Turo Virtanen  
Department of Political  
and Economic Studies,  
University of Helsinki  
turo.virtanen@helsinki.fi

The author wants to provide a systematic introduction to the theme and furnish a base for discussion and analysis of “a number of interconnections between ‘foundational’ philosophical and some of the key themes debated” in the literature of public governance, public administration and public management.

The main argument is that philosophy provides a distinctive and constitutive contribution to the knowledge and understanding of public administration and that this is alongside with but also beyond the knowledge of other disciplines contributing the field of Public Administration (PA). The author’s starting point is that ontological, political philosophical and epistemological issues tend to receive only scant attention, if any, in the literature of public governance, public administration and public management.

The book is organised along key thematic areas. The author discusses the rationale of the book in the introduction and then moves to key philosophical streams in the next two chapters. The fourth chapter applies the results of the previous chapters to Public Administration, focusing on ontological and epistemological questions. Political philosophical aspects and their foundational issues – common good, social contract, legitimacy – in the field of PA are examined next. Finally, the author chooses three great thinkers – A. Lorenzetti, N. Machiavelli, and T. More – to delve into three important dimensions of PA: public virtues, ‘realism’ in politics and utopian thinking. The last chapter pulls the threads together and examines the contribution to PA, when it is conceived as scientific knowledge, practical wisdom, or practical experience.

The book is most rewarding as reading experience. The reader should have some elementary knowledge and skills of philosophical reasoning to gain more about opening doors to different conceptual worlds. The book is mostly about ‘philosophy *for* PA’, not about ‘philosophy *of* PA’, as the author specifies in the last chapter. The former is about presenting philosophical knowledge for selective applications to themes of contemporary significance in PA. Indeed, the author’s book provides an immense scope of distinctions and viewpoints, introducing mainly issues of ontology. PA and its contemporary issues can and should be revisited and reconsidered employing new conceptual instruments. The philosophy *of* PA is about professional philosopher’s reflections about specific themes relevant for PA: for example, Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. The problem here is that contemporary philosophers do not pay much attention to debates within PA. However, the author considers H.A. Simon and D. Waldo as examples of this tradition. In my view, for a professional philosopher, the famous Simon-Waldo debate about the nature of PA is relatively simplistic. The third option the author specifies is ‘mapping backwards from PA to philosophy’. This means asking individual scholars to track backward what the foundations of

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\* **Turo Virtanen** is an adjunct professor of Administrative and Organisation Studies at the University of Helsinki. His research is about administrative reforms, public management, and higher education and underlying theories and concepts.

# Philosophy Of Administration

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