

ONE-WAY, TWO-WAY, OR DEAD-END STREET

British influence on the study of public administration in America after 1945*

Abstract

What intellectual influences, if any, have British public administration scholars had on their American counterparts since the Second World War? In this article, the author briefly reviews the major areas of theory and research in the study of public administration in Britain. It identifies the important work by British contributors in modernist-empiricism, the new public management, regulation, policy networks and governance, and interpretive theory. It argues that, although there is a discernible American influence on British public administration, there is little British influence on American public administration; it is a one-way street. Increasingly, British scholars are involved in a growing community of European public administration scholars with whom they share active, two-way connections. Moreover, recent developments in Europe mean that the American and European public administration communities are growing further apart. The strength of modernist-empiricism in American, and the turn to an epistemology of 'blurred genres' in Europe, means that there are two self-referential communities with the attendant danger that any intellectual engagement is a dead-end street.

Mapping the terrain: who?

To ask what influence British public administration has exerted over the intellectual development American public administration since the Second World War flies in the face of common sense. American public administration has more scholars, more graduate programmes and research funding beyond the wildest dreams of British academics. British

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scholars will invariably cite organization theory and policy analysis as two major influences on British public administration. Most American scholars probably could not think of a single equivalent British influence on American public administration, although they might cite the odd individual author. So, this paper tackles a non-subject because British public administration has had little or no influence on the intellectual development of American public administration. American scholars may not pay attention to British theory and research but that does not mean that there has been no work of significance. This section identifies the major contributors and the next section describes the main intellectual contributions of the post-war period. There are two subsidiary objectives. First, the body of the text focuses on key contributors and contributions. The endnotes provide a more comprehensive guide to the British literature for American readers. Second, the article locates the British contribution in a broader European context and suggest that the study of public administration on the two continents is best characterized as two self-referential communities, not as intellectual engagement.

There is some evidence that helps to identify individual British scholars who could be categorized as ‘boundary spanners’; that is, those individuals who manage the links between organizations, or in this case professional communities, by activating and managing networks (Williams 2002). Goodin (2009: 36 and 38) analysed the indexes of the ten volumes of the *Oxford Handbook of Political Science* to identify the sub-disciplinary leaders, defined as the 1 per cent of people whose names appear most often. There is no listing for public administration, but there are separate listings for political institutions and public policy. For political institutions, there are two British academics on the list of 22 with a known affiliation to public administration: R. A. W. Rhodes and G. Stoker. For public policy, there are three British academics on the list of 29: Christopher Hood, Christopher Pollitt, and R. A. W.

Rhodes. Quite obviously, British contributors form a small minority but these few individuals are potential boundary spanners.

Other assessments rely on judgements of reputation rather than counting citations in indexes.

Nonetheless there is a reassuring consistency. Hood (1999: 297–300) itemizes several ‘major theoretical “discoveries”’; Patrick Dunleavy (1991) on bureau shaping; Greenwood et al.

(1980) on contingency theory; R. A. W. Rhodes (1988) on policy networks; Andrew Dunsire

(1978, 1996) on the cybernetics of bureaucracy; Richard Rose on public expenditure (Rose and Davies 1994); and a miscellany of contributions under the heading of ‘typological work’

(for example, Hood 1983 (2007) on policy instruments). Not all these judgements are made

by academic peers. The Political Studies Association of the UK’s guide to political studies

was written by, and for, students. It identifies six ‘leading lights’ in public administration

Patrick Dunleavy, Christopher Ham, Grant Jordan, R. A. W. Rhodes, John Stewart and Gerry

Stoker, and notes the ‘intolerable’ lack of women because of the ‘traditional patriarchal

nature of academic life’ and the subject’s lack of ‘sex appeal’ (Balsom et al. 1995: 92–3).

Finally, there is the Thomson ISI (or Institute for Scientific Information) citation data. Taking

the field’s top British journal, *Public Administration*, few articles published before 1990 are

ever cited and none before 1986 made the top 100 articles published. For the top 40 citations

since 1986 there is a familiar pattern; only five British authors had two or more articles and

they accounted for 43 per cent of all citations – Patrick Dunleavy, Christopher Hood, Vivien

Lowndes, R. A. W. Rhodes, and John Stewart and Keiron Walsh. There is only one American

academic cited in the Top 40 citations for *Public Administration*. Taking *Public*

Administration Review as the equivalent leading American journal, not one article by a

British author is listed in its ‘top 40’ citations nor is a single British scholar among the top 30

cited authors.¹ The brutally simple point is that public administration is all too often parochial.

American public administration may be the world leader in the field but it does not escape

this fate. As Sharman and Weller (2009) show, the overwhelming proportion of content in American political science and public administration journals is by Americans for Americans on America. The point about American parochialism is often conceded (Heady 2001, Stillman 1997). National journals in Europe are less focused; for example, in the 2000s, some 45 per cent of the articles in *Public Administration* were written by authors from outside Britain, mainly from Continental Europe. In sum, the most striking feature of the citation data is that it shows America and Europe as two relatively self-contained communities. So, the twelve British boundary spanners do not span the Atlantic, although they cross the Channel. America remains a dead-end street for British and European public administration while there is growing community of European scholars. So much for the broad picture. What did these individuals contribute? Turning to specific contributions a more nuanced picture will emerge.

