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Political Leadership

A Pragmatic Institutionalist Approach

Robert Elgie

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A Pragmatic Institutionalist Approach

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Palgrave Studies in Political Leadership
ISBN 978-1-137-34621-6 ISBN 978-1-137-34622-3 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-34622-3

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017950300

Cover illustration: Ingolf Pompe 25 / Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
The registered company address is: The Campus, 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW, United Kingdom

Preface

The aim of this book is to provide an institutionalist account of political leadership. We have labelled it a pragmatic institutionalist account because it is rooted in a certain version of the philosophical tradition of American pragmatism. This book is a companion piece to our previous volume, *Studying Political Leadership: Foundations and Contending Accounts* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). There, we catalogued the existing scholarship on political leadership according to the competing philosophical foundations on which such work was based. This was the first time that any such exercise had been attempted. We argued that whether authors were aware of it or not, the scholarship on leadership outcomes was founded on certain ontological and epistemological assumptions. By identifying different foundational combinations and by reporting which work was consistent with which combination, we made the claim that we were better placed to understand the scholarship on leadership outcomes than before. More than that, we showed that these different foundational combinations were incompatible with each other. This allowed us to identify the studies that could properly be compared with each other because they were based on the same foundational combination and those that could not because they were based on a different combination, again improving our understanding of the study of this topic. In our previous volume, we merely catalogued the work of others. We did not identify either our preferred foundational combination or our perspective on how best to study leadership outcomes in the context of such a foundation. This is the task we now set ourselves. We proceed in a series of steps.

In Chap. 1, we identify different ontological and epistemological foundations of the world, distinguishing between positivist and constructivist perspectives. We then focus on a third approach, scientific realism, identifying the reasons why we choose to study political leadership from this foundational perspective. We then turn to American pragmatism. We identify two forms of pragmatism and explain why we privilege the Peircean variant. This form of pragmatism aims to arrive at well-settled beliefs about the world through a process of practical inquiry.

In Chap. 2, we turn to the study of political leadership. We begin by identifying the basic interactionist paradigm within which the study of leadership outcomes is conducted. According to this paradigm, leadership outcomes are the result of the interaction of personality and contextual factors. We are interested in one type of contextual factor. Specifically, we are interested in the impact of leadership institutions on various political outcomes. To establish the theoretical basis of this account, we turn to the study of institutionalism. We specify the ontological and epistemological assumptions of our institutionalist account. We show that institutionalism provides us with the opportunity to generate well-settled beliefs about the effect of leadership institutions on various outcomes in a causally complex world.

In Chaps. 3, 4, 5, and 6, we engage in practical empirical inquiry. We study the effect of institutions on leadership outcomes using a multimethod approach. In Chap. 3, we report the results of a laboratory experiment showing that presidential institutions can shape individual behaviour under certain conditions. In Chap. 4, we engage in a large-n, cross-national observational study, demonstrating that institutions affect the extent to which voters hold incumbent political leaders responsible for the performance of the economy. In Chap. 5, we begin with a medium-n observational study, indicating the predictors of president/cabinet conflict in Europe. We then follow up with a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) of the same topic, pointing to the particular combination of institutional conditions that are associated with this outcome. In Chap. 6, we apply the same methodological combination, but this time to the study of the institutional sources of presidential control of the cabinet in a single country, France.

In Chaps. 7 and 8, we address the problem of endogenous institutional choice. Up to this point in the book, we have assumed that institutions have an exogenous impact of actor behaviour, shaping leadership outcomes. However, if institutions reflect actor preferences and are chosen

endogenously, then they do not shape behaviour, but merely reflect existing behavioural preferences. Focusing on two in-depth qualitative case studies of institutional choice in France and Romania, we find little evidence to suggest that leadership outcomes are endogenous to institutional choice. This confirms that we have good reason to believe that institutions have an independent effect on leadership outcomes.

In Chap. 9, we revisit the main themes of the book, arguing that scholars should emphasize the study of institutions, but in a way that leads to modest conclusions about their effect under conditions of causal complexity.

Dublin, Ireland Robert Elgie

Acknowledgements

This book could not have been written without the support, advice, and comments of many different people.

To begin, I would like to thank Palgrave for being both supportive of the project from the start and very patient when waiting for the delivery of the manuscript. As with the previous volume, this one took much longer to complete than I had expected. So, thanks to Ambra Finotello, Imogen Gordon Clark, Jemima Warren, Sara Crowley-Vigneau, and Amber Stone Galilee. Thanks also to the editor of the Palgrave Studies in Political Leadership, Professor Ludger Helms, for agreeing to publish the book in his fine series.

