This article focuses on the theories and methods that have been developed and deployed by scholars in order to understand both the cause and effect of delegation within state systems. It identifies three dominant traditions in the study of delegation, each of which reflects a certain disciplinary lineage as well as great variety in terms of ontological, epistemological and methodological positions. The aim of this article is not to make any normative claims about the innate superiority of any particular approach but to instead argue in favour of a pluralistic methodology which is sensitive to the layered quality of knowledge. By way of forging a sense of a shared enemy or weakness, the article concludes by arguing that all three traditions are united by their relative failure to study the logic of delegation and the power of ideas. In essence, each of the traditions has focused too heavily on what could be termed the politics of delegation (that is, the secondary consequences of delegation) and has, as a result, failed to focus attention on the politicization of delegation in terms of locating the basic logic of delegation back within the contours of public contestation.

Delegation involves the (re)distribution of power within and beyond socio-political bureaucratic systems. Although delegation is by no means a new phenomenon in the design or reform of state systems, the centrifugal dynamics of New Public Management (NPM)-inspired reorganizations towards the end of the 20th century led to a rapid disaggregation in the structures of many advanced liberal democracies. More recently, global institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, advocate large-scale delegation and hiving-off as a central aspect of building state capacity, maximizing efficiency and ensuring market confidence; while the ‘new governance agenda’ within the European Union (EU) is also tied to the creation of a number of quasi-autonomous independent agencies. Of the nine countries examined in the OECD’s 2002 Distributed Public Governance survey, delegated governance mechanisms constituted at least 50 per cent, and in some cases over 75 per cent, of the public sector in terms of expenditure and personnel. Delegation is therefore a core concept for scholars and practitioners with an interest in public sector management, governance, public policy, political science, and the capacity of the state.

Although this article is interested in non-majoritarian institutions, extra-governmental organizations, para-statals – ‘fringe bodies, quangos and all that’ (Chester 1979) – its core focus is on the theories and methods that have been developed and deployed by scholars in order to understand both the cause and effect of functional delegation within state systems. It argues that three dominant traditions in the study of delegation can be identified, each of which reflects a certain disciplinary lineage and great variety in terms of ontological, epistemological and methodological positions. In terms of locating this article within the broader literature, an important and highly influential reference point would be Mark Pollack’s Learning from the Americanists (Again): Theory and Method in the...
Study of Delegation (2003a) which identified two dominant traditions (the ‘Americanist’ and ‘Europeanist’) within a narrative which argued,

It is no secret that European(ist) scholars have largely followed – at a greater or lesser distance – their American(ist) colleagues in the formulation of theories about delegation of powers to non-majoritarian institutions. (2003a, p. 200)

This article develops and deepens Pollack’s work through a historical analysis of the evolution of theories and methods in the study of delegation. It achieves this in three distinct ways: (1) by locating the influence of each tradition on a timeline of the 20th century in order to indicate the ebb and flow of theoretical and methodological fashions; (2) using this timeline to reject the use of geographically-related epithets (‘Americanist’ and ‘Europeanist’); (3) and then exposing and exploring the existence, influence and apparent resistance of a third tradition. More broadly, this historical analysis of distinct traditions is significant not only for a number of epistemological and methodological reasons but also due to the manner in which it emphasizes the role of intellectual heritage and exposes resistance to change, and through this posits certain questions about the role of intellectual gatekeepers. The aim of this article is not to make any normative claims about the innate superiority of any particular approach; it does, however, seek to respond to an overly Americanized account of the study of delegation. It argues in favour of a more pluralistic methodology which is sensitive to the specific insights that a variety of theories and methods can contribute to our overall understanding of delegatory processes and the complex inter-play of resource dependencies that characterize chains of delegation. As such it contributes to and takes forward Pollack’s attempt to foster a clearer agenda and framework for the comparative analysis of national level delegation.

This article is divided into three sections. The first section demonstrates the existence of three dominant traditions in the study of delegation; this flows into a discussion on the utility and implications (plus limitations) of this tripartite organizing perspective in the second section. The concluding section attempts to step-back from a focus on distinct traditions and considers what is missing from the study of delegation. Drawing on insights from strategic learning models it proposes a critique based on a lack of theoretical, methodological and empirical research on the primary logic of delegation in terms of the role and power of dominant ideas as a consequence of a predominant focus across all three traditions on the secondary consequences of delegation.

