1. Introduction

A Search for Identity

In 1968 Dwight Waldo published an article Scope of the Theory of Public Administration. In his article Waldo made a famous statement that the study of public administration has an identity crisis. The alleged crisis is precisely at the interstices of ‘scope’ and ‘theory’, that is, it links the subject matter and the means to understand and explain this object of study. Scope, Waldo points out, is closely related to the issue of the objectives of public administration, and with the boundaries of the field. These are, however, unclear since the late 1940’s; what is more, the meaning of ‘theory’ is diverse (Waldo, 1968, p.2). The scope of the theories used is indicated by problems, according to Waldo, “problems that have both practical and theoretical dimensions” (Waldo, 1968, p 2). But to argue that coherence can be found by stating that the
problems, objectives, boundaries, and so on, all concern public administration is hardly helpful as it is unclear what public administration is. (Waldo, 1968, p 2).

This brief argument by Waldo provides us in a nutshell with the topic: the scope or topics, and the theories or explanatory ideas that make up the study public administration.

The focus is upon understanding the complex nature of our ideas on public administration and why its ‘identity’ so quickly seems to evade us. Let me emphasize from the start my own position: it makes no sense to look for an identity, paradigm, discipline, or whatever supposed coherent, unifying core of questions, ideas, practices, problems, methods, and/or approaches; particularly not for the study of public administration. As I have indicated before, if we need such labels, perhaps ‘crisis as identity’ captures the nature of the study of public administration better. Though, of course, readers should make up their own mind when trying to make sense of the variety of viewpoints about the nature of the study and what it means to understand or theorize about public administration.

Undoubtedly today all social studies find it difficult to pinpoint their object of study in a more detailed and encompassing way. However, in the 19th century German Scholar Lorenz von Stein argued, it is the worst of all studies for the study of public administration: defining its subject matter, i.e. public administration (‘öffentliche Verwaltung’) presupposes an overwhelming number of other complex concepts, ranging from the very nature of humanity, freedom, and justice, to society, law, and, last but not least, the state. Yet, no reason to despair, for as indicated most fields of study only have some vague comprehensive notion of what they are about, i.e. their subject matter. Thus sociology is about ‘the social’, psychology about ‘the psyche’, and political science about ‘politics.’ Usually these encompassing core concepts are much disputed and their meaning remains implicit and vague. Also authors may wonder what precisely is ‘politics’? Is it just about who gets power? Or is it about social interaction more generally, or about peaceful resolving social strive, or…. Whatever? What we choose makes a difference to what is regarded a relevant phenomena or also how it should be interpreted or explained. Without exception, the social sciences or studies presuppose a normative image of humanity and society. At first glance, the difficulty to pinpoint is perhaps a special concern for social sciences, because their object of study is usually not some simply empirically observable phenomenon. Rather social sciences are intertwined with ideas about, for instance, justice, order, (proper) behavior, responsibility, i.e. with social constructs. Nevertheless, similar issues surround physics (‘the sciences’). For instance the famous physicist Feynman is known to have ‘redrawn the field’ by means of writing a new textbook. He presented the field, its topics, concerns, and the interrelationships between them in a new way, thereby providing a different understanding of what the study was about. In one sense the average scientist is just doing his or her job and not really bothered by discovering its overarching subject matter. That’s left to others, the theoreticians and philosophers of the field arguing firm foundations or encompassing perspectives, as well as, to textbook authors and journal editors pragmatically determining
what they consider as belonging to the field and what not.

Why would we be interested in the theory and scope of public administration? To begin with, most of us are interested in specific issues: running an organization, attainment of policy goals, and the like. That is obviously the stuff involving public administration. But what then is considered a matter of public administration? How is “it” described, explained, and possibly changed? How is a specific part of social reality constructed? How to understand it and thereby act upon these ideas? For do not our ideas influence our actions?

This said, it may appear easy to determine what public administration is, and thus what are considered appropriate topics of study, i.e. the scope, or do we simply take a look at what is being studied and written by public administrationists? The obvious problem here is, however, that we quickly end up going around in a circle: for who are we to consider authors on public administration? People calling themselves so? Scholars paid a salary as members of a university department called ‘public administration’? Authors publishing in a journal with public administration in its mission statement? Depending on our purposes this can be useful starting points, however, whatever approach we favor, all start with our ideas what public administration (and its study) is about.

Public Administration versus public administration

Before delving into history, a warning: the term ‘public administration’ easily results in confusion. First, public administration can refer to a social reality of people and organizations, budgets, administrators, and so on. Next the term may distinguish between its everyday, non-scientific use in social practice, and its scholarly application. In the former case, the term refers to fuzzy and/or different concepts. In the latter case, the term denotes the object of study and ideally allows for a clear or clearer definition. For example the term ‘bureaucracy’: in every day circumstances it implies ‘government’, ‘bureaucrats’, ‘red tape’, and so on with usually (negative) normative connotations. On the other hand, an academic study of ‘bureaucracy’ defines it a following specific theories of, for instance, Weber. Thus the term is used with a precise meaning, i.e. referring to a special kind of organization, and is not intended to be normative (although the term “ideal-type” itself leads into considerable semantic confusion).

Second, public administration can denote a specific academic field of study, i.e. the science or study of public administration. Here, a study and its object of study need to be distinguished: political science and politics do not coincide, nor do sociology and social reality, or psychology and the psyche. Sociological questions and social problems, or psychological questions and psychic problems are not identical; even though the former aims at better understanding and explaining the latter. Contrary to other languages, however, English does not provide us with distinct terms for study and object of study, such as in German ‘Verwaltungswissenschaft’ and ‘öffentliche Verwaltung’ or in Dutch ‘Bestuurskunde’ and ‘openbaar bestuur.’ Dwight Waldo pointed out this problem in 1968 when discussing the scope of the study. In a note he stated:
Discussions of public administration are plagued by a serious problem because differing meanings may be given to or understood by the phrase. Sometimes in seeking to be clear and precise, I have used upper case to refer to the self-conscious enterprise of study, and the like, and lower case to refer to the practices or processes which are the object of our attention" (Waldo, 1968, p.1).

His words appear to discover an easy solution, but it isn’t. Quickly the two terms are confused in English, despite good intentions. Even Waldo in his own article forgets to capitalize when applicable. The solution I propose throughout this essay is to use the term ‘the study (or science) of public administration’ but reserve the term ‘public administration’ to denote the object of study. Nevertheless, for brevity I immediately will pose an exception: the theory and scope of public administration (here) will mean the theory and scope of the study of public administration.

A final, closely related, preliminary observation: as already noted, the term public administration is part of the English language. Other languages may or may not use similar terms and/or have equivalent concepts. Some languages, such as Indonesian and Hungarian have no immediate equivalent concept for public administration. No universal natural language exists. What we can express is inherently dependent upon the language we use. Language and social reality are intertwined. Even if we seemingly possess equivalent terms, important small differences persist. For example, ‘science’ in English normally defines a specific methodological stance, i.e. the methodology of the natural sciences. Thus the idea of a science of administration is associated with Herbert Simon’s logical-positivism. Social studies and (other) humanities are commonly regarded not as sciences but ‘studies’.

However, in German (and other languages) social studies, the study of history and of law all refer to ‘Wissenschaft’, no natural science methodology is included in the meaning of the term. As we will see later on, linguistic and cultural differences are also pronounced in the conceptualization of the object of administrative study.

How to Study ‘Theory & Scope’?

One additional introductory topic concerns the meaning of ‘theory and scope.’ Together, theory and scope comprehensively denote the identity of a field of inquiry. By contrast ‘theory’ includes the ideas developed in order to describe, understand, and/or explain the object of study. The latter refers to the ‘scope’ as the part of reality that is taken into consideration. At the opening of this essay, Dwight Waldo closely identified scope with other concepts such as objectives and problems. Scope encompasses what is being studied. As Waldo indicates, it deals with content and thus defines boundaries for administrative science. This broad meaning of theory and scope includes a way, method or methodology to identify topics and to theorize about them. Delving a bit deeper into these matters, theory and scope appear intricately intertwined, as would probably found within everyday common place perspectives.

How can theory and scope be described? To start with the latter, scope concerns the question: What is the study of public administration actually studying, i.e. what are the accepted topics taken into consideration? At first glance, this question seems easy to answer: we can look for the description of our subject matter, i.e. a
definition of public administration and deduce from this definition what phenomena are relevant to the study. Alternatively a more inductive approach can be used by identifying the topics dealt with in books and articles on public administration and thereby establish its scope. However, as will become apparent, no generally accepted definition of public administration can be discovered. As Waldo puts it: “‘public administration’ is itself problematic, controversial” (Waldo, 1968, p 2).

As for theory, the question is; ‘what are the accepted ways of study?’ Why is theory so important? In its simplest, theory concerns ideas about the nature of reality. A bit more sophisticated, theories are at the heart of explanations how and why things are as they are, or how perhaps how they should be. The basic kind of explanation, in turn, places something in a context, i.e. to fit it into what we already know to enable to provide meaning to it. An ink spot ‘O’ can be interpreted as the letter O when placed in the context of the alphabet. Within a mathematical treatise by contrast, it refers to the number 0 (i.e. zero). In a discussion about steel tubes, it can mean the cross section of a circular tube, as opposed to △ or □, and so on. In this basic sense, theories are an everyday matter and all around, although often implicit. What is more, they can be very unreliable or limited in use. Theories explain ideas about reality and serve as a basis of action. Better everyday theories may result in better, even more effective and/or efficient actions. Theories constitute claims as to what is real: their claim to validity relies on for instance practical experience, intuition, research, logical analysis, as well as normative, moral, ideological beliefs and claims. Scientific theories are rationally best available“‘guesses” or hypotheses. Scientific or academic research aims at refining theories by testing through application of the most rigorous methodological standards. Issues regarding theories (and their scope) in the study of public administration thus concern the questions about what kind of theories are needed and/or possible to discover.

Additionally, two related (yet, analytically distinct) issues: first, the ideas or way to arrive at valid theories and to test and improve them (i.e., the methodology) second, the image of reality a theory encompasses or creates (i.e. ontology). The methodology concerns questions in the field of the philosophy of the social sciences: ‘Should PA develop paradigms?’, ‘Is a positivistic approach viable?’ or ‘What does interdisciplinarity mean?’ The ontology concerns the philosophy of public administration, and enters into the broader fields of political, social, economic, legal, and moral philosophy.

