

Why Should *I* Adopt Pluralism?¹

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Abstract: Heterodox economists have come under suspicion of what Giere (2006) termed ‘strategic pluralism’ [Van Bouwel (2004), Sent (2003, 2006)]. Stealthily, they might actually be what Garnett(2006) called ‘paradigm warriors’. The goal of this contribution is not so much to judge the accused, but rather to assess the accusations. They seem to lean heavily on the claim that an advocate of pluralism should be a pluralist himself. Though this assertion sounds like a truism, I will argue against it. I maintain that pluralism is a desideratum at the aggregate level, but inappropriate at the individual level. More specifically, this contribution clarifies the notion of pluralism by introducing an often neglected but crucial distinction between different levels at which pluralism can be situated. From within this framework, I argue why paradigm warriors and strategic pluralists need not undermine pluralism but can indeed even strengthen it.

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1. Introduction

If the most perplexing thing in the world is a lack of theory, the second most perplexing must be an abundance of it. The latter is what we witness in economics today. A broad range of schools strive for scholarly attention: neoclassical, social, feminist, institutionalist, Sraffian, Marxian, Austrian, Post Keynesian, etc. They not only differ in their answers but also in the way they frame their questions, rendering an unbiased comparison extremely difficult, if not impossible. This issue is clearly not economics-specific. Whether it is quantum mechanics, international relations theory or indeed even forest management, diversity is ubiquitous across the spectrum of the sciences. Even highly formalized sciences like logic and mathematics are divided into different schools of thought, debating fundamental issues such as the acceptability of certain kinds of inconsistencies or the existence of numbers. This strongly suggests that dissensus is not a transient matter. I consider it to be a stylized fact about scientific research and as such the related issue of pluralism becomes of key importance. I take pluralism to be an epistemic position which acknowledges the validity of different possible perspectives on reality in an active way, which means that they are not only tolerated but also taken into account when goals of knowledge (prediction, problem-solving, truth, curiosity, policy advice, funding decision,...) are to be achieved.

Given the ubiquity of divergent views, it is indispensable to develop strategies to handle them without halting or distorting knowledge production. How to manage this multiplicity of views constitutes the basic problem at hand. Of course, discrimination among views is often best dealt with by scholars from within the respective disciplines themselves. But given its common occurrence in virtually any science, an across-the-board story remains to be told. What are the causes of pluralism? Does it result from the nature of the world or from the way we investigate that world? How should scientists manage diversity? What does pluralism mean for science policy? What can a general analysis contribute to the solution of discipline-specific problems of theory choice?

Such general questions are not specific for philosophy of science. Among others, heterodox economists have shown to be specifically keen on the notion of pluralism. So much so that they have come under suspicion [Van Bouwel (2004), Sent (2006), Giere (2006)] of what Ronald Giere has termed *strategic pluralism*. It refers to a pluralism advocated as “primarily just a strategic move in the game of trying to dominate a field or profession. Those in the minority proclaim the virtues of pluralism in an effort to legitimate their opposition to a dominant point of view. But one can be pretty sure that, if the insurgent group were itself ever to become dominant, talk of pluralism would subside and they would become every bit as monistic as those whom they had replaced.”² This would mean that the aims of heterodox calls for pluralism are actually no different from those of what Garnett (2006) called *paradigm warriors*, i.e. those “committed to the paradigmist approach, viewing heterodox

² Giere (2006), p.40

economics as primarily a search for demarcation criteria that would render heterodox economics distinct from and superior to orthodox (mainstream) economics.”³

This contribution does not aim at judging the accused, but rather to assess the accusations. The assessment turns around the general question of how to manage divergence of views, a matter intricately connected to pluralism. Rather than getting tangled up in the controversy, my main concern lies with the very concept of pluralism itself. I introduce a crucial but often neglected distinction between different levels at which pluralism can be situated. From this framework I explain why paradigm warriors and strategic pluralists need not undermine pluralism but can indeed strengthen it. Basically, my argument is the following. The criticism tacitly assumes that an advocate of pluralism should be a pluralist himself. Though this sounds like a truism, I will argue against it. I maintain that pluralism is a desideratum at the aggregate level, but not necessarily at the individual level. *We* should be pluralists, but not *me* and neither should *you*. I argue that an individual scholar should take stance, i.e. come up with an original, robust and consistent position from which he develops and defends his results. A personal stance, biased as it can be, is the only way to obtain sufficient informative guidance for question-resolving inquiry.

