

# UNDERSTANDING GOVERNMENT: FOUR INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS IN THE STUDY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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In this article a conceptual map of the identity of the study of public administration is developed that encompasses its theoretical diversity and richness. It organizes public administration scholarship into four main intellectual traditions: practical wisdom, practical experience, scientific knowledge and relativist perspectives. The objective is to outline the study's fundamental heterodoxy and interdisciplinarity. While the study clearly has strong national components everywhere, the four main intellectual traditions go across and beyond national traditions of government and of its study.

It is to be presumed and desired that students of government will play a larger role in the future than in the past in shaping of the types of civic education; but this will not be possible unless *a broader view is taken of the relation of government to the other social sciences, and the function of the political in the social setting*. (C.E. Merriam 1934, p. 97; original emphasis)

The status of the study of public administration in academia is not as unproblematic as European handbooks tend to show, and at the same time much more coherent than comes across in American handbooks (in this article the term 'government' refers to the substantive object of knowledge, while 'public administration' refers to the academic study). In Europe the study is generally rooted in two, quite distinct, organizational settings. At the university level, curricula focus on teaching theory, while research concerns both theoretical and applied challenges. At institutions of higher vocational education, teaching is much more hands-on, focused on particular skills in, for instance, personnel management, budgeting and finance, and so on. Scholarship in Europe is more understood in terms of *Wissenschaft*, a branch of knowledge, which includes 'science' in its contemporary and more restricted meaning as well as various other intellectual traditions.

In the US, public administration curricula and research are situated at the university, where attention to theory and practical skills are combined in an intellectual atmosphere that favours 'science' over *Wissenschaft*. Another distinction between European and American scholarship is that handbooks in the former tend to develop an organic and systematic perspective upon the study as a whole, while US handbooks display the study more as a string of specializations. Indeed, little has changed since the time 50 years ago when William Siffin observed that '...the study of public administration in the United States is characterized by the absence of any fully comprehensive intellectual framework' (quoted in Caldwell 1965, p. 52). In both continents, however, scholars distinguish a scientific approach from other approaches. This highlights the specific problem of public administration's status in academia: is it and ought it be a science in the restricted sense? Has it, is it, and ought it be *Wissenschaft* (which includes science, skills, wisdom, and a variety of relativist perspectives)?

In the section that follows I use the American crisis of identity literature as point of departure since it clearly demonstrates the fundamental challenge of any such study. In

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addition, it seems that the American debate has been fiercer than the European one in that the initial Simon–Waldo exchanges continue to drive current debates. I outline four general traditions to the study of government in public administration that are relevant to and salient in both European and American scholarship, thus providing a conceptual map that goes beyond the mere listings of theories and approaches. Each tradition is host to a variety of theories, models, approaches, and so on. Examples that illustrate European and American scholarship will be provided in the more detailed discussion of the four traditions that follow. That the work of many more is not referenced, however, should not be regarded as dismissive. In the discussion on scientific knowledge I will include references to political scientists, since many scholars of government identify with political science (and the active public administration section in the American Political Science Association), rather than with public administration. Perhaps the four intellectual traditions can be regarded as ideal types, useful to characterize existing scholarship. To that end, similarities and differences between these traditions are outlined and summarized. In the concluding section an argument is presented that advocates the study of public administration as an interdisciplinary pursuit.

## THE AMERICAN IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE STUDY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

It is intriguing that public administration's 'crisis of identity', as Waldo called it (1968, p. 443), has been mainly debated between 'scientists' and 'holists', 'positivists' and 'traditionalists' (White and McSwain 1990, p. 5), or 'rationalists' and 'normativists' (Harmon 2006, p. 31). Scientists such as Simon, then, and Meier and O'Toole, now advocate more rigorous research methods with an eye to developing public administration as a science and a true academic discipline, focusing on and fleshing-out a science in relation to specific problems and/or topics. Holists such as Waldo, Stillman, and Wamsley are more concerned with the understanding of government as a whole and emphasize its service to the community and the public sector at large. To them, public administration trains professionals as well as scholars and is by nature an interdisciplinary study that moves between and draws upon the social sciences at large.

When Simon accepted the Dwight Waldo Award in 1995, he graciously observed that the study of public administration had absorbed two revolutions: his own call for a scientific approach (Simon 1957 [1947]), and Waldo's advocacy for an interdisciplinary approach (Waldo 1984 [1948]) (Simon 1995, p. 404). Prior to World War Two, the study had claimed to develop a scientific approach to public administration through scientific management and the search for organization principles, but its pretensions were blasted by both Simon and Waldo. Simon criticized the lack of true scientific methods, and Waldo pointed to the fundamentally value-laden nature of the study. Simon stressed the need for science in his exchanges with Dahl (1947; Simon 1966 [1947]), with Waldo (1952a, b; Simon 1952), with Banfield (1957; Simon 1958), and with Argyris (1973a, b; Simon 1973a, b), while Waldo increasingly came to regard public administration as a professional study. This was not novel. Already in the late 1930s, William Mosher, Dean of the Maxwell School, argued that administrators could be trained '...in much the same way as physicians and engineers are equipped for the practice of their profession' (as quoted in McCurdy and Cleary 1986, p. 49). But Waldo gave this approach wide currency.

It took a while for this debate between scientists and holists to spread but by the end of the 1960s it was widely acknowledged that public administration suffered from an

identity crisis (Waldo 1968; V. Ostrom 1974). Was it a science, a profession, or ... what? In the 1980s and 1990s, the debate was joined by a variety of scholars, some siding with 'Simonian' calls for more scientific rigour (McCurdy and Cleary 1984; Perry and Kraemer 1986, 1990; White 1986a, b; Stallings and Ferris 1988; Houston and Delevan 1990, 1994; Mainzer 1994; White *et al.* 1996; Dubnick 1999), and others with 'Waldonian' calls for an interdisciplinary public administration more relevant to society and operating with a variety of theoretical perspectives (Marini 1971; Waldo 1971; Frederickson 1980; Wamsley *et al.* 1990; Wamsley and Wolf 1996). This confrontation between 'scientists' and 'holists' has lost nothing of its intensity – as is illustrated by De Zwart (2002) in his confrontation of Farmer (1999) and by the recent exchange between Luton (2007) and Meier and O'Toole (2007). The two groups of contestants, that is, 'scientists' and 'holists', have been so vocal that they overshadow the degree to which prewar, inductive public administration survives; at the same time, it prevents a proper assessment of the most recent tradition in public administration, that is, the relativist perspectives generally associated with post-modernism. (On a side note, one can argue that there never really has been a debate. Advocates of one approach tend to talk past rather than with protagonists of other approaches. Harmon (2006, p. 34) observes that rationalists only engage in more philosophical debate when they are provoked.)

The search for identity in public administration may never be complete as long as it is cast in terms of a hierarchy of knowledge in which each 'school' or group claims superiority. American scholars of public administration are both guided and blinded by the contrast between scientists and holists and do not fully acknowledge that

1. the study of public administration may have one identity crisis engaging two groups of contestants, but that there are – at least – four intellectual traditions in the Western world at large;
2. specialization for epistemological purposes results in intra- and inter-disciplinary compartmentalization of knowledge, prohibiting the development of a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of government.

