

Why Should I Adopt Pluralism?

Rogier De Langhe

Centre for Logic and Philosophy of Science

Ghent University (UGent)

Blandijnberg 2, B-9000 Gent, Belgium.

Rogier.DeLanghe@Ugent.be

Abstract: If the most perplexing thing in the world is a lack of theory, the second most perplexing must be an abundance of it. This contribution clarifies the notion of pluralism by introducing an often neglected but crucial distinction between different levels at which pluralism can be situated. It intends to provide a framework for scholars dealing with the question how to manage the divergence of views they are confronted with.

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?

I introduce a crucial but often neglected distinction between different levels at which pluralism can be situated. From this framework I address the general question of how to manage divergence of views, a matter intricately connected to pluralism. Basically, my argument is the following. 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. Most contributions on pluralism seem to focus on ways to make different views somehow compatible, believing that this will enable dialogue and new insights. Considering dissensus as a given allows us to skip this and pass right on to the problem of managing diversity, an aspect of pluralism I believe to be of much greater importance to practitioners in the field.

Interestingly, dissensus (or diversity or divergence of views - I use these interchangeably) is actually not supposed to appear. If there's only one world out there, as most will concede, there should be a trend toward increasing consensus as knowledge advances and science comes closer to the Truth,. But this kind of linear view of an ever growing body of knowledge and consensus is not what we observe. As it turns out, diversity is a stylized fact about science. The literature offers a number of explanations for this gap between one world and the multiplicity of views. These might be seen as causes of dissensus.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.”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: 28) “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.”; 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.”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.

Situatedness: There is no view from nowhere. Every scholar necessarily occupies a certain place in the world historically, geographically, socially,... Shapin (1982: 4) 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*.

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 $\sim p$ 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 debatable⁴; the linguistic relativity hypothesis for instance suggests that differences in categorisation of the world can lead to a different perception of the world. In other words, people speaking different languages might have different world views.

Pragmatism: Different goals and interests constitute different perspectives on the world (Kitcher, 2001: 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.

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 .⁵ 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'⁶) that leaves its advocates not only unspoiled but also in ignorance.

Both the sceptic and the syncretist have a safe but unfruitful stance. Since the options of accepting all and rejecting all can nothing but be rejected, it follows that the only alternative left to reach an informative stance is to make a selection after all. Now let's presume we do this in the most minimalist of ways, making a choice just for its own sake (e.g. by flipping a coin).

(3) This leads to a very extreme form of *relativism*.⁷ This extreme relativist resigns himself to the necessity of choice, but denies the existence of any 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 varies independently from good arguments for or against it. He has no tool whatsoever to convince others of his stance, except for his all-encompassing indifference. More importantly, he has no reason for a protracted exploration of a particular point of view, for the perspective he holds might change with every coin flip. An arbitrary choice is thus not sufficient, not for the scholar himself nor for his colleagues. So we need something more; some kind of a warrant⁸.

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 extreme relativism. So a first general conclusion is that we need to make some kind of 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 pluralism claiming its own truth is a very un-pluralist thing to do .
- 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 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 some warranted choice, but this apparently contradicts with the very nature of pluralism. As a consequence, it seems as if every fruitful research will need to retreat into monism in order to avoid an unfruitful position characterized by self-defeat and "anything goes."

This, I contend, is a false impression. What this contradiction points to is not so much a flaw in the concept of pluralism itself, but rather a failure on the part of theoreticians 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 solves the two problems and 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. 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 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 seven 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. The reason why situatedness, pragmatics, path dependency and experiential diversity caused divergence was that when scholars are aggregated, the result is that a multiplicity of different situations, interests, paths and experiences come together. However, from the point of view of an individual scholar, this multiplicity collapses: it is *your* situation, *your* epistemic interest, *your* path and *your* experience.⁹ As such, contrary to the aggregate level where all seven factors mentioned are causes of dissensus, from the point of view of the individual scholar these latter four factors stop causing divergence. This means that the individual has more tools available to make a warranted choice. It is this additional determination which provides leeway for a warranted choice at the individual level even if this warrant is not available at the aggregate level.¹⁰ From the individual perspective a choice might be made on grounds not available at the aggregate 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, section one). It is therefore indispensable to manage it in a way that does not impede on knowledge production. The three strategies I have treated in section three 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 two problems associated with this statement could be countered by introducing a multi-level version of pluralism, leading to the solution that holding a stance on the individual level does not disqualify diversity at the aggregate level; and choice can be warranted on the individual level due to reduced indeterminacy, in the face of insolvability at the aggregate level. Warranted choice can go hand in hand with pluralism on the condition that pluralism is confined to the aggregate level. In other words, the cost of warranted choice is individual level pluralism.