Mapping the terrain: what?

There is some evidence about the topics on which British scholars have made a contribution. Dargie and Rhodes (1996) and Rhodes et al. (1995) analysed *Public Administration's* contents for the period 1945–95. These analyses show that the journal's subject matter remained diverse but there were five significant trends. First, between 1945 and 1969, the journal became a professional social science journal reporting empirical research. In the early years, articles had little theoretical content. They were not formally 'academic' in the sense that they had no abstract, introduction, argument, sub-headings, or conclusion. Authors did not engage with the academic literature. Second, between 1970 and 1989 there was significant growth in articles focused on public policy making. Third, the proportion of articles on public management increased from an average of 8 per cent over the period 1970–89 to 32 per cent between 1990 and 1994. Fourth, empirical analysis in all its forms became

the dominant research method, and of the several empirical methods employed, the case study was the most important. Finally in this period, there was an increase in the theoretical content of articles. Although the number of theoretical articles remained constant at some 4–6 per cent, as Dunsire (1995: 33) observes, ‘most contributors to a journal such as this [*Public Administration*], including practitioners, are aware of theoretical writings on their topics’.

Case studies were now topped and tailed with theory. By the mid-1990s, the overall picture is that of a subject developing a stronger theoretical and empirical character.

Rhodes (2011b) updates this analysis for the period 1990 to 2009. From 1990 to 2004, public management was the largest single category, although it tailed off in the late 2000s.

Traditional public administration pottered along. Although some classical topics, such as administrative law, almost disappeared, others aged well. Local government and the national health services continued to attract much scholarly attention. Some topics, such as accountability, staged a mini-comeback. The contents remained diverse. The journal published articles on policy areas new to its pages (for example, sport, the police). However, there were three standout changes: theory, comparative public administration, and policy networks and governance. Theoretical articles became much more common, rising steadily to 10 per cent. The increase in comparative material rose from some 23 per cent to 45 per cent, mainly on European public administration. There was a rapid increase in the articles on networks, interorganizational analysis and governance from nothing in the early 1990s to some 10 per cent throughout the 2000s.

The distinctive contributions

Using the content analysis as a guide, this section summarizes the distinct and distinctive intellectual contributions of British public administration under the headings of: modernist-

empiricism, the new public management, regulation, policy networks and governance, and the interpretive turn.

Modernist-empiricism

The story starts immediately after the Second World War when traditional public administration was dominant. The old order is best represented by its grand old men: William Robson (1895–1980), Norman Chester (1907–86) and W. J. M. (Bill) Mackenzie (1909–96). Their work was essentially institutional and concerned to analyse the history, structure, functions, powers and relationships of government organizations (see Mackenzie 1975; Rhodes 1991; Robson 1975). Robson represented that blend of institutional description and Westminster reformism so typical of the British school. ‘His great ability was to assemble a huge mass of data, to analyse order out of the complexity, and to argue a coherent case for change’. He was ‘one of the Olympian Fabians, worthy company to the Webbs’ (Jones 1986: 12). Norman Chester’s best books were the official history of the nationalized industries (1975) and a history of the English administrative system between 1780 and 1870 (1981). Bill Mackenzie (1975) was admired for his lucid, nuanced essays on both British government and the study of public administration. It changed in the 1970s with the expansion of the British university system, the rapid growth of the social sciences, and the impact of American theory and methods.

British scholars remain sceptical about the American science of politics and its methods. For example, Bogdanor (1999: 149) is keen to distinguish British political science from its American counterpart and argues the main characteristics of British political science are its aversion to the ‘over-arching theory’ and ‘positivism’ of American political science (see also Gamble 1990: 408). The distinction is too sharp. If British political scientists were uncomfortable with the hypothesis testing and deductive methods of behaviouralism, they

were at ease with ‘modernist-empiricism’. Modernist-empiricism treats institutions such as legislatures, constitutions and policy networks as discrete, atomized objects to be compared, measured and classified. It adopts comparisons across time and space as a means of uncovering regularities and probabilistic explanations to be tested against neutral evidence (see Bevir 2001 and 2006). British public administration scholars were all too willing to treat institutions such as legislatures, constitutions and policy networks as discrete objects to be compared, measured and classified. Many remain comfortable with Bryce’s exhortation (1929, Vol. 1: 13) that, ‘it is Facts that are needed: Facts, Facts, Facts’. What is more, their modernist-empiricism overlapped with behaviouralism at various junctures. Both adopted comparisons across time and space as a means of uncovering regularities and probabilistic explanations to be tested against neutral evidence. These overlaps provided a channel through which many British political scientists had their ‘homoeopathic doses of American political science’ (Hayward 1991: 104). So, British public administration, while still favouring case studies, nonetheless expanded its toolkit to encompass quantitative methods and there was a new methodological rigour in the subject (Gamble 1990: 413).