This is both a practical and a pedagogical concern. It is interesting that Simon and Waldo could not be further apart about the epistemological objective of the study, but explicitly agreed with Merriam on the pedagogical need, that is, understanding government from a wide range of disciplinary insights:

the proper training of 'administrators' lies not in the narrow field of administrative theory, but in the *broader field of the social sciences* generally. (Simon 1957, p. 247; emphasis added)

administrative thought must establish a working relationship *with every major province in the realm of human learning*. (Waldo 1984, p. 501; emphasis added)

## A CONCEPTUAL MAP FOR STUDYING GOVERNMENT

Scholarly attention to government dates back to Antiquity, but its concentration into two increasingly separated studies (public administration and political science) is only about 60 years old. Thus the major challenge is to make sense of the vast range of approaches that proliferated against the background of the unprecedented expansion of government

that has taken place since the late 19th century. The desire to understand and explain this government growth has spawned dramatic specialization and compartmentalization of knowledge within public administration and across the social sciences. Indeed, looking at American handbooks, the study often comes across as a series of specializations, each with its own theories, models and interpretations. It is tempting to conceptualize the study as a large variety of theories, as for instance Frederickson and Smith have done (2003). However, their eclectic listing only reinforces the long-standing impression that public administration lacks a core and consists only of a series of specializations and disjointed theories. Any such conclusion that the study lacks a core, however, can be reached only if one evaluates public administration's current status in terms of a scientific discipline, that is, with its own logic, rigour, and epistemology. An entirely different conclusion can in fact be reached when public administration is regarded as an interdisciplinary study, one whose core is defined by the object of study (government) rather than by theories and methods in use. Public administration can and should be defined on its own terms, and not on the basis of inappropriate comparisons to other studies which either claim to have (namely, political science) or do have (namely, the natural sciences), a disciplinary, that is, epistemological and methodological core. In other words, it is possible to develop a meaningful conceptual map of theories and approaches used in the study of public administration.

Four intellectual traditions to the study of and the discourse about government can be distinguished in public administration. Each has a unique objective for the study of government. In order of their emergence over time, they are:

1. *A study for the development of practical wisdom* (as, for instance, in the work of Waldo, Frederickson, Rosenbloom, Stillman, Rhodes, Rutgers, Hood, König). This work focuses on political (and, since the late 18th century, also administrative) theory and includes attention to, among other things, world view, public morality, the ruler's (since the late eighteenth century both political officeholders and civil servants) disposition towards and relation with citizens, and the development of 'grand theory';
2. *A study for the development of practical experience* (as, for instance, in the work of Taylor, Gulick, Fayol, Hood, Mayntz). This work is more technocratic in orientation and focuses particularly on instruments and techniques useful in day-to-day administration and for on-the-job experiential learning;
3. *A study for the development of scientific knowledge* (as, for instance, in the work of Simon, Meier (in terms of 'science'); Auby *et al.*, Luhmann, Rhodes, Van Braam and Bemelmans-Videc (in terms of *Wissenschaft*)). This work searches for a 'scientific' or *Wissenschaftliche* and/or unifying theory;
4. *A study of relativist perspectives*, more often referred to as postmodernism, a term that I hold to include a variety of different approaches (as, for instance, in the work of Farmer, Fox, Miller, Box, Bogason, Frissen). This work emphasizes interpretation and subjectivity.

Each of these four traditions is explored in greater detail as the article unfolds. The four traditions can be placed on a continuum from most objective to most subjective. The scientific knowledge approach is critical of the other traditions: practical experience works with proverbs and its intuition and inductive approach are lacking in scholarship as pure 'science'. In this view, the interpretivism, normative underpinnings, and eclectic interdisciplinarity of the practical wisdom tradition is equally flawed, especially

for not distinguishing facts from values. Positivists basically ignore postmodernism. In turn, postmodernists argue against the hierarchy of values implicit in practical wisdom (that is, the pluralism of truths grounded in an inter-subjectivity that rejects relativism; see Berlin 2000, pp. 11–12), against the ‘technocratic’ focus of practical experience, and against the positivist’s claim of objective reality. In this continuum, scholars focusing on the skills of practical experience or on the historical, philosophical outlook of practical wisdom do not criticize but augment one another.

The identity of public administration in the US is mainly debated between representatives of scientific knowledge and of practical wisdom. European scholars debated the same issues as their American colleagues but generally with much less purple prose (see, for example, Rhodes 1991; Rutgers 1993). More importantly, European scholars also appear to have embraced public administration as an interdisciplinary study rather than as one that ought to strive for ‘science’ or for professionalism only (see, for example, Chevallier and Loschak 1974; Hesse 1982). In other words, in Europe, there have not really been two clear camps of contestants.

The positivist critique in public administration is that research is not cumulative enough, not rigorous enough, too eclectic, and too little focused on the testing of theory. Mainstream public administration had failed to take on its responsibility as a social science – as, for instance, Dubnick (1999) and Gill and Meier (2000) argued – and this suggests that a pure science of administration is much less rooted in the study than an interdisciplinary and professional orientation. Simon’s influence is larger among political scientists (including that group of more than half of public administration scholars who identify with political science; see Ellwood 1996, p. 56), business administrationists, and organizational sociologists. Waldo’s influence is believed to be greater in the study of public administration (Dubnick 1999, pp. 11–20; De Zwart 2002, p. 485) and has inspired the search for an identity specific to public administration. In the US in the postwar era, the Minnowbrook-I conference (that spawned the New Public Administration (NPA); see Marini 1971; Waldo 1971; Frederickson 1980), the Minnowbrook-II conference (Frederickson and Mayer 1989), and the Blacksburg Manifesto (BM) (Wamsley *et al.* 1990, pp. 31–51), were all major attempts to flesh out a theoretical and/or a normatively grounded identity for public administration. The NPA, however, has not generated a major theoretical reform of public administration (O’Toole 1977; Bozeman 1979, p. 45; Stillman 1999a, pp. 2–3). The same can be said for the BM. Both continue, however, to inspire (White and McSwain 1990; Wamsley and Wolf 1996; Frederickson 1997; Stillman 1999a; Raadschelders 1999, 2003a, b). European handbooks thus far clearly show that public administration continues to have a holistic identity. Its scholars are much less confrontational than their American brethren, perhaps because of the more explicit acceptance of the study’s interdisciplinarity – best captured in the concept of *Wissenschaft*.

### Practical wisdom

The earliest discussion of practical wisdom in the Western world is in Aristotle’s *The Nicomachean Ethics* and includes attention for both intuition and ‘science’ in the restricted sense (Aristotle 1976, pp. 209–16). Ample attention is given to prudent leadership in a time when politics was central to government. Also part of the practical wisdom tradition is the so-called ‘mirrors of princes’ (*Fürstenspiegel*) literature which dates back to the (West) European Middle Ages and Renaissance, of which Machiavelli’s *The Prince* is the best known (Björkman 2003). Practical wisdom addresses three fundamental questions: (1) Where are we going?; (2) Is it desirable to go there?; (3) What can we do to get there?

(Flyvbjerg 2001, p. 63). To answer these questions, a ruler must understand the social context in which he decides to take action; understand the nature of the actual and desired relation between ruler and ruled; and have some command over knowledge about government.