TRADITIONS IN THE STUDY OF DELEGATION

In order to demonstrate the distinctiveness of a particular object, approach or method, it is necessary to provide some reference points or markers against which judgements concerning idiosyncratic qualities can be made. This section seeks to review the wider literature on delegation as it has evolved throughout the 20th century and through this process identifies three dominant traditions in the study of delegation (see table 1, where these are set out). Disciplinary traditions are defined as sets of values, assumptions and approaches that are united by a degree of internal and external coherence and which promote, implicitly or explicitly, a specific ontological and epistemological position and, as such, are commonly tied to specific methodologies. Traditions therefore provide a form of conceptual lens through which certain research methods and forms of knowledge are viewed as valid or legitimate. This article is therefore a contribution to disciplinary history that reflects and assesses the intellectual forces that have shaped the study of delegation.
TABLE 1  The study of delegation: three dominant traditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tradition</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>Rational/Public Choice Theory, Principal-Agent Theory</td>
<td>Principal-Agent Theory, New Institutionalism</td>
<td>Normative Political Theory, Old Institutionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>Foundationalist</td>
<td>Foundationalist</td>
<td>Anti-foundationalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Positivist</td>
<td>Realist</td>
<td>Critical Realist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Blended. Statistical survey evidence complemented by case study analysis and interview material</td>
<td>Qualitative. Descriptive case studies and semi-structured elite interviews. Some superficial survey evidence and analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary tradition</td>
<td>Scientific management</td>
<td>Public Law</td>
<td>History/philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>Deductive</td>
<td>Deductive</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic priority</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Accountability/patronage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arguments for</td>
<td>• Provides a rigorous approach with the capacity to analyse a range of variables and their inter-relationships across a number of actors</td>
<td>• Ability to combine structural-instrumental perspectives with those emphasizing cultural, functional and external factors</td>
<td>• Combines a detailed account of the governance of delegation with the capacity to detect the nature and importance of both formal and informal relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tight research design</td>
<td></td>
<td>• This style of approach is accessible to a non-academic audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arguments against</td>
<td>• Quantitative methods and deductive approaches lack the capacity or flexibility to reflect the iterative nature of delegated relationships</td>
<td>• Underplays political dimensions</td>
<td>• Little more than ‘rich description’ or political journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• This style of approach is not accessible to a non-academic audience</td>
<td>• Methodologically complex/demanding</td>
<td>• Often insular with little methodological capacity for comparative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Overly concerned with formal mechanisms of delegation and control</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Case studies offer ‘low leverage’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Data driven</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Historically unable to locate delegation within broader socio-political developments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example journal</td>
<td>Constitutional Political Economy</td>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>Parliamentary Affairs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be located within the contours of much broader studies such as that of Easton, Gunnell and Stein’s *Regime and Discipline* (1995) which have done much to promote the sociology of knowledge as it relates to political analysis.

Although seeking to specify dominant traditions or approaches in this manner risks exaggerating the degree of epistemological and methodological coherency that actually
exists, it is possible to argue in relation to table 1 that a constellation of values and assumptions can be identified in each case. (Indeed this was the implicit assumption of Pollack’s influential 2003a chapter cited above.) This section attempts to explicitly map the contours and topography of these traditions and through this develop a discourse, organizing perspective and heuristic framework with the capacity to compare and contrast traditions, detect trends in terms of convergence and divergence, and through this capture the diversity in terms of theory and methods that exists amongst scholars in the study of delegation. However, it also seeks to reject the use of certain geographically related epithets for these traditions and through this provide a more nuanced and sophisticated account of how different traditions have become more or less popular over time in specific countries and between different sub-disciplines.

Tradition 1 (T1)
In simple terms, T1 is associated with applying the theory and methods of political science to the study of delegation. As will be discussed below, this tradition became highly influential during the second half of the 20th century under the influence of public choice theory. The view of individuals as rational, self-interested utility maximizers facilitated the construction of models, notably principal-agent theory, from which explanations could be deduced and predictions made of the behaviour of actors. To a significant extent, the study of delegation became polarized between the ‘runaway bureaucracy’ or ‘Congressional abdication’ school (Lowi 1970; Niskanen 1971, 1975) and the ‘Congressional dominance school’ (Weingast and Moran 1983; McCubbins and Schwartz 1984; McCubbins et al. 1987). In this context scholars devised a number of methods to test hypotheses (that is, using a deductive approach) about the existence and influence of presidential and congressional controls over the sphere of delegated governance and it is possible to trace a flow of studies involving gradual theoretical and methodological maturation in response to empirical research which moved beyond this binary debate and sought to capture a greater range of variables (see, for example, Moe 1987; Wood 1988; Ferejohn and Shipan 1990).

The 1990s witnessed a further step-change in the theory and study of delegation as the focus of analysis moved from the behaviour of agents to the delegation stage itself where principals make strategic decisions about the need to delegate and how to balance independence and control. This approach remained rooted in rational choice theory and principal-agent modelling but now sought to gain an improved insight into the conditions under which principals will delegate functions and allocate discretion through the application of a transaction-cost analysis – that is, the net benefits of delegation minus the administrative and oversight mechanisms established to prevent shirking. Leading texts in this vein include Epstein and Halloran’s Delegating Powers (1999) and Huber and Shipan’s The Costs of Control (2000). The transaction cost approach to delegation was also accompanied by an increased emphasis on the analysis of ‘hard’ data and a move away from the case study approach which was increasingly viewed as a ‘soft’, overly descriptive, lacking in theoretical rigour and potentially misleading in terms of understanding principal-agent dynamics (see Huber and Shipan 2000, p. 35; see also Calvert et al. 1987).