Theoretically, the 1970s saw the arrival of organization theory and policy studies in British public administration (Hood 1990; Rhodes 1991). Influence was a one-way street; British public administration adapted American theory and methods to local issues and institutions. The most prominent manifestations were the application of contingency theory to British central and local government (Greenwood et al. 1980; Hood and Dunsire 1981; Ranson et al. 1980); and case studies of policy implementation (Barrett and Fudge 1981). Both exemplify modernist empiricism and both proved to be dead-end streets as they fractured into myriad contending approaches.²

The brevity of these remarks should not be seen as a reflection on their importance. They were important. They are now an embedded part of how we understand public administration

today. The prime example is George Boyne and the Public Management Research Group at Cardiff Business School. They have conducted a series of linked projects on the determinants of organizational performance in the public sector (and for an overview see Ashworth et al. 2010). These projects are large surveys of public officials in English and Welsh local government and focus on conceptualizing and measuring performance, and testing theories of the relative success (or failure) of different organizations. They adapt ideas from the generic management literature and apply them to public organizations; for example, theories of planning (Boyne et al. 2004; Boyne and Chen 2007), organizational strategy (Boyne and Walker 2004; Andrews et al. 2006), and leadership (Andrews and Boyne 2010). Their work has been published in the best American journals and in collaboration with American colleagues (Andrews et al. 2007; Boyne et al. 2005). However, although their modernist-empiricism is a good example of joint working with American colleagues, it is also an example of the American influence on British public administration, not the other way round.³

Modernist empiricism is a continuing strand in British public administration. Other ‘revolutions’ of the 1970s did not survive. Rational choice and deductive modelling may be a prominent part of American political science but exerted little influence over the study of British public administration. There are rare exceptions, of which the most important is Patrick’s Dunleavy’s (1991) analysis of bureau-shaping.⁴ Similarly, at one point, it looked as if the European influence of neo-Marxist state theory would be a contender.⁵ Instead it became an example of the ‘passive pluralism’ so common in British political science, which allows new subfields, like feminism and race, ‘to establish themselves *alongside* the existing fields co-existing in a patterned isolation within the same institutional framework without either genuinely engaging with each other or becoming entirely autonomous’ (Collini 2001:

299–300). There was a true heavyweight champion in the ring – the new public management (NPM) – and patterned isolation was not its fate; it dominated the 1990s and beyond.

New public management

Managerialism has a long history in British public administration. As Pollitt (1990, chapter 2) shows, it did not originate in the 1980s.⁶ However, it was reinvigorated in the 1980s in the guise of the NPM. In his seminal article, Hood (1991: 4) sees Australia, Britain and New Zealand as the Anglo-Saxon heartland of NPM, not America. NPM was not invented by Osborne and Gaebler (1992) or the National Performance Review of 1993. Its origins lie in the dry pronouncements of the New Zealand Treasury (1987, see also Boston et al. 1996), Margaret Thatcher's messianic commitment to New Right reforms (Pollitt 1990, chapter 3), and the rise of economic rationalism in Australia (Davis and Rhodes 2001; Pusey 1991). It was, and remained, a pot-pourri of ideas.

In Britain, its initial incarnation extolled the virtues of private sector management techniques, claiming that they would increase the economy, efficiency and effectiveness – the 3Es – of the public sector. It focused on managerialism or hands-on, professional management; explicit standards and measures of performance; managing by results; and value for money. Subsequently, it also embraced marketization or neo-liberal beliefs about competition and markets. It introduced ideas about restructuring the incentive structures of public service provision through contracting-out, quasi-markets; and consumer choice. The British civil service was to shrink because it had shed responsibilities to the private sector and its function was now to negotiate and manage contracts. Margaret Thatcher introduced both these managerial and neo-liberal ideas and both were adopted by New Labour, with a twist. New Labour had its own response to the dilemmas posed by neo-liberal reforms. It introduced a third strand to managerialism, focused on service delivery, consumer choice, and joined-up

government.⁷ The earlier strands of managerialism had their roots in management theory and neoclassical economics. This strand drew on different types of social science, mainly new institutionalism and communitarian theory (Bevir 2005: chapters 2 and 3). It incorporated ideas about managing with and through networks to improve coordination and begat an expanding literature on partnerships and collaboration (see below).

It did not take long, however, for public management to become a major area of research in public administration throughout America and Continental Europe. It would take too long to recount an already familiar history. For present purposes, the important point is that public management became a two-way street between Britain and America. The briefest glance at the contents page of the encyclopaedic *Oxford Handbook of Public Management* (Ferlie et al. 2005) demonstrates all too clearly that it is an international enterprise. Many welcomed the development, seeing it as the solution to public administration's search for a new role in the neo-liberal world (Boyne 1996). Indeed, for Frederickson (2005: 301, n. 1) public administration and public management have become synonyms. The central question for this paper is whether the UK's contribution to the study of public management is important. First, for a time, British public administration was at the forefront of applied research on such subjects as privatization, contracting, and most notably regulation (see below). Second, mapping the changing ideas and institutions of public service reform led to much comparative work, most notably on the Antipodes and OECD countries. For example, Rhodes and Weller (2001) compared management reforms in Australia, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, The Netherlands, and New Zealand, concluding that, if there was one generalization covering all six countries, it was 'Antipodean exceptionalism' because the pace and extent of change in Australia and New Zealand was greater than in either Britain or Europe. Also, there were sharp differences between the Anglo-Saxon traditions of the UK and the USA and the state traditions of Continental Europe (Bevir et al. 2003). However, the