Before delving into these three distinguished topics – scope, ontology, and methodology – the next section briefly discusses the development of the study of public administration over the centuries in order to provide a necessary context to assess the nature of administrative sciences, i.e. the theory and scope of public administration. In section 3 the scope of the study will be taken into consideration, followed by a brief outline of the meaning of ‘public administration’, i.e. the ontology in section 4. Next the methodology of the study will be discussed in section 5, with particular attention to the topic of interdisciplinarity. In the final section some observations on the studies future will be made.
2. A Brief History of the Study: Four Periods

What is considered a subject matter for the study of public administration? What approaches and theories are regarded relevant throughout history? The idea that public administration is a subject that can or should be distinguished from others social practices developed slowly. A conscious notion of ‘public administration’ as a specific social phenomenon emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, special attention for the state organization and its servants predates this unique idea by two centuries or more. The belief that such subject matter deserves special attention, not offered by other fields of study originates in the mid-seventeenth century, although arguably, this insight was rediscovered several times before. A lot of similar concepts and ideas are considerably older, and, certainly not were limited to Western thought. Much older Chinese ideas on, for instance, recruitment can be traced in the work of an early 18th century administrative theorist, Christian von Wolff. However, the Western world developed the modern study of public administration as a specialized academic or scientific study evolving through four phases of historic development in (Rutgers, 2004):

- Prehistory
- The Classic Period
- The Modern study of Public Administration
- The Differentiated or Contemporary Period

Prehistory and Classic Period

The first two predate the development of an actual study of public administration. Of public administration in prehistoric, i.e. illiterate, societies we now know a fair amount; based on archeology, records by contemporary authors, and anthropological studies of societies with oral traditions. From such sources numerous ideas about what is currently viewed as leadership, administrative organization, and the like were present. Some fundamental insights are literally older than history. The evidence of the achievements of these people can be found at Stonehenge, Mesa Verde, as well as other early sites with remains of mankind. First records of what can be called administrative ideas are Sumerian. Sumeria marks the birth in a formal sense and of the Classic Period. It actually does not yet include the rise of any conscious study of public administration, but does contain roots of several administrative ideas and insights. In fact, script was itself a prime administrative invention for the first city states. From early on ideas concerning proper behavior in ‘the public service’ were written out and handed down to new generations in schools. The so-called instruction literature provided moral guidance for how to behave and work in government over 3000 years. The Middle Ages in the Western Mirrors of Princes moral treatises were written on the behavior of a future king, at the same time as a means of instruction for those involved within government.

During the Classic period great ideas developed and were handed down over centuries, including ideas about how to administer and organize by the Greek philosophers and Roman administrators. Also medieval authors should not be overlooked. They developed, for instance, double book keeping and were the first to write down a modern merit system. Nevertheless, no specific study of public administration emerged.
Administration and government were hardly distinguished at all. ‘Public’ in as far as encompassed by the state was the property of a monarch. Subjects were, well simply subjects.

The Modern Study of Public Administration

First attempts to create a specific study of public administration were formulated by Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff in his Teutscher Fürstenstaat, or German Principality first published in 1656. Seckendorff described topics germane to the administration of a small principality and referred to his approach as scientific, as he aimed to transcend the contingencies of everyday and local practices. He also explicitly distinguished himself from the existing studies at the university in philosophy, politics and religion: the practice of public administration required a different body of knowledge in his experience as a head in the administration of the principality of Fulda. This is emphasized by his book being published in German, whereas the academic language was still Latin. Similar ideas were voiced around 1700 by the French author Nicolas Delamare. In his Traité de la Police (1703-1738), or Treatise on Polity. He crafted a study about public administration (for a much vaster country). Delamare explicitly pointed out that his approach was new, in his case he pointed out differences with the legal treatises that were usually studied before entering the administration. To the modern reader both books by Seckendorff and Delamare are primarily modge podge collections of historical, practical, and legal knowledge for running state administration or government. Nevertheless, a special body of knowledge that today would be labeled ‘public administration’ was beginning to emerge.

The new study really took hold throughout the seventeenth century in the guise of the so called council studies: Cameralism and polity science. An important date is 1729 when the first two university professors of Cameralism were appointed in Prussia. This implies the study became formally recognized and institutionalized. Within a few decades cameralism was taught at most mid-European (German language) universities and even special cameralistic schools were established. Drawing upon the initially very eclectic sources of knowledge, by the eighteenth-century scholars such as Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi and Joseph Sonnenfels started to develop more systematic and theoretically founded approaches to the study. The core concept to denote the object of study was, however, still not ‘public administration’, but ‘policy’, ‘polity’ or ‘police’ (the three not being distinguished, just as administration and government still were used as synonyms). Eighteenth century academics reasoned from a contract theory of the state. They argued that a monarch or prince should provide happiness for his subjects by means of the state's administration or polity. They cited Greek theorists as their prime sources, particularly the Aristotelian notion of Eudaimonia, i.e. total physical and moral happiness as the purpose of administration and the normative basis of policy and state organization. Attempts to unite all potential relevant knowledge for a newly understood ‘public administration’ never resulted in agreement or consensus. Again and again, attempts were undertaken to establish the study and to find its true foundations and unity. While similar approaches and topics were
repeatedly studied, Incremental changes or developments can be noticed. Especially towards the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries topics such as ‘the choice of a spouse for the prince’ were dropped, whereas political economy and administrative law rose in prominence.

Likewise, this era witnessed a more modern concept of sciences emerging. The idea that scientific study can advance social progress and improve humanity, i.e. early positivism, suited the study of public administration well. The French author Charles-Jean Bonnin published *Principe d'administration publique*, or *Principle of Public Administration* in 1812. Bonnin called his study of public administration (as before) a practical science, and saw as its key challenge as the need to balance law and social studies. He explicitly drew upon positivistic natural sciences for his intellectual mode.¹

As before, early nineteenth century authors never fully agreed on the nature of administrative sciences and pleaded for incorporating different perspectives or methodologies. After more than a century of growth, the study started to dwindle mid-nineteenth century and nearly disappeared entirely within 10 years. Its eclipse derived from the lack of success at discovering a coherent, encompassing body of knowledge with a clear identity; the result of other developments, such as the rejection of practical studies as belonging properly within universities, the growing dominance of administrative law and constitutional law, as well as from an inability to include modern economic thought in the cameralistic framework. The rise of economic studies and the development of the social sciences throughout the nineteenth century, also overwhelmed the study of administrative phenomena, yet did not entirely annihilate it. In fact, the most elaborate, if not megalomaniac, though systematic, coherent effort to create a study of public administration dates from the second half of the nineteenth century. The German scholar Lorenz Von Stein (1815-1890) envisaged a comprehensive administrative science. He called the study of public administration the crown on all the sciences, because the state administration must use all human knowledge in order to ensure a better society and guarantee freedom for its citizens. Notwithstanding Stein, a unique administrative science disappeared almost entirely from Europe. Concomitantly with a rise in prominence of legal studies, the meaning of administration became narrowed to ‘the execution of law’ and therefore not regarded an appropriate topic for social scientists to analyze. Despite a few early European twentieth century investigations, the theoretical development of a study of public administration was left to the other side of the Atlantic.

In the slipstream of nineteenth-century ideas on the improvement of public ethics (the moral reform movement), a study of administration started to develop rather quickly in the early twentieth century in the United States. Traditionally, Woodrow Wilson's essay “The Study of Administration” (1887), is regarded

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¹ Positivism as the believe in the advancement of society by the science, in particular empiral sciences is usually linked with Claude Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) and, more importantly, with the ideas of Auguste Comte (1798-1857).
The first herald of the new study, although historically and more correctly Frank Goodnow’s publication *Politics and Administration* (1900) and the establishment of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research in 1906 deserve those honors. The focus was on creating a politically neutral, professional, performance-oriented, and responsive state apparatus. As a starting point, a normative distinction between political and administrative became important. This made it possible to regard public administration as being in principle identical to business administration. This coincides with a strong influence of scientific management developed by Frederick Taylor that promoted scientific administration. Henry Fayol is another important author who developed a general theory of administration and (also) focused on tracing ‘principles of administration.’ Fayol argued that no strict naturalistic laws could be expected as some uncertainty is involved in human behavior; hence his focus on principles. A search for administrative principles flourished in particular in the 1920s and 1930s. Public Administration earned wide recognition and its main leaders were actively involved all layers of U.S. government.

To conclude this brief outline of the modern period its characteristics include: (1) serious attempts to develop an identifiable study of public administration (as we would understand it now), (2) numerous authors arguing the need for practical relevance of knowledge, and, (3) efforts to integrate a number of (existing) bodies of knowledge that pertain to public administration. Originally a broad mix of topics covered a range from forestry to healthcare, law and political/moral ideas, later the entire social sciences (economics, political science, sociology, psychology) and law (the latter more prominent in Europe). An important characteristic of the modern period is that authors sought theoretical unity, as well as a singular foundation; their goal was a comprehensive, unifying theory. European forerunners of the study were unsuccessful in this respect, as were the pre-WWII American authors, for the search for ‘principles’ and a normative foundation.

The Differentiated or Contemporary Period

By the 1950’s the American discourse on the study of public administration lost its self-confidence in its origins (at least, its theoreticians did). Severe criticism focused on its claims to being scientific plus on discovering principles. Herbert Simon and Dwight Waldo are the most prominent postwar scholars to voice the need for new directions.

Simon’s foundation premised upon *Administrative Behavior* (1947), argued for a new intellectual logical-positivistic, empirical science of decision making. Facts should be central to the science of administration, and values or value judgments ought not to be the object of administrative science. On the one hand, Simon stuck to the ‘modern’ search for a universal basis of the study. On the other hand, he rejected the idea that, as a science, the study can, or even should, strive for integration of all possibly relevant knowledge involving administrative practice. Strikingly, his approach attracted few followers within the traditional ranks of American public administration and Simon did not consider himself turned away from the study of public
administration because it failed to meet his criteria of science.

Waldo convincingly showed that the principles approach could not be sustained, but more profoundly, he analyzed the field’s normative foundations in *The Administrative State* (1948). Contrary to Simon, Waldo underscored political, value basis of contemporary public administration. Rather than limiting the scope of the field, he called for a wider, more interpretative, and philosophical perspective, though without identifying or entrancing a single, monolithic methodology. By the 1960’s, Waldo also began talking about an identity crisis that still persists one way or another. Alternatively, he proposed viewing the field as a ‘profession’ or an ‘enterprise’, utilizing a plurality of bodies that linked theory and practice.

The 1960s saw the development of an autonomous study of public administration taking off again in Europe. These developments were heavily influenced by the U.S. Roughly, public administrationists became divided along two dimensions: academic versus practice oriented and research versus educational ideals. The academic-research-oriented authors pursued a positivist approach in the spirit of Herbert Simon. Their focus centered on decision making and organization studies. Followers of Dwight Waldo addressing academic-education ideals (and ideas) primarily concentrated on forging a generalist curriculum, that combined social sciences, history, comparative studies, and political theory. Advocates of both camps can be found in Europe. Although their prime concern to establish a social science perspective within public administration to supplement the dominant European legal approach.

Discussions about the scientific status of the field and on its theoretical foundations continued unabated finding its focal point at the 1968 Minnowbrook Conference.

Alternatives bloomed throughout the 1970s and 1980s, such as New Public Administration launched in Minnowbrook, making a homogeneous view of the field virtually impossible. The empirical study of public organizations and policies, however, dominated the research agenda. More or less independent ‘schools’ emerged focusing on either public policy or public management. Also more specific theoretical or methodological orientations, such as rational choice theory or communication theory, became popular. In Europe, the diversity in the study was much less, simply due to the small number of academics. European administrative sciences continued to be characterized by relatively strong, independent national “state-centered” traditions.