Overall, it is possible to suggest from this brief review that T1 consists of five core elements: (1) allegiance to a broadly positivist approach to political analysis; (2) a commitment to deductive logic and reasoning; (3) a preference for quantitative analysis and large-n surveys; (4) a focus on formal mechanisms of delegation and control; and...
(5) an attempt to discourage normative democratic theory within studies in favour of a more neutral ‘scientific’ approach to delegation. Pollack (2003a) is undoubtedly correct to emphasize that American scholars have played a leading role in terms of the theory and methods employed to understand delegation. Not only does this reflect their long historical tradition of governing through semi-independent agencies and the existence of robust systems of public law and legislative oversight but it also reveals the strong influence of rational choice theory from the 1970s and the role it played in popularizing specific assumptions, theories, frameworks and methods. Like many European countries by the end of the 19th century the topography of the American state was littered with hybrid bodies which had been established to overcome a number of obstacles faced by traditional public bureaucracies (for a review of the US, see Koppell 2003; on Europe, see Greve et al. 1999).

T1 remains a powerful tradition or approach in the study of delegation and it is undoubtedly true that European scholars have learned a great deal from American scholars working within this ontological and epistemological framework. Yet to simply associate T1 with American scholarship, as Pollack does, risks masking a number of critical features. Not least the fact that T1 emerged from the 1960s onwards and before this point the study of delegation in the US adopted a predominantly case study based methodology and frequently involved highly normative observations regarding control and accountability (for example, Guild 1920; Friedrich 1940; Cushman 1941; Seidman 1952). In this sense, much American scholarship during the 20th century was more closely aligned with T3 (see below) than T1.

Tradition 2 (T2)
Although T2 has borrowed heavily in terms of theory and methods from T1, it is possible to identify three major differences in terms of its empirical focus, epistemological basis and research methods. Empirically this approach is generally targeted on a quite different constitutional terrain as scholars within this school are seeking to understand the nature and consequences of delegation either within or between mainland European parliamentary democracies or inside the evolving architecture of the EU (for example, Huber 2000). In essence, the depth and precision of analysis achieved by T1 reflects the fact that it has been developed and refined around a very specific constitutional configuration and although this may be transferable to other systems with broadly similar characteristics, such as the institutions of the EU (Pollack 2003b), its sharpness and precision are dulled by the incorporation of a wider set of dependant variables. Moreover, many of the specific official datasets that made certain methodological techniques possible in the US are not available in other countries, thereby closing-off certain analytical choices.

Second, although the scholars who operate within this approach are broadly committed to a deductive approach, accept principal-agent theory as a valuable frame of reference, and are skilled in quantitative methodological techniques, they are arguably less committed to the positivist zeal which is implicitly or explicitly ingrained within T1. Although rational choice theory is influential, its application is tempered by the need to develop theories and approaches to the study of delegation that can accommodate institutional complexity while also reflecting, for example, the existence of informal or ‘soft’ mechanisms of autonomy and control or the role of ideas. Principal-agent modelling is therefore complemented by alternative frames of reference that embed functional logic within broader contextual and ideational processes. The work of Thatcher (2003), Van Thiel (2004), Lodge and Kai (2005) and Elgie (2006), for example, have utilized the insights
of historical and sociological institutionalism to garner new tools of political analysis, notably institutional isomorphism, in order to understand the dynamics of delegatory decisions. For these reasons (and thirdly) T2 is characterized by a pluralistic approach to methodology combining sophisticated large-n quantitative analysis alongside a number of detailed case studies and elite interviews which is frequently missing from studies within T1 and T3 and is admirably adopted in Van Thiel’s Quangos: Trends, Causes Consequences 2001. Elgie (2006, p. 211) defends this methodological approach by stating,

"there are distinct advantages to an approach that combines large-N and case studies. . . findings are likely to be more robust if they are based on information from different types of investigation rather than only one. It is the accumulation of evidence across the different types of study that matters as no single piece of information proves or disproves any of the hypotheses advanced."

Moreover, scholars within this tradition have also sought to accommodate the tension between breadth and depth by adopting a common and reasonably effective research design in which a number of country profiles are located within introductory and concluding sections which provide and then reflect on a thematic or theoretical framework of analysis (see, for example, OECD 2002; Pollitt and Talbot 2004; Pollitt et al. 2004). In this context, Thatcher and Stone Sweet’s (2003) The Politics of Delegation, Bergman, Muller and Strom’s Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies (2003) and Braun and Gilardi’s (2006) Delegation in Contemporary Democracies represent arguably the most advanced or state-of-the-art studies within this tradition. What these studies provide is a greater level of theoretical and methodological depth than had hitherto been present within T2. Conceptually and methodologically this involves a willingness to adapt or complement functional principal-agent approaches with ‘richer’ explanations. As Thatcher and Stone Sweet (2003, p. 20) emphasize: ‘the politics of delegation calls for analyses going well beyond simple functional logics, involving how actors’ interests are defined, policy is made and enforced and the legitimacy of government is conceived’. Conceptually, this approach frequently utilizes the notion of ‘chains of delegation’ to fit not only within the complexity of parliamentary democracies but also emerging models of multi-level governance (see Bache and Flinders 2004).