most comprehensive comparative analysis of public sector management reform was conducted by Pollitt and Bouckaert, who compared public management reform in ten countries revealing not only the diverse reforms and equally diverse outcomes, but also that *'the international management reform movement has not needed results to fuel its onwards march'* (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000: 132: italics in original). Indeed as they observe, local frames of references mean that 'the application of a single template for reform across the globe (or even across the liberal democracies of Western Europe, North America and Australasia) is ... inherently improbable' (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000: 18). This conclusion is well illustrated by their discussion of the trade-offs and dilemmas of reform; for example, between improving quality and cutting costs, where the trade-off hinges on the local context (chapter 7). The book commands heavy citation because it is easily the best comparative study on the subject. Consistent with the theme of this article, the authors are from Britain and Belgium respectively. So, for a short time, NPM gave British public administration a leading, not a following, role. Of course, it could not, and did not, last.

Regulation

Regulation is a new term in studying British government. Previously we talked about audit, inspection, licensing, and accountability. It was the turf of the lawyers. One of the most significant changes in British government at the end of the twentieth century was the growth of 'the regulatory state' and 'the audit explosion', with the consequent, ubiquitous presence of the concept of 'regulation' and the proliferation of disciplines studying the subject.⁸ For decades, Britain exemplified club government or self-regulation by the City and the professions. Its characteristics were informality, trust and shared understandings. However, belief in the virtues of public ownership foundered on their recurrent financial problems. Similarly, confidence in service delivery by professionals was eroded by repeated scandals.

The market liberalization in the 1980s, the privatization of formerly nationalized utilities and an interventionist state created a system of command and control regulation. On the back of these far-reaching changes, it is not too far-fetched to suggest that there grew a British school in the study of regulation. As the editor of *Regulation and Governance* opined, ‘three of the five most influential people on regulation in public policy and administration were Brits: Hood, Moran and Power’ (personal correspondence, 14 October 2010). Also, ‘most of the interesting work is outside the US and the contribution of US scholars to the field in the last two decades is minor. They held to old notions of what regulation is’ (personal correspondence, 25 November 2010). The key question becomes what are the distinctive characteristics of this school? It has its own style of working, a focus on the workings of the regulatory process, and several key concepts including the idea of the regulatory regime. In part, the characteristics of the British school reflect the preferred style of working of its main contributors. For example, Christopher Hood (1999: 306) argues: ‘One basic task for PA ... is the prosaic but always necessary job of mapping out the detailed administrative arrangements of government and public services’. He also suggests that ‘Given the multitude of approaches to public administration, ... it is important to do more to develop “test sites” in which alternative approaches to understanding administrative phenomena are identified, juxtaposed and tested’ (Hood 1990: 120). This combination of map-making with juxtaposition and testing theories, distinguishes much work on regulation. Thus, Moran (2003) documents the origins of the regulatory state (see also Majone 1994). Hood et al. (1999) document the growth of waste-watchers, quality police and sleaze-busters in the internal regulation of British government. Hall et al. (2000) tested the Cartesian, bureaucratic (or rational) model of decision-making, the adhocatic-chaotic model, and the bargaining-diplomatic (or political) model. Other people’s theories which Hood tests regularly include,

for example, Douglas (1970 and 1982) on cultural theory (see, for example, Hood 1998, and Hood et al. 2001).

Apart from mapping the regulatory state, the British School also explored the dynamics of the regulatory process. For example, Hall et al.'s (2000) ethnographic study of the inner life of British telecommunications focuses on how culture regulates regulation. It did so in three ways. First, it defined the boundaries of what was thinkable. Second, the clash of micro-cultures stabilized policy, preventing any one approach dominating. Finally, culture both incubated reforms and acted as a shock absorber for alien changes. They paint a convincing picture of an organization constrained by its culture, bounded rationality in decision making, and interdependence. They stress the limits to rational regulation and prefer the idea of 'collibration' or the 'judicious or opportunistic manipulation of tensions among the different actors in regulatory space' (Hall et al. 2000: 204; see also Dunsire 1996).

Finally, the British school is associated with various attempts to reconceptualize the field and four concepts command attention – regulatory regimes, regulatory space, the audit explosion, and meta-regulation. The focus of analysis moved the formal–legal American model of public regulation of business by agencies, with its myopic focus on regulatory capture, to the comparison of regimes. Thus, Hood et al. (2001: 10) compare 'the complex of institutional geography, rules, practice and animating ideas that are associated with regulating' nine risk regimes (see also Scott 2006: 652). Second, within regimes, it is a common for formal–legal authority to be shared and the idea of 'regulatory space' (Hancher and Moran 1989: 277) focuses attention not only on the resources, interests, ideas and bargaining skills of the several actors but also on the intermingling of public and private domains and organizations. Third, the theory of the audit explosion (Power 1999 and 2005) analysed the shift from traditional audit, with its focus on regularity and legality, to the new audit with its focus on efficiency, effectiveness and, most significantly, performance. The explosion occurred