During the writing of the book, I have called upon various colleagues to comment on draft chapters. The usual caveat applies. Any mistakes or problems of interpretation are my own responsibility. Nonetheless, I would like to thank Cristina Bucur, Bogdan Dima, Bernard Dolez, David Doyle, Christine Fauvelle-Aymar, Ken McDonagh, Sorina Soare, and Gabriela Tanasescu for their comments. In addition, I would like to give particular thanks to two people. The first is Cristina Manolache, who provided invaluable research assistance for the chapter on Romania. The second is David Doyle, who did all the work arranging the laboratory experiment in Chap. 3 and who helped to design the experiment itself. Dave is a world-class researcher, a fine colleague, and it is always a pleasure working with him.

I would also like to thank all the academics and experts who agreed to respond to the survey on president/cabinet conflict that was the basis of the studies in Chap. 5. They are Miljenko Antić, David Arter, Daunis

Auers, David S. Bell, Radek Buben, Cristina Bucur, Paulo Canelas Rapaz, Clayton M. Clemens, John Coakley, Alistair Cole, Gabriel Marian Cosmin, Marina Costa Lobo, Goran Čular, Jurgen Dieringer, Bogdan Dima, Antoaneta Dimitrova, Bernard Dolez, Stepan Drahokoupil, Kevin Featherstone, Dominic Fenech, Carlo Fusaro, John Gaffney, Michael Gallagher, Sergiu Gherghina, Selena Grimaldi, Emiliano Grossman, Anna Gwiazda, Miro Haček, Sean Hanley, Ólafur Þ. Harðarson, Tim Haughton, Vít Hloušek, Janis Ikstens, Gabriella Ilonszki, Indridi H. Indridason, Alexandra Ionascu, Carlos Jalali, Marcelo Jenny, Mindaugas Jurkynas, Andres Kasekamp, Dae Soon Kim, Ronald King, Philipp Koeker, Karl-Rudolf Korte, Petia Kostadinova, Tatiana Kostadinova, Alenka Krašovec, Gunnar Helgi Kristinsson, Ómar H. Kristmundsson, Algis Krupavicius, Raymond Kuhn, Erik Lastic, Lukas Linek, Richard Luther, Pedro Magalhães, José Magone, Raul Magni Berton, Iain McMenamin, Thomas Meyer, Wolfgang Müller, Gary Murphy, James Newell, Zenonas Norkus, Hannu Nurmi, Heikki Paloheimo, Dimitris Papadimitriou, Ausra Park, Gianfranco Pasquino, Gianluca Passarelli, Vello Pettai, Janis Pleps, Robert Podolnjak, Thomas Poguntke, Ekaterina Rashkova-Gerbrands, Tapio Raunio, Theresa Reidy, Marek Rybář, Thomas Saalfeld, Tõnis Saarts, Sorina Soare, Aleks Szczerbiak, Allan Sikk, Branko Smerdel, Peter Spáč, Maria Spirova, Roland Sturm, Melanie Sully, Gabriela Tanasescu, Mauro Tebaldi, Jean-Louis Thiebault, Gabor Toka, Rein Toomla, Hubert Tworzecki, Visvaldis Valtenbergs, Réka Várnagy, Manfried Welan, Waldemar Wojtasik, Emilia Zankina, and Radoslaw Zubek.

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CHAPTER 1

Making Sense of the World

How do we make sense of political leadership? All the time, we see presidents and prime ministers on television; we hear them on the radio; we read about them in the newspapers; we see them on billboards; we follow them on social media; we may even come across them in the flesh, sometimes being awed by what we think of as their charisma. We witness them debating with opponents, delivering press conferences, giving short interviews to reporters, visiting workers and patients in hospitals; we even see them holidaying "in private". We parse their words, look at their body language, consider their clothes, examine their haircut, and sometimes even judge them by their spouses, especially if they do not have one. We read about the offices that political leaders occupy; we discover information about their background and personal characteristics; and we learn about the historical, social, cultural, economic, and international context in which they are operating. We call upon theories, ideas, and concepts to describe, understand, and perhaps explain what we observe. In short, we examine political leaders and we study their actions. And yet still the question needs to be asked. How do we make sense of political leadership?