2. Framing pluralism

I have introduced dissensus as a stylized fact about scientific practice. It could be argued that dissensus does not deserve this status because, for instance, dissensus might swiftly be eliminated by engaging in rational constructive debate. But this misses the point. Divergence might cease for a certain problem, but it will never cease for science in general. Since divergence in this sense will always be around, it is not sufficient to look for ways to bring different views together. Most of the time the real problem scholars will face is how to manage divergence *in the meantime*. Only a small group of specialists are concerned with fundamental discussions that could possibly eliminate divergence with respect to a certain issue, while a lot of scholars in fundamental and applied research use assumptions about the issue on which divergence exists in their own research. This is where science is no longer a matter of discriminating between or reconciling views, but of managing diversity.

Looking at pluralism as a way to manage diversity offers a fresh angle on the issue. Firstly, as noted above, it allows to treat dissensus as exogenous. Most contributions on pluralism seem to focus on ways to make different views somehow compatible. Treating dissensus as exogenous allows us to skip this and pass right on to the problem of managing diversity, which, as I noted in the previous paragraph, I believe to be of much greater importance. Secondly, it stresses the importance of dissensus (or diversity or divergence of views - I use these interchangeably), because it is exactly this which triggers pleas for pluralism. They are intricately related and as such they offer a fruitful angle from which to discuss pluralism. Fact of the matter is that diversity is actually not supposed to appear. Assuming the world is

³ Garnett (2006), p.522

consistent, as most will concede, there is one and only one truth out there. So from this monist ontology, as knowledge advances and science comes closer to the Truth, there should be a trend toward increasing consensus. But this kind of linear view of an ever growing body of knowledge and consensus is not what we observe. Perhaps for ideal observers it would be, but as it turns out, diversity is a stylized fact about science. The literature offers a number of explanations for this, which can be seen as causes of dissensus.⁴ I

- 1) **Underdetermination:** Theories are never completely determined by the data they are built upon. The most famous instance of this is Hume's problem of induction, formulated by Born (1949) as '... no observation or experiment, however extended, can give more than a finite number of repetitions'; therefore, 'the statement of a law - B depends on A - always transcends experience. Yet this kind of statement is made everywhere and all the time, and sometimes from scanty material.'⁵
- 2) **Ontology:** The complexity of the world necessitates pluralism. This argument has been put forth in economics, e.g. Caldwell (2004) "Some may agree with Lawson and me that pluralism makes good sense; the complex nature of social reality may also mean that it is inevitable."; in philosophy of science, e.g. Giere (1999) "This great complexity implies, I think, that it is impossible to obtain an adequate overall picture of science from any one perspective. [...] The only adequate overall pictures will be collages of pictures from various perspectives."⁶; as well as *in tempore non suspecto*, with a paraphrase of Voltaire: "in a subject as difficult as economics, a state of doubt may not be very comfortable, but a state of certainty would be ridiculous."⁷
- 3) **Cognition:** Conversely it is argued that it is not the complexity of the world but the limitations of our own mind that necessitate us to simplify and specialize. Theories and models typically highlight a number of salient features while obscuring others lest they become as complex as reality itself and hence uninformative (like a map on a 1-1 scale). Our representations of the world are thus inevitably partial.
- 4) **Situatedness:** There is no view from nowhere. Every scholar necessarily occupies a certain place in the world historically, geographically, socially,... Shapin (1982) writes "Reality seems capable of sustaining more than one account given of it, depending upon the goals of those who engage with it." Hacking (1999) calls this the *contingency thesis*.
- 5) **Experiential diversity:** Everyone has a unique set of experiences. According to Rescher (1993) this leads to a perspectival rationalism in which one person can conclude p and another ~p with both claims being rationally warranted against their respective sets of experiences. Different experiences also leads to learning different languages. The impact this has is debatable⁸; the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis for instance

⁴Of course it is extremely difficult to be exhaustive here. I can do no more than present what I believe is a representative sample of the literature. These points elaborate on a similar enumeration by Van Bouwel(2005), p.1

⁵ Born(1949), p.6 as quoted in Popper(1992), p.54

⁶ Giere(1999), p.28

⁷ A paraphrase of Voltaire, quoted from Kurz, H. D. and Salvadori, N. (2000), pp. 235-258

⁸ For a classic critique of conceptual relativism, see Donald Davidson (1973-1974)

states that there is a systematic relationship between the grammatical categories of the language a person speaks and how that person both understands the world and behaves in it. In other words, different groups of people use different conceptual schemes.