Practical wisdom in Antiquity provided several crucial elements in the Western approach to the understanding of government, including the selection of moral reasoning and logical arguments as a knowledge base to be used by the guardians (or trustees, stewards) of society; a knowledge ideal of moral truth and grand theory (but see the challenge to this particular legacy from the late 18th century on in Berlin 1999); a methodology of reflection and comparison; and a focus on drawing upon various bodies of knowledge, commonly referred to as interdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity is often defined in terms of an epistemological unity of knowledge requiring an integration of concepts and theories. An example is Dogan (1996, p. 97) who appears to define interdisciplinarity in terms of relations between whole disciplines. In his view, political science maintains only relations between sectors of different disciplines and is therefore not 'interdisciplinary'. However, whenever there are active relations between disciplines, in terms of an exchange of knowledge regarding a particular object of knowledge, there is interdisciplinarity. Successful mapping of this interdisciplinarity, though, requires a cognitive meta-framework.

Representatives of this tradition in the 19th century were German scholars such as Von Mohl, Von Stein, and Wagner who desired to develop an encompassing understanding of government (grand theory) (Rutgers 1994, pp. 400–1). Among the 20th-century authors, there is the monumental Weber who was deeply concerned with substantive issues and problems that he believed to be larger than any single approach could handle (Lindenfeld 1997, p. 296; see also Waldo 1965, 1978, 1984, p. 203). Post-war representatives of this approach include a variety of American and European scholars. In the US, Waldo's comprehensive approach to public administration fits well in the practical wisdom approach and perhaps represents 'soft-core rationalism' (in contrast to Simon's 'hard-core rationalism') (Harmon 1995, p. 4). Given his interests in citizenship and public sector ethics, Frederickson (1997) also fits in this approach. Stillman's search for sources and themes of public administration represents an historical approach befitting practical wisdom (1999b). The habit of looking at public administration through different lenses (legal, political, managerial), as Rosenbloom did (2005 [1986]), is equally characteristic for practical wisdom. Morgan's carefully developed argument for administrative phronesis, that is the discretion and autonomy civil servants must have in order to develop workable, acceptable, and fitting solutions to social problems, is yet another example (1990, pp. 73–4). Lindblom fits in this tradition since his partisan mutual adjustment is as much grounded in specialist knowledge as it is in lay probing (1990). Finally, Wamsley and Wolf may label themselves as high-modern (1996, pp. 22–4), but their object (a normative grounding) and style of reasoning puts them squarely in the 'practical wisdom' group. Representatives of this tradition in Europe include Hood, whose study of the rhetoric of public management challenges the possibility of singular perspectives (1998). Another example is Rutgers and his attention for the philosophical and historical origins and development of public administration (2004).

This approach is generalist by nature and eludes the modelling necessary for the development of a 'natural science'-style of public administration. Some scholars consider practical wisdom's interdisciplinarity to be its greatest weakness. For instance, Mainzer wondered whether '... hostility to *disciplines* reflects deep distrust of *discipline*?' (1994,

p. 364; italics in original). He suggested that interdisciplinarity may mask a fuzzy eclecticism that lacks a sense of what is most significant because the study has failed to develop a theory at the core (1994, p. 383). He advised public administration to stay close to a '... philosophically sensitive, historical alert political science ....' (1994, p. 384) because mere interdisciplinarity may very well lead to pseudo-learning and superficiality (1994, p. 383).

However, there are several considerations supporting public administration as an interdisciplinary venture. First, a social phenomenon as complex as government (internally, with its multiple organizations and policies, as well as externally, in its multiple relations with society) cannot be understood within one discipline or approach. Public administration is a study that does not fit the disciplinary mould (see Wamsley 1996, p. 354) and is fed (in part) by theories and concepts of various traditional disciplines. At the same time, public administration must always balance the theoretical interests of its scholars with those of its practitioners since, in the end, the latter must be synthesizers of social wisdom (Brownlow 1934, as quoted in Stillman 1999b, pp. 116–17; Dimock 1936, p. 129; Tead in 1935 and Durham in 1940, as quoted in Waldo 1984, p. 95 – as applied science – Simon 1966, p. 35; Redford 1961, p. 758; Waldo 1984; Wilson 1998, p. 269). Interdisciplinarity breaks through the linguistic and conceptual isolation that may come from being too focused on unified theory and methodology (on economics, see Nelson and Winter 1982, p. 405).

Second, it provides an excellent context for a generalist outlook on government that goes beyond the applied skills knowledge of the specialists and considers a more expansive outlook on what is usable (Lindblom and Cohen 1979). Third, practical wisdom draws upon common sense, and therefore allows for incremental learning through experience (Lindblom 1990). Fourth, and related to this, it works with the existence of human background skills: that is, with the tacit knowledge (see Polanyi 1962, 1966; Nelson and Winter 1982, pp. 80–1) that supports the intuition and judgement (Simon 1997a, p. 130) with which businessmen (see Barnard 1968, p. xxvii), statesmen (Berlin 1996, p. 45) and civil servants (see Self's 'intellectual appraisal' 1979, p. 192; and Schön's 'reflective practitioner' 1983) operate. Fifth, in its explicit philosophical, political theory, historical and comparative content, it acknowledges (not resigns itself to) different national traditions in public administration. Finally, in its embrace of moral reasoning, judgement, and interpretation, practical wisdom conditions 'respect' for different viewpoints and approaches.

### Practical experience

The systematic pursuit of practical experience, a tradition with an eye for description and prescription, starts with Von Seckendorf's study published in 1656 (1976). Practical experience develops further in the 18th-century *Kameralistik* in the German principalities and in the French *Science de la police* (also known as 'policy' science). Cameralism in the limited sense concerns the administration of the king's income and domains. In the broader sense it encompasses economics, politics, and social studies. While 17th-century Germanic studies focus on the internal structure and functioning of government through examples/cases (Rutgers 1994, p. 281), 18th-century scholarship in the Germanic principalities branches out into the study of public welfare services (Rutgers 1994, p. 284; 2001, pp. 33, 36, 41). Until the late 18th century, Germanic scholarship mainly concerns practical implementation techniques based in Aristotle's ethically directed practical wisdom (Lindenfeld 1997, p. 2). From then on the state sciences split into politics as a

natural law science that studies the nature of the state, types of government, and constitutions on the one hand, and the study of laws and administrations of particular states on the other (Lindenfeld 1997, p. 19). Likewise, the French 'policy' science focuses on practical experience, non-judicial training for civil servants, and on the need for public welfare services (Rutgers 1994, pp. 281–2). In the 19th century, the German *Staatswissenschaften* and the French *sciences administratives* turn toward the development of a unified (that is, in grand theory style) administrative science (in its broader connotation of *Wissenschaft*).

By the end of the 19th century the university-based study of government in Germany is supplemented with privately and municipally funded commercial academies because businessmen and industrialists find that academic theories no longer meet their need for practical skills (Lindenfeld 1997, p. 286). In France (Fayol) and elsewhere in Europe, the enthusiastic adoption of Scientific Management is an excellent example of practical experience. Other developments indicating a need for applied knowledge include the emergence of training programmes at local and state levels in the USA and elsewhere from the 1880s onwards (see, for example, Stillman 1998; Raadschelders 1998, p. 17), the emergence of (local) research institutes (for example, the New York Bureau of Municipal Research: see Stivers 2000), and the international exchange of information and experience between local administrators (for examples of US civil servants and scholars visiting local governments in Europe, see Saunier 2003; for examples of Japanese civil servants visiting Europe, see Westney 1987).

Characteristic of the 'practical experience' approach is the search for applied knowledge in a narrow, technicist sense. Both Taylor's time and motion studies and Gulick's management functions and organization principles (area, objective, process, clientele) are excellent examples of the prewar search for principles of organizational design that is grounded in experience. In their 1937 *Papers on the Science of Administration*, Gulick and Urwick write that such a science '...can be arrived at inductively from the study of human experience of organization, which should govern arrangements of human association of any kind' (quoted in Martin 1952, p. 667). Postwar practical experience continues along these lines and is, both in the US and in Europe, interested in prescription (Mayntz 1978, p. 2).