During the 1980s off and on the study’s mainstream trended towards a practically relevant, empirical public policy making and public management. Nevertheless, a proliferation of alternative approaches to the study continued, even by an explicit ‘refounding movement’. Mainly inspired from administrative practice, Reinventing Government or New Public Management became a core topic in the debates in the 1990s. Debates on the scientific status of the study resurfaced. Authors identified numerous sources for the identity crisis, and sought new fundamental approaches. By the late 1990s and early 21st century calls for a broadening of the field from ‘public administration’ to ‘governance’ were heard.
If pre-WWII period administrative sciences can be characterized by an institutionalization of research programs, academic curricula, and specialist journals and associations, the postwar witnessed a rapid growth of plurality and diversity in administrative theory and scope that defies any single unifying, easy comprehensive grasp of the study. Existence of an increasing body of knowledge in the study of administration does not result in a well-defined identity or self-image in the early 21st century. As in the modern period, the study is characterized by attempting to combine practical and scientific or academic objectives as well as eclecticism and, by what nowadays is often called a multi- or interdisciplinary orientation. The search for a unifying, all encompassing system or general theory, with an accompanying methodology, is no longer at the heart of the intellectual concerns today. To what extent this results in paradigmatic, theoretical and/or ontological relativism, and to what degree, remains in dispute. Such trends are certainly not specific to the study of public administration, but its study is perhaps more prone to the consequences of fragmentation due to its multi- or interdisciplinary nature. As in the modern period, a prime argument for attaining an independent status still relies on its ability to offer more than other studies do, for understanding and explaining the phenomenon of public administration.

This brief overview of the study’s development indicates that scope and theory of the study demonstrate both continuity and change. There was more or less agreement since the mid 17th century about what was important to study, even though topics disappeared and new one’s arrived. In principle all relevant knowledge and approaches, from the earliest founders onward, were deemed important for consideration. What topics took priority, which approaches should be dominant, and included within administration studies, never resulted in consensus at least in general terms.

3. The Study’s Concern: An Empirical Approach

Topics in the Literature

What is the object of study of public administration? Obviously, ‘public administration,’ but what is denoted by this concept? At first glance these questions seem easy to answer: just look at the definition of public administration. However, there is no generally accepted definition of public administration. The descriptions that do receive a fair amount of acceptance are vague and hardly helpful. To give some examples:

"Public administration is detailed and systematic execution of public law." Woodrow Wilson (1887)

"Public administration is the management of men and materials in the accomplishment of the purpose of the state." Leonard D. White (1926)

"Administration is both social engineering and applied psychology." Marshall E. Dimock (1937)

"Public administration is the organization and management of men and materials to achieve the purpose of government." Dwight Waldo (1955)

"When a government is organizes for the effectuation of community business, we have what has come to be called public administration." Dimock (1967)
“That part of the public domain concerned with the administrative aspects of the resolution of public issues.”
Gerald Caiden (1971)

“(1) The executive branch of government (yet it is related in important ways to the legislative and judicial branches); (2) the formulation and implementation of public policies; (3) the involvement in a considerable range of problems concerning human behavior and cooperative human effort; (4) a field that can be differentiated in several ways from private administration; and (5) the production of public goods and services.” Richard Stillman (1983)

“Generally speaking, public administration is concerned with managing change in pursuit of publicly defined societal values.”
(Robert B. Denhardt, 1990)

These definitions do offer an idea what the study of public administration is about, but they are open to debate will be the concern later on.

Instead of deducing the relevant topics from a definition, we can perhaps empirically establish what topics are relevant in the study of public administration.

One of the most impressive overviews of field’s changes is provided by archives of the Public Administration Review (PAR); arguably the most important journal for featuring its general study over the last seven decades, PAR archives define, or at least represent, a broad cross-section of administrative subjects. A host of topics and approaches can be identified: Almost all key contributors can be found, as well as, many seminal essays reflecting poignant the intellectual trends, debates and milestones. The variety in topics seems almost endless. However, some topics recur with regularity, for instance, all kinds of ‘management’ and ‘policy’ surface and resurface. Others seem limited in time, thus we may notice the rise and fall of programming, planning and budgeting system (PPBS) and, a decade later, of zero base budgeting. The image of what public administration is about does not easily arise out of such an eclectic array of topics.

A logical spot to look for a more structured overview of the topics dealt with in the study of public administration is offered by introductory books to the study. They give a quick insight into the topic included, and how they are linked. Often such books are the way most become acquainted with the field in the first place, when comparing textbooks immense diversity, already signaled by Waldo, is apparent, i.e. much less unanimity than expected. A look at three examples may illustrate the difficulties. To start with, Richard Stillman’s Public administration - Concept and Cases (2010), an introduction to the study that is widely used in the United States and in its ninth edition (which has now gotten a special ‘international edition’). Looking at the titles of the chapters there is clearly an enormous variety of topics being addressed. Many easily seem to fit the previous definitions of the field. Some require perhaps more imagination, and others seem to be absent. An obvious example of the latter is ‘public law’ that figures so prominently in Wilson’s definition but is not even mentioned in Stillman’s index. Although 500 pages, Stillman’s introduction clearly indicates its only a selection of topics.

An even vaster text is the Handbook of Public Administration (2007) edited by Jack Rabin, Bartley
Hildreth and Gerald Miller over 1200 pages, with 31 chapters, divided into 15 units of its the core topics. Here public law does figure and public administrative history is also added. Reorganization and ecology are, however, absent in this overview. The latter topic is not so easily identified in the book, the former is highlighted explicitly in at least two chapters (and is indexed as ‘reorganization factors’). What is perhaps less clear is that the book focuses on the United States, both historical chapters explicitly state so, as does Stillman’s text. This is another indication that the study of public administration does indeed heavily focus upon the national or local levels as an academic field of inquiry.

As a third example we can take George Frederickson and Kevin Smith’s *The Public Administration Theory Primer* (2003). This book specifically aims at providing an overview of the field, but focused on its major theories thematically, rather than methodologically:

- Theories of political control of bureaucracy
- Theories of Bureaucratic Politics
- Public Institutional Theory
- Theories of Public Management
- Postmodern Theory
- Decision Theory
- Rational Choice Theory
- Theories of Governance

To this list, add ethics, as the authors explicitly indicate it is a topic left out of the book (so a legal and a history perspective are entirely out of the authors’ scope). As before, similarities and differences can be noted with the other two. In this case the introduction of ‘governance’ as a specific concern is interesting as an argument can be made that ‘governance’ is replacing ‘public administration’ as the key term to denote its object of study. But that is an issue to be discussed in a later.

The three books provide us with an idea what according to the authors should be regarded the core topics, concerns, concepts, and issues facing the study of public administration. There is a lot of similarity, but a lot of variance as well.

**The Normative Nature of Scope**

A brief empirical survey of the topics tackled in the study of public administration may be a useful beginning to grasp what any study is about, as a kind of prolegomena, i.e. a ladder to climb to get an overview, but one that is no longer helpful to arrive at criteria for identifying what is relevant and what is not. This fits with one of the possible meanings of ‘scope’ mentioned in the dictionary: ‘an instrument’, ‘thing looked at or through’ (as in telescope’). It provides possibly important, yet contingent information, but why some topics are regarded relevant rather than others or some are more central remains unclear.

A dictionary definition likewise reveals other meanings for scope, such as ‘end aimed at’, ‘purpose’, ‘intention’, ‘outlook’, ‘range’, which in turn suggests the kind of topics being taken into consideration is dependent upon what we want to know in the first place. For instance, to determine what is specifically ‘public’ about public administration requires that the meaning of ‘public’ can be identified. Scope thus combines ‘why,
what and how’, obviously implying that discussing scope requires delving into ‘theory’, for theory also concerns these three questions. Put differently, what is considered the scope of the study of public administration is theoretically determined. As the philosopher Karl Popper argued: theory precedes observation: To state ‘observe’ makes no sense, unless there is an idea what to observe. That assumes some preliminary definition of public administration in order to be able to observe. We need first a theory, or at least a definition, of public administration. Here we touch upon the notion of object constitution.

Simply put, meaning is given to the phenomena by an observer: colors, shapes, and the like. A common starting point in modern epistemology is that there is no given reality. There is always object constitution as Husserl named it, i.e. the recognition that human thought is constitutive for our understanding of the real. Understanding and interpretation implies ordering, especially of relations (cf. John Dewey, 1981: 406). Many different kinds of orderings are however possible, especially when social reality is the object of inquiry. The most basic tool for ordering is by learning to see similarities and differences, and thus to distinguish between the signals our senses register: similarity and difference constitutes the basic normative dichotomy enabling us to give meaning to our (bare) observations. Thereby observers can distinguish among oak trees, houses, food, strawberries, male and female, and so on. Social phenomena are amongst the most complex to identify. They are rarely directly observable at all: bureaucracy, civil servant, due process, law, budget, and planning processes, depend on a broad, complex meaning. In an academic context, such as the study of public administration, the aim is to improve upon everyday observations and meanings, i.e. to improve our criteria for similarity and difference, our assumptions and theories. An important aspect required to be able to make improvements, is to realize the nature of our observations and the meanings applied. Perhaps three dichotomies, it will be later argued, are at the heart of our understanding of public administration (politics & administration, public & private, and state & society). None of these provides clear cut, let alone undisputed criteria for similarities and differences or rather, suggest semantic fields of possible meanings.

The object constitution concerns primarily a conceptual representation of reality and as such, constitutes the actual ‘scope’ of the study, i.e. what is regarded as real: here ontology is the subject. The object of study provides what can be regarded relevant for research, i.e. the object of cognition which comes closest to what ordinarily is termed reality. To conclude these observations on the scope of the study, what becomes clear is that a field’s scope is utterly intertwined with theories used. What phenomena, topics, or goals are regarded proper for the study of public administration depends upon our ideas about reality, i.e. about what constitutes public administration. This brings us to a next concern: what is theory? Before turning to this methodological question, let us first delve a bit more into the ontology of the study: why is the concept of public administration so tricky to pin point to begin with?
4. Scope: The Study’s Ontology

Conceptualizing Public Administration

As indicated, many write about public administration as if it is crystal-clear what 'public administration' is. Everyone knows what it is about, yet, when trying public administration we seem at a loss. In brief, it is difficult to establish what precisely is the subject matter of the study comprehensively: “there really is no such subject as ‘public administration’, but rather (...) public administration means different things to different observers and lacks a significant common theoretical or applied meaning” (Rosenbloom, 1993: 5). It is sometimes even regarded as indefinable (cf. Caiden, 1971: 3). Particularly in 1990’s American literature the reader was bombarded with titles suggesting a re-examination, refounding, new image, and the like, of public administration. Perhaps this is not surprising as it is often argued that public administration is a complex concept and has to be studied from a variety of disciplinary perspectives (legal, psychological, social, economic, historical, political), and, what is more, that as a cultural phenomenon, its meaning depends on the linguistic and national context.

The confusing nature of the meaning of public administration is due to many factors, ranging from the everyday use of ‘administration’, ‘execution’, ‘management’, and ‘government’ as interchangeable and distinct. Dunsire (1973) devoted a book to the meaning of ‘administration’ and distinguished fifteen different uses of the word. Even the original Latin verb ‘administratio’ already had two distinct meanings: ‘to help, assist, or serve’, and ‘to manage, direct, or govern’.

We can best regard the concept of public administration as acquiring its meaning within the context of another related concept which it is closely linked to (perhaps almost synonymous), as well as, opposed to and differentiated from other concepts; i.e., what can be called a semantic field. Thus the meaning of ‘public administration’ will in part depend on what is regarded public, and private, or management, politics and administration.