- 6) **Pragmatism:** Different epistemic goals and interests constitute different perspectives on the world [Kitcher (2001), pp.55-62]. Explanations are affected by what kind of an answer you want from it, e.g. 'technical' interests of planning, prediction and control; 'practical' interests of mutual understanding; and 'emancipatory' interests of liberation, freedom from domination and autonomy. Weber and Van Bouwel (2002) show how this can be understood for the social sciences.
- 7) **Path dependence:** Knowledge has a history; it is not produced from nothing. The past determines how an issue is conceptualized in the present. Past problems for instance determine which instruments have been devised, which institutions have been set up and how they work. But also scholars have a knowledge history. Their past research interests, education, jobs, contacts, ... As such, the past affects both future paths and current stances.

3. A first cut

Now that I have set out the scope of the problem and listed a number of causes of diversity, it is time for a first cut at the problem of how to handle diversity.⁹ I start with the two limiting alternatives: to accept all views simultaneously (syncretism) and to accept none (scepticism). Although these views are extremes and thus rarely held, they will prove to be useful beacons.

(1) *Syncretism* is an all-embracing position that comes down to accepting a conjunction of the alternatives. As there is something to be said for each of the contenders, judgment is suspended and all are kind-heartedly adopted as constituting the sum of our knowledge of the subject. The problem with this position is that it runs aground on its own inconsistencies. The answer to any question would be both yes and no, rendering syncretism ultimately uninformative. You can't have your cake and eat it too.

(2) Perhaps a more cynical response is the one which sees the alternatives as cancelling each other out. The *sceptic* stands perplexed when confronted with the multitude of views. While the syncretist still made a decision (be it an empty one), the sceptic refrains completely. If all inquirers were to adopt this stance, science itself would come to a full stop. Their situation would be comparable to that of the ass of Buridan, the poor creature that starved while sitting between two equally appealing stacks of hay. Scepticism seems to be driven by a precautionary principle ('in dubio, abstine'¹⁰) that leaves its advocates not only unspoiled but also in ignorance.

⁹ I owe the distinction between syncretism, scepticism and relativism to Rescher (1993)

¹⁰ A principle originating from medicine, meaning 'abstain when in doubt'.

Both the sceptic and the syncretist have a safe but unfruitful stance. By exclusion, it follows that the only alternative left to reach an informative stance is to somehow get back to one coherent doctrine. Choice is required after all. So let's presume a choice is made just for its own sake.

(3) This leads to *relativism*. The relativist resigns himself to the necessity of choice, but denies the existence of any rational ground for picking one alternative over another. In the end the relativist is indifferent toward the alternatives; he only chooses because he feels he has to. His commitment is contingent on taste, culture, history, luck, etc., so it can vary independently from good arguments for or against it. It is thus difficult to take this position serious from a scientific point of view, since arguments in favor of it are self-defeating. It follows that making an unwarranted choice is not sufficient.

This first cut already enables to derive a few useful hints of how a credible view on the management of theoretical diversity should look like. From (1) and (2) I inferred that choice cannot be dispensed with. Additionally, from (3) I concluded that choice will somehow need to be warranted in order to avoid the quagmire of relativism. So a first general conclusion is that we need to make a warranted choice when faced with divergent views. This creates two notorious problems:

- 1) How can we be pluralists if we need to make a choice? Pluralism's inability to choose leads its critics to declare that it is *self-defeating* because it assumes its own exclusive truth.
- 2) How can choice be warranted if multiple divergent views are rationally justifiable (from the epistemic context as sketched in the seven points of §2)? It is argued by critics of pluralism that this lack of warrant associated with pluralism leads to an *anything goes*.

4. A matter of levels

Already after a first cut, the problem of how to manage diversity seems to run aground on its own assumptions. It was shown that the only way to avoid syncretism, scepticism and relativism (which I evaluated as unfruitful positions) was to make a warranted choice, an option that ran into two serious problems. From there it seems as if there can be no pluralism without syncretism, scepticism or relativism and that as such every fruitful research naturally slides back into monism.

This, I contend, is a false impression. What this tension points to is not so much a flaw of pluralism, but rather a failure to distinguish between two different levels at which pluralism can be situated: the individual and the aggregate level. I will show that this multi-level distinction gives the notion of pluralism more conceptual clarity.