To answer this question, we need to ask a bigger one. How do we make sense of anything? How do we make sense of the world and our experience of it generally? These are philosophical questions. They have nothing to do with political leadership in isolation. Instead, they have to do with the nature of reality and what we can know about the world. Is there a "real world" out there separate from our subjective experience of it? If so, what

R. Elgie, *Political Leadership*, Palgrave Studies in Political Leadership,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-34622-3_1

form does it take? Whatever form it takes, what can we know about the world? Can we be sure of everything about it, or just some things and, if the latter, which things can we be sure of and to what extent can we be sure of them? Perhaps we cannot be sure of anything about the world at all. These are long-standing and yet still current philosophical questions. There have been and there remain many different answers to them. The key point is that these questions and the answers to them are prior to any questions we might ask about specific aspects of the world. In other words, before we ask how we can make sense of political leadership, we need to ask how we can make sense of the world more generally.

In this book, we aim to present a philosophically informed study of political leadership. We do so because the study of political leadership is always founded, knowingly or otherwise, on a particular philosophical position. In a previous volume (Elgie 2015), we identified a number of basic philosophical approaches and showed how existing studies of political leadership corresponded to these different approaches. However, in that volume we also showed that in the vast majority of cases the philosophical underpinnings of the studies were only implicit. We had to infer the foundations on which they were based. In this book, rather than leaving such foundations unstated, we prefer to bring them to the front. There is an advantage to this strategy. Some philosophical positions are incompatible with each other. Here, we understand incompatibility to mean that the relative validity of different foundational approaches is not susceptible to empirical testing. By identifying the foundations of our approach, we identify the sorts of studies with which it can reasonably be compared as well as those with which it cannot. We do not claim that everyone should necessarily study political leadership in this way. We are not engaged in a process of foundational imperialism. However, we do hope to present a study of political leadership that is constructed on a very general but nonetheless coherent and logical foundation that could serve as a basis for comparison with other studies built on a similar foundation.

In this chapter, we establish the philosophical foundations of our approach to the study of political leadership. We begin with a general discussion of ontology and epistemology before presenting two basic philosophical positions, positivism and constructivism, demonstrating that they are incompatible with each other. We then focus on a third position, scientific realism, setting out how we understand the world on the basis of it. In philosophy, all terms are loaded. So, we leave it until later in the chapter to state exactly what we mean and do not mean by this term. Within the

framework of scientific realism, we identify with an approach that is consistent with the philosophical tradition of American pragmatism. We present a summary of the pragmatic tradition, distinguishing between two variants of it, and identifying the implications for scientific inquiry of the Peircean version that we prefer to adopt. In these ways, we establish the philosophical foundations of our institutionalist account and the empirical inquiry that we will conduct in subsequent chapters.

1.1 Making Sense of Philosophical Foundations

Philosophical foundations are metaphysical. That is to say, they do not in themselves constitute the world. Instead, they are the basis of our beliefs about how the world is constituted. Philosophical foundations are also meta-theoretical. They are prior to the theories that we might have about how the world works, whatever way we think the world is constituted. More than one theory can be consistent with a given foundation, but the adoption of a certain foundation may necessarily entail the rejection of a particular theory.

Philosophical foundations are important because they shape the way we think about the world. However, they are also highly contested. This point applies to all domains of philosophical inquiry. There are different philosophies, different philosophies of science, different philosophies of social science, and so on. Many of the same philosophical debates are common to each domain of inquiry. Nonetheless, there are different foundational positions whatever the domain. Here, we are interested in the philosophy of science and the social sciences.

Philosophical foundations vary in terms of their ontology and epistemology. Ontology is the study of existence or being. What is the nature of the world? What properties are there in the world? Do the properties of the world exist independently of our own experience, or do we bring the world into existence? Epistemology is the study of knowledge. What can we know about the nature of the world? How do we come to know anything about the world? For both ontology and epistemology, we can distinguish between two opposing sets of assumptions.

Ontologically, there is a fundamental division between what we might call "realism" and "non-realism". Realism "denotes a belief in the reality of something – an existence that does not depend on minds, human or otherwise" (Chakravartty 2007: 8). This may seem like a common-sense belief. Of course, we might say, there is a real world out there. We experi-