because of political demands for greater bureaucratic responsiveness, the fiscal crisis of the state, and NPM's concern with better services. It was fuelled by 'a crucial supply-side factor ... the existence of private and public sector accounting professionals' (Power 2006: 329). The consequences include greater standardization, codification, broadening audit to include performance measurement, and several pathologies, including gaming performance measures, which lead Power to describe audit as a 'fatal regulatory remedy' (Power 2006: 335). Finally, interest grows in the idea of meta-regulation: 'the process of regulating regulatory regimes' (Scott 2006: 664, and 2003). Scott itemizes experiments in regulator governance such as steering self-regulating systems by using enforced self-regulation and responsive regulation, and regulatory reviews (see also Ayers and Braithwaite 1992). Levi-Faur and Gilad (2004: 112–4 and 120) conclude that the British regulatory state created new state agencies, increased delegation, codified and formalized regulation, multiplied regulatory technologies, and created a system of public control implemented by a mix of public and private actors subject to meta-regulation by the central state. Students of the British regulatory state have mapped these shifts, reported on the workings of the new system and developed concepts for understanding its practices.

Policy networks and governance

The first wave of network governance theory is known as the 'Anglo-governance school' (Marinetto 2003), which seeks to describe and explain the varieties of policy networks. It is important to recognize that there is a large and active European presence in this subfield. There are at least three other approaches to networks and governance; *steuerungstheorie* in Germany (Mayntz 1993 and 2003; Scharpf 1997), network management in The Netherlands (Kickert et al. 1997; Koppenjan and Klein 2004; Kooiman 1993 and 2003), and most recently a normative literature that raises the question of whether networks and governance increase

participation (Sørensen and Torfing 2005). These strands are best seen as emphases or foci, not schools of thought, as there is much interweaving of ideas and methods. The Anglo-governance School is part of this larger European community.⁹

Network governance is associated with the changing nature of the state following the public sector reforms of the 1980s and can be seen as public administration fighting back against managerialism. It evokes a world in which state power is dispersed among a vast array of spatially and functionally distinct policy networks composed of all kinds of public, voluntary, and private organizations with which the centre now interacts.¹⁰ Such networks have a significant degree of autonomy from the state – they are self-organizing – although the state can indirectly and imperfectly steer them (Rhodes 1996a: 660). In sum, for the Anglo-governance school, governance refers to governing with, and through, networks.

The British work on networks and governance pre-dates American contributions on the subject. Salamon (2002: 1 and 11–14) talks of ‘the revolution that no one noticed’, itemizing among other changes the shift from hierarchy to networks.¹¹ Frederickson (1999 and 2005) claims that network and governance theory ‘repositions’ public administration at the forefront of political science in facing the challenges of the fragmenting, disarticulated state. Both take up a debate for American public administration began in Britain in 1988. Similarly, when the American public administration ‘discovered’ policy networks, they displayed limited awareness of the several approaches to networks in European public administration.¹² There was no two-way street. They brought their characteristic modernist-empiricist skill set to bear on networks and governance. They combined ‘large *N*’ studies of networks¹³ with an instrumental or tool view that sought to make the study of networks relevant to public managers.¹⁴ Their European counterparts preferred comparative case studies, although there was a shared focus on network management and the allied subjects of partnerships and collaboration.¹⁵

The second-wave of network governance accepted the shift from bureaucracy to markets to networks but disputed that it led to any significant dispersal of state authority. It focused on metagovernance or ‘the governance of government and governance’ (Jessop 2000: 23; Jessop 2007b). Metagovernance is an umbrella concept that describes the role of the state and its characteristic policy instruments in network governance. Given that governing is distributed among various private, voluntary, and public actors, and that power and authority are more decentralized and fragmented among a plurality of networks, the role of the state has shifted from the direct governance of society to the ‘metagovernance’ of the several modes of intervention and from command and control through bureaucracy to the indirect steering of relatively autonomous stakeholders (Rhodes 1997b). Both metagovernance and meta-regulation are ‘bringing the state back in (yet again)’ (Jessop 2007: 54).¹⁶ There is even an incipient instrumental or tool view of metagovernance. This toolkit includes the state setting the rules of the game for other actors; using storytelling to influence what actors think and do; steering through its distribution of resources such as money and authority; and altering the mix of both actors and governing structures; and stepping in when network governance fails (Bevir and Rhodes 2010: chapter 5; Jessop 2000: 23–4, and 2003). With its focus on the role of the state, and its links to neo-Marxist state theory, this strand in the literature is yet to elicit much interest from American public administration scholars.¹⁷

In sum, network governance has four faces. First, it provides a modernist-empiricist description of public sector change whether it is the increased fragmentation caused by the reforms of the 1980s or the search for better coordination of the 1990s. Second, it offers an interpretation or explanation of government change. It argues that hierarchic models of responsible government are no longer accurate. It tells a different story of the shift from hierarchic government to governance through networks to metagovernance. Third, it offers policy advice to public managers on how best to steer networks. Finally, it offers

prescriptions on networks and democracy, and on how networks and governance could increase participation. For many, this network governance literature offers a compelling picture of the state; indeed Marsh (2008b: 738) is concerned it ‘may be becoming the new orthodoxy’. It also provides clear evidence of the growth of a European community of scholars.