The critique that scientific management is not scientific enough and too mechanistic is phrased in strong terms. Nonetheless, it continues to be of great relevance to the development of public administration in two very different ways. The first legacy of scientific management in the US is the return of the case study approach so characteristic of early Cameralism. One of its premier advocates is Waldo. Several curricula in mainstream public administration work with the case study approach. Case studies serve as illustrations of a more general theoretical principle (Page 2003, pp. 159–60), requiring that the micro levels of concrete experience are linked to the macro level of social experience at large (Merton 1967; Simon 1985, p. 303; Luhman 1985; Mouzelis 1991, pp. 106–7). The case study approach is as important as ever in American public administration. In Europe, case studies fell by the wayside until the late 20th and early 21st centuries when network theory was built on the bases of case studies (see, for example, Klijn and Koppenjan 2004).

The second legacy is that of public administration as a design science that is based on experience. This is considered desirable because of 'the natural desire of practicing administrators to escape the harassment of human vagaries [and move] towards a science of public administration specializing in the design of models for the machinery of government'

(Davidson 1961, p. 852). A good example of public administration as a practical design science is the development of a range of design principles to help practitioners with the construction and maintenance of self-governing organizations or common pool resource management institutions (E. Ostrom 1992, p. vii). Design science as 'science' will be further discussed below.

What does practical experience have to offer? First, contemporary government must provide many services using instruments and techniques considered appropriate. As early as the 16th century, growing government activity creates a demand for learning by case and by example. This is even more important today. Public administration needs case studies to illustrate the challenges of contemporary government, providing practitioners with 'real-world' applications of theory, and to aid the development of theory. Second, a strong interest emerged on the practice of public management (for example, personnel, budgeting, organizational design, and leadership), especially in Anglo-American countries. Third, this approach is multidisciplinary by nature since the eclectic borrowing of techniques or even theories is informed by the needs of the day and not purely by academic desires. It is here that the practitioner can exercise influence over the extent of academic input in problem-solving. Related to this, fourth, is that a focus on practical experience helps to root advice about the 'what' and the 'how to' in specific settings. Efforts to generalize practical experience in other settings have been difficult, if not disastrous (E. Ostrom 1990; De Zwart 2002, p. 490).

### Scientific knowledge

The scientific approach to knowledge originates in the 17th century and gains momentum during the Age of the Enlightenment. Scientific, technical, and factual information quickly becomes superior to any other type of knowledge – as noted by Hamann in 1765 (Berlin 1993, p. 126) and Burke in 1790 (Dishman 1971, p. 111; see also Yankelovich 1991, p. 197). It is here that the divergence between the European and American approach to public administration in the 20th century is most striking. In Europe, public administration is much less perceived as a study that is in competition with traditional disciplines, and generally not as one that ought to spend its energies towards the creation of an administrative science (narrowly understood), but rather as one that ought to attempt to unify the study around core concepts (see, for example, Auby 1966; König 1970; Van Braam and Bemelmans-Vidéc 1986).

In the US, Simon is the most strident advocate of a narrow scientific approach in public administration. He focuses on organizational behaviour and on the decision-making and thinking processes of what Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) call the 'competent performer' (who focuses on the processing of logical information and analytical problem solving), the 'proficient performer' (who intuitively chooses on the basis of analytical evaluation prior to action), and the 'expert' (who also operates upon intuition, tacit knowledge, and a holistic approach to the subject matter) (Barnard 1968, p. 302; Simon 1997a, pp. 130–5; Flyvbjerg 2001, pp. 13, 20–1). The science of administration is a design science since the social world must start with the notion of bounded rationality and work through disconnecting the design or means from the final goals so that the design assures optimal future flexibility (see Simon 1981, pp. 188–90; see also Jones 2003, p. 407).

Simon operates upon a logic of discovery which holds that research starts with an idea (Simon 1991, p. 107), such as bounded rationality, which is first explored through theoretical understanding and then through developing and testing hypotheses. However, when the major difference between substantive, objective rationality, and procedural, bounded

rationality, is that the former implicitly operates with untested auxiliary assumptions about utility and expectations (Simon 1985, p. 297), then the latter logically has inductive elements for starting with testing auxiliary assumptions through observations and recording of human thought processes in specific situations – such as diagnosis by a medical professional, the moves made by grand master chess player in simultaneous games, solving physics and math problems in high school and college, and so on, and not in a generalized setting (Simon 1985, p. 295) – in order to arrive at a uniform theory of information processing in the human brain (compare this to Riker's discussion of procedural versus substantive rationality as operating on *ex post* respectively *ex ante* assumptions: 1990, p. 172). Hence, it is too simple to say that Simon's work is deductive or inductive by nature. Indeed, the natural and social sciences work with both approaches (see Daneke 1990, p. 384; Babbie 1998, pp. 36, 60).

Simon's design science of public administration is descriptive and explicitly concerned with the activity of information processing and with the best division of labour for information processing which involves '...human and mechanized components of man-machine systems' (1973a, p. 270). Simon's design science 'catches on' in public administration, but in a manner different from what he envisaged (for example, finding 'widely varying applications', as Daneke observed (1990, p. 385). Moving away from Simon's intent, Miller argues that public management as a design science would be much more 'useful' than public management as a natural science (Miller 1984, pp. 251–68). The same applied focus is found in Shangraw and Crow who argue that public administration as a design science '... can be separated from the behavioural sciences such as political science, psychology, or economics ...and...that it has not accepted its role of designer and evaluator out of fear that it will not be accepted in the academic community' (Shangraw and Crow 1989, pp. 156–7). Their understanding of design science, though, is very different from Simon's. They explicitly include description *and* prescription (p. 155), and ground the design and evaluation of institutions, mechanisms and processes in previous experience (p. 156). In addition, they present an inter-disciplinary curriculum for a design science (p. 157). In contrast, Simon's curriculum example is clearly disciplinary (1981, p. 190). In a commentary upon Shangraw and Crow, Overman writes that design science is making headway in public administration, public management and public policy programmes. At the same time, he criticizes it for not providing a viable alternative to systems theory and for coming close to 'discredited' notions such as comprehensive rationality, social engineering, and technocratic rule (Overman 1989, pp. 159–60). Like the case study approach, the design science approach – whether in Simon's pure sense or in Shangraw and Crow's applied and interdisciplinary sense – appears to continue to hold the attention of scholars in public administration (especially in public management).

To be sure, Simon's design science is a pure science based on facts and tested propositions which '...does not, or should not, have any illusions that it is prescribing for public policy' (Simon 1966, p. 36; see also Lalman 1993, p. 98). Instead, it designs decision processes in such a manner that three vital criteria are met: comprehensiveness, technical sophistication, and pluralism (Simon 1973a, p. 276). If public administration includes a focus on applied knowledge, it cannot work within the boundaries of academic specialization and should be labelled 'political economy' (Simon 1966, p. 35). Simon's influence has been especially strong among scholars who study political and/or bureaucratic institutions (see, for example, Moe 1980, 1990; Bendor and Moe 1985; Bendor 1988; Alt and Shepsle 1990; Hammond 1993; Bendor *et al.* 2001; Krause 2001; Krause and Meier 2003) and/or public management (see, for example, Kettl 1993, p. 411; Kettl and Milward 1996;

Brudney *et al.* 2000; Heinrich and Lynn 2000; Bertelli 2004; Meier and O'Toole 2006). The big challenge that scholars in this tradition face is the charge that they have failed to produce predictive and lawlike generalizations, and that generalizations are probabilistic at best (Harmon 2006, pp. 50, 54).