Note that the framework I've sketched only points out the trade-offs that obtain. Whether or not we actually want to give up individual level pluralism for warranted choice is something that remains to be shown separately. This assessment will proceed in two stages. First I give five 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 benefits of warranted choice at the individual level

More sound: 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.

More realistic: The naïve assumption that the parts need to be pluralist in order for the whole to be pluralist is abandoned; social systems are not just the sum of their parts.

Best of both worlds: Warranted choice at the individual level allows one to exploit the increased determinacy at the individual level while retaining the benefits of diversity.

Transparency: Individuals voicing their preferences loud and clear improves market efficiency. Clear stances result in an increased transparency, actually boosting compatibility rather than limiting it.

Condition of possibility: For pluralism to be possible, different well-elaborated perspectives are already presupposed, which makes the presence of different separate but coherent views at some lower level a condition of possibility for higher level pluralism.

5.2. Costs of dropping individual level pluralism

Loss of scope?: From a statement like that of Kurz and Salvadori (2000: 37) one would be inclined to conclude that dropping individual level pluralism 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.” 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.¹¹ 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.

Inconsistency is lost as a tool: One of the main problems related to individual level pluralism is that inconsistency is lost as a tool. This is an important logical device for the individual to structure his inquiry. Whenever meeting something inconsistent with his own ideas, he will either have to reframe it to fit those ideas or change them altogether. Festingers (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance supports the view that the mind actively engages in reducing tension between dissonant cognitions. So whether we like it or not, the tool of inconsistency might well be something that just 'is there' at the individual level and which we can't reason away no matter what kind of view we hold on how to deal with pluralism.

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 function if all scholars have their own private stance which they themselves feel to be the best game in town? How can we foster compatibility and avoid isolationism? In other words, having abandoned a naive view on social structure, 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), 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, leading for example Sir Isaac Newton to state he was "standing upon the shoulders of giants". Thirdly, it was stated that knowledge production is mostly path dependent (cf. path dependence, section two). 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.

Impossibility of eclecticism?: Taking stance, i.e. making a warranted choice, in no way presupposes that you do this neatly within the boundaries of a certain perspective or a certain school. This is the way the aggregate level influences the individual level. Views don't just fall from the sky. Taking stance involves the individual positioning himself within the diversity of views already available, constructing a base from which to engage in his own reasearch activities.

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? Because he can do no other. The reasons why knowledge is perspectival are reduced at the individual level (from seven to three) exactly because, for the individual, a number of elements concerning his perspective are not a matter of choice. It's not possible to *have had* another personal history; it's not possible for a woman to momentarily stop being a woman, etc. So given a perspectival knowledge the individual might still feel compelled to a position from his personal position. However, this does not settle the matter completely, because the scholar might be compelled to a point of view, but still realize it is just a point of view. For this it is necessary to refer to the difference between belief and pursuit.¹² Pursuing a certain line does not rule out that you believe your knowledge is bound to be perspectival. And as Kitcher (1990: 8) notes, the scientific community doesn't care what you believe, but only what beliefs you pursue.¹³ Finally, scholars might also be motivated by their belief that elaborating a certain stance benefits the aggregate level (and it is at this higher level that the goals of science will ultimately need to be situated.¹⁴) supported by the insight that individual specialization, independence and decentralization in the end often tend to offer better results at the aggregate level.¹⁵

6. WHERE TO GO?

The cost for warranted choice turns out to be surprisingly low, its benefits being underrated and its costs overestimated. Hence, I believe there to be good reasons to prefer warranted choice to individual pluralism. A reason for the proliferation of individual pluralism might simply be that it inadvertently sneaks into the discourse of well-meaning pluralists being unaware of the conceptual boundary between different levels of pluralism. For them, individual level pluralism brings little benefit at a huge cost. As such, advocates of pluralism might consider reformulating their position since I hope to have demonstrated that a pluralist has little to lose and much to gain from dropping individual level pluralism.

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.

The claim that an advocate of pluralism needn't be a pluralist himself might become more tangible when 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 democracy¹⁶ 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. 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.