The Interpretive Turn

Inglis (2000: 112) argues that there has been a lethal attack on modernist-empiricism, and the work of philosophers such as Charles Taylor, Peter Winch and Alasdair MacIntyre means that using the methods of the natural sciences in the human sciences is ‘comically improper’.

Richard Bernstein, Clifford Geertz, and Richard Rorty could be added to a long and growing list of such critics, before mentioning the long-standing hermeneutics tradition of Continental Europe. There is a new clarion call – modernist-empiricism is a dead-end street, long live ‘blurred genres’ and ‘the interpretive turn’.

As Geertz (1983: 21) points out that ‘there has been an enormous amount of genre mixing in intellectual life’ as ‘social scientists have turned away from a laws and instances ideal of explanation towards a cases and interpretations one’ and towards ‘analogies drawn from the humanities’. Examples of such analogies include social life as game, as drama, and as text.

This ‘refiguration of social theory represents ... a sea change in our notion not so much of what knowledge is but of what it is that we want to know’ (Geertz 1983: 34). There is a problem for public administration. As we blur genres, ‘the social technologist notion of what a social scientist is is brought into question’ (Geertz 1983: 35). Rather, the task is not only to recover the meaning of games, dramas and texts, but also to tease out their consequences.

There is a growing European literature on this ‘interpretive turn’ in policy analysis, public administration and organization theory (for a survey, see Wagenaar 2011).¹⁸ Rather than

seeking to predict the best policy option or the outcomes of organizational change, this approach focuses on the looser idea of telling stories, or provisional narratives about possible futures.¹⁹ Bevir and Rhodes (2003, 2006, 2010) are among the leading exponents of an interpretive approach in Britain and regularly use examples drawn from public administration.²⁰ They focus on the social construction of a practice through the ability of individuals to create, and act on, meanings. Individuals are situated in webs of beliefs handed down as traditions and these beliefs and associated practices are changed by the dilemmas people confront. To explain individual actions, they focus on the actors' own interpretations of their beliefs and practices, and on the set of reasons that led to the particular action. To understand an institution and its processes, we must understand the beliefs and practices of its members and the traditions that inform those beliefs and practices. They use policy narratives, or stories by participants, to recover their beliefs and practices about 'how things work around here'. Narratives are the form theories take in the human sciences. They explain actions by reference to the beliefs and desires of actors. People act for reasons, conscious and unconscious (Bevir 1999: chapters 4 and 7).

Narratives use the toolkit of political anthropology, especially observation, to recover meaning through other people's stories. Like Geertz (1993: 9), they use observation and interviews to write 'thick descriptions', which recount 'our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to'. They seek to understand the webs of significance that people spin for themselves. For example, Rhodes (2011a) provides a 'thick description' of life at the top of British government departments, which gets beneath the surface of official accounts and lets interviewees explain the meaning of their actions, providing an authenticity that can only come from the main characters involved in the story (see also Rhodes et al. 2007). It also highlights the centrality of storytelling among civil servants, most of whom accepted that the art of storytelling was an integral part of their

work. Such phrases as ‘are we telling a consistent story?’ and ‘what is our story?’ abound. They do not necessarily use the term ‘storytelling’. They talk of ‘getting the story straight’; ‘getting it together’, ‘we’ve got the story’, ‘when you explain it, when you have the narrative’; and ‘we have reached agreement on some of the main storylines’. They use stories not only to gain and pass on information and to inspire involvement but also as the repository of the organization’s institutional memory.

Is genre blurring the future for public administration? Will narratives and observation become common research tools? Is the natural science model too well entrenched? Are those colleagues of an interpretive persuasion condemned to criticize from the sidelines? It is too early to tell, but two points are already clear. A British wing of public administration is developing the approach, and they are not alone with a growing network in Europe.²¹

Conclusions

British public administration is part of a larger and growing community of European scholars (see Bouckaert and van de Donk 2010). It is small, but has several thriving areas of research: modernist-empiricism, comparative public management, regulation, policy networks, governance, and interpretive theory. In the 1990s and 2000s, it had substantial research council funding.²² It has a cadre of distinguished professors including Patrick Dunleavy, Christopher Hood, Christopher Pollitt, R. A. W. Rhodes, and Gerry Stoker. This cadre of senior academics engages with one another’s work on an established European circuit. All are boundary spanners who have made and continue to make a distinctive and international contribution. The discipline survives, even thrives, in the twenty-first century because these leading players mastered the ‘trick’ of linking policy and academic relevance. They may specialize in public service delivery or other topics of the day, but they locate such topics in the broader agendas of the social and human sciences. What they do not do is exercise much,

if any, influence on American public administration. Rather, we have two self-referential communities with limited intellectual engagement.