In order to get some insight into the intricacies of the concept of public administration, and thus the ontology of the study, we can focus attention on three pairs of concepts that delineate its meaning(s): public and private, state and society, and politics and administration. The three can perhaps be regarded founding dichotomies for the concept of public administration. Let us take a very brief look at all three of them.

Public & Private

The similarities and differences of public and private (business) administration concerns an almost unavoidable topic in textbooks on public administration. The interpretation given to the differences has implications for ideas about people and organizations. Based on the nature of the distinction authors, for example, argue for different core values guiding action, and/or having a different relevance. Thus Lawton and Rose (1994: 18/19) claim that accountability is of greater importance in the public sector than in the private.

A minimal difference put forward is, for instance, that the latter is focused on efficiency, while the former takes...
effectiveness as its prime value. Most authors thus put forward a set of characteristics to score public and private administration on (cf. Starling 1986; Allison 1992). A fundamental difference can be argued by pointing at the prerequisite of public administration for ensuring liberty, safety, and justice, requiring authoritative powers to keep private strive and action in check. A regularly surfacing question is in what sense public administration actually is “public”? Debates usually are framed in terms of opposing concepts such as “state” versus “market”, or profit” versus “non-profit.” This is at the heart of debates on “privatization”, “contracting out”, “political liberty of functionaries”, “democratic administration”, “public management”, and “representative bureaucracy” (cf. Haque 1996; Luton, 1996).

Clearly the public/private divide is not a topic specific to the study of public administration, but figures in all social sciences. Jeff Weintraub therefore calls it the “grand dichotomy”: a widespread organizing category that means several things at once (Weintraub, 1997: 2). He distinguished four approaches, each of them having a long heritage and carrying powerful ideas about social reality. The different interpretations will result in varying ideas about what public administration is or should be. We have to ask, what meaning(s) of “public” are available, dominant, or changing, and which of these are relevant to “public administration”? What are the consequences of these alternative interpretations for understanding and developing public administration?

Politics and Administration

Traditionally the politics/administration dichotomy is referred to in the study of public administration as the founding dichotomy (see Overeem, 2010 for an in-depth study of the debates on this). Simply put, the dichotomy’s main contribution to the meaning of “public administration” is to border off “administrative phenomena,” enabling us to distinguish between administrative and political (-legal) actions, and/or between administrative and political functionaries. This has consequences for almost every topic in the discourse on public administration: responsibility, recruitment, the policy-process, professionalism, democracy, bureaucracy, etc. We have to be careful, however, because there is no unanimity about what the distinction precisely refers to, or if it is even tenable at closer examination.

The roots of the politics/administration dichotomy can be traced back to the Cameralist and Police-science traditions. The ideas were linked to attempts to adapt the idea of a separation of powers, which was generally conceived as insufficient to study administrative reality. This is also a core argument in Goodnow’s Politics and Administration (1900), the first to really kick off modern debates. Best known, however, is Wilson’s earlier attempt to distinguish politics and administration, enabling him to refer to the “business of administration.” According to the customary picture the dichotomy constitutes the foundations that “put the study on the map” in the United States. Paradoxically, the dichotomy was, however, also almost immediately attacked and the object of debate. Today’s textbooks in public administration still discuss the dichotomy through arguments showing it is unrealistic, normatively unjustified, over simplistic, etc. It
is perhaps surprising so many authors feel this lingering need to reject it “once again”, but perhaps it really is a founding concept for grasping the nature of public administration. Depending on the approach taken, it can be assigned different characteristics that may lead to its acceptance or rejection. As such the dichotomy depends upon other ideas about the nature of social reality. For instance, how it is related to the idea of the separation of powers, or decision-making and judgment (cf. Nieuwenburg & Rutgers, 2001). It is vital to distinguish between the use of the dichotomy in descriptive and explanatory empirical research or in a more normative (perhaps even ideological) context with prescriptive intentions, or in terms of a constitutional principle (Overeem, 2010). There are a host of questions still to being discussed, concerning the tenability of the dichotomy in general, the consequences of alternative approaches, and the coherence or incommensurability of diverging conceptualizations.

State and Society

The third grand dichotomy underlying the construction of the concept of public administration concerns the relation between state and society. It positions public administration as something “in between” the authority to make decisions (state) and the people that are to be administered (society). Although there is a vast literature on the (nation) state, analyses of the concepts for the notion of public administration are rare. Although perhaps not immediately obvious to most students of public administration, there is good case to be made to refer to the debates on administrative theory as a “Great State Debate” (Stillman, 1991: 173). Discussions of the nature of public administration in relation to state and society are, however, rare. Nevertheless, the literature on state and society in general, i.e. in political theory, is overwhelming (cf. Dyson, 1980).

The opposition of state and society originates in 16th century debates on the nature of “the state”, a label used “to refer to the institutional apparatus surrounding the ruler” (Manicas, 1987: 25). In traditional state theory the state was regarded as a sphere that is hierarchically placed over its subjects. The monarch personified the state and governed by developing a polity for his subordinates. The notion of “society” only was framed as late as the 19th century. Some consider Montesquieu as the first to use a kind of state /society opposition, others point at Kant, but it is plausible to attribute this honor to Hegel as he explicitly distinguished “state” and “society” as two distinct spheres of legitimate social action (Berki, 1979: 8). Hegel argued that the state has to guarantee the individual’s existence, safety, and well-being. Although safety and protection of the individual are the final goals of society, the state transcends this limited perspective. The difference implies, for instance, that whereas relations in society are contractual, the state does not constitute a contractual relation (Hegel, 1821/1995: § 258). As the protector of the weaker in society, the state is above the various competing interests and has to intervene in the free play of the forces of the market in order to guarantee a minimum standard of living for every individual. Hegel’s ideas entered the study of public administration for instance through the work of Lorenz Von Stein. He conceptualized “the working state” as a concept of public administration which influenced almost
unnoticed the discourse on both sides of the Atlantic (Miewald 1984; Van Riper 1983).

Of the three dichotomies, the state/society opposition is perhaps the most difficult for students of public administration. This is due to two factors. First, there is relatively little appreciation in administrative discourse of the dependence of our idea of public administration on the concept of state. Second, the idea of some kind of cleft or opposition between state and society hardly seems to be noticed as a topic anymore as the two are simply presupposed as ‘interlocking’ somehow. Perhaps the anti-state sentiments in the U.S. discourse hamper taking this problem seriously, whilst pressing practical issues tend to override conceptual scrutiny. As with the politics/administration dichotomy, we seem to be left with a dichotomy we cannot abolish entirely, nor accept with all its connotations and patent difficulties in representing social reality.

In recent literature the term governance is presented as comprehensively referring to the governing or administration of “state and society”. Governance seems to suggest an image of social reality where a state/society bifurcation disappears. Once governance is so undifferentiated it seems unlikely it can replace “state and society” and/or “public administration”. It is therefore hardly surprising authors almost immediately introduce a multitude of kinds of governance: private, public, even ‘government governance’.

In the very brief description of the three dichotomies we may notice an uneasy mix of social scientific and legal concepts. There seems to be a incompahtibilité d’humeur between the legal discipline with its normative orientation to order society, and the variety of social (scientific) studies focusing on explaining empirical social reality. This is perhaps most visible with regard to the concept of state: Social scientists regard it (merely) a sub-system of society, whilst legal scholars regard the state as encompassing sovereignty and morality: “The idea of the state stands in complete contrast to the notion of political institutions as neutral ‘transformatory’ structures processing ‘inputs’ (demands and support) from the system’s environment into ‘outputs’” (Dyson 1980: 230).

Continuing to attack the validity of the three founding dichotomies is as much beside the point as it is unwise to uncritically or dogmatically accept them and thus ignore the varying meanings core concepts in the study of public administration do have. What is more, there is mutual influence, overlap, and interdependence of the three dichotomies. As a result there is no agreement on the importance of these links, or the superiority of any of the dichotomies. The same holds for the legal and social approach to conceptualizing public administration that surface in the analysis of all three dichotomies. To conclude this short outline of the problems and intricacies of the conceptualization of public administration, it can be noticed that the studies subject matter – ‘ontology’- is perhaps more complex and less straightforward as expected at first glance. There is not some easily identifiable, set of characteristics, let alone some empirical phenomenon authors agree upon as constituting ‘public

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3 Cf “... governance without government...", but also: "... government without governance..." (Rosenau, 1992: 5), and “the role of government in governance” (Pierre, 2000: 241).
administration,’ i.e. as a specific kind or sphere of social action. As already referred to in the first section, Von Stein already was well aware that establishing the nature of public administration and what empirical manifestations it can have presupposes an awful lot of (other) concepts and theories.

5. Theory: The Methodology of the Study

The Methodological quandrum

Every notion of object constitution and the conceptual nature of the object of study, i.e. the study’s scope, both signal that scope is ‘theory driven’. What is accepted as reality, i.e. our ontology, depends on what is regarded real, important, knowable, and the like, bringing us to the counterpart of object constitution or ontology: the methodology. A study is characterized by both its object of study and the ideas (and ideals) with regard to the best, correct and/or valid way of studying, i.e. accepted and prescribed ways of constructing, testing and changing theories. Any study always is characterized by both a specific ontology and methodology (cf. Martin Hollis, 1994). The two are intertwined, but the methodology prescribes the kind of theories and methods of investigation that are accepted as valid. This is where the strength of academic research relies: the validity of truth claims relies on the methodology. Methodology constitutes a touchstone for scientific truth; the logic to derive valid conclusions, i.e., theories, from the established facts whereas the ontology includes statements made about reality - facts - in the first place. Hardly surprising, a multiplicity of methodologies and methods abound within the social sciences, and thus also in the study of public administration, all requiring quite different demands upon the construction of theories.

The Nature of Theory

Earlier a generalized fundamental description of theory was advanced, almost amounting to the statement that all (more or less consistent) ideas about the nature of reality may be regarded as a theory in a very broad established. So this is a dimension concerning the methodology of sociology. The other dimension they distinguish deals with the ontology, i.e. the nature of social reality (captured by them in terms of ‘sociology of radical change’ versus ‘sociology of regulation’). Denhardt adapted this very scheme to outline the state of the art in the study of public administration, using ‘political’ versus ‘organizational’ as characterization of the ideas on the ontology of the study. In principle the two dimensions thus distinguished allow for four combinations. However, enlightening as such an ordering is, it also implies a simplification, perhaps oversimplification. The different ideas about the nature of the object of study is probably more complex than the political versus organizational allows for. For instance, where would a ‘legal’ orientation fit?

4 The discussion on the nature of ‘national’ traditions in the development of public administration as described in Painter & Peters (2010) underlines the local context of our conceptualizations.