The advantage of T2 exists at a number of levels. From a normative perspective it avoids the overly positivist pretensions of T1, while also rejecting the descriptive-prescriptive approach that is common within T3 (see below). Empirically, it offers the capacity to achieve a detailed and consistent comparative analysis that can reveal cross-national patterns and trajectories and, methodologically, its pluralistic approach sensitizes analysis to the existence of formal and informal modes of control as well as the complex inter-play between agency, context and structure. T2 is therefore distinct from T1 despite the fact that, as Pollack emphasizes, the latter tradition has clearly drawn on some of the theories and methods that were originally developed within T1. However, it is the central contention of this article that there exists a third distinct tradition in the study of delegation that has proved (stubbornly) unresponsive to learning from either T1 or T2.

Tradition 3 (T3)

T3 is distinctive because not only does it form the oldest tradition in the study of delegation but it has also proved largely resilient to the influence of the positivist and rational choice determined approaches that have been dominant for some time within T1 and are increasingly influential in T2. In this regard it imports its own assumptions, theories and
methods into the study of delegation. These are in themselves derived from an approach
to the study of politics more generally that is imbued with an enduring anti-scientific
sentiment (itself a legacy of T3s development and influence prior to the advent of more
pseudo-scientific approaches from the 1950s onwards). T3 has therefore been infused
from its inception by ambivalence towards explicit deductive modelling and conceived
as more of a co-operative enterprise between practitioners and academics characterized
by: (1) an inductive approach; (2) little sophisticated modelling or hypothesis generation;
(3) a preference for qualitative methodologies (notably case studies and semi-structured
elite interviews); (4) a tendency to locate analyses within normative democratic theory;
and (5) an insular, almost parochial, focus on single-country studies.

For T3, the study of delegation aimed to demystify the institutions and processes
of politics and government in a manner which eschewed ‘scientific’ posturing and
was suspicious of importing theories of frameworks from overseas. This approach was
epitomised in seminal texts such as Finer’s Primer of Public Administration (1950). This
descriptive-prescriptive (old) institutional approach is found within a great number
of 20th century studies that focused on tracing the changing contours of the state (for
example, Bunbury 1944; Anderson 1946; Street 1950; Friedman 1951; Willson 1955; Chester
and Willson 1957; Parris 1969; Jordan 1976; Chester 1979), examined the issue of control
and co-ordination (for example, Robson 1936; Hanson 1954; Schaffer 1956; 1969), and
focused on accountability (for example, Finer 1940; Daniel 1960; Chapman 1973; Barker
1982) and ministerial patronage (for example, Jennings 1938; Finer 1952; Richards 1963;

T3 may not have embraced the explicit theoretical modelling that has been prevalent
within T1 and T2 but it has always been founded on the implicit acceptance of an
institutionalized framework that reflects a particular model of democracy. This point
has been acknowledged by leading American scholars. Peters (2009), for example, states
‘There often was a theory that was informing the institutional research, but that theory
was well-hidden’. This emphasis on implicit and explicit theoretical frameworks flows
into a much broader ontological and epistemological debate concerning the assumptions,
ambitions and limits of knowledge in the social sciences. Pollack (2003a, p. 200) argues
that ‘Americanists appear to have thought more systematically about the difficulties in
testing hypotheses about delegation and agency’. This view is highly contentious. It is not
that T3 has failed to reflect systematically about the challenges of deductive reasoning –
quite the reverse – scholars operating within this tradition have considered but rejected
this approach for ontological, epistemological and methodological reasons that are well-
known with the broader debate between political science on the one hand and political
studies on the other. As Dunleavy et al. (2000, p. 3) suggest, political studies has since its
inception been associated with a degree of (anti-modernist) scepticism and eclecticism in
its theories and methods.

Towards the end of the 20th century, three new strands emerged within T3. First,
the study of delegation became a central element of the ‘governance turn’ to the degree
that it was suddenly located within a concerted drive towards a more theoretically
driven and methodologically rigorous approach (Rhodes 1997). Through its emphasis
on central strategic capacity, the steering of complex networks and fuzzy forms of
accountability governance theory provided a framework, discourse and approach to
delegation which posed distinctive questions about the ‘unravelling’ of the state. The
second strand dovetailed with this governance-theoretic approach by focusing on the
growth and role of independent regulatory authorities (and regulatory failure) as a
by-product of neo-liberal privatization policies (Thatcher 1999; Moran 2001a, b). The final strand involved a challenge to the normative anti-delegatory position of much of the literature published within this tradition from the mid-1970s onwards. Hogwood (1995, p. 227) captured this stance by reviewing the literature and concluding that ‘the only shared value appears to be that quangos are rather shameful’ (for a review, see Cole 2005). The work of Marquand and Harden (1999) and Flinders and Smith (1999) rejected the assumption that delegation and democracy were incompatible and instead sought to explore the potential role that delegated organizational forms might play in creating new arenas of democratic engagement (for an updated and expanded exposition of this position from within this tradition, see Vibert 2007). These three strands merged to promote the study of ‘delegated’ or ‘distributed’ public governance (see, for example, Flinders 2004a, b) which were not new terms for well-trodden issues but marked a distinct approach to the study of delegation based around a number of themes. These included: (1) an acceptance of delegation as a central feature of modern state projects; (2) an awareness of the role of delegation above and below the nation state; and (3) the encouragement of a deeper and more analytically refined appreciation of delegation than the frequently descriptive accounts that had dominated T3 for much of the 20th century.