A less apparent and indirect influence of Simon is evident in E. Ostrom's extensive work. Ostrom combines case study and design science and has both scientific and applied objectives. Two features make her research stand out. The first is the enormous number of cases that include the collection of data on thousands of common pool resource organizations (CPRs) all over the world, thus contributing to the validity of conclusions. The second is the implicit design science approach. Systematic analysis of successful CPRs has resulted in identifying features contributing to the longevity of institutions. Ostrom calls these features 'design principles' (1990, pp. 88–102) and uses these as elements of a theory of self-organization or self-government and to prescribe for reality (see discussion above). Simon is much less influential among those who adhere to a pure public choice approach that only emphasizes rational and maximizing behaviour (as observed by Bendor 1988, pp. 383, 390 and by Heckelman and Whaples 2003). He states that scholars who work with game theory or rational expectations theory do not take the severe limits of the decision-maker's actual knowledge and computational powers into account (Simon 1991, p. 122).

The assessment of Simon's influence in public administration is mixed. Recall that Simon suggested how the study had absorbed both his and Waldo's revolutions. Dubnick wrote that mainstream public administration was so influenced by Waldo's emphasis on professionalism that an aversion developed against the 'logical positivist bogeyman' (1999, p. 40). If Dubnick is right, a proper assessment of Simon's potential meaning for the study of public administration is prohibited by bias. For instance, Hood and Jackson wrote that Simon's influence must be limited because few proverbs have been laid to rest, administrative argument has not really changed, let alone improved, and positivism commands less universal respect today than when Simon wrote about public administration (1991, pp. 20–1). However, each of these observations can be countered. First, keeping the differentiation between pure and applied science in mind, Simon (1969) merely points out that 'proverbs' have no place in 'a science' of administration. He says nothing about the role of proverbs in day-to-day government. Consequentially, and second, Simon studies the logic of administrative argument but never expresses a desire to change administrative argument in practice. From early on he regards himself as a scientist, not an applied scholar. Third, whether an approach (or theory) commands 'less universal respect' is not relevant as a measure of its theoretical quality. However, the impact of Simon's thought has been doubted. For instance, Fellow Nobel Prize winner Kenneth Arrow wondered 'Why [...] has the work of Herbert Simon, which meant so much to all of us, [...] had so little direct consequence?' (quoted in Williamson 1990, p. 182). Simon argued (though not in response to Arrow) that economics operates upon a 'preposterously omniscient rationality' having reached a stage of 'Thomistic' refinement in game theory and rational expectations theory that have great intellectual and aesthetic appeal but little relation to actual or possible behavior' (1997a, p. 87; see also 1997b, pp. 26, 63). He is convinced, though, that bounded rationality and satisficing will become mainstream in economics (1991, p. 364) and he may well be right (see Sarin 1999, p. 82).

The strongest and most biased critique has come from scholars who find Simon's scientific approach dehumanizing (see, for example, Storing 1962). This has prompted others to support Simon's quest even though they did not identify with his approach (see, for

example, Schaar and Wolin 1963, pp. 133–7; Landau 1972, pp. 193–202). Some scholars argue that public administration should develop a methodology of its own, with a rigour worthy of the positivist challenge (Gill and Meier 2000, pp. 9, 13). To be sure, such rigour in public administration does not require unified theory, but methodological pluralism: what theories and concepts are relevant depends upon a particular research object and thus may vary from one research project to another (see Meier 2005, p. 665).

The research tradition with which Simon and so many others are identified is that of logical positivism. Simon wants to adapt this approach to the needs of the social sciences, since the fundamental difference between it and the natural sciences is that the former deals with far more complex social and organizational phenomena upon which experiments cannot be conducted (D'Andrade 1986, p. 39; Simon 1997, p. 358; Meier 2005, p. 655). Discussing his 'proverbs' article, Simon writes in Humean fashion that 'It is true that I am still accused of "positivism" as though that were some kind of felony, or at least a venial sin; and there still seems to be widespread lack of understanding of why one cannot logically deduce an "ought" without including at least one "ought" among the premises' (1991, p. 270). He revisits the issue of positivism in the commentary to Chapter 3 in the 4th edition of *Administrative Behavior*, saying that his initial use of 'logical positivism' is meant to provide a philosophical foundation to the 'is' and 'ought' distinction. Recognizing logical positivism as widely discredited, he dryly remarks that replacing that term with 'empiricism' makes the entire argument go forward just as well (1997, p. 68).

Simon is obviously correct when observing that an 'ought' cannot be derived from two 'is'es' (1948, p. 844; 1973b, p. 348). However, this observation draws attention to a major problem with the logical positivist approach to the study of government: that is, the separation of facts from values. The notion that facts can be established rests upon the claim that an objective reality exists (for example, Meier and O'Toole 2007, p. 786 versus Luton, 2007, p. 527). Scholars observe several other problems. The first is of methodological nature and concerns the level of analysis. In 1990, for instance, the economist Coleman argues that the social sciences should explain social rather than individual behaviour and thus take the social system, not the individual, as the primary level of analysis (cited in E.O. Wilson 1998, p. 187). However, should we choose between studying social or individual behaviour? E. Ostrom's work shows that one can profitably combine them.

A second problem is epistemological and concerns clarity of the philosophical justification(s) for how and why theory produces knowledge and clarity about the concepts (or proverbs) with which an attempt is made to capture objective reality. Not surprisingly, the complex phenomenon of government attracted the attention of scholars from various disciplines and this generated a wide variety of theories. Consequentially, as MacDonald argued, scholars seldom probe the epistemological inconsistencies of their reasoning. He illustrated this with a discussion of instrumental-empiricist and scientific-realist approaches to rational choice theory (MacDonald 2003). However, is a dichotomous presentation of theories useful? Overman argued that as long as reality is portrayed as dichotomous (for instance, democracy versus bureaucracy, artificial versus natural approaches) the study is doomed to eternal debate (1989, p. 160). In the same spirit, McSwite wrote that public administration's legitimacy crisis is rooted in concept-pairs such as democracy – efficiency and politics – administration that are regarded as dichotomous rather than as complementary (1997, p. 148). Along the same lines, Harmon argued that the study of public administration operates upon so-called schismogenic paradoxes where each of two opposing principles is neglected in favour of the other. Instead, he suggested that public administration should work with antinomial paradoxes where two ideas or

principles are presented in necessary and creative tension with one another (1995, p. 7; see also Wamsley 1996, p. 354). Harmon presented fascinating examples of such antinomies (1995, pp. 93, 112, 119, 150, 186–7) and later expanded on these (2006).