5 The combination of ontology and methodology has been pinpointed by many philosophers and sociologist of science. For instance Burrel and Morgan, in their study on the nature of sociology distinguished on the one hand between subjective and objective approaches, i.e. between those adhering to an interpretative, hermeneutic and a more naturalistic or positivistic methodology. The former claiming that subjectivity is a part of the object constitution, the latter claiming that objective facts can be

6 Methods refers here to specific techniques for gathering facts such as interviews, document analysis, surveys, case study research, and so on.
sense. Perhaps the only additional prerequisite was that it provides some kind of context for explanation. An opposite of such a very broad and hardly discriminating concept of theory are detailed and much more demanding definitions of what may count as an acceptable scientific theory: “A scientific theory is an attempt to bind together in a systematic fashion the knowledge that one has of some particular aspect of the world of experience. The aim is to achieve some form of understanding, where this is usually cashed out as explanatory power and predictive fertility” (Ted Honderich, 1995, p. 870). From the days of the ancient Greeks through twentieth century logical empiricism, ideas of theory as a ‘hypothetical-deductive system’ has been developed; i.e. that a theory should start from established axioms and hypothesis on the basis of which all explanations can be deduced: “Explanation is thus a matter of showing how things happened because of the laws of the theory” (Honderich, 1995, p. 871). Many argued for this specific sort of theory, perhaps only suitable for the natural sciences, not for social sciences and humanities at all. Such one-of-a-kind notion of theory excludes other ideas of for comprehending the nature and workings of reality. Yet, it is beyond this analysis to extensively delve into all the different methodologies and philosophies of the social sciences in order to establish the numerous possible meanings of ‘theory’ in philosophy of the social sciences. Nevertheless, some theorizing over theory is necessary to establish what it is and what consequences different views on scientific theory can have for the study of public administration. Noted at the beginning, starting point here can be that the study of public administration is or aims to be interdisciplinary. What is more, in order to obtain an overview of the possible theory and scope of the study, a metaperspective is needed. Both arguments result in rejecting in advance a fixed theory of theory, i.e. of choosing a specific methodology or ontology.

**Naturalism**

For simplicity, we can distinguish between two major approaches to theory: the naturalistic approach and the interpretative. To start with the former, the basic idea of naturalism is that theories fill a full range of specific criteria, the most important one being that theories are in principle universal in application. Theories are in fact the attempts to explain observed regularities or laws. They enable us to argue from contingent observation to universal knowledge. For example, Newton’s claims of observation that there is a ‘law of gravity’; again and again an object’s ‘fall’ is explained by means of a theory of gravity stating that object attract one another and that the earth (a pretty big object) will attract an apple (a small one, so the former appears to fall towards the latter). Theories thus enable us to explain and, what is more, to predict as theories are supposed to express causal relations. The focus on causal explanations, i.e. in terms of causes and effects, makes explanation and prediction, or description and prescription, symmetrical according to this methodology. That is, if a phenomenon can be explained in terms of its causes, prediction what will happen in every case a specific cause is present is therefore possible. From this logic derives so called positivistic claims, i.e. the idea that science can help improve society for it can offer the means to predict and thus establish courses of action. For this reason, an ability to predict, i.e., the predictive power of a theory, is regarded an important
characteristic of a good theory. Positivist theories are closely related to universal statements or laws, or also called the nomothetical methodology (nomos = law), the hypothetical-deductive system or deductive-nomological methodology. Deduction from hypotheses explain what is happening by subsuming a case under the regularity captured by theory. Earlier quotes from Ted Honderich exemplified this methodology. A final observation in this extremely brief outline of positivism it is referred to as naturalistic for this methodology claims to describe, explain and predict what reality is like. What is more, positivism does so objectively, i.e. without being confounded by values. All sciences supposedly adhere to such a methodology in order to be regarded “true” sciences of least according to those subscribing to this methodology. In fact, in the English language the label ‘science’ is commonly restricted to studies adhering to this philosophy of the sciences. In the study of public administration, the best known adherent to this unique definition of methodology is Herbert Simon. His focus is on facts and values are outside any discussion of scientific study. Values are considered out of the sphere of the sciences because they are not objectively verifiable.

Naturalistic theory is widely accepted, and is as much disputed. Its core theories prove not to be as integrated and deductive as required. Also the importance of prediction is downplayed. More semantic approaches to theory argue that theories are much more like ‘theoretical models’ capturing aspects of experience. A major difference between the traditional idea of scientific theory aims at prescription, whereas modern schools regard theory primarily a means for description in accord with actual observations on how the sciences in reality work (cf. Honderich, 1995, p. 871)

Within naturalistic methodology also different kinds of theory may be distinguished. They are in part indicative for some of the problems related to this methodology. Anatol Rapoport (1958) provides four meanings of theory in the sciences, two specifically fit here. First, theory in the exact sciences is primarily a collection of theorems, i.e., statements about empirical reality that are (to some extend) verifiable. Strictly speaking, a theorem is a proposition that logically derives from definitions and other propositions. The general idea is that some terms used by science reference outside language and are empirically verifiable.

A second meaning of theory Rapoport illustrates by means of pendulum theory (‘law’) in physics; there are many discrepancies between the theory and the realized motion of a pendulum. A generally accepted theory thereby takes as its starting point a number of obviously not real assumptions, such as absence of friction: “In return for sacrificing precision … he [the physicist] gains simplicity and, what is more important, he gets at the fundamentals … of the situation” (Rapoport, 1958, p. 975). Ultimately, in physics the aim is to describe a theory in a formal mathematical language, referring to a highly idealized world.

A major problem is that many key concepts in theories are difficult to express in empirically verifiable terms. In this case well known examples are length, time and mass. The problems of being able to clearly define key variables increases when going from physics to the social sciences. In the latter many concepts originate in
common sense. For example in definitions of ‘crime’ or ‘religion’; a scientific definition may be at odds with what people (the object of study) regards as crime or religious. There are also often no sharp criteria available, thus Peter Winch wonders, “How many grains of wheat does one have to add together before one has a heap?” (Winch, 1988, p.73), indicating that within the social sciences, theories must to take into account the common meanings used by people. Here we touch upon the so-called issues of double hermeneutics. Whereas in physics scientists are more or less free to define concepts, in the social sciences, language and meanings become themselves very much part of the object of study. Rapoport points at a call for consensus amongst scholars, yet even rudimentary concepts such as ‘social action’ defy any agreed consensus. Different interpretations of social action, in turn, will have serious consequences for theories about social reality (Rapoport, 1958, p. 980). Such concerns become even more complicated when fellow researchers move outside their sphere of expertise for in society ‘bureaucracy’, ‘leadership’, and so on have all kinds of connotations a typical researcher has no control over.

Hermeneutics

Any other methodological stance can be referred to as interpretative or hermeneutic and is commonly outlined in opposition to naturalistic methodology. Here the focus is not so much on causal explanation. Its starting point is not external, objective observation, but seeks internally to understand what the reasons are for (human) action. Sometimes this difference is expressed in terms of a focus on explanation, i.e. causal explanation, versus understanding, i.e. so called reason-explanations. An underlying idea is that reasons are not considered simply causes, for these would possess causes in turn, and so on. The latter, it is sometimes argued, would have serious implication for the possibility of morality and responsibility. Also laws or law-like explanations are generally regarded of less importance, i.e. for understanding may be specific to time and place (such as ‘Why did Caesar cross the Rubicon?’). Another way of expressing the difference between naturalism and interpretative approach is that the former approaches reality externally, while the latter attempts to understand what goes on internally, i.e. within a person’s mind. Another important difference is that the hermeneutic methodology rejects the possibility of objective observation; all observation, or at least explanation and interpretation is somehow ‘theory driven.’ This can be illustrated by the problem of double hermeneutics: in the natural sciences scientists chose concepts to describe and explain physical reality and thus interpret the observed phenomena. In social sciences and humanities scientists must interpret human interpretations. As a consequence, observed social reality may actually change based on resulting interpretations (or even simply observing people may change their behavior). Human action is very much knowledge driven in the first place. What is more, choice of terms and concepts

7 This is not entirely the same problem as in the Natural Sciences, where the method of observation is known to possibly influence observations, for it is only the scientist actions that influence the observation, not an interaction between scientist and the interpretation of the observed phenomena. Yet, there are interesting comparisons to be drawn here, in particular relating to the so-called agent-structure problem in the ontology of the social sciences (cf. Jochoms & Rutgers, 2006).
is not simply up to the researcher, for in social reality concepts already exist. Only to some extent can a researcher define what is accepted behavior, i.e. what is religion, politics, or such concepts, containing meaning only within social reality itself, an issue that Rapoport referred to earlier. The third kind of theory he discussed relates to hermeneutic methodology, one dealing with the “intuitive understanding of social behavior” (Rapoport, 1958, p. 981). It should be noted that Rapoport does not regard this methodology adequate. It takes the previous concerns a lot further, and assumes ‘reasons’, i.e. the motivations and drives of humans are different from causal explanations. Further, Rapoport points out, the ideal of generalizations, let alone ‘laws’, is no longer taken as the core concern. One example can be drawn from the historical study of trying to unravel Alexander Hamilton’s motives for a particular kind of administration a researcher in this instance is not primarily interested in tracing universal explanations, but to the contrary, aims at understanding why and how Hamilton in his specific situation developed his ideas and ideals. Clearly, other authors will argue ‘reasons’ and causes are indeed not to be confounded.

Finally, Rapoport points out a fourth meaning of theory as ‘normative theory’. Normative theory is most evident in political theory as well as within public administration because it does not fit a positivist methodology approach at all. Such theory attempts to develop a framework for researching ‘the best kind of administration’. However, within physics a lot of normative ideas are likewise intertwined. Rapoport cites as a case in point Galileo Galilei’s general law of falling bodies, according to him, would never have developed if Galileo took facts seriously, for most falling bodies, such as leaves, never follow the idealized pattern of falling (i.e., straight down): “Galileo’s was, in a way, a normative theory. It described not how bodies fell but how they ought to fall under idealized conditions” (Rapoport 1958, p. 983). More generally speaking, the so called ‘ceteris paribus’ clauses (‘other conditions than those taken into consideration unchanged’) that accompany all theories, express an idealized, normative foundation of theories. A moral kind of normativity is thus implied by stating what kind of public administration should be favored. In the latter case, unavoidable ideals about humanity and society are involved.

Although the hermeneutic approach may have the stronger position in so far as it may seem to encompass naturalistic methodologies, clearly from the onset it lacks precision. Put differently, whereas naturalism may claim and demand more of theories than ultimately is perhaps tenable, the hermeneutic approach lacks criteria for a “good” or “successful” theory almost entirely, i.e., lacks, if not principled rejects, actual methodological criteria (cf. Hollis, 1995). A point certainly valid from a more positivistic perspective, but also very much a hermeneutic principle as Hans-Georg Gadamer famously argued that truth and method are irreconcilable (Gadamer, 1972). The best available examples are the hermeneutic circle (‘the whole is needed to explain the parts, and the parts are needed to explain the whole’), as well as, Gadamer’s notion of the ‘melting of horizons’, what (over simplistically stated)

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8 Including myself, but this is not the place to argue a specific methodology.
amounts to the requirement that interpretations should overlap with the original meanings somehow, or the idea that interpretations should at least be contextually verifiable or reproducible.\footnote{However it should be noted that there are also authors in the area interpretative research that do argue specific methods for theory construction. In my opinion, this usually implies a rejection of what is at the heart of hermeneutics and a recurring to positivistic ideas (cf. Winch, 1988).}

\section*{Debates}

Within these two major categories of naturalism and hermeneutics many more specific methodological stances can be distinguished (such as phenomenology, scientific realism, among others). Thus ‘critical theory’ can be regarded a variant of hermeneutics, i.e. an explicit emancipatory impulse demanded of scholars. For instance, some argue that rejecting naturalistic objectivity should result in an explicit normative stance of scientists to aid the underprivileged, whereas generally science supports the interest of the elite and the wealthy. Also most so called post-modernists fit within the hermeneutic methodology. Though building on the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michel Foucault, they point to the linguistic nature of all knowledge, all discourse, and regard knowledge (and rationality) which is bounded by its local context. A most extreme stance is Jacques Deridat, who even rejects the universality of the requirement to be consistent. One may object that this makes all claims to knowledge and truth empty. On the other hand within the naturalistic framework Karl Popper already argued what may be said as relativistic, i.e. that we can have either truth or certainty, never both. These matters, however, go way beyond the scope of this argument. What should be observed here is that ideas about what is a (scientific) theory depend upon the methodology an author adheres to. Quarrels about what kind of theory students of public administration should look for turns ultimately on the ideas about what constitutes scientific research to begin with. Within the study of public administration a couple of famous debates can to a large extend be reduced to such methodological differences, even though the authors in question may not explicitly make such assumptions clear. For instance, Simon versus Waldo, and Golembiewski versus Ostrom, and in more recent years debates between ‘mainstream’ authors and ‘postmodernists’. Some authors, however, explicitly discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different methodologies (Jay White 1986; Frank Fischer, 1990, pp 240 e.v.).