The impact, however, of these three strands should not be exaggerated. Although governance theory marked an influential and highly distinct alteration in understandings of the state, it did not reflect an attempt to promote the theories and methods of studying delegation that were pivotal within T1 and T2. If anything, it marked a further shift away from rational choice inspired deductive modelling and quantitative techniques (for example, Bevir and Rhodes 2005). Older traditions had been adapted rather than repudiated. Moreover, traditions, styles and cultures are notoriously difficult to alter, and despite the influence of governance theory and the work of proponents advocating a less normative foundation for analyses, the 1980s and 1990s saw the publication of a number of influential scholarly texts that were clearly written and located squarely within T3, such as Barker’s Quangos in Britain (1982), Weir and Hall’s EGO Trip (1994), and Skelcher’s The Appointed State (1998).

This section has developed and refined Pollack’s work on dominant theories and methods in the analysis of delegatory processes (see figure 1). It has achieved this in three specific ways: (1) it has identified and discussed a third dominant tradition (T3); (2) it has rejected the use of geographical epithets (however loosely applied); and (3) it has illustrated why American scholarship should not automatically be interpreted as synonymous with T1 – and why T3 (see Flinders 2008) should not be solely associated with ‘British’ political studies. It is possible to illustrate these points through a disciplinary timeline (as figure 1 illustrates). In this context, critical elements of the figure include the manner in which T3’s timeline includes the work of a significant number of American scholars (and could also include a number of Canadian, Indian, Australian, French and Italian scholars), and T1’s include several prominent British scholars. Figure 1 also illustrates Pollack’s argument concerning the ‘learning’ process of T2 from T1 (indicated through an element of overlap). The existence of these three traditions and the apparent intellectual distance and overlaps that exist between them raises distinct questions about the sociology of knowledge, political analysis and the dissemination of knowledge. These issues are explored in the section that follows.
FIGURE 1 Evolution of theory and methods in the study of delegation

ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

As with any typological endeavour, it is possible to suggest that table 1, above, could and/or should be further refined by the addition of more traditions or sub-strands. Nevertheless, at this point the article concurs with Sartori (1970) that ‘three slices are sufficient for the purposes of logical analysis’. Although some intellectual contributions or disciplinary strands may have been overlooked, the aim here has been to put down a number of markers or reference points on an otherwise uncharted conceptual terrain in order to reflect upon how we study and understand delegatory processes within emerging frameworks of (multi-level) governance. Moreover, by undertaking this conceptual exercise it is possible to not only identify examples of cross-fertilization across and between theories, methods and territories in the study of delegation, but also highlight not the superiority of any one tradition but the distinct insights offered by each approach, thereby fostering a pluralistic approach to theories and methods.

This article has also rejected the use of geographical epithets because they risk overlooking the existence and evolution of differing theories and approaches within certain countries or continents. Clearly not all the scholars within a specific geographic terrain are operating within the parameters of a single tradition. However, it is by exposing and examining the work of what we might light-heartedly refer to as academically ‘deviant’ scholars that we are able to further consider the traction of each tradition and also the receptiveness of traditions to external influences. In terms of cross-fertilization it is possible, as Pollack (2003a) detailed at length, to detect a strong T1 → T2 line of influence – arguably exemplified in the work of Yesilkagit (2004) – and it is therefore arguably more profitable and in line with the thrust of this article to focus on the inter-relationship(s) between the T1 and T3. This allows us to further assess the analytical leverage of each dominant approach while at the same time observing the apparent resilience of traditions in the study of delegation and, through this, begin to understand the barriers to a more
pluralistic and rounded approach. In many ways this section attempts to provoke a conversation about the theories and methods which form central canons of T1 and T3 because scholars operating within these traditions have tended to talk past or talk over each other rather than to each other about the respective qualities of different tools of political analysis.

Seeking to tease T1 away from an ‘Americanist’ epithet is important due to the fact that examples of intellectual resilience exist and it is possible to identify many American scholars of delegation who remain associated with T3’s theories and methods. During the high-point of rational-choice theoretic methodologies in the 1960s and 1970s, many prominent scholars in the US operated within the parameters of T3 – particularly in relation to the analysis of the Tennessee Valley Authority and other government corporations (for example, Jerry Mitchell, Harold Seidman, David Lilienthall, Herman Finer, Jameson Doig, Luther Gullick, among others). Towards the end of the century, works such as Koppel’s *The Politics of Quasi-Government* (2003) and Carpenter’s *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy* (2001) also adopted those theories and methods associated with T3. To associate T1 with an ‘Americanist’ approach therefore risks overlooking the existence of an influential and consistent strand of delegatory analysis within American scholarship.