ence it every second we are awake. We experience it when we bang our toe against the leg of the table in front of us. However, the radical, non-realist sceptic thinks differently. We experience the world only through our senses. Yet we know that our senses can deceive us. For example, we think we see something in the desert, but it turns out to be a mirage. It is not real. So, how do we know that our senses are not always deceiving us? Maybe we merely think there is a real world out there when we are, in fact, mistaken. Maybe the table in front of me is an illusion and the pain from my toe is just my senses deceiving me? Few people adopt this radically sceptical subjective position that accepts nothing for real outside our own consciousness. However, there is another much more common non-realist position in the social sciences. One version is Laclau and Mouffe's (2001: xiv) "ontology of the social". Here, there are real, mind-independent objects in existence. However, these objects only gain meaning though discursive social activity. In other words, the world exists, but we give meaning to the world only through language. This position avoids the radical metaphysical scepticism of pure subjectivism, but it is still an essentially non-realist perspective. For sure, the material world may have an ontological existence, but it has no meaning outside our engagement with it, outside the language we use to make sense of it. As we shall see, adopting a realist or non-realist position is only a starting point. All the same, it is useful to make a basic distinction between these two ontological positions, not least because, by definition, it is impossible to be simultaneously both a realist and a non-realist.

Epistemologically, there is a division between those who believe we can have objective knowledge about the world and those who believe that all knowledge is essentially subjective or relative. Like the ontological realist, the objectivist seems to adopt a common-sense position. After all, we make knowledge-based claims all the time. We know what the time is. We know the milk is in the fridge. Certainly, we might disagree about what we can claim to know, and about the extent of our knowledge about what we can claim to know, but surely, the objectivist would claim, we can at least know something about the world. Once again, though, the subjectivist or relativist is sceptical. The radical sceptic might again claim that we can come to know things only through our senses. Yet, as we have seen, our senses can deceive us. When we were in the desert, we claimed to know that there was an oasis in front of us, but we were mistaken. Perhaps that experience is more general. Maybe our senses are always deceiving us and we cannot know anything for sure. As before, though, we do not have to

adopt such a radically sceptical position. The subjectivist or relativist might simply argue that if we give meaning to the world, then we can know the meaning we have given to it but no more. This means there can be no objective knowledge, or knowledge that is independent of the meaning we have given to it, but there can be subjective knowledge. Put differently, knowledge exists, but it is a social construction. Again, there are many variants of these arguments, but it helps to distinguish between the claim that there can be objective knowledge and the competing claim that knowledge is purely subjective or relative because, as before, these two positions are mutually exclusive.

Here, and following Elgie (2015: 35), we distinguish between three different foundational positions in the philosophy of social science on the basis of these competing ontological and epistemological assumptions. They are, on the one hand, positivism and, on the other, two post-positivist positions, constructivism,[1] and scientific realism (see Table 1.1.) We acknowledge that these are very broad and highly contested categories. Nonetheless, we are not alone in identifying a tripartite schema of this sort. Similar ones have been proposed by scholars writing from the perspective of social science generally, as well those writing in the disciplines of sociology, political science, and international relations. They include Alvesson and Skoldberg (2010: Chap. 2), Clark (2008: 167), Cruickshank (2012), Kurki (2010: 139), McAnulla (2005: 31–32), Monteiro and Ruby (2009: 16), Rivas (2010: 209), and Shapiro and Wendt (2005).[2] In the rest of this section, we sketch the foundational assumptions of what we label as the positivist and constructivist positions in the natural and social sciences. In the next section, we discuss scientific realism in more detail.

The positivist starts from an objectivist epistemological assumption. This is based on the claim that we can have objective knowledge about the

Table 1.1 Foundational positions based on the combination of different ontological and epistemological assumptions

	Objectivist epistemology	*Relativist epistemology*
Realist ontology	Positivism	Scientific realism
Non-realist ontology	Wendt (1995)[a]	Constructivism

Source: Author

[a]This fourth cell corresponds to a logical, but unusual combination of different ontological and epistemological positions. Rivas (2010: 208–209) categorizes Alexander Wendt's (1995) work in this way. However, we do not follow up on it here