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. A principle being illustrated in its most well-known form by the prisoner's dilemma: both prisoners do the most rational thing on the individual level but end up with a suboptimal outcome.

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.¹⁷

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The author is Ph.D. fellow of the research foundation Flanders (FWO) and acknowledges their support. Thanks to Jeroen Van Bouwel, Maarten Van Dyck, Erik Weber and the participants of the 2007 ICAPE and AHE conferences.

REFERENCES:

- Born, M. (1949) *Natural Philosophy of Cause and Chance*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Caldwell, B. (2004). "Some Comments on Lawson's Reorienting Economics: Same Facts, Different Conclusions" *Post-Autistic Economics Review*, issue 28, 25 October 2004, article 3 available at <http://www.btinternet.com/~pae_news/review/issue28.htm> (accessed April 15, 2008).
- Davidson, D. (1973-1974) "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 47: 5-20.
- Festinger, L. (1957) *A theory of cognitive dissonance*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Garnett, R. (2006) "Paradigms and Pluralism in Heterodox Economics," *Review of Political Economy*, 18(4): 521-46.
- Giere, R. (1999) *Science without Laws*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Hacking, I. (1999) *The Social Construction of What?*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kant, I. (2003) [1787] *The Critique of Pure Reason*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kitcher, P. (1990) "The Division of Cognitive Labor," *Journal of Philosophy*, 87(1): 5-22.
- Kitcher, P. (2001) *Science, Truth, and Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kurz, H. and Salvadori, N. (2000) "On Critics and Protective Belts," in: H. Kurz and N. Salvadori (eds) *Understanding 'Classical' Economics: Studies in Long-Period Theory*, 235-58, London: Routledge.
- Laudan, L. (1977) *Progress and Its Problems*, Berkeley: California University Press.

Popper, K. (1992) *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, New York: Routledge.

Rescher, N. (1993) *Pluralism: Against the Demand for Consensus*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Shapin, S. (1982) "History of Science and Its Sociological Reconstructions," *History of Science*, 20: 157-211.

Van Bouwel, J. (2005). "Towards a Framework for Pluralism in Economics." *Post-Autistic Economics Review*, issue 30, 21 March 2005, article 3. Available at <http://www.paecon.net/PAERReview/issue30/VanBouwel30.htm> (accessed April 15, 2008).

Weber, E. and Van Bouwel, J. (2002) "Can we dispense with structural explanations of social facts?" *Economics & Philosophy* 18: 259-75.

¹ Of 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: 1)

² Born (1949: 6) as quoted in Popper (1992: 54).

³ A paraphrase of Voltaire, quoted from Kurz, and Salvadori (2000: 235-58).

⁴ For a classic critique of conceptual relativism, see Donald Davidson (1973-1974).

⁵ I owe the distinction between syncretism, scepticism and relativism to Rescher (1993).

⁶ A principle originating from medicine, meaning 'abstain when in doubt'.

⁷ Indeed, relativism needn't be arbitrary, but in this case it is; hence the adjective 'extreme'. Again it must be stressed that these extreme views are only to be used as beacons, not as typifications of the (undoubtedly more subtle) views actually held by real scholars.

⁸ A warrant has so far only been defined in a negative way, namely as anything which is not arbitrary. This is sufficient for this first cut. Later on in the paper, a positive account will be suggested by referring to the reduced indeterminacy at the individual.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Note that while subjectivity was traditionally seen as an impediment to knowledge, it follows from the way I have constructed my argument that here it is assigned a constitutive role instead. While at the aggregate level there are no grounds for discrimination between perspectives, individual scientists can turn to the constitutive force of their individual situatedness, epistemic interests, pragmatics and experience to provide grounds for a warranted choice. Turning to their own interests, experience, etc. scholars can pick a perspective, not on the basis of its being the "right" perspective, but because it allows them to spend time using the methods they master

best, answering the questions they themselves deem most relevant,... The point is that it doesn't really matter which perspective is chosen (there's no answer to that question at that moment), as long as the scholar makes a choice which he himself stands for. A choice (and the resulting specialisation) is needed in order to develop a certain stance thoroughly, devise the best arguments for it, come up with critical tests and eventually perhaps even allowing it to be falsified in the future.

¹¹ “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: 47)

¹² introduced by Laudan (1977: 108-114)

¹³ “what the community cares about is the distribution of pursuit not the distribution of belief”

¹⁴ Or how else could the billions in tax money that are spent on research be accounted for?

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.”

¹⁷ It 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.