Conversely, it needs to be emphasized that T1 has been adopted by scholarly communities beyond the US. The work of the London School of Economics’ Public Policy Group during the 1990s attempted to import certain rational-choice deductive-based models and approaches into the study of delegation in Britain. This included Dunleavy’s *Bureaucracy, Democracy and Public Choice* (1991), Dowding’s *The Civil Service* (1995), and James’ *The Executive Agency Revolution in Whitehall* (2003). The position of Dowding’s work more widely has been highly significant due to its explicit critique of T3’s qualitative and ‘un-scientific’ approach (see, for example, Dowding 2001). While Dunleavy, Dowding and James represent British scholars importing elements of what we might term an alternative tradition, the more recent work of Bertelli (2008) represents an American scholar of delegation shifting the (T1) theories and methods he had previously developed and applied in the American context (2005, 2006a, b) – formal models, deductive theoretical positions, statistical analysis of independent and dependent variables, and so on – to the British political system (2008). The influence of these ‘deviant scholars’ on T3 should not, however, be overstated, and T3 appears curiously resilient, even resistant, to ‘social scientific’ approaches in the study of delegation. Explaining this resistance is one of the themes developed below. The main message emanating from T1 and T3, therefore, appears to be a certain insularity and reluctance to look up from and beyond their traditional frames of reference – a point which underlines this section’s attempt to provoke some form of engagement as well as reflecting on what factors prevent dialogue.

Returning to Bertelli’s 2008 article provides a bridge between these two issues. As emphasized above, T3 is relatively impoverished when it comes to explicit and systematic theoretical application and development which makes Bertelli’s study’s large-n approach with the capacity to analyse a range of variables and their inter-relationships significant and at the very least novel. But it also provides a valuable case study in terms of developing a conversation on the merits of certain theories and approaches, because those scholars working within the intellectual bounds of T3 may suggest that the imposition of a data-driven framework fails to capture or reflect the existence of critical qualitative dimensions. This might lead them to question the epistemological value of this approach and suggest a need for a form of methodological triangulation that draws in qualitative
data (in a manner akin to T2). In response, those operating within the parameters of T1 might seek to demonstrate the capacity of their quantitative techniques to account for the existence and role of non-quantified variables or, more pointedly, seek to emphasize that respondents rarely provide ‘true’ responses to qualitative methods (such as surveys or semi-structured elite interviews) but generally provide answers that are strategically constructed to reinforce certain constitutional expectations.

Developing this theme of engagement encourages us to look more broadly and acknowledge the work of other scholars who have begun to make their theory-driven approaches travel into new empirical terrain and in this context the work of Ballman et al. (2002) on the EU is noteworthy. Yet at the same time these attempts to import theories and methods to new institutional and constitutional configurations allow us to understand the manner in which different traditions can perform:

1. inculcate certain epistemological assumptions about the collection and validation of knowledge 
\textit{vis-à-vis} delegation;
2. offer both strengths and weaknesses in terms of measuring specific variables;
3. as a result, contribute a layered quality in terms of building up a body of knowledge.

This notion of a layered conception of knowledge is significant in light of this article’s lack of a normative stance in favour of any one tradition. It therefore concurs with Aldo Leopold’s much cited advice that ‘The first rule of intelligent tinkering is to keep all the parts’ (1945). The benefit of a pluralistic approach to theory and methods in relation to delegation is demonstrated by comparing research that focuses on the same topic but from different traditions. Take, by way of an example, the work of Carpenter (2004) on regulatory dynamics, Van Thiel’s work (2004) on ‘quangocratization’, and the present author’s work on distributed public governance (Flinders 2004a). Each of these pieces focuses on what might be termed the politics of delegation (see below for further details) but the complex algebraic formulae deployed by Carpenter stands in stark contrast to the explicit theoretical framework of Van Thiel, and the thematic approach of Flinders. The significance of these traditions in the context of this article stems from the fact that dominant approaches inculcate certain values, not just regarding the nature of knowledge in the social sciences but specific ideas and beliefs regarding the object of analysis and how it should be studied. They also utilize quite different frames of reference, discourses and methods in order to validate their theory of knowledge epistemologically.

The identification of specific traditions in the study of delegation therefore aids understanding, not only in relation to dominant conceptual lenses and the need for cross-fertilization or spill-over, but also forces us to consider structural and cultural obstacles that may entrench or maintain certain traditions. This in turn raises broader questions about the dissemination of knowledge within and between traditions and how this process is brokered between epistemic elites. What this survey suggests is that journal editors and reviewers play a leading role as intellectual gatekeepers in terms of defining and imposing a view about what constitutes ‘good’ or ‘legitimate’ research (see Crane 1967). The position of post-modern theorists of public administration within American political science provides an interesting case study. The epistemology of this sub-strand of administrative research – as reflected in the work of Fox and Miller (1996), McBeth and Clemons (1999) and de Zwart (2002) – seeks to expose and deprivilege the scientific discourse and language of T1 and instead professes an anti-foundational one that interprets social scientific discourse as just one among other equally deserving discourses.
In this regard the approach of American post-modern administrative theorists resonates with the interpretive theorists that have sought to promote a similar position within T3 (Bevir and Rhodes 2003).