Pluralism was characterized as follows: “Pluralism is to acknowledge the validity of different possible perspectives on reality in an active way, which means that they are not only tolerated but also taken into account when goals of knowledge (prediction, problem-solving, truth, curiosity, policy advice, funding decision,...) are to be achieved.” The introduction of levels actually splits this up into an individual version and an aggregate version. The latter says that diversity of views should be respected and accommodated at the level of groups of scientists, conference organizers, editorial boards, science policy, etc. The former looks at pluralism from the standpoint of the individual scientist: “Should *I* adopt pluralism?”, “Should *I* mark alternative views merely as plausible or actually endorse them?”.

To my knowledge, this distinction is at least not frequently being made in the literature on economic methodology. Here are a few examples that explicitly ignore it:

*“[...] academic pluralism has social as well as individual prerequisites. It **requires methodological awareness and tolerance by individual scholars** as well as a set of institutional conditions embodied in ‘the organization of the academic community, how individuals operate within it, [and] its relationships to other communities and to the society at large.’”¹¹*

*“Accepting pluralism on epistemological grounds requires from everyone taking part a sacrifice. One must surrender the dream . . . which I suspect has infected **each of us** from time to time, that of believing that our particular approach to or tradition of economics is or could become **THE** economic truth. Once people sacrifice this conceit and put their heads and good-wills together, many things become possible.”¹²*

*“[Pluralism is a] positive valuing of a diversity of views in the minimal sense that **one** who is so committed would not want to reduce the number of available narratives or views”¹³*

The introduction of levels removes the apparent tension associated with the two problems. The first problem occurred when pluralism appeared to be incompatible with the choice for one particular view, leading to the criticism that pluralism is self-defeating. When looked at from a two-level perspective this problem disappears because holding a stance (on the individual level) does not disqualify diversity (at the aggregate level) any longer. Hence, pluralism on the aggregate level is not self-defeating.

Now that it has been shown that choice does not preclude diversity, the question remains how it is possible for that choice to be warranted in the face of the defined insolubility of divergence, thus avoiding an *anything goes*. The introduction of an individual and an

¹¹ Backhouse (2001), p.166 –my bold-

¹² Fullbrook (2005) –my bold-

¹³ Hargreaves-Heap (2001), p.356 –my bold-

aggregate level once again offers a solution. The way to proceed is to note that the inconclusiveness between views is an inconclusiveness at the aggregate level. To make this point I start by referring back to the causes of divergence of views I have enumerated earlier. Apart from an ontological cause, a cognitive cause and underdetermination I mentioned situatedness, pragmatics, path dependency and experiential diversity. Interestingly, in terms of the individual/aggregate-distinction, all seven obtain at the aggregate level, but only the first three obtain at the individual level. While situatedness, pragmatics, path dependency and experiential diversity cause divergence because they have a myriad of possible interpretations at the aggregate level, the multiplicity collapses into singularity at the individual level: it is *your* situation, *your* epistemic interest, *your* path and *your* experience.¹⁴ As such, those four factors no longer cause divergence on the individual level. This means that the indeterminacy on the aggregate level is much greater than on the individual level. Hence, what might not be a warranted choice at the aggregate level might still be one on the individual level. The result is a solution for the second problem. Choice can be warranted (on the individual level) in the face of insolvability (at the aggregate level).

5. How to manage diversity?

Divergence of views is a basic feature of the practice of science (stylized fact, §1). It is therefore indispensable to manage it in a way that does not impede on knowledge production. The three strategies I have treated in §3 did not meet this condition. However, they did suggest that a credible view on how to manage diversity could be obtained by allowing a warranted choice. The paradoxes associated with this statement proved to be solvable on the condition that a multi-level version of pluralism was introduced. It led to two solutions. Firstly, holding a stance on the individual level does not disqualify diversity at the aggregate level. Secondly, choice can be warranted on the individual level due to reduced indeterminacy, in the face of insolvability at the aggregate level. What emerges is that warranted choice requires a pluralism that is confined to the aggregate level.

So in the end the pluralist must choose between warranted choice and individual level pluralism. In other words, the cost of individual level pluralism is warranted choice. But is it worth it? I will show it isn't. This assessment will proceed in two stages. First I give three reasons to prefer warranted choice over individual level pluralism. Then I take away a number of fears that could be associated with dropping individual level pluralism.