Finally, fuzziness, if not sloppiness, are inherent within the discussions on the methodology of the study of public administration. Some authors reject positivism, yet nevertheless stick to the ideas about the requirements of theory espoused by it. Often postmodernism is ‘adhered to’ seemingly as an excuse not to elaborate on methodological starting points. Conversely, certain authors may adhere to a naturalistic stance as their methodological approach, yet at the same time refer to (Kuhnian) paradigms as characterizing the development of the study over the decades. Probably most clearly this occurs in discussions of the possibility of an interdisciplinary study of public administration; which is the topic of the next section.
The Issue of Interdisciplinarity

Specific issues of relevance to the study of public administration concern the ability to compare, combine or even integrate different approaches. A call for the study of public administration to become interdisciplinary is as old as the study, which can be traced in the eclectic attempts of 18th century Cameralists and policy scholars efforts to bring together all knowledge considered relevant for running the state. For example, Lorenz von Stein’s late 19th century attempt to create an all encompassing ‘Science of administration’ (Verwaltungswissenschaft), or in the early 20th century Research Bureau Movement, sought to merge various administrative approaches. However, after WW II explicit calls for interdisciplinary research were made and the nature of interdisciplinary research became a major academic topic of special concern. In this section the basic ideas on interdisciplinarity are discussed as they (obviously) have a bearing on the kind of theory allowed and strived for. Before delving into the more theoretical underpinnings of this topic, some remarks on the arguments in favor of Interdisciplinarity have to be taken into consideration.

Why the Call for Unification?

That students of public administration attempt to integrate a variety of approaches seems self-evident at first glance. Interdisciplinary theory is needed as administrative problems are rarely specific or limited enough to be captured adequately by one theoretical approach. Few nowadays consider administrative problems simply legal issues, as was the dominant idea in Europe between mid 19th until mid 20th century.

Similarly, rarely is attention limited to merely economic, psychological, or sociological theories in order to explain or ‘solve’ an administrative dilemma. In brief, the call for Interdisciplinarity arises from the practical necessity to cope with social problems which require many different sources or disciplines input. This derived perspective from administrative practice was as relevant three hundred years ago as it is today. However, cogency increased due to the specialization within the sciences, i.e. the fragmentation of our knowledge (cf. Jos Raadschelders, 2008).

There is also a more theoretical argument: the sciences today seek more consistent and coherent theories than any time before. Starting from the assumption that there is one reality, integrating knowledge and overcoming inconsistencies, to arrive at an all-encompassing knowledge: ‘unified theory’ was the positivistic phrase for this idea. It implies scientists want to overcome the differences and specialization of disciplines just as much as practitioners. However, it may not be necessarily self-evident that the practical and theoretical arguments for unification have the same implications for the development of theory: the practical need for unified theory demands arriving at concrete knowledge of how to resolve a problem. Theoretical requirements, on the other hand, aim for more encompassing, i.e., more abstract, theories to explain how different theories conceptually can be integrated.
A catchphrase for arriving at unified knowledge is 'interdisciplinarity'. Theories developed within various specialized scientific disciplines should somehow link together and be unified to create a coherent, more encompassing theory that, in turn, will assist to more comprehensively or better understand the nature of administrative reality. What then is interdisciplinarity? To begin first, briefly, we should consider the nature of disciplines, and then turn to associated terms such as multi- and interdisciplinarity. Though, before delving into the meaning of discipline, a closely related, but actually rather specific theory will be discussed: the theory of scientific paradigms.

"Paradigm" is widely used in the study of public administration. Usually the term is used to denote a specific, more or less coherent way of viewing administrative reality. Authors discussing various paradigms usually apply a different ontology and (probably) methodology for studying public administration. For instance Nicolas Henry discusses the development of the study in terms of newly emerging paradigms (Henry, 1989). The term denotes as such perhaps nothing special. Etymologically it simply means ‘example’. Thus ‘paradigmatic’ research serves as an example for others, indicating what they consider a proper way of doing research. The term does however possess a much more specific and probably more important connotation: Thomas Kuhn famously used the term as to refer to specific approaches in the sciences and to explain how sciences develop.

The most well known example of attempting to apply paradigmatic theory to envisioning the evolution of the study of public administration is Vincent Ostrom's *Intellectual Crisis in American Public Administration* (1974). Ostrom explicitly states that a paradigmatic crisis exists within the field and that a "Kuhnian" crisis could resolve this state of affairs. Indeed his book attempts consciously to develop a new paradigm for the field. Ostrom explicitly cites Kuhn as providing his philosophical source.

In Kuhn’s sociological theory of sciences, a paradigm consists of a fundamental scientific study, with a theory, open questions, and examples of doing research. Once accepted by a group of scientists it can be only then regarded as a scientific paradigm. As a paradigm encompasses an ontology and methodology, it constitutes a closed system for giving meaning to reality as well as for evaluating theories. For scientist, Kuhn writes; "Their paradigm tells them about the sorts of entities with which the universe is populated and about the way the members of that population behave: in addition, it informs them of the questions that may legitimately be asked about nature and of the techniques that can properly be used in search for answers to them" (Kuhn, 1972: 86). An integral part of Kuhn's theory – but often overlooked - is that a paradigm is not established over night, it has a history and exists for quite awhile before it is recognized as such. Kuhn actually stresses that only with hindsight can existence of a paradigm be identified. It is not something than can be planned. Once

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10 This section is based primarily on Rutgers (1994)

11 Isaac Newton’s *Philosophiae Naturalis Prinicipia Mathematica* (1687) being a classic example of such a study.
a field of study developed a paradigm, it can be defined as a fully developed science, and thereby rational progress becomes possible.

As a paradigm is an accepted, more or less closed system of knowledge that gives meaning to reality, according to Kuhn, it is almost impossible to comprehend what scientists within another paradigm addresses because a paradigm is exclusive for its followers. This aspect of Kuhn's theory is not undisputed and should perhaps be relaxed. Nevertheless, this perspective underscores that a paradigm is not something easily accepted or rejected. In fact people spend years at university to learn it, thoroughly, and paradigms can be completely at odds with one another about the nature of reality and of research (and thus about 'theory'): what he calls incommensurable (i.e. beyond comparison). Once a paradigm has been established, over time disputes arise due to inherent problems it cannot deal with (so called anomalies). Ultimately this rejection may result in a so called "revolutionary phase" in which one paradigm succeeds by another after a competitive period. Ironically as rationality is possible only within a paradigm (as it contains the very criteria for a science relative what is regarded rational discourse), transition between paradigms is itself not rational.

Since its original formulation Kuhn’s theory received both fierce support, plus intense criticism in the philosophy and sociology of the sciences. Its importance continues because many still use the term in reference to Kuhn. In particular, it ought to be noted that he regards ‘paradigm’ a descriptive concept. Kuhn rejects prescriptive use of his theory explicitly: "If (...) some social scientists take from me the view that they can improve the status of their field by first legislating agreement on fundamentals and then turn to puzzle solving, they are badly misconstruing my point" (Kuhn, 1970: 245). On several occasions Kuhn highlights that his theory is hardly applicable to the social sciences as they are at best only partial parallels to be found among them (mainly in psychology).

Like Ostrom, Robert Golembiewski (1977) draws upon Kuhn's theory to analyze the development of the field. Contrary to Ostrom, Golembiewski does not call for a new comprehensive paradigm, but rather argues against "paradigmatic closure" (Golembiewski, 1977: 42). Instead, students of the field should develop sub- or mini-paradigms. Thus, Ostrom, Golembiewski, and Henry take as their fundamental philosophy of science Kuhn's theory, yet their diagnoses and prescriptions are hardly reconcilable within a theory. Golembiewski even acknowledges this when he writes: "As straightforward as it seems, however, Kuhn's view of scientific development is a questionable guide." (p.208). None of the three deal with the problem of incommensurability closely associated with paradigm theory, therefore attaining true interdisciplinarity particularly problematic. But let us first turn to the concept this paragraph started with: discipline.

Kuhn himself is not clear on the relation between his notion of paradigm and the meaning of a scientific discipline. He does write about a "set of paradigms" (1970: 272) within a discipline, but in his later work (i.e. form 1973 onwards) replaces "paradigm" by "disciplinary matrix." Suffice to say, both terms are often exchangeable and both figure in many disputes about the study of public administration. Concepts of paradigm
and discipline to a large extent are treated as synonymous, although we have seen, in Kuhn’s theory ‘paradigm’ possesses a precise meaning. "Discipline", by contrast, usually carries a greater authority and respectability than "paradigm."

No unanimity concerning the disciplinary status of the study of public administration exists. For instance Waldo rejects it, whereas others write books about "the state of the discipline" (cf. Lynn & Wildavsky, 1990). Whether or not the study of public administration is a discipline or not, depends obviously on what is considered characteristic of a discipline. In a loose sense the term can merely indicate that there are organizational units in the universities called ‘public administration’, employing professors in public administration, with journals and conferences, altogether making up a discipline. In a stricter sense discipline refers to a coherent body of knowledge, with shared (ontological and methodological) assumptions; in brief, the stuff Kuhn attributed to a paradigm. The two can also be mixed up in the same phrases such as ‘public administration is an interdisciplinary discipline.’ Thus, Robert Denhardt writes about the study as a discipline, with a "tremendous richness and complexity", which "lacks a sense of identity" (1990, p. 43).