A third problem can be drawn from Polanyi's concern that objectivity and formalization of knowledge cause the destruction of other knowledge. This is reiterated in Yankelovich's reference to the philosopher Bernstein who believes objectivism to be a destructive force that distorts reality and undermines wisdom and common sense (Polanyi 1966, p. 20; Yankelovich 1991, p. 197). Too much emphasis on empirical public administration may jeopardize 'the use of imagination' where 'small matters' studied by the scholar carries him into the 'larger questions' (Dahl 1961, p. 772; Davidson 1961, p. 854; Redford 1961, p. 759). In addition, in the pursuit of scientific knowledge, there is a danger of too much focus on method. Some argue that a focus on method need not inhibit attention for real-world problems and puzzles (Gill and Meier 2000); yet others raise concerns: 'Method becomes ritual when the analyst concentrates on an elaborate or rigid "conceptual framework" and limits his interpretive role to the internal structure of the data, as if he believed that only so far as he is able to neutralize his own judgment will his study be scientific and thus, by definition, meaningful' (Davidson 1961, p. 851; Lindblom 1997, p. 233). Findings may also be more specific to method than methodologically sophisticated scholars care to admit (Fiske 1986, p. 68).

A fourth problem is normative by nature and questions a positivist study of public administration that lacks attention for the moral challenges administrators face and the value-laden choices they must make every day (Redford 1961, p. 759; Waldo 1984). Simon is dismissive of any other than the positivist approach (see Crowther-Heyck 2005) but this has met with objections. In public administration, the New Public Administration (NPA) approach, for instance, is very explicit in arguing that the study must be committed to the values of both good management and social equity. The post-positivist NPA is not against positivism *per se* but hopes for a public administration that is less generic and more public; less descriptive and more prescriptive; less organization-oriented and more client-oriented; less neutral and more normative than logical positivism. However, as argued by Frederickson, it is no less scientific (Frederickson 1980, pp. xii, 11–12), showing a European sense of *Wissenschaft*. Indeed, the NPA, the Blacksburg Manifesto, and the mushrooming public sector ethics literature, are indicators of how much, over the last 40 years, the study of public administration has started to deal with normative concerns.

A fifth and final problem of logical positivism concerns the fact that it seemingly fails to take the 'human side of enterprise' into consideration. For instance, management information systems may support managers, but at the same time cause anxiety '... because the use of the system reduces the role of their intuition, reduces their space of free movement, increases their experience of psychological failure' (Argyris 1973a, p. 263). Hence, too rational an approach to organizations is tyrannical and may have unintended consequences for the interaction between supervisor and subordinate as well as for the amount of creativity needed to achieve the organizational objective of productivity and profit.

The issue of what constitutes 'science' with respect to government may not be resolved, but it seems there is room for both a 'broader' Waldonian and a 'narrower' Simonian definition, especially when the former is helpful in identifying the contents of the administrative 'black boxes' through qualitative research and when the latter can help identify, through quantitative research, which of these factors, elements, configurations, and so forth are the most influential (Lynn *et al.* 2000, p. 13). However, a parsimonious model cannot include every potentially explanatory variable and must indicate to which

management or policy domains and jurisdictions (including levels of government) it pertains (Ellwood 2000, p. 329).

Critique levelled against Simon specifically and against positivism in general should not overshadow positivism's merits. First, positivism generated valuable new insights and theories and channelled an explicit methodological disciplinarity with an eye to ultimately arriving at epistemological unity. It is generally agreed that public administration profits from quantitative studies in organizational sociology and from an economics-based rational choice theory and principal agent theory. Second, positivism forced a rigour of conceptualization, research design, and proof that is focused on providing a solid description of the phenomenon of interest. This description can be empirically grounded, that is, inductively developed on the basis of observations of reality, or can be theoretically inspired, that is, deductively, and on the basis of logic and/or common sense. Equally valuable, third, is that its scholars did not give up pursuing objectivity while at the same time acknowledging that interpretation is a fact of life. It is too simplistic to consider positivism and holism as opposites, with the former relying upon hard quantitative methods and the latter upon the 'softer' qualitative analysis. Such a dichotomous presentation obscures the fact that both types of analysis involve extensive interpretation (Kritzer 1996, pp. 13–15; Goodin and Klingemann 1996, p. 12). Fourth, Simon's type of organizational theory and 'rational man' is not devoid of attention to emotion and humanity (see Simon 1973b, p. 347) but focuses on the power of reason. According to Simon: 'In Argyris' Dionysian world, [...] the rational man is cold, constrained, incapable of self-actualization [...] In my Appolonian world, reason is the handmaiden of freedom and creativity' (Simon 1973b, p. 352). Perhaps Simon was confused. The Nobel Prize winner for medicine in 1937, Szent Gyorgyi, distinguished between two lines of thinking. The Appolonian tends to develop established lines of thinking to perfection while the Dionysian is more open to new lines of research (see Hall 1989, p. 124). I argue that Simon was a Dionysian when developing a new line of research, and very much an Appolonian when refining it.

Fifth, more than any other approach, positivism takes up the challenge of explanation (compare *Erklären*) and thus complements, the understanding (compare *Verstehen*) provided by the other traditions. If there is a problem associated with positivism, it is that some of its advocates do not consider the merits of other approaches and that its critics may not always understand or may even be unwilling to understand, the 'language' of logical positivism which even the initiated do not always find accessible. (On a side note, Lalman *et al.* observed when talking about political science that: 'Today, even for the mathematician, a great deal of technical skill may be needed to comprehend papers in the field [...] and even with the mathematician's technical advantages, a great deal of reflection is required to comprehend the "political" content of the formulations and their solutions' (1993, p. 77). But then we must also ask: Are logical positivists or scientists willing to consider and work with and in other traditions? Indeed, where Simon invites scholars to acquire 'sufficient technical skill' before considering logical positivism, logical positivists ought to consider the merits of other approaches and not only from their own standpoint. When Simon debated others (in chronological order: Dahl, Waldo, Banfield, and Argyris), he generally emphasized the strengths of his and the weaknesses of other approaches.

### Relativist perspectives

This tradition includes, as an example, phenomenology (Hummel 1977), critical theory (Box 2005) and various other approaches that are usually lumped together under the label of 'postmodernism'. In her overview of postmodernism in the social sciences, Rosenau

distinguishes, as she calls them, 'affirmative' from 'sceptical postmodernists'. Sceptical or radical postmodernists are pessimistic about the future and regard this age as one of fragmentation, meaninglessness, vagueness and one lacking moral anchors (Rosenau 1992, p. 15). Their primary method is deconstruction of modernity's organization of reality in increments of linear, purposive, homogenous and evolutionary time. As a consequence, past, present, and future are collapsed and only confusion remains (Rosenau 1992, p. 22). As far as I can tell, sceptical postmodernism has no supporters in public administration. Affirmative postmodernists, however, have made inroads in public administration (Frederickson and Smith 2003, pp. 145; Denhardt 2004, pp. 165; see also the journal *Administrative Theory & Praxis*).

Affirmative postmodernists wish to augment positivist epistemology and methodology with intuition, selective judgement, feelings, imagination, and various forms of creativity and play (Rosenau 1992, pp. 117, 172; Miller 2003, pp. 16–17); they also favour interpretation over deconstruction (Rosenau 1992, p. 118) and believe that postmodern social science should be descriptive rather than predictive and policy-oriented (Rosenau 1992, p. 169). 'Affirmatives' emphasize the importance of rejecting the grand narrative over time in favour of the local and regional narrative with which individuals can identify.

The 'affirmatives' may very well trace their origins to Antiquity's scepticism and to 19th-century Romanticism, which held that there is no right answer to questions; that truth varies from individual to individual; and that human values are contradictory (Berlin 1999). A more elaborate study of the intellectual origins of postmodernism is not necessary here, but would be rewarding and perhaps even remove it from the realm of the 'suspect' approach where 'anything goes' (Bevir 1999, p. 79). At the time that Rosenau's study was published, postmodernism was emerging in public administration. Her only source of information seems to have been an article by Caldwell who wrote that public administration in a postmodern society has to transform information into validated, usable knowledge (1975, pp. 570–1).