A relatively clear feature of the literature review on which this article is based is a correlation between traditions and journalistic outlets. Scholars working within T1 publish predominantly (and understandably) within journals that promote a broadly ‘scientific’ or rational-choice theoretic position (American Political Science Review, JPART, Public Administration Review, Constitutional Political Economy, and so on). Those studies located within T3 tend to be published in journals with a long-standing aversion to this approach (Political Studies, Parliamentary Affairs, Political Quarterly, and so on). Those operating within what we have loosely termed a Europeanist (T2) approach are likely to find their intellectual home within the parameters of journals such as Public Administration, West European Politics or Governance.

To highlight the role of journal editors (and reviewers) as intellectual gatekeepers and make a link between dominant traditions in the study of delegation and the (implicit or explicit) promotion of certain forms of knowledge by certain sections of the journals market is not the same as presenting an argument about intellectual manipulation and domination. Just as there are exceptions to every rule, it is possible to identify, for example, American journals – Administrative Theory & Praxis, Administration & Society – that publish articles that employ ‘non-traditional’ approaches (see, for example, Emmert and Crow 1988). However, at the broadest level, a link exists between traditions and outlets. Restated, certain traditions are conceptually and analytically tied, if not synonymous, with certain journals and as such a scholar operating within T1 is unlikely to find their submissions accepted by those journals associated with T3 (and vice versa). In this regard, Bertelli’s (2008) article in Political Studies represents a significant (and welcome) exception. However, this review does demonstrate the manner in which journal editors have the potential to confine the parameters of knowledge on which students draw; this may, without sensitivity and awareness, set in train a certain path dependency or in-built bias against certain traditions, approaches or methods.

So far this article has argued that at a relatively broad level it is possible to justify a typology exhibiting three specific traditions (see table 1, above). The critical element of this three-fold typology is its attempt to rebuff geographical epithets and instead offer a richer account of the manner in which the theories and methods deployed by scholars to study delegation have evolved both within and between countries. This typological endeavour is important because it provides a useful heuristic tool with the capacity to look beyond prosaic debates concerning the vaunted supremacy of certain approaches or the existence of social ‘facts’. More importantly, it seeks to demonstrate the layered quality of social knowledge and how the contributions of each tradition each in their own way contribute to our sum understanding of delegatory processes. More fundamentally, and by way of forging a sense of a shared enemy or weakness, it is possible to argue that all three traditions are united in their failure to study the logic of delegation and the power of ideas. In essence, each of the traditions has focused on what could be termed the politics of delegation (that is, the secondary consequences of delegation) and has, as a result, failed to focus attention on the politicization of delegation in terms of locating the basic logic of delegation back within the contours of public contestation. This is what is arguably missing from the study of delegation across all traditions.
WHAT IS MISSING FROM THE STUDY OF DELEGATION?

The modern state could not function without delegation. Functions and responsibilities are delegated to agencies, boards and commissions operating with a significant degree of autonomy. This, arguably, empowers governments to address a wide range of social issues simultaneously without having to be involved with the minutiae of day-to-day socio-political interactions. Delegation therefore provides a structural and esoteric capacity beyond the cognitive and physical limits of politicians. However, it also creates a number of largely secondary unintended consequences or ‘negative externalities’. These include issues associated with the following: (1) internal control and auditing; (2) external accountability and scrutiny; and (3) concerns related to patronage and corruption. However, in focusing on the politics of delegation it is possible to suggest that scholars have overlooked the existence of a number of broader macro-political themes which, taken together, demonstrate the need for the politicization of delegation.

The argument being made here is analogous to Argyris and Schön’s (1978) distinction between single-loop and double-loop learning and the role of ‘mental maps’. The former approach to organizational analysis focuses on the manner in which individuals study institutions and processes in order to detect or correct errors by assuming that certain ‘goals, values, plans and rules’ are given. Double-loop learning, by contrast, adopts a deeper more fundamental approach by questioning the governing variables themselves (that is, the dominant ideas, assumptions and values upon which decisions are made, institutions founded and policies designed). In essence, all three traditions so far examined have tended to exhibit single-loop learning and, as a result, the logic of delegation itself, rather than its consequences, needs to be the focus of critical political analysis in order to push the process back within the sphere of public contestation. Put slightly less forcefully and possibly more accurately, although the interpretive approach within T3 and the post-modernist approach within T1 do clearly emphasize the role and force of dominant ideas they have not yet been applied to the specific topic of delegation.

A similar argument can be made in relation to rational choice theory and public choice theory. These theoretical approaches remain hugely influential in the design of modern management relationships, and also in the scholarly analysis of incentives and sanctions within public administration. And yet, as Hay (2004, p. 39) powerfully argues, rational choice-theoretic positions are themselves imbued with an ‘ingenious, paradoxical and seldom acknowledged structuralism and a series of analytical assumptions incapable of capturing the complexity and contingency of political systems’. There are few studies that seek to explicitly challenge the ideas and assumptions associated with rational choice as they pertain specifically to the logic of delegation. To suggest that interpretive or post-modern theories and methods may provide a way of untangling and teasing apart the role and power of dominant ideas which fuel delegatory processes should not be interpreted as a departure from the pluralistic arguments of this article. It is an acknowledgement that studying specific elements of the politics of delegation – in this case the role and power of ideas – demand specific theories and methods that can then contribute to the overall sum of knowledge.