Leaving aside a more ‘organizational’ definition, what does discipline mean, what, if we look at “it” from the perspective that refers to knowledge production, i.e. as a methodological or epistemological concept? Basically, the term equates with what discipline also refers to as in the case of, for instance, sports, or the military: a clear, comprehensive set of rules and regulations for control and obedience. A scientific discipline consists of a set of ideas and regulations for research that have to be learned and adhered to by participants. This implies that within the discipline certain ways of thinking and reasoning are approved of, others not; some phenomena are regarded as real and/or important, others not. As Rapoport puts it: “discipline” means constraint on the mode of thought. It prescribes a repertoire of concepts, the patterns of classification, the rules of evidence, and the etiquette of discourse" (1958, p.972). Just like a paradigm, a discipline supposedly determines how research is carried out, warrants the acceptability, and signifies significance of its statements and conclusions. A discipline in this methodological sense is probably rare within the social sciences. Stephen Toulmin (1972) argues that physical sciences, the legal profession, and engineering traditions can be regarded disciplines in this strict sense. He regards the social sciences "would be disciplines" as there is limited agreement on specific methodologies or on the nature of society, i.e., there is a plurality in "learnings" rather than discipline of thought uniting social science scholars. Factors Toulmin mentions as hampering the development of a discipline are probably familiar to students of public administration: a great variety and complexity of objects of research, absence of common concepts used for structuring the study, and lack of fully developed methods for resolving problems. Toulmin emphasizes: "The crucial element in a collective discipline... is the recognition of a sufficiently agreed goal or ideal, in terms of which common outstanding problems can be identified" (Toulmin, 1972, p.364). At the beginning of this introduction, as Waldo pointed out the study of public administration lacks precisely such unity and thus ended up in its present-day ‘crisis of identity’. 
There are perhaps good reasons to relax the notion of discipline somewhat in its application for customary every day discourse. Yet, what remains central is the idea that within a discipline, even if in usage less strict, meaning of statements (the validity of research and conclusions) is ensured. This, however, results in what is called ‘the disciplinary paradox’: if we describe the social sciences in terms of disciplines, interdisciplinarity becomes problematic. The attractiveness of developing a discipline is that it provides a firm basis for legitimizing theories as well as their claim to knowledge (‘scientific truth’). Interdisciplinarity then by definition implies stepping outside the safety of a discipline. In fact, interdisciplinarity becomes more or less a contradiction in terminus. For this reason, Lewis Mainzer opposes what he regards as a movement of the study of public administration toward interdisciplinary (1994, p.365). Once the social sciences are analyzed in terms of disciplines (or paradigms for that matter), interdisciplinary becomes almost by definition an unattractive alternative due to the inherent lack the "scientific rigor" of a discipline. An alternative is to eliminate the word ‘interdisciplinarity’ entirely, and refer to the integration of theories. In any case perhaps wisdom needs to be exercised when care applying the unreflected idea of discipline to the social sciences (despite Mainzer’s statement: "A good professional or a good amateur respects discipline; a dilettante, a fadist, or an opportunist does not." (p. 365). But then, we may wonder what counts as a scientific discipline in the social sciences in the first place.

Before delving further into the more philosophical debates on interdisciplinarity or the integration of theories, let us consider what efforts so far were undertaken to conceptualize the study of public administration by some of its leading scholars. Roughly three approaches to the study of public can be distinguished. The first group of authors search for a single foundation for the study. The second argue for a kind of unity within diversity, or diversity despite unity. The third alternative takes this further by seeking identity through heterogeneity.

The first approach is currently the dominant and most heterogenic group because authors locate possibilities for unity from widely diverse sources. Three examples serve as illustrations. First, Dwight Waldo attempted to formulate one response to the crisis of identity of public administration by advancing the concept of a profession: “My own conclusion is that the most promising, and perhaps, in fact, necessary, line of development is found in adopting a professional perspective” (Waldo, 1968, p. 9); “It is not united by a single theory, but is justified and given direction by a broad social purpose” (p.10). However, Waldo is well aware that a professional perspective is supposed to build upon training in a specific discipline to begin with. He therefore concludes that perhaps it is a matter of “let's-act-like-a-profession-even-though-we-can't-be-one.” (Waldo in Brown & Stillman, 1986, p. 105). Perhaps not a very satisfactorily solution due to it's self-contradictory nature.12

12 Later Waldo came to refer to the study as an ‘enterprise’.
Whereas Waldo in a sense aims at a single ideational’ or perhaps even verbal unity or coherence under professional terminology, most authors aim at a more substantive unity in terms of an overarching theory. Niklas Luhmann and Vincent Ostrom a second alternative exemplify. To start with the latter, in one of his early works, the German systems theoretician Niklas Luhmann specifically examines the founding the study of public administration (‘Verwaltungs-wissenschaft’). Luhmann points out three fundamental problems for creating a modern study of public administration: the fragmentation of knowledge on the subject matter, the cleft between normative and empirical research, and a capability to formulate a theory that can encompass the complexities of public administration. According to him, systems theory may adequately resolve these issues (Luhmann, 1966, p. 64). Systems theory embraces a normative structure that individuals apply to reduce complex reality into a controllable reality. From a systems perspective, public administration is a complexity reduction mechanism for authoritative decisionmaking in every society (Luhmann, 1966, pp. 69-70). All other approaches to public administration can be reframed or reduced to an idea of system rationality, i.e., their contribution to the continuity of a system in its context. Accordingly, the cleft between the normative and the empirical becomes resolvable by an acknowledgement that a system’s normative roots (in terms of its rules, interactions, and so on), has to be accepted as a social fact by researchers (‘the normativity of the factual’ Luhmann, 1966, p. 116). Although systems theory has many proponents, Luhmann’s way of unifying the study has generally not found wide-spread acceptance at least not necessarily in line with Luhmann’s elaborate theory developed in later years. His approach is questionable since it fails to encompass all theories as originally claimed; Rather, has social systems become simply one more addition to the increasing fragmentation of existing knowledge about public administration?

Vincent Ostrom takes yet an other normative stance in his The Intellectual Crisis in American Public Administration (1974). A specific theory of ‘democratic administration’ serves in his view as a sound basis for studying public administration in the United States. To what extent this theory can be applied elsewhere is not really his concern. Ostrom looks for normative starting points for studying public administration by analyzing the American constitution and the work of early the ‘founding fathers’ such as Hamilton and Madison, as well as Tocqueville. A combination of political theory along with a public choice perspective forges his dominant methodology, resulting in a new paradigm for the study of public administration. As is the case with Luhmann, there are followers, but clearly Ostrom’s ideas did not become a widely accepted paradigm.

All three approaches are inherently reductionist: Waldo’s reduces the study to a ‘profession’. Unique as it implies he does not seek to establish a theoretical unity. Luhmann and Ostrom exemplify what is more common, formulating an encompassing theoretical or normative perspective by arguing that all other approaches can (or should) by subsumed under either systems or public choice theory. None, however, became accepted or succeeded in dominating administrative sciences so far nor are they likely to in the foreseeable future.
Foundations of Public Administration

The second cluster of authors offers room for diversity in approaches, yet also tries to find unity without reducing the acknowledged needed diversity to a single starting point. Robert Golembiewski and Aris Van Braam illustrate this.

Golembiewski (1977) distinguishes, what he calls, three mini-paradigms in the study of public administration the Traditional Paradigm; the Social-Psychological Paradigm; and the Humanist/Systemic Paradigm. Its focus should not be on the development of a single theoretical core for the study, but rather on specific abilities and technologies to solve problems: “A viable centre for public administration may eventuate from the success of public administrationists in dealing with several such positions of the circumference” (Golembiewski, 1977, p. 216). Golembiewski calls to ‘just do it’. In the end, this perspective may result in some shared core. In opposition to Ostrom, his approach is anti-paradigmatic. What remains open, however, is how even by focusing on more limited, specific, practical topics different approaches can be unified, let alone how the resulting mini-paradigms (whatever they are) eventually are unified.

Aris Van Braam (who only published in Dutch) is interesting as he explicitly discusses the development of the study of public administration from an eclectic attempt to unify theories by means of developing a multi- and eventually interdisciplinary study. Van Braam avoids speculating on the content of the possible theories that will result, but rather begins with the existing diversity in the study which should be mapped. What is more, he is aware that there are different normative ideas that may block all efforts at unification, particularly the variety of images of humanity that authors assume; i.e. ontological differences that cannot be simply bridged by one theory.

Both Golembiewski and Van Braam indicate that as soon as diversity in the social sciences is taken seriously by authors, stipulating an encompassing theory becomes increasingly complicated. Both, in a sense, aim for unity, but are keenly aware of the difficulties that must be overcome, in order to establish an overarching methodology and ontology; Both consider this gap too wide to bridge.

A third group takes matters even a bit further by abolishing even the idea of any possible future theoretical unity. Contemporary administrative study is rather characterized as inherently heterogenic: fragmentation is not something to be solved in any definitive way. Even more than their previous authors, the starting point is in a meta-theory of the study, i.e., an interpretation of the nature of social science and interdisciplinarity, rather than focusing on any the development of a specific (empirical or normative) theory providing an all-encompassing ontology and methodology for the study. Klaus König and Jos Raadschelders serve as good examples (and my own approach as a differentiated study likewise fits here). But first the French authors Jacques Chevalier and Danièle Loschak can illustrate the diagnosis underlying these approaches.

Chevalier and Loach regard the study of public administration so fragmented that they question its status of being regarded a singular study: the study defies all...
attempts to look for a core. Chevalier and Loschak conclude that attempts to establish a unifying study should be abandoned; rather its heterogeneity should be accepted (Chevalier & Lochak, 1987, p. 27). Klaus König picks up on their analysis by seeking to establish what philosophy and sociology of the social sciences which can support such an understanding of administrative science. König’s study is by far the most thorough study discussed so far. He argues that there are a number of integrative theories existing next to each other, and that the (ordinary) scientist will not be able to break through barriers between them. This does, however, not imply that König regards any integration of theories impossible. His insight that ‘disciplinary’ approaches do not suffice to understand administrative problems adequately (both theoretically and practically), actually demands that we look for ways to bridge differences. König distinguishes four approaches, or ‘knowledge interests’ relevant for public administration that may integrate theories: an orientation on norms (normativity); on facts (reality); on possibilities (potentiality) and on aspiration (ideality). The first coincides with a legal approach to public administration; the others fit more within the social sciences and political theory. What remains is a multiplicity of ‘administrative sciences.’ In order to integrate theories and knowledge some kind of framework or system of reference (‘Bezugssystem’) is required. According to König, this approach cannot be encompassing or ‘ultimate’, but should consider more or less as a meta-theory, provided that the concepts and norms selected will integrate relevant knowledge. Thus selection and integration is not random or eclectic in nature, but guided by a specific perspective (König, 1980, p. 39). He signals in particular decision theory as a fundamental basis for such future development.

Finally, Jos Raadschelders who also takes the issue of the integration of theories as a central issue for the study of public administration: how to arrive at (some) coherence in the multiplicity of relevant studies on public administrative phenomena? “The identity crisis of public administration has an academic or epistemological (theory and method) as well as an existential dimension (discipline or sub-field in other discipline) that are further compounded by an identity crisis in the real world of public administration or government” (Raadschelders, 2003). He outlines four reasons for such compartmentalization of knowledge about public administration ranging from simple specialization and work division to a profound fragmentation of Western thought, as well as four types of integration of knowledge, from professional to a unified science (Raadschelders, 2000). The types of fragmentation can be connected to types of integration. Ultimate integration is impossible in his view “The fact that contesting frameworks of reference exist does not leave much hope that unity of knowledge in public administration, or in the social sciences at large, can be achieved.” (p. 207). The best available alternative would be, according to Raadschelders, differentiated integration: “This is … still not an integration at a theoretical level, but rather an integration around either an organization of the field or around a conceptual approach to the field.” (p. 206).13 It implies that integration and coherence might potentially achieved by starting from an explicit unifying conceptualization. Raadschelders does so himself, for instance, in his textbook Government; a Public Administration Perspective: “various disciplines and

13 Raadschelders ideas are very similar to my own, see later on).
specializations that study, among other subjects, government” (Raadschelders, 2003b).14

To conclude this brief outline of ideas on the coherence of the study by its major scholars, fragmentation is regarded problematic, but their ideas about resolving such fragmentation are very different. Some search for a basis for a coherent conceptualization of the study from a specific point of reference in order to decide what is relevant. The result of many arguments is that the study must either become homogeneous, or a completely heterogenic plurality. In the first case, authors strive for some "unifying paradigm," in the other words, the existence of the study is more or less denied and its "unity" is sought outside scientific spheres, such as in a "professional perspective" or within its subject matter "public administration". Opposite are authors that reject any specific point of reference as the 'true' or superior one. They direct their attention to an epistemological meta-theory that accounts for the possibility of integration of theories as such and thereby indicate how an ‘interdisciplinary’ study of public administration may be achieved. The former position relies on arriving at consensus on the studies core concepts, in particular a conceptualization of ‘public administration’. The latter approach demands more arguments from the philosophy of the social sciences as more insight into the alleged problems of integration.


