The concern

The strongest definitions of the term "paradigm" links metaphysical-level ontological and epistemological presuppositions with interconnected sets of world-level theoretical propositions ranging across the macro, meso, and micro levels of political life. In the strongest definitions of "paradigm" metaphysical presuppositions and world level propositions form a whole that stand or fall together [2].

Using this strong definition has two unfortunate consequences for political science.

1. It carries an assumption that getting the metaphysical right is both necessary and sufficient for understanding and explaining world-level phenomena.

2. It promotes accepting strong forms of the "incommensurability thesis" that adherents of different paradigms cannot understand one another and that their respective research work yields results that cannot be compared to each other in any analytically useful way.

Reasons for concern

All study of politics — whether done as "science" defined by acritical formulations of logical positivism, as "human science" incorporating the view that conscious humans have to be studied differently than conscious physical things, or as "humanistic" study — is motivated by desire to understand and explain world-level phenomena. If, as suggested by the diagonals in the middle column, there is no close correspondence between metaphysical-level propositions and the solidity of world-level phenomena, then getting the metaphysics right is not sufficient.

Recent studies of deliberation have shown that insulated communities among the like-minded result in study held beliefs and promote development of increasingly extreme formulations of them. Applied to the academic world, these studies suggest that restricting serious intellectual interchange to fellow holders of the same paradigm will produce increasingly tight logical arguments driven by the metaphysical assumptions. Since metaphysical presuppositions are not sufficient for establishing the solidity of propositions about world-level phenomena, there is no reason to expect that these metaphysically-driven logics will always produce propositions that help understand or explain world-level interactions, processes, or outcomes.

References
[2] This formulation intentionally pushes "incommensurability" to its limit.

Implications

This warning against allowing metaphysical debate to become all-consuming of intellectual energy is not a complete rejection of efforts to formulate the metaphysical. It is simply a warning against assuming that ontology and epistemology will solve all analytical problems.

Metaphysical presuppositions are a necessary part of all research: they provide the deep warrants connecting the concepts and relational terms in theories purporting to illuminate claims about the real world that it contains.

Two patterns of observed connection between metaphysical-level presuppositions and world-level phenomena cast doubt on the notion that there is any one-to-one link between them:

Pattern A. One metaphysical presupposition : Two world-level propositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>metaphysical level</th>
<th>world level proposition</th>
<th>claim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>presupposition</td>
<td></td>
<td>very little cooperation; extensive self-seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individualism</td>
<td>focus on actors who</td>
<td>fear loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>expect reciprocity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pattern B. Two metaphysical presuppositions : One world-level proposition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>metaphysical level</th>
<th>world level proposition</th>
<th>claim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>presupposition</td>
<td></td>
<td>collapse of political system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individualism</td>
<td>focus on actors who</td>
<td>are egocentric utility maximizing officials who take advantage as hierarchical discipline erodes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lose cohesion as shared beliefs erode</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second example, individualism alone does not define what actors will do sufficiently to guide understanding or yield explanations of world-level activity. Analysts combining it with another assumption (such as holism) may produce collapse of an existing political order that offers plausible accounts of the internal roots of Soviet collapse.