Within this body of knowledge the issue of contingency is central. In the 21st century, with only a few dissenting voices, the logic of delegation appears almost beyond dispute: it has very nearly become an ‘essentially uncontested’ concept within contemporary conceptions of good governance. Global institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, advocate large-scale delegation and hiving-off as a central aspect
of building state capacity, maximizing efficiency and ensuring market confidence. The ‘new governance agenda’ within the EU is also tied to the creation of a number of quasi-autonomous agencies (see Thatcher 2002). The logic of delegation has become so embedded that Marcussen (2006) argues in some policy areas it has become ‘apoliticized’ since anyone challenging the notion risks being immediately labelled irrational. And yet the benefits of delegation remain far from uncontested. Bertelli is correct to note that,

The administrative efficiency conception of the new governance, for example, creates incentives for parties that advocate efficiency reforms to make policy commitments through delegation to quangos. (2006b, p. 586; emphasis added)

The work of McNamara (2002), James (2003), and Van Thiel (2004), to draw on just a few examples from across the traditions identified above, questions the link between delegation and superior economic outcomes. This leads Peters and Pierre (2004) to suggest that the ‘Faustian bargain’ – a decline in democratic clarity in return for economic benefits – is delivering very little.

Consequently, the politicization of delegation emphasizes the existence of contingency. National politicians do enjoy choices in relation to whether to delegate specific services, in which form delegation should take place, how a proportionate balance should be achieved between independence and control, when to intervene and at what point to reinstitute direct ministerial control. These choices take on added emphasis when it is appreciated that delegation creates its own epistemic momentum through a process of deskilling. As the number of functions and responsibilities delegated to para-statal bodies operating at the periphery of the state increase, so the latter undermines its own intellectual capacity. Thereby it creates information asymmetries that weaken its bargaining position, reduce its holistic knowledge base and institutional memory, which, taken together, further decreases confidence in the direct delivery capacity of the state. As more functions drift across the ‘spectrum of autonomy’ (see Greve et al. 1999) the intellectual evisceration of the state may become acute. And yet there has been very little reasoned debate on this process or whether a residual number of core functions and responsibilities should be maintained beyond the grasp of delegatory forces. Delegation is therefore linked to a loss of confidence in politics, the state and the potential for collective action. Furthermore the belief that numerous functions and responsibilities should be delegated well beyond the direct control of elected politicians became particularly influential since the end of the 20th century. Thus, Alan S. Blinder (1997, p. 115), former Vice-Chairman of the Board of Governors of the US Federal Reserve, has argued,

Those who say that big government is the problem have got it wrong. The real problem is that the government is pushed and pulled by interest groups and partisan politicking, often at the public’s expense. . . . Shift responsibility for things like tax from the politicians to experts; besides knowing more they work in a politics free-zone. Tossing the ball to the technocrats won’t weaken democracy. . . . but it will produce better results.

Within European governance, the influential European Policy Forum (2001, p. 11) has praised the ‘depoliticisation of many government decisions’ as ‘one of the most promising developments since the last war’, while in the UK the New Labour government has explicitly based its approach to statecraft on the merits of depoliticization (see Flinders and Buller 2006). Depoliticization, however, arguably represents an acutely pessimistic response to the challenges of modern governance. The tactics and tools of
depoliticization conspire to narrow the realm of conventional politics while locating the drivers for this process beyond the control of national politicians. Hay (2007) therefore isolates depoliticization as a key variable in explaining contemporary levels of public disenchantment with politics.

To call for the politicization of delegation is therefore to work within the parameters of Habermas’ (1996, p. 62) work on depoliticization and the public sphere, ‘the depoliticisation of the mass of the population and the decline of the public realm as a political institution are components of a system of domination that tends to exclude practical questions from public discussion’. These notions of domination and exclusion take us back to this article’s emphasis on disciplinary traditions, intellectual gatekeepers and the benefits of a pluralistic approach to theory and methods and a layered conception of knowledge. As Easton et al. (1995, p. 1) emphasize, if we can obtain some understanding of the internal and external forces that have shaped a discipline, that very knowledge may help us to transcend whatever constraints or blinkers those forces may impose on contemporary analyses and thereby achieve a deeper and more nuanced understanding of political phenomena. It is in re-positioning the existence of choice regarding delegation within the sphere of public contestation, and thereby a more optimistic view on the potentialities of collective action, with which this article has been principally concerned, and where scholars working within and across all traditions should arguably focus their attention.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to thank Anthony Bertelli, Sandra Van Thiel, Melvin Dubnick, Oliver James, Mark Thatcher and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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Date received 19 June 2008. Date accepted 22 December 2008.