world. However, the positivist also adopts the empiricist position that we can have objective knowledge only on the basis of what we observe with our senses. Unobservable phenomena are unverifiable. This objectivist epistemological position leads to what would appear to be a realist ontological claim that the world consists of real entities, but only ones that are observable to us. In fact, this seemingly realist ontological claim seems to rely on a non-realist foundation (Rivas 2010: 210). After all, if all that exists is what is observed with our senses, then entities do not have an existence that is separate from us. They exist only in so far as they are subjectively observed. For the purposes of this book, we leave aside this issue. The key point is that positivists claim that we can have objective knowledge about observable entities that exist in the world independently from us. These entities include phenomena that can be directly observed, but also ones that are detectable with some form of instrument or device. Thus, positivists are happy to consider radio waves, gravity, atoms, and equivalent entities as ontologically real. This does leave the existence of certain phenomena open to debate. For example, to date the Higgs boson has been detected at the Large Hadron Collider to a six-sigma level of certainty. In other words, its existence remains probabilistic. Most positivists would be willing to accept the existence of the Higgs boson given this extremely high degree of probability, though some might still wish to entertain a certain ontological scepticism. Whatever about the existence of the Higgs boson, the insistence that entities are real only if they are observable or detectable causes a certain problem for positivists in the social sciences. Many of the concepts that are central in this domain, such as power, class, gender, and leadership, are both unobservable and scientifically undetectable. There is no device for detecting leadership. This leads many positivists in the natural sciences to reject the idea that positivism is consistent with social scientific inquiry. That said, there are plenty of social scientists who would nonetheless label themselves as positivists. We leave open the question of whether positivism is compatible with social scientific inquiry. Suffice it to say here that positivists in the social sciences usually adopt an instrumentalist view of ontology. That is, they treat essentially unobservable phenomena "as if" they were ontologically real (Monteiro and Ruby 2009: 27). This move allows positivist social scientific investigation to continue.

Confident that there is the possibility of objective knowledge about observable features that really exist in the world, positivists in both the natural sciences and the social sciences wish to explain how the world works.

Here, though, they face the problem of explaining how one thing causes another. Causation is not an observable entity. It cannot be either directly observed or detected with any sort of special "cause-finding" device. All we can observe is Humean "constant conjunction". Here, we witness one event followed by another event, and we assume that the former causes the latter. Unable to observe or detect causation yet wanting to make causal arguments, positivists typically make the same sort of instrumentalist move that we outlined previously. They treat constant conjunction relations as if they were causal relations. As part of this exercise, positivists also tend to adopt a deductive logic. In both the natural sciences and the social sciences, positivists put forward theories about the world and causal relations in the world and treat these theories "as if" they were ontologically real. Hypotheses can be deduced from these theories. These hypotheses create the expectation that constant conjunctions are likely to be observed in a certain way if the theory is true. If subsequent observations are consistent with the ones that were expected, then the hypothesis is confirmed, causal relations are assumed, and the theory is treated as true. This provides a certain solution to the unobservability of causation. It also provides grounds for the positivist to make the claim that there can be objective knowledge that applies generally, indeed perhaps even universally. If a theory has general, indeed universal implications and if there is observational evidence that the causal relations occur regularly in a manner that is consistent with the theory, then the positivist can claim to have identified a general or universal law. The identification of causal relationships of this sort allows the positivist not only to provide explanations of past outcomes, but also to make predictions about future ones. Thus, from a starting point about the possibility of objective knowledge and a number of instrumentalist moves, positivists propose a scientific method that allows them to make general, potentially universal cause-and-effect statements about the world around us and indeed about the future state of the world, including the social world.

By contrast, the constructivist starts from a subjectivist or relativist epistemological position. Constructivists reject the idea that we can come to have knowledge about the world based simply on observations made via our senses. Instead, they take the position that knowledge is based on language. There may indeed be ontologically real pebbles, stones, boulders, and mountains out there in the world, but we give meaning to these terms and, therefore, to our experience of the world only through the use of language. More than that, we share an experience of the world in this way. We all understand what we mean by pebbles, stones, boulders, and

mountains in pretty much the same way. There are conventional ways in which we understand the world. In other words, the construction of meaning is linguistic, but it is a social rather than a purely individual exercise. This is what is meant when constructivists state that knowledge is a social construction. It follows from this proposition that our knowledge of the world may change as the conventional understanding of the world changes. This point applies both to scientific and social scientific inquiries. For example, we may once have understood Pluto to be a full planet, but now we understand it, at least for the time being, as a dwarf planet. This subjectivist or relativist epistemological position has ontological consequences. The constructivist does not have to take the position that what we understand as pebbles, stones, boulders, and mountains do not exist. In that sense, they can adopt some form of ontologically realist position. However, in the sense that the constructivist argues that we understand the meaning of these and all other objects only through language, then to all intents and purposes these rocky features might as well not really be there (Banta 2012: 385). One way of thinking about the consequence of the constructivist's position is to say that they collapse ontology into epistemology. There is little point in talking about ontology, because it is simply reducible to epistemology. This move has implications for the focus of social scientific inquiry. Constructivists have no ontological or epistemological qualms about studying concepts such as power, class, gender, and leadership. Such concepts may or may not have an ontological reality, but certainly their meaning is socially constructed. Therefore, the constructivist is willing to interrogate and analyse these concepts, even though they are unobservable.

