

## Pluralism - Why Bother?

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### Issues to explore

- What is pluralism?
- Types of pluralism;
- What type of pluralism are we trying to achieve?
- What are the barriers to developing a pluralistic outlook as a researcher?
- What are the barriers to developing a more pluralistic form of economics?
- Why bother with pluralism?

### Science: Not the truth?

- "I believe that ideas, such as absolute correctness, absolute precision, finally valid truth etc., are illusions that should never find a place in science... This attractive feature in our thinking seems to me the greatest blessing bestowed on us by modern science. The belief to be the possessor of the one and only truth is the deepest root of all evil in the world".



Max Born, Nobel Prize for Science Winner, 1954

### Pluralism: common meanings

- Pluralism as a reflexive concept, discussed both in orthodox and heterodox economics, with multiple meanings and motivations;
- Pluralism versus plurality;
- Pluralism as a plurality of approaches at ontological, methodological, theoretical and ethical values;
- Dialogue between schools;
- Structured pluralism;
- Tolerance of different viewpoints;
- Eclecticism;
- Openness to new ideas;
- Acceptance of otherness;
- Relativism.

### Forms/Types of Pluralism

- The main thrust of pluralism: interest in truth, challenge of knowledge and science; with few exceptions (Hayek, Knight) economists have not been concerned with questions regarding knowledge, uncertainty or truth;
- **Methodological pluralism:** First form and the most frequent used both in economics and other social sciences;
- **Ontological pluralism:** advocates a plurality of worlds/realms;
- **Epistemic pluralism:** advocates a plurality of ways to justify claims of knowledge motivated by limited knowledge and uncertainty.

### Plurality (Maki, 1997: 38)

- Ontological plurality – world;
- Veristic plurality – truth;
- Intentional plurality – meaning;
- Theoretical plurality – theory;
- Linguistic plurality – language of formulating theories;
- Epistemological plurality – way of rationally justifying theories or beliefs in them;
- Pragmatic plurality – aim, question, problem;
- Methodological plurality – method, criterion, standard;
- Meta-methodological plurality – methodology;
- Axiological plurality – value;
- Ethical plurality – moral value;
- Ideological plurality – ideology.

### What type of pluralism are we trying to achieve?(1)

- Pluralism does not advance the acceptance of all theoretical and methodological frameworks concerning certain issues/ phenomena in economics: relativism versus pluralism;
- Pluralism in the context of Kuhnian incommensurability of views and paradigms to be rejected.

### What type of pluralism are we trying to achieve?(2)

- Pluralism that does not imply a relativist attitude of 'anything goes';
- Pluralism that implies progress and structure at some level whilst licensing plurality at other levels;
- Pluralism that allows criticism and conversation between economists.

### Pluralism, fragmentation, integration: example

- Bigo & Negru (2008) concerned with plurality of approaches in economics and social sciences, abundance of contributions (fragmentation), and absence of conversation;
- Fragmentation results from both non-resolution (disagreement) and non-assembly (specialization). Scholarly practice and the existence of disciplinary boundaries seem to favour fragmentation;
- Pluralism cannot exist without criticism;
- Proposed a concept ontologically-reflexive pluralism to depict integration of views by recognizing pluralism;
- A view of pluralism that allows integration, has a structure/coherence at some level whilst licensing plurality at other levels.

### Implications of a reflexive form of pluralism

- This will enable to see where differences are presupposed, held and defended; why differences in methodology might arise or presupposed as regards the social realm;
- Whether the oppositions are less fundamental than previous thought; locating conflicting views in terms of epistemic specificity and their origin; etc. uncovering differences in mechanisms and state of play.

### What are the barriers to achieving a pluralistic outlook as a researcher?

- Mainstream education and the lack of exposure to alternative perspectives;
- Personal skills such as lack of intellectual curiosity, open-mindedness, etc.

### Economics as a pluralistic discipline - barriers

- schism in the profession between modelers and non-modelers; political issues and dominance conducive to a lack of engagement between ideas/schools, lower rankings for heterodox journals;
- Heterodoxy not taken seriously anymore;
- Homogeneity in teaching and content of discipline (lack of external shocks perhaps?)
- Lack of methodological pluralism.



### Why bother with pluralism?

- Because our knowledge of the world is limited, uncertain and incomplete;
- Because the quest for confirmationism is an illusion;
- Because of a complex and open nature of reality;
- Relativity of values and institutions - historical, geographical and cultural pluralism;
- Because pluralism implies open-mindedness and opposition to dogmas...