Delusion or Differentiated Study?

As we have seen previously, once the sciences are conceptualized in terms of disciplines or paradigms, the problem of the disciplinary paradox arises: The only way out would be to reject interdisciplinarity as a valid road to travel, for it implies stepping outside discipline or paradigm spheres which guarantees the validity claims in the first place. However, as indicated, Kuhn (and many others) argued that the social sciences do not fit a paradigmatic or disciplinary description to begin with. Whether it is sociology, economics, psychology, or political science, there is a plurality of approaches, i.e., a plurality of ideas about these studies’ ontology and methodology. Social sciences defy any attempt to reduce them to a few ‘paradigms’ and are perhaps disciplines from a sociological perspective, with a host of internal ‘schools’ and ‘paradigms’. As George Frederickson (1976) underscores "There will doubtless continue to be arguments that public administration is neither a field, profession, nor discipline." (p.575). He concludes that the study should not become any of them; it exists as interdisciplinary, at least for Frederickson. So, part of the problem of the identity concerns its images and ideals that scholars assume about the nature of a study itself. What any of these images possess to resolve is the question of how different approaches and theories can be integrated remains unclear, which brings us again to the philosophy of the social sciences. Though we may reject Mainzer’s idea of a return to the safety of political science as a discipline, he does pose a core problem: "An interdisciplinary approach to public administration study may mask a fuzzy eclecticism that lacks any sense of what is most significant" (1994, p.364). This is not a unique
warning: "Unifying concepts can be unifying fallacies or mystifying concepts" (Adrianus De Groot, 1986: 289. Transl. MRR). Similarly Chester A. Newland wrote "the diversity can be more than a maddening weakness. Correctness is lacking. And some movements have encouraged reduced linkage." (1994, p.486), he even refers to "A field of strangers in search of a discipline" (p.487).

Another serious problem persists if we want to confront, compare, and/or integrate different theories. This issue is perhaps even more important if social science lacks a clear disciplinary or paradigmatic status. How can we ensure that an integration of theories will ultimately work?

Traditionally the integration of theories is not regarded problematic in the philosophy of the sciences: choosing between theories and/or concepts is regarded a matter accomplished through empirically testing. The positivistic ‘empirical cycle’ would do the job. The ideal of sciences, such as the physical sciences, on principle are supposed to share one (mathematical) language, thereby guaranteeing the possibility of comparison and integration. In theory all theories can and should be linked, and/or subsumed under an encompassing theoretical perspective. Kuhn firmly rejected such a positivistic image and made both acceptance and rejection more problematic. According to Kuhn, a paradigm is exclusive, which implies that the integration of knowledge becomes virtually inconceivable, unless understood as the development of a whole new paradigm. In fact, the rational comparability of paradigms became very problematic if not simply impossible as criteria for rationality are relative to a paradigm. In the case of the social sciences and humanities this is even more problematic due to their inherent complexity and lack of a common mathematical language, i.e., the very absence of paradigmatic unity. Despite these problems, theories on and methods for the integration of knowledge, i.e. for interdisciplinarity research, are very rare. One can hardly blame scholars of public administration wrestling with the nature of their study, if other studies and in particular the philosophy of the social sciences do not provide a helping hand.

The most pronounced problem discussed in relation to the viability of interdisciplinarity concern is ultimately an incommensurability of untranslatability of its concepts and theories. Recognition of this problem derives from Kuhn’s paradigm theory. As each paradigm constitutes a specific context for providing meaning, it is conceivable that concepts and theories may be totally different. However, incommensurability is not limited to Kuhn’s theory (and is comparable to the issue of underdetermination in linguistic theory). First of all, incommensurability is primarily of concern when dealing with fundamental and comprehensive theories but is not always an issue. Paul Feyerabend, the most pronounced and radical author, even states that incommensurability is not an acute problem for the everyday scientist (Feyerabend, 1978: 190) for it concerns so-called ‘universal theories’ “if interpreted in a certain way” (Feyerabend, 1975: 114). Others, however, have pointed out that that incommensurability can occur, among theories within the same conceptual framework (cf.

15 Perhaps it is easiest to stick to this generally accepted term, without necessarily subscribing to a disciplinary theory of the sciences, i.e., simply using it as a synonym for knowledge integration in general.
Hintikka, 1988). As William Mesaros and Danny Balfour emphasize: "But since many people can see both [i.e. paradigms or Gestalt figures] at different times, there exists a bridge to communicate that fact" (1993, p.26) They are correct, but the issue of incommensurability is still unresolved. Even if we can understand different perspectives, but that does not imply that their contents can be compared or integrated (cf. Feyerabend, 1975: 284; 1970: 227). As Mesaros and Balfour point out, the real question is whether we can construct [what they call] ‘trans-paradigmatic evidence.’ Feyerabend thinks it is achievable, however, not within the sciences, but rather by means of philosophical doctrine. In short, according to Feyerabend there will never be "inter-paradigmatic evidence" without explicit choices being made. The observation by Mesaros and Balfour that "relativity is ontologically constitutive of humans not of the world" (p.30), does not resolve this problem. An accepted ‘unity of reality’ will not guarantee commensurability of ideas about reality, as theories are always underdetermined by facts. They are not simply reducible to factual statements. Conflicting theories may explain the ‘same’ facts. Thus even if we agree on ‘trans-disciplinary evidence,’ it is still possible to construct incommensurable theories without being able to translate them. This latter issue is known as the Duhem-Quine thesis (cf. Willard Quine, 1969; Donald Peterson, 1984).16

How then to conceptualize an interdisciplinary study of public administration without having to resolve all of these issues, i.e. without accepting some specific philosophy of the sciences, whether stating unity or diversity, and without resorting to relativism either? The briefly discussed ideas on the study by König and Raadschelders seem able to accommodate the problem of incommensurability and acknowledge that the integration of knowledge is not easily achieved and possibly (always) contextual. To give some further depth to this image of the study of public administration as a differentiated study (cf. Rutgers, 1993), first of all, let us distinguish, on the one hand, between the presence of a plurality of studies dealing with phenomena of public administration (so studies originating in political science, sociology, economics, social psychology, law, and so on), and, on the other hand, the specific interdisciplinary study of public administration which combines and confronts various approaches in order to achieve a ‘wider’, more comprehensive understanding of public administration. The latter constitutes a differentiated study. To enable integration and selection of relevant concepts and theories, researchers need to establish what is the most relevant or promising and thus use this criteria as a guide, i.e. as an integration manual. A differentiated study is an area of interest, whose boundaries and contents are describable in terms of the topics dealt with, within which knowledge from different sources (‘basic disciplines’) can be integrated. Integration and selection of relevant theories may be attained by means of the formulation of constantly changing, varying integrative theories derived from one or more of the approaches regarded relevant within the differentiated study. This reflects the ideas captured by Golembiewski’s in terms of mini-paradigms, as well as in singular

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16 Though, just as Mesaros and Balfour refer to many a dispute concerning their philosophical starting points, the consequences of underdetermination are subject of debate; although this debate mainly concerns the impact it has on everyday discourse, its relevance for scientific conceptual systems seems to be generally accepted (cf. Strawson, 1970).
approaches of Ostrom’s or Luhmann’s, though of course, universalistic claims of these theories’ approaches must be also rejected. No integrative theory can or should provide a final unifying basis, for it would destroy the interdisciplinary outlook of the entire study and thereby reduce it to just another scientific specialism. Although any image of the study as a differentiated study may be useful and in line with recent ideas on the philosophy of the social sciences, a meta-theory as such does not provide an integrative framework. Fuzziness and eclecticism can only be resolved by clearly outlining the approach taken and by indicating why it is the most relevant and tenable. Any integrative theory should convincingly provide us with a conceptualization of an aspect of public administration: the conceptualization of public administration as object of study.

5. A Future for the Study of Public Administration?

“It is of great use to the sailor to know the length of his line, though he cannot with it fathom all the depths of the ocean” (Locke, 1978: 13).

After having discussed many theories on public administration, Frederickson and Smith conclude their book by asking if there is ‘a bright future for theory’: “Does theory have a useful role in a field as fragmented and applied as public administration?” (2003, p. 229). This reflects Waldo’s diagnosis of an identity crisis in the study of public administration referred to the beginning of this article. This article aimed to delve deeper into the nature of Waldo’s diagnosis by analyzing, be it briefly, the study’s ontology and methodology using ideas from the philosophy of the social sciences and from the discourse on the study of public administration itself. Is there still a crisis 50 years on? Does the study have a future? Well, yes. On the one hand, as we have seen the whole idea of a crisis, as well as its solution(s), hinge on assumptions about what makes for an identity of a field of study in the first place. On the other hand, it suggest there perhaps never really was a crisis, or, alternatively - as I argued elsewhere (Rutgers, 1998) - perhaps ‘crises’ in the sense of rejecting some disciplinary or paradigmatic closed system, is the very identity of the study of public administration. That is, I would argue the study is and has to be pluralistic, multi, and/or interdisciplinary if its students intend to understand ‘public administration’ comprehensively for both academic and practical purposes. Frederickson and Smith also note: “Any linear process of theory in public administration, any semblance of a steady incremental march toward a central paradigm or disciplinary objective – these disappeared long ago’ (2003, p. 246). Perhaps it is time to abolish attempts to construct some ultimate integrative, coherent theory of public administration.

Integration does not so much result in a coherent body of knowledge, but points at a process of continuously striving for the confrontation of diverging approaches in order to better understand some aspect of (what constitutes) administrative reality: "Interdisciplinarity is neither a subject matter nor a body of content. It is a process for achieving an integrative synthesis, a process that usually begins with a problem, question, topic, or issue." (Thompson Klein, 1990: 188). Considered from a historical, as well as, from an epistemological perspective, a unifying framework does not seem to either characterise the study or constitute a prerequisite for its
continuation. This, however, does not imply abandoning reflection on the study’s very ontologies and methodologies, but rather stresses the need to reflect upon them because there is no agreed upon ‘paradigm.’ As the quote from John Locke at the beginning of this section suggest, knowing the normative nature of our concepts and the epistemological starting points of our undertaking may be valuable insight into ‘the length of our line,’ as well as make us realize that we cannot apply our concepts and insights in all possible times and places.
Bibliography


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