5.1. *The benefit of warranted choice individual level pluralism*

I have already shown how warranted choice enables to resolve two notorious problems associated with pluralism. A pluralism enabling warranted choice will hence be more sound. Secondly, it seems to me that one of the main problems related to individual level pluralism is that inconsistency is lost as a tool. While this is acceptable on the aggregate level because in

¹⁴ Epistemic interests might also vary on the underlying level of different problems an individual is faced with, but the point is that singularity obtains when an individual is faced with a certain problem or view.

the end our knowledge is bound to be perspectival (because of the seven reasons for divergence in §2), giving up this tool at the individual level seems too high a cost. This is what Hodgson(2001) has in mind when he insists that

*“There is much to be said for tolerance of many and even antagonistic scientific research programmes within an academic discipline or university. But we should not tolerate the existence of inconsistent ideas within our own heads. The policy towards science must be pluralistic and tolerant, but science itself must be intolerant of what it regards as falsehood [...]”*¹⁵

A final argument for warranted choice is a transcendental one. It might be brought in that aggregation is only possible if different well-elaborated perspectives are already available at the aggregate level, making monism at some lower level a condition of possibility for higher level pluralism.

5.2. Dropping individual level pluralism

Loss of scope?

From a statement like that of Kurz and Salvadori (2000) one would be inclined to conclude this is not a good idea.

*“[T]o seek dominance for one theory over all the others with the possible result that all the rival theories are extinguished amounts to advocating scientific regress.”*¹⁶

Of course, Kurz and Salvadori have a genuine concern when they suggest that making a choice limits the scope of research. However, I compare it to the point the dove has when it states that it could fly much faster, if only the wind wouldn't hinder it so much. Of course, should the air disappear it would not fly faster but drop dead on the ground.¹⁷ The point is that boundaries not only restrict but also define. For the individual scholar, taking stance offers a way to cut a path through the desert of data. It provides him with a lens through which he can see; and although every lens has its distortions, without it he is blind. More technically, taking a personal stance, boosted by increased determinacy on the individual level but biased as it can be, seems to offer a unique way to obtain more informative guidance in inquiry. The increased determinacy at least partially renders individual pluralism obsolete. Also, it is important to note that prospects for individual pluralism are limited by the fact that personal bias isn't always a matter of choice for the individual. Limits of scope are often not a personal choice at all. One's proper situatedness, epistemic interests, path dependency and experiential diversity determine one's perspective. As such, the individual is 'trapped' within it. It is impossible, for example, to *have had* a different history. Thirdly, individuals voicing their preferences loud and clear improves market efficiency. Although I am wary of pushing the

¹⁵ Hodgson (2001), p.35

¹⁶ Kurz, H. D. and Salvadori, N. (2000), p.37

¹⁷ “The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, might imagine that its flight would be still easier in empty space.” Kant (2003), p.47

analogy between science and markets too far, I believe a point remains to be made for the increased transparency which results from taking stance. In this way, individuals taking a warranted choice can actually boost compatibility rather than limit it.

Isolationism

One still might bring in that making too clear a choice is unacceptable, not from a scientific point of view but from a social perspective. How can a scientific community work efficiently if all scholars have their own private stance which they themselves feel to be perfectly justified? How can we foster compatibility and avoid isolationism? In other words, it remains to be shown how a community of autonomous scholars can add up to the scientific community we observe, with its divergence of views but not totally fragmented. Firstly, actively reacting against alternative views might be more useful than tacit tolerance. At least the former means both parties are still on speaking terms with each other, hence it might turn out to be more constructive to be a paradigm warrior than to be a tolerant pluralist. Secondly, no scientist can cover a whole discipline (cf. cognitive limitations argument, §2), so he will have to rely on the work of others and choose among their contributions in order to get a view of the whole. The isolation, if any, will thus be rather mild. New information will most often be woven into the fabric of the old. Thirdly, it was stated that knowledge production is mostly path dependent (cf. path dependence, §2). Scholars will mostly be choosing among frameworks of others instead of producing their own. A fourth factor that can be indicated which has less to do with knowledge than with group dynamics is the occurrence of herding-behavior. In any group, it is to be expected that a number of scholars will choose for the safety of the most common stance, no matter what their personal stance is. In sum, taking stance is mainly a matter of positioning oneself *within* the diversity of views already available in the community of scholars and as such it is to be expected that their individually taken positions will nonetheless cluster around a number of well-elaborated and incommensurable perspectives that already exist. Hence I believe that dropping individual pluralism does not lead to the extremes of isolationism. Indeed, the argument could even be turned upside down by stating that *not* taking stance on the individual level might lead to isolationism. Although I am wary of pushing the analogy between science and markets too far, a market works more efficient when ever participant voices his preferences loud and clear; only then can an optimal aggregation of needs take place. Similarly, I believe a point might be made for the increased transparency which results from taking stance. As such, individuals making a warranted choice can actually boost compatibility rather than limit it.