The constructivist's position has consequences for the nature of inquiry. The identification of cause-and-effect relations is premised on the existence of ontologically real, mind-independent entities. Yet, the constructivist collapses ontology into epistemology. The result is that the constructivist rejects the very idea of causality (ibid.: 383). For the constructivist, everything we understand about the world is socially constructed, including claims about causal relations. When we talk about causal relations, we are merely expressing a socially constructed interpretation of socially constructed aspects of the world. The constructivist can show how our socially constructed understanding of the socially constructed world has changed over time and how it can vary from one socially constructed context to another. However, the constructivist cannot provide—and is not interested in providing—a cause-and-effect account of

the world. Instead, the constructivist often adopts a normative or critical perspective of the world, questioning our received wisdoms, and interrogating our socially constructed understandings of the world. For example, the constructivist may take the view that the current socially constructed consensus on a particular issue may come about because some people have more power than others. Wilfully or otherwise, the powerful impose their view of the world on others, constructing an interpretation of the world that suits what they perceive to be their interests. By critiquing the way in which we conventionally view the world, the constructivist creates the potential for social progress and emancipation, for a new and more equitable social construction of the world. In short, the constructivist rejects a scientific method that aims to identify objective cause-and-effect relations, focusing instead on how our understanding of the world is socially constructed, often critiquing conventional ways in which the world is socially constructed.

In the philosophy of the natural and social sciences, positivism and constructivism are incompatible positions. They are incompatible because foundations have no foundations (Monteiro and Ruby 2009: 26). That is to say, the validity of the ontological and epistemological foundations on which the different positions rest is not susceptible to empirical testing. We cannot go out and discover, or observe, which foundation is correct. It is certainly possible to identify logical contradictions in the foundations of any philosophical position. Nonetheless, when philosophical positions rest on logical but mutually exclusive foundations, then no amount of empirical testing will determine which of the two positions is valid. It may be possible to find empirical evidence to refute the real-world implications that are consistent with a given philosophical position, but it is not possible to reject the foundation of that position itself. For example, the implications of certain positivist theories may be empirically testable, but even if they were found to be false, this would not render the foundations of positivism invalid, only the particular positivist theory that is being tested. In short, metaphysical foundations can be philosophically rejected, but not empirically disproved.

In the discipline of International Relations, there is an ongoing philosophical battle between positivists and constructivists as to which is the correct foundation for their subject. Yet, this debate is fundamentally unresolvable, precisely because the two foundational positions are essentially incompatible. The positivist cannot provide empirical evidence to support the claim that there can be objective knowledge of causal relations

in a real social world and, therefore, that scholars of International Relations should study the subject from a positivist perspective. This claim rests on metaphysical rather than empirical foundations. An equivalent point, though, applies to constructivist claims about epistemological and de facto ontological relativism. In other words, in both International Relations and other domains of inquiry, the battle between positivists and constructivists is not empirically winnable. In this context, we could simply ignore such foundational philosophical issues altogether. Indeed, as we noted previously, most scholars of political leadership have adopted precisely this attitude. Here, though, we wish to present a philosophically informed account of political leadership. This means that we have either to choose between one of these two incompatible foundational positions, or to adopt an alternative one. We prefer the latter option, choosing scientific realism as the philosophical foundation for this study.

1.2 Making Sense of Scientific Realism

The origins of scientific realism lie in the study of the philosophy of the natural sciences. Here, scientific realism emerged in the 1960s as a challenge to the dominant positivist paradigm. In this sense, like constructivism, we can think of scientific realism as a form of post-positivism. In the social sciences, the origins of what we are calling "scientific realism" emerged in the 1970s. Here, it roots lie in the work of Roy Bhaskar and his concept of critical realism (1975 [2008], 1979 [2005]). It is an open question as to whether the concepts of scientific and critical realism are compatible. There are authors who consider them to be synonymous (Brown 2007: 409). By contrast, there are those who suggest that they are separate. For example, Bennett (2013: 465) implies that they are quite different, and Kurki (2007: 361) certainly wishes to distinguish between them. More commonly, though, scholars in the social sciences state that critical realism is a form of the type of scientific realism that is found in the natural sciences. For example, Wight and Joseph (2010: 2) state that critical realism "is a very specific development" of scientific realism within the social sciences, even if it is "vital to differentiate" the two (ibid.: 4); Chernoff (2007: 400) believes that critical realism "can be conceived of as a very specific, though quite unusual, sort of" scientific realism; while Patomäki (2002: 9) calls critical realism "a particular form" of scientific realism. That said, there are also scholars who do not particularly distinguish between the two concepts, some using only the term "critical real-

ism", including Alvesson and Sköldberg (2010), Banta (2012), Danermark et al. (2002), and Lewis (2002), and others referring solely to "scientific realism", such as Joseph (2007), Monteiro and Ruby (2009), Rivas (2010), and Shapiro (2005). In this book, we are not concerned with establishing whether or not the concepts of scientific and critical realism are compatible, but, for reasons we identify below, we privilege the term "scientific realism".