The size and prestige of the American profession means that it has a continuing influence both through modernist-empiricist and its associated sophisticated tool kit and through new intellectual fashions, which almost invariably become everybody else's fad. Methodological rigour, especially the formal reasoning of rational choice, divides the two communities.

European public administration embraces diverse traditions and methods. It differs from British public administration because its roots lie in constitutional and administrative law.

The study, however, of the new public management, policy networks and interpretive policy analysis are shared intellectual concerns, drawing British and Continental European scholars ever closer, especially in Northern Europe. The more American public administration goes down the path of empiricist, 'large *N*' studies, the fewer its British and Northern European adherents, let alone adherents among the legal tradition still strong in Southern Europe.

Although the claim may err on the side of overstatement, the danger exists that American modernist-empiricist public administration will be seen as a dead-end street. Also, such intellectual trends as reinventing government and public value are heavily conditioned by their American constitutional and political context. They travel poorly, and probably should not travel at all (Rhodes and Wanna 2009), yet still they attract often uncritical disciples. So, America remains the Dark Continent for British and Continental European public administration.

Of course we will, and we should, engage with interesting ideas and practices wherever we may find them. Joint initiatives such as the transatlantic dialogue (TAD), sponsored by the European Group of Public Administration (EGPA) and the American Society of Public Administration, are to be welcomed. It is a European link, however, and poses the question of whether there is a future for the Anglo-Saxon Diaspora? Richard Stillman (2010), the editor

of *Public Administration Review* (PAR), argues that the mission of his journal is to ‘promulgate generalist administrative ideas’ to forge a ‘corporate identity of like-minded generalist professionals’. That mission is specific to a country with no such cadre of state officials. He talks to American practitioners as the journal’s primary audience. PAR is the local professional journal. On the other hand, European public administration is shaped by several distinct state traditions; for example, the consociational, Napoleonic, and *rechtsstaat* traditions (see Dyson 1980; Kickert 2007). Europeans can pride themselves that they have a plurality of parochialisms to go with their many theories and eclectic methods!

Care must be taken not to overstate the case for British public administration. It is a small discipline compared with the Netherlands, let alone Germany. It is minuscule compared with the giant that is American public administration, whether measured by number of scholars, graduate programmes or research funding. It is challenged by American traditions of study. Its contributions to the field are often downplayed if not ignored. It is reliant on government especially research council research funding. There are few private foundations. There is only a small postgraduate recruitment pool with which to replace its grand old men and women. It remains profoundly unsexy; witness the droves of students in terrorism and security studies, or international relations more generally. In the recovery from the global financial crisis, it is vulnerable to changes in government policy, especially cuts in public expenditure (see Hood 2011).

Like public administration elsewhere, British public administration does not have an agreed theoretical core and it grapples with, but does not resolve, the divide between pure and applied research.²³ Colleagues will continue to bemoan the lack of a disciplinary core or our failure to engage with practitioners. Others will extol the virtues of the latest American intellectual fashion, and rail against British parochialism. We may have moved from order to chaos (Lundquist 1985) but that translates into diversity and controversy; it is a discipline in a

melting pot of traditions. It also confronts the challenge of blurring genres, and perhaps Britain and the rest of Europe's greatest contribution to American public administration is yet to come from this interpretive turn.

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Notes

¹ I would like to thank Lucie Trarieux (*Public Administration*) and Michael Streeter (*Public Administration Review*), both of Wiley-Blackwell, for producing the citation data.

² For a survey of the diversity of organization theory, see Morgan 2006. On the fragmentation of implementation studies in Britain, see Barrett 2004, Dunsire 1995, and Hill 1997.

³ Greenwood and Hinings pioneered this approach with their analysis of the changing management structures of British local government (Greenwood et al. 1980; Ranson et al. 1980) but their subsequent work has been on the private sector; for example, on strategic organizational change, and managing professional service firms. See Greenwood and Hinings 1996, and Greenwood et al. 2002.

⁴ See also his work with Helen Margetts on the government of information technology (Dunleavy et al. 2006a and b.).

⁵ For an historical overview see Hall and Ikeberry 1989. For surveys of current approaches see Hay 1996; and Hay et al. 2006. The doyen of British state theory is Jessop (1990 and

2007). On post-Marxism, the state and the study of governance, see Bell and Hindmore 2009, and Bevir and Rhodes 2010, chapter 5.

⁶ On the deep roots of managerialism see Chapman and Dunsire 1971: 17, and Thomas 1978. For a more detailed discussion of today's version of managerialism, see Hood 1991, and Pollitt 1993 [1990]. For 'a state of the art' compendium on public management, see Ferlie et al. 2005.

⁷ The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is the major funder of social science research in the UK. In 2000, it funded a major research programme on public service delivery at the Centre for Market and Public Organization (CMPO) at the University of Bristol. On public service see, <http://www.publicservices.ac.uk/index.php/category/research>; and on the CMPO see, <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmipo/publications>. Both last accessed on 21 October 2010.

⁸ The growing importance of the academic study of regulation is matched by the number of reviews of the subfield; see, for example, Baldwin et al. 1998, Baldwin et al. 2010, Levi-Faur 2004, Moran 2009, Powers 2005, and Scott 2006. As these several reviews make clear, there is also much intellectual exchange and overlap of themes and topics between British, European and scholars in RegNet at the Australian National University. See, for example, Ayers and Braithwaite 1992, and Majone 1994.