Postmodernism in public administration, however, developed quite differently. It gained momentum in public administration from the early 1990s onwards, especially in the US (see Adams 1992; Farmer 1995, 2005; Spicer 2001; Miller 2002; Miller and Fox 2007). In Europe, postmodernism was not nearly as important, although some scholars have identified with this approach (see, for example, Frissen 1999; Bogason 2000). Farmer's 1995 study provides the best introduction to postmodern thought in the literature. He extensively compares characteristics of modernity (that is, particularism, scientism, technicism) with features of postmodernity (imagination, deconstruction, deterritorialization, and alterity), and argues that the latter perspective accommodates the cultural diversity of today's society much better. Farmer claims that his study is one of deconstruction (1995, p. 148), but his writings do not come across as those of a sceptical postmodernist. Indeed, in the epilogue, he writes that neither modernity nor postmodernity need be rejected, but that the value of their contributions must be properly understood (Farmer 1995, p. 248). Miller and Fox underline this by observing that a perspectivist epistemic community does not imply an abandonment of 'the old positivism' (2000, p. 682).

One of the critiques postmodernism faces is that it is an approach where 'anything goes'. This critique has merit since postmodernists deny any claim of objectivity. However, once such a critique becomes stereotypical: that is, condemning all that is published under that label, we may fail to see that the relativist perspectives of postmodernism produces good and bad scholarship just like any other tradition. One of the problems of the postmodernist approach is that its 'value' cannot be assessed in the familiar disciplinary

terms. It is fair to raise three fundamental questions. First, what can postmodernism offer once it has deconstructed the knowledge acquired on a mono-, multi- or interdisciplinary basis? Second, in what sense do the philosophical, historical, comparative and interpretative contributions of postmodernism differentiate it from practical wisdom? And, third, the most serious of challenges, how can scholars who embrace a relativist perspective hold to a claim of describing social reality when they deny the possibility of an objective and even intersubjective reality? Indeed, when truth and facts are considered subjective, cognitive relativism cannot lay any claim upon the quality of its own analysis. In the words of De Zwart: 'Cognitive relativism backfires' (2002, p. 490).

Nevertheless, postmodernism has several features important to the study of government. First, affirmative postmodernists advocate the inclusion of philosophical, historical and comparative approaches (Spicer 2001, pp. 125, 133; see also Miller 2002, p. 57) but they are not unique in this (see the discussion on practical wisdom, above). Second, postmodernists warn against reification when they point out that organizations have neither material substance nor a purpose of their own beyond what individuals pursue (Miller 2002, p. 53). Intriguingly, they have this in common with methodological individualists (who adhere to a scientific knowledge narrow definition of science. Third, they object to Simon's advice that administrators must '...take as their ethical premises the objectives that have been set for the organization' (quoted in Spicer 2001, p. 98). Surely, ethical premises rooted in societal and individual demands and preferences must be considered (Waldo 1996). *In extremis*, the emphasis on organizational objectives can and has resulted in agentic shifts with, in many cases, disastrous consequences (see Adams and Balfour 1998). Fourth, postmodernists operate upon a holistic view of society and human beings and sometimes hold to a strong conviction that its scholarship must help to emancipate those who have been marginalized in the past, such as women and minorities (in critical theory, see, for example, Jun 2006, p. 2). Postmodernists regard public and business organizations as fundamentally intertwined social constructions (Farmer 1995, p. 60). In addition, they remind us that the free market is not as free as some think (Miller 2002, p. 46; compare Polanyi 1944, pp. 71, 141). Fifth, and in line with practical wisdom, postmodern authors emphasize diversity of values, cultures, traditions, and styles of life (Berlin 1999; Spicer 2001, p. 90) which must be disseminated in a discursive community of people so that different solutions to social problems can be considered and a choice made for consensual solution (Miller 2002, p. 97; see also Lindblom 1990). They are inclined to take the human being as the starting point of analysis (McSwite 2002). Sixth, like the 'Waldonians', high-modern and postmodern authors regard too much focus on techniques and instruments of personnel management, budgeting, organizational structuring, and the like, as severely impoverished when disconnected from the values which give these instruments meaning (McSwite 1997, p. 15, 2002). Finally, and this is perhaps their unique contribution to the understanding of government, is that they have called attention to what is left out and unsaid (Goodin and Klingemann 1996, p. 21). Here, Catlaw's study of 'the people' as an abstract and fabricated notion is a good example (2007).

## **SIMILARITIES, DIFFERENCES, AND HOW THE DIFFERENT TRADITIONS PROVIDE UNDERSTANDING**

At this point it is helpful to highlight similarities and differences between these four traditions, thus augmenting the brief outline given above. Both practical wisdom and relativist perspectives emphasize interpretation, value, moral reasoning, judgement, emotion,

reflection and discourse, and comparison. A fundamental difference between the two used to be that practical wisdom implicitly (in Antiquity) or explicitly (in the 19th century) pursued grand theory. Currently, the difference between practical wisdom and postmodernism is that the former holds to some hierarchy of values (that is, intersubjective value-pluralism) and interpretations where the latter does not. Scholars of the practical wisdom tradition in the 20th and 21st centuries seek interdisciplinarity through the integration of substantive knowledge from different disciplinary traditions around an identifiable core. Thus, they will not exclude the potential of any theoretical approach (Raadschelders 2005). Postmodernists emphasize a methodology that challenges accepted and traditional positivist knowledge. Like positivists, they take the individual as point of departure for analysis. But, where the former emphasizes rent-seeking and preference-ranking actors, the latter stresses the human being as a whole (*Gestalt*). Scholars in the traditions of practical wisdom and practical experience generally believe in an intersubjective reality, while those working in the tradition of scientific knowledge agree that there is an objective reality (the correspondence theory) that we can know. Scholars embracing a relativist perspective hold that reality is socially constructed and interpreted (see table 1 for a comparison of the four approaches).

The first part of table 1 concerns the internal characteristics of the discourse about government, while the second part explores the link between these internal features and the social-political environment. The four approaches can be summarized best by showing how they define and/or provide understanding:

1. *Practical wisdom*: defines understanding as a satisfying 'description' of some aspect of reality, that is, government, through moral reasoning and logical arguments applicable to the widest possible range of phenomena, and through reflection, interpretation, and comparison of time and context in an interdisciplinary manner;
2. *Practical experience*: defines understanding as a satisfying 'description and prescription' of some type of administrative action, by means of cases or examples applicable to the widest possible variety of comparable phenomena through experimental testing of the best way to conduct activities in a multidisciplinary manner;
3. *Scientific knowledge*: provides understanding through a satisfying 'explanation' of some aspect of administration with probabilistic statements and perhaps lawlike generalizations or principles through experimental testing of laws or principles in a monodisciplinary manner;
4. *Relativist perspectives*: here, understanding is regarded as a potentially unlimited range of 'interpretations' about some aspect of 'reality' through intuition, selective judgement, feelings, imagination, creativity and play and through uncovering and/or deconstructing diversity of values, cultures, traditions, and styles of life in a non-disciplinary manner.