In the philosophy of the natural sciences, there is a "bewildering variety of definitions" of scientific realism (Devitt 2005: 770). Indeed, as one of the leading writers on this concept in this area notes, "[i]t is perhaps only a slight exaggeration to say that scientific realism is characterized differently by every author who discusses it" (Chakravartty 2014). The same can be said of the work in the social sciences too (Maxwell 2012: 4–5). That said, a version of scientific or critical realism has become relatively dominant in the discipline of International Relations in the last couple of decades (Patomäki and Wight 2000; Wight 2006). In this book, we do not simply borrow a version of scientific or critical realism that has been set out elsewhere. Instead, we adopt a new perspective. In so doing, we admit that we are adding yet another characterization of scientific realism to an already long list. That said, even if we are sure that many scholars currently working within the scientific or critical realist paradigm will find differences between their appreciation of the concept and the one presented here, we are also confident that the vast majority of scholars who work within this paradigm will see basic commonalities between their approach and ours. This is because scientific realists share the same basic ontological and epistemological assumptions.

In the natural sciences, scientific realists typically begin with a discussion of epistemology and then move to ontology. Here, scientific realists "share in common the convictions that scientific change is on balance progressive and that science makes possible knowledge of the world beyond its accessible, empirical manifestations" (Leplin 1984: 2). The first conviction refers to the idea that science has developed in a fairly consistent way over time. For example, even Einstein's rejection of Newtonian mechanics did not mean that Newton was entirely wrong in every respect. Instead, Einstein built on Newton, allowing science to move forward. The long process of incremental scientific advancement means that we can have good reason to believe in the scientific enterprise in general. For example, if we were to read an undergraduate physics textbook, we would have good grounds for believing the truth of the basic account of the

world that is presented there (Boyd 2002). Thus, the physicist's textbook is more than a socially constructed interpretation of the world. Instead, the scientific realist wishes to claim that scientific progress has generated at least some objective knowledge about the world. That said, the scientific realist is not necessarily making a claim that we have complete knowledge of the world. After all, even if we have considerable baseline knowledge in areas such as physics and chemistry that is unlikely ever to be completely refuted, even in these domains some of our current scientific wisdom may turn out to be only partially correct and perhaps even incorrect. Thus, we can have knowledge of the world, but we are likely to have only imperfect knowledge. The second conviction is related to this point. If we have good reason to believe the truth or approximate truth of the physicist's basic account of the world, then we also have good reason to accept the existence of the entities that the physicist claims constitute this world. These include not only observable entities, such as pebbles, stones, boulders, and mountains, but also unobservable entities, such as radio waves, gravity, and atoms. We can take it that these entities really exist. From the combination of these two convictions, Chakravartty (2014) sums up the standard scientific realist position in the natural sciences as follows: "our best scientific theories give true or approximately true descriptions of observable and unobservable aspects of a mind-independent world."

In the social sciences, Bhaskar's critical realism takes a different form, but it shares the same basic ontological and epistemological convictions. Bhaskar begins with a consideration of ontology and then moves to epistemology. He adopts a resolutely realist ontology. In a world without people, he states, "[the] tides would still turn and metals conduct electricity in the way that they do" (Bhaskar 1975 [2008]: 12). Moreover, the mechanisms that cause the tides to turn and metals to conduct electricity would also continue to "operate even if unknown, and even if there were no-one to know it" (ibid.: 27). Thus, he adopts the ontological position that both physical phenomena, which are observable, and causal mechanisms, which are unobservable, have a mind-independent existence (ibid.: 37). Bhaskar combines this realist ontology with a relativist epistemology (ibid.: 241). Knowledge of the world, he argues, is a social product (ibid.: 178). There can be no knowledge of the natural world, including the causal mechanisms in the world, without people engaging in the study of it (ibid.: 176). For Bhaskar, though, this does not mean that we can know nothing for certain, or that we can have only socially constructed knowledge. This is at least partly because he places ontology before epistemology. As he puts it, "the ontological independence of the event is a condition

of the intelligibility of its description" (ibid.: 181). In other words, we use words to try to make sense of the world, but we are nonetheless trying to make sense of something that actually exists in the world. We are not merely constructing the world with our words. For Bhaskar, some claims to knowledge about the world will be better than others. Thus, the hard work of science must continue (ibid.). Even so, through such work we can gain at least some degree of what amounts to relatively objective knowledge about the world outside us.