⁹ For reviews of the several approaches see Boerzel 1998 and 2011, Klijn 1997 and 2008, Mayntz 2003, Marin and Mayntz 1991, and Rhodes 1990 and 2006.

¹⁰ The 'Anglo-governance school' school's proponents included Rhodes 1988, 1990, 1994, 1996a, 1997a and b, 1999 [1981], and 2000; Richards and Smith 2002; Smith 1999; and Stoker 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2004. It is reviewed in Kjaer 2004, Marinetto 2003 and there is a reply in Rhodes 2007.

¹¹ Salamon (2002: 8 and 43, n. 26) credits Frederickson 1997: chapter 3 for suggesting the use of the term ‘governance’ to describe such changes. Kettl (2000: 24) credits it to Frederickson (1999: 19).

¹² Of course, America has its boundary spanners. On networks and governance, Robert Agranoff 2007 and Lawrence O’Toole 2001 and 2004 deserve an honourable mention for engaging with European colleagues. Others cite mainly American literature. For example, Goldsmith and Eggers 2004 list only four publications by British and European authors in their bibliography and none are discussed in the text (see also Kettl 2002a and b).

¹³ For a survey of American ‘large *N*’ studies and more citations see Meier and O’Toole 2005 and note the joint work with George Boyne and his colleagues at Cardiff Business School.

¹⁴ The American literature on managing networks, collaboration and partnerships includes, for example: Agranoff 2007, Agranoff and McGuire 2004, Ansell 2011, Ansell and Gash 2007, Bingham and O’Leary 2008, Goldsmith and Eggers 2004, Kettl 2002a and b, McGuire 2002, Meier and O’Toole 2009, O’Toole 1997, and Salamon 2002.

¹⁵ British work on managing networks was pioneered by Gerry Stoker; see Perri 6 et al. 2002 and Stoker 2004. His work won the PSA’s ‘Making a Difference’ Award in 2004. There is now an extensive British and European literature on managing networks, collaboration and partnerships that includes, for example, Goss 2001, Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Kickert et al. 1997, Klijn 2005, Koppenjan and Klijn 2004, Lowndes and Skelcher 1998, Skelcher 2005, and Sullivan and Skelcher 2002.

¹⁶ The main texts on metagovernance are Bell and Hindmoor 2009, Jessop 2000 and 2003, Kooiman 2003, and Sørensen and Torfing 2007.

¹⁷ There are always exceptions. B. Guy Peters has been a leading boundary spanner between British, Continental European and American public administration for over two decades; see for example, Peters and Pierre 2003. Pierre and Peters 2000 engage with ideas of governance and the changing role of the state, although they do not explicitly mention metagovernance.

¹⁸ The European literature on policy analysis and the interpretive turn also includes, for example, Dryzek 1993 and 2006, Fischer 2003, Fisher and Forester 1993, Fischer et al. 2006, Hajer 2009, and Hajer and Wagenaar 2003. On the interpretive turn in organizational analysis see, for example, Czarniawska 1998 and 2004, Gabriel 2000, Law 1994, and Morgan 1993.

¹⁹ There is a massive literature on narratives. Alvermann 2000 provides a short introduction. See also Barthes 1993; Bevir 1999: 252–62 and 298–306, and 2000; Ricoeur 1981, chapter 11, and 1991, chapter 6; and White 1987.

²⁰ On the British debate about interpretive theory see Bevir and Rhodes 2003, 2006 and 2010; and the symposia debating this work in *British Journal of Politics and International Relation* 6(2) 2004: 129–64; and *Political Studies Review* 6(2) 2008: 143–77. See also McAnulla 2006, Marsh 2008a, and Hay 2011. Interpretive theory comes in several guises, most notably the Anglo-Foucauldians on governmentality. For a review see Bevir and Rhodes 2010, chapter 3. Most of this work does not address public administration but relevant examples include McKinlay and Starkey 1998, and Rose and Miller 2008.

²¹ On American work, there is a short overview in Raadschelders 2008: 938–40. See also Fox and Miller 1995, Farmer 1995 and 2010, McSwite 1997 and 2002, Miller 2002, Stone, 2002, and Yanow 1999. British work occasionally commands some attention in America (see for example Stivers 2008). The Public Administration Theory Network (PAT-Net) attracts Australian, British and European contributors, as does its journal, *Administrative Theory and*

Praxis; see www.pattheory.org, last accessed 28 October 2010, and Harmon 2003: 168–70.

For the most part American work in this idiom attracts only cult attention.

²² As well as the research on public service delivery listed in note 7, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) also funded the local governance, Whitehall, and devolution and constitutional change research programmes. On local governance see Stoker 1999 and 2000; on Whitehall see Rhodes 2000; on devolution see www.devolution.ac.uk/Publications2.htm, last accessed on 21 October 2010.

²³ On the state of public administration in Britain, see for example, Hood 1991, 1999 and 2011, Osborne 2010, and Rhodes 1991, 1996b and 2011b.