Implausibility

But if knowledge ultimately is perspectival, then why should individual scholars choose to take stance while at the same time realizing that their position is a priori at best only partially true? Firstly, as I pointed out earlier, the reasons why knowledge is perspectival are reduced at the individual level (from seven to three) and the resulting determinacy is not a matter of choice. It's not possible to *have had* another history. So given a perspectival knowledge the individual might still feel compelled to a position from his personal position. Secondly, there

is a difference between belief and pursuit.¹⁸ Kitcher(1990, p.8) notes that “what the community cares about is the distribution of pursuit not the distribution of belief”¹⁹. Hence it is possible to pursue a certain line while at the same time believing that knowledge is bound to be perspectival. Thirdly, it could be argued that scholars anticipate the benefits their stance will bring to the aggregate level (and it is at this higher level that the goals of science will ultimately need to be situated.²⁰) supported by the insight that individual specialization, independence and decentralization in the end often tend to offer better results at the aggregate level.²¹ In this way they exploit the advantages of taking stance on an individual level (such as reduced indeterminacy, transparency and the tool of inconsistency) while at the same time promoting aggregate results at the higher level.

5.3. Conclusion

In sum, I believe there to be good reasons to prefer warranted choice to individual pluralism. The cost for warranted choice turns out to be surprisingly low. The only explanation I can see why individual pluralism is still around is that it inadvertently sneaks into the discourse of well-meaning pluralists, perhaps because it is taken for granted as an integral part of the doctrine of pluralism. I hope to have shown here that it is not. A pluralist has little to lose and much to gain by dropping individual level pluralism. It might be inferred that many pluralists are holding a position that can easily be made much sounder without losing much of its power.

Perhaps the claim that an advocate of pluralism needn't be a pluralist himself becomes less controversial if formulated from a political point of view: to be an advocate of democracy does not rule out having a clear stance. Indeed, it is even expected of politicians to have a clear stance on the individual level. The extent to which a politician can also be an advocate of democracy²² is probably comparable to the extent to which a scientist can take stance at the individual level while still being an advocate of pluralism. So along with different levels come different roles to be played. The different roles a scientist will need to fulfil are then individual roles like writing articles, giving lectures, etc. and aggregate roles like editor, reviewer, conference organizer, dean, etc. Individuals have shown to be able to sustain both individual and aggregate roles (with their respective goals and rules of conduct) at the same time. Of course it would be naïve to assume that these different roles are totally separate if fulfilled by the same person, but all the same this is what people like prime ministers, judges and referees do. At the risk of pushing the analogy between science and politics too far, an individual level pluralist could perhaps even be seen as the scientific equivalent of a populist: someone who wishes to please everybody but whose policy perspectives are very restricted because he is tied to all kinds of incommensurable commitments.

¹⁸ introduced by Laudan(1977), pp.108-114

¹⁹ Kitcher (1990), p.8

²⁰ Or how else could the billions in tax money that are spent on research be accounted for?

²¹ This statement refers to the comprehensive body of literature on collective decision making and collective action. A number of caveats are in order here. For example, a good method of aggregation is required for this mechanism to work.

²² In line with Voltaire's famous quote: “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”

A general lesson to be drawn is that the shortest way to reach a desideratum at the higher level is not necessarily to desire it at the individual level. Like individual level pluralism in politics leads not to democracy but to populism, I have contended that individual pluralism in science might not be the best way to reach aggregate pluralism. This principle is most simply illustrated by the prisoner's dilemma: both prisoners do the most rational thing on the individual level but end up with a suboptimal outcome.

As a guideline for practice I infer that advocates of pluralism should not bother trying to convince individual scientists of adopting pluralism in their own research nor blame them for not doing so. Instead, from the point of view I have advocated here, the true challenge for pluralists is to concentrate their efforts toward designing the aggregate structures in such a way that they reflect the diversity at the individual level.