To whom are these approaches useful? Practical wisdom is of pedagogical value since it provides a broad and interdisciplinary basis of knowledge upon which the contemporary role and position of government in society can be assessed. Hence, it is useful to (under) graduate students, public servants in elected and appointed positions, as well as citizens. However, it is also useful to the pure scientist, someone who should not avoid thinking about the potential social consequences of theory. Given the need for applicable skills, practical experience is attractive to policy- and decision makers from the lower to the higher levels. Some are specialists and some are generalists, but all are managers who

TABLE 1 *Characteristics of four intellectual traditions in and social objectives of the study of public administration*

	Scientific knowledge	Practical experience	Practical wisdom	Relativist perspectives
<b>Characteristics of the four approaches</b>				
1. Origin	17th–18th century; post-1940s in public administration and political science	Kautilya, Plato, 17th century; 1900→ in public administration, 1950→ in political science	Aristotle; Mirrors of Princes; 1950s→ in public administration and political science	Romanticism; 1990s→ in public administration and since late 1990s in political science
2. Knowledge ideal	Unity of knowledge and middle range theory: explanation, objectivity, epistemological integration	Standardized activity and grand theory: description, usable knowledge, professional integration	Moral truth and grand theory: inter-subjectivity, differentiated integration	No grand narratives or 'formal' theory: interpretation subjectivity, no integrative ideal
3. Sources of knowledge	Facts, propositions, data	Precedent, experience, inventory of principles and techniques	Arguments, moral reasoning, judgement, interpretation, tacit knowledge	Interpretations, values, judgement, feelings, emotions
4. Methodology	Positivist; 'natural-science' style; focus on rationality and <i>episteme</i> (science)	Case collection; comparison; textual examples; focus on mechanism and <i>techné</i> (skill)	Hermeneutic; discourse; reflection; comparison; focus on rationality, substance and <i>phronesis</i> (prudence)	Discourse; reflection; comparison; focus on irrationality and uncertainty
5. Disciplinary desire/status	Mono-disciplinary	Multi-disciplinary	Inter-disciplinary	Non-disciplinary
6. Substantive interest	Bureaucracy, efficiency, decision and organization theory	Universal principles of organization and management	Evolution of governing, authority	Language, culture
7. Representative authors	Simon, Meier, E. Ostrom, Auby, Luhmann, Van Braam	Taylor, Gulick, Kettl, E. Ostrom, Fayol, Hood, Mayntz	W. Wilson, Weber, Waldo, V. Ostrom, Rosenbloom, Hood, Rutgers, König, Stillman	Farmer, Fox, Miller, Spicer, McSwite, Frissen, Bogason, Box (affirmatives)
<b>Social objectives of the study of government</b>				
8. Political objective = legitimization of ~	No particular political objective other than legitimizing public administration as a science	Public versus private spheres, bureaucracy for a strong state, social stratification	Ruler – ruled relation	Politics and administration, complexity, relativity of existence
9. Policy objective =	Policy-making upon objective facts	Policy implementation with the proper instruments	Support policy making of king-philosopher	To question rationales of policies
10. Task of administration =	Achieve satisficing outcomes	Organizational support of ruler	Improving ruler behaviour	Linking individual and collective desires
11. Role of mid- to higher level administrator	Neutral advisor, specialist at middle level, generalist at higher level	Administrative advisor, generalist	Political advisor; generalist, intellectual appraisal, reflective practitioner	Interpreter or deconstructionist
12. Representative authors	Laswell	Kautilya, Aristotle, public intellectuals	20th century	Foucault

Source: adapted and expanded from J.C.N. Raadschelders. 2005. 'Government and Public Administration: Challenges To and Need for Connecting Knowledge', *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 27, 4, 608, reproduced with permission.

must match means to ends and costs to benefits. This approach is equally useful in the classroom since it brings the real world of government closer to the student through cases and examples. Scientific knowledge is of course important to researchers pursuing science: it also provides an important approach in the classroom, but perhaps less so at the undergraduate level and more so at the graduate (especially doctoral) level. The practitioner may find some use for scientific knowledge, but it is up to that practitioner, and not the scientist, to see how it can be applied to the real world (Simon 1966, p. 34). Finally, relativist perspectives are important if only because academics and practitioners must be willing to question the value and challenge the strength of convictions and orthodoxies. As far as studying government is concerned, this approach is perhaps most fruitful in an educational environment with advanced graduate students or mid-career professionals, because it requires a solid knowledge basis in the study of public administration. More specifically, the relativist perspectives are by some considered the avenue through which line managers' interests are best served. After all, given its emphasis on professional skills, the study of public administration caters mostly to specialists (Cunningham and Weschler 2002, pp. 105–6, 109; Imperial *et al.* 2007)

### THE ARGUMENT FOR EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PLURALISM

In this article, four intellectual traditions in public administration have been presented. Both in the US and in Europe, scholars focused their epistemological concerns with the nature of the study on the question of whether public administration ought to be a 'science' or a *Wissenschaft*. In the US especially, this contrast has resulted in strong confrontations. These may have overshadowed the degree to which public administration hosts a wide variety of theories, approaches, models, and so forth. In that sense, the American identity crisis literature has not really been very helpful: that is, in suggesting that there are irreconcilable differences between scientific knowledge and practical wisdom. Where in the natural sciences scholars favour a methodology distinctive for their field, scholars in public administration advocated methodological pluralism, but one of a specific kind. For instance, when Simon refers to pluralism he explicitly means '...not a single analysis but several, prepared by protagonists that have different interests and different viewpoints' (1973a, p. 276). In 1995, O'Toole argued along similar lines: '...let many research designs bloom...', and it would be best if the scholars would '...apply differing research perspectives on a common subject and to compare and assess the perspectives, their relative values, and the ways that they can or cannot be used in coordinated fashion' (1995, pp. 294, 296). I assume this to mean methodological pluralism. This approach is difficult. O'Toole observed that '...executing such a project would require high levels of commitment from participating scholars, a shared willingness to grapple in good faith and in the context of an actual research agenda, and resources for research at a level rarely experienced in this relatively unsupported field' (1995, p. 296). The big question is: 'How can mature yet diverse scholars actually collaborate with one another, embracing interdependence and difference...' (Harmon 2006, p. 149).

The methodological pluralism I advocate is one that is not limited to various methods within scientific knowledge only, but one that makes use of methods, theories, and approaches in the other intellectual traditions as well. Indeed, the four intellectual traditions are in and of themselves not able to provide the kind of understanding that contemporary government requires. The unprecedented degree of organizational complexity of

contemporary government and of government's penetration in society has made government an object of study in all of the social sciences. The epistemological and methodological diversity that results from this disciplinary variety of concepts and theories-in-use means that, ontologically, the study of public administration cannot but be interdisciplinary. Public administration is the only study of which its scholars can claim to study government as a whole (and not just one disciplinarily defined aspect). Public administration's diversity is captured in this article in four traditions rather than in an eclectic and incoherent listing of various concepts, theories, models, and schools. This identity cannot and should not be sacrificed for the kind of specialization that results from narrower epistemological and methodological perspectives upon public administration. Again, any narrowing of perspective will lead to limited understanding. This means that arguments in favour of one approach and critical of other approaches are unacceptable. Together, I think that the four approaches contribute to this more encompassing understanding of government. None can stand by itself. Public administration ought not to be limited to 'scientific knowledge' but, should, instead be *Wissenschaft*, an approach that works with scientific knowledge, practical experience, practical wisdom and relativist perspectives. But it does require that scholars not only say what needs to be done – that is, work together across traditions – but actually do it.

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