In the study of International Relations, critical realism tends to follow the logic of Bhaskar's argument. For example, Patomäki (2002: 8) and Wight (2006: 26) make three Bhaskar-like metaphysical commitments. They are: "ontological realism (that there is a reality independent of the mind(s) that would wish to come to know it); epistemological relativism (that all beliefs are socially produced); and judgemental rationalism (that despite epistemological relativism, it is still possible, in principle, to choose between competing theories)" (Wight ibid.). In his version of realism, Wight (ibid: 32), like Bhaskar, believes causal mechanisms to be ontologically real, indicating that he is committed to the position that unobservable phenomena can be considered to have a mind-independent existence, or, as he puts it, that "the world of experiences/appearances does not exhaust the real" (ibid.: 37). Also like Bhaskar, he adopts a fallibilist epistemological position. We should be "continuously critical" (ibid.: 38) of our knowledge claims, he states, but we must acknowledge that some descriptions "seem to be better than others at capturing various aspects of the world" (ibid.: 37). For sure, he claims, "beliefs are socially produced" and it is "conceivable that our current stock of knowledge could be overturned at some point in the future" (ibid.: 39). At the same time, science is an activity that "attempts to articulate in thought the natures and constitutions and ways of acting of things that exist independently of that thought" (ibid.). This leads to the conclusion that "there may be, and often are, good grounds for preferring one theory or account of some aspect of the world to another" (ibid.: 40).

These accounts all have their differences. Moreover, there is much more to any one of them than we have presented here. For example, in the natural sciences, scientific realism is often associated with a number of specific arguments, including the success (Devitt 2005) or no-miracles argument (Okasha 2002). For its part, Bhaskar's critical realism is extremely complex, not least his consideration of three levels of reality, the domains of the real, the actual, and the empirical (Bhaskar 1975 [2008]: 46). Wight's analysis is also very considered, including discussion of con-

trol and causal mechanisms and much more (Wight 2006: 33). While these accounts are different, they resemble each other in two key foundational respects and in ways that mean they differ from both positivism and constructivism. First, they all adopt a realist ontology that includes consideration of unobservable features of the world. Second, even though they adopt a relativist epistemology, they make the claim that we can at least arrive at some more or less objectively correct explanations of the world. These are foundational assumptions. We can infer from them that scientific realism constitutes a philosophical position that is incompatible with positivism and constructivism. This means that it is incorrect to think of either scientific realism or critical realism as a "via media" (Monteiro and Ruby 2009: 21) between positivism and constructivism, or as a "middle-ground" (Rivas 2010: 203), or "compromise" (ibid.: 205) position between the other two. Instead, what we are calling "scientific realism" is a separate and distinct philosophical position in itself.

We adopt an account of political leadership that we believe to be consistent with a scientific realist foundation. Specifically, we make the following ontological and epistemological assumptions.

We adopt a realist ontology. We assume that there are mind-independent entities in the world outside us. These entities include natural phenomena, such as pebbles, stones, boulders, and mountains. They include people. They also include observable human creations, such as buildings. The set of natural phenomena also includes entities that are not directly observable, but that are detectable, such as radio waves, gravity, and atoms. We are agnostic as to whether particular natural phenomena exist. For example, we do not feel the need to take an explicit position on the existence of the Higgs boson. The point is that we assume that unobservable natural entities can and do exist in this regard. In addition, we assume that the set of mind-independent entities includes naturally unobservable and undetectable human creations. They include non-material entities, such as ideas. Ideas are a purely human product. If there had never been any people in the world, there would never have been any ideas in existence about the world. For example, while we are currently agnostic as to the natural existence of the Higgs boson, we are more than happy to accept the existence of the idea of the Higgs boson. Ideas also have purely social consequences. They do not have any direct effect on the natural world. Only people acting upon an idea can have an effect on natural phenomena. Thus, if there were no longer any people in the world, there would no new ideas and nobody to act upon them. Ideas include concepts such as power,