Finally, it should be noted that the sketch of pluralism I have presented here has only set out a few beacons, namely those which I thought were useful for the purpose at hand. Many great challenges concerning pluralism have remained unmentioned; perhaps the biggest of them all is to get a clearer view on aggregation and how it actually proceeds or should proceed.²³

6. Strategic pluralists and paradigm warriors

So far I have mostly been concerned with outlining a specific version of pluralism. With this theoretical framework now in place, the stage is set for an assessment of the controversy about strategic pluralists and paradigm warriors. The former has been introduced by Giere(2006). It refers to a pluralism advocated as “primarily just a strategic move in the game of trying to dominate a field or profession. Those in the minority proclaim the virtues of pluralism in an effort to legitimate their opposition to a dominant point of view. But one can be pretty sure that, if the insurgent group were itself ever to become dominant, talk of pluralism would subside and they would become every bit as monistic as those whom they had replaced.”²⁴ The latter I have drawn from Garnett(2006), meaning those “committed to the paradigmist approach, viewing heterodox economics as primarily a search for demarcation criteria that would render heterodox economics distinct from and superior to orthodox (mainstream) economics.”²⁵

The main concern here is how these are assessed. Ronald Giere states: “This strategic pluralism has nothing to do with metaphysics or epistemology, and everything to do with

²³It might be inferred from not tackling this issue that I implicitly assume the view that the individual level simply adds up to the aggregate level. However, this bottom-up view is not self-evident. For example the aggregate might also influence the individual; this is suggested in the last paragraph where I state “taking stance is mainly a matter of positioning oneself *within* the diversity of views already available in the community of scholars”. To address this issue thoroughly is not necessary for the purpose at hand; it will however be taken up in future publications as it is intricately related to the distinction I have introduced.

²⁴ Giere(2006), p.40

²⁵ Garnett(2006), p.522

professional power and dominance.”²⁶ Van Bouwel (2005) adds: “Here [in the case of strategic pluralism], pluralism is being used as a kind of social lever, and we might question whether this motivation represents a *really* pluralistic stance [...] or whether it will eventually lead to monism.”²⁷ And Sent(2003) calls strategic pluralism “against the spirit of pluralism”²⁸. Garnett(2006), for his part, complains that: “leading heterodox economists (including some who profess to be pluralists) are still committed to the paradigmist approach, [while] heterodox economists – indeed, academic economics at large – would be better served by an egalitarian pluralism that is committed to intellectual tolerance and diversity as well as to capabilities-enhancing reforms in economic education, scholarship, and professional development [...]”²⁹

It should be clear by now that strategic pluralists and paradigm warriors are looked at with great suspicion by fellow pluralists. It is assumed that such an attitude undermines the sincerity of their calls for pluralism, for how can anyone advocate pluralism without being a pluralist himself? So the implicit rule on which these suspicions are based is that advocates of pluralism should be pluralists themselves. However, in the previous I have shown that this rule is not as straightforward as it looks. In fact I have even argued against it, stating that a difference needs to be made between the individual and the aggregate level. Decomposing this rule using the multi-level distinction points out that “An advocate of pluralism (e.g. in the academy)...” is a statement intended for the aggregate level. “... should be a pluralist himself (i.e. in his own head).” is a statement at the individual level. In other words, saying that advocates of pluralism should be pluralists themselves conflates the individual/aggregate distinction. As I have shown, there is no necessary connection between aggregate level pluralism and individual level pluralism. Indeed I have even argued that pluralism is much more sound if it drops individual level pluralism. I therefore contend that it is perfectly acceptable for advocates of pluralism to be no pluralists themselves and hence my assessment of the above-mentioned accusations is that they are misguided.

Ideally it might be called for that scholars talking about pluralism systematically make explicit this multi-level distinction, though this will probably prove too laborious. I do hope to have shown that the line of criticism against certain pluralists which consists of showing that they are stealthy monists should be treated with more care, for its validity is not as straightforward as it seems. Also, I hope to have made a clear case for a more refined concept of pluralism that might inform future contributions on the topic. For that matter, Rob Garnett is still right when he noted that “Pluralism remains an undertheorized topic in economics [...]”³⁰

²⁶ Giere(2006), p.40

²⁷ Van Bouwel(2005), p.2

²⁸ Sent(2003), p.3

²⁹ Garnett(2006), p.522

³⁰ Garnett(2006), p.527

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