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Conclusion

Towards Engaged Pluralism in the Study of European Trade Politics

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Abstract

Going back to the Kuhnian debate about the assumed incommensurability of different paradigms, we point at the need for engaged pluralism in political science. We illustrate this by giving illustrations from the different paradigmatic perspectives included in the special issue and how they could speak to each other. While this analysis clearly shows the limits and difficulties encountered during such an endeavor, we hope to have laid the basis for a more reflexive dialogue within the literature.

Keywords

Paradigms; trade policy; IR; EU; trade; critical theories; pragmatism; engaged pluralism

A discussion between people who share many views is unlikely to be fruitful, even though it may be pleasant; while a discussion between vastly different frameworks can be extremely fruitful, even though it may sometimes be extremely difficult, and perhaps not quite so pleasant (though we may learn to enjoy it). (Karl Popper, in Walker 2010: 439)

The aim of this special issue is to take the first step towards an inter-paradigmatic debate in the study of European Union (EU) trade politics. This article will discuss the merits and limits of inter-paradigmatic dialogue and apply this to the different perspectives of the contributors to this special issue. The first section will assess the Kuhnian argument about the purported incommensurability of different paradigms and point to the need for a engaged pluralism among different 'paradigmatic' perspectives. The second section will look at how a reading of the articles in this special issue indicates that a confrontation among different paradigms as well as between different theories can be or become a learning experience.

INTER-PARADIGMATIC DIALOGUE: MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

This section will address three different questions: is it possible to engage in inter-paradigmatic dialogue, is such an exercise desirable, and if yes, how should this be achieved? The first question has often been answered negatively by referring to Thomas Kuhn's famous 'incommensurability thesis'. The concept of scientific paradigms dates back to Kuhn's influential work entitled 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions' (1962). Kuhn defines a paradigm as 'a theoretical research stream that has reached vast consolidation as regards its scientific development and, even more important in the sociological vocabulary, the formation of a research community with a solid core of accepted values, methods, and analytical tools' (see Padula and Battista Dagnino 2007: 49). Scientific evolution is characterized as a process whereby 'normal science' underpinned by a certain paradigm becomes challenged by 'revolutionary science' with fundamentally different assumptions and methods (e.g. the shift from Newtonian to Einsteinian paradigms in physics). Kuhn's 'normal scientists' will typically turn a blind eye to anomalies, given their devotion to the further elaboration and specification of their own paradigm. Ultimately they will be discredited by a scientific revolution, usually initiated by young scholars or scholars new to the field, who propose a fundamentally different paradigm. What is important for our purpose is that Kuhn's philosophy of science precludes meaningful interaction between different paradigms.

Different paradigms become incommensurable because they involve different theories, concepts and methods and because they are supported by different language-culture communities (Walker 2010: 435-6). This notion of incommensurability has strongly influenced political science and in particular international relations scholarship (Waever 1996: 150-1; Walker 2010: 436).

However, the incommensurability thesis could be disqualified or could at least be relaxed, especially when applied to social sciences. Kuhn essentially theorized about the natural sciences and never intended to apply his work to the social sciences.¹ Political science and international relations simply lack the background conditions of concrete, universally recognized, scientific achievements that are necessary to speak about paradigms along Kuhnian lines (Walker 2010: 435). For example, the so-called 'paradigms' in international relations – realism, liberalism and constructivism, or the divide between rationalism and constructivism (see Figure 1 in the introduction of this special issue) – have quite some common ground and cannot be seen as incommensurable.

Various contributions to the literature have shown that even synthesis may be possible, for instance the neo-neo-synthesis following the so-called inter-paradigm debate between liberalism and realism that has taken place within international relations. A similar evolution has characterized EU studies since the early 1990s.² It is true that radicalism has been less involved in this debate (Waever 1996: 150-1). Also between rationalists and reflectivists a dialogue has proven to be possible, as shown by moderate constructivist accounts in international relations (e.g. by Wendt) and EU studies (e.g. by Checkel; see also Checkel and Moravcsik 2001) which seek to bridge different ontological and epistemological assumptions.

This dialogue may be extremely difficult and not always satisfying. It would certainly be more comfortable to remain locked within one's own academic community and stick to paradigm mentalities. However, our point is that it would be exaggerated to speak of Kuhnian incommensurability. The obstacles confronted when trying to combine different meta-theoretical perspectives are often more related to resource scarcity in terms of limited time, energy and money, than to logical incompatibility (Jupille 2006: 213). After all, incommensurability can be seen as a 'red herring' in academic debates: 'despite the plurality of approaches we use and despite our particular disagreements, we are usually quite able to talk to each other and discuss matters.' (Kratochwil 2003: 126) The three – isms, rationalists and reflectivists have more in common than Newtonian and Einsteinian physics.

Then, why would an inter-paradigmatic dialogue be desirable? One reason is that paradigmatic insulation and related navel-gazing could undermine political scientists' ability to engage in political problem-solving. It has contributed to their policy irrelevance and their role as 'scholars on the sidelines', as Joseph Nye has argued with respect to American political scientists:

Scholars are paying less attention about how their work relates to the policy world, and in many departments a focus on policy can hurt one's career. Advancement comes faster for those who develop mathematical models, new methodologies or theories expressed in jargon that is unintelligible to policymakers. (Nye 2009)

As proponents of pragmatism have argued (e.g. Cornut 2009), specific paradigms in international relations are insufficient to capture the complexity of international politics (see also Walker 2010: 447). 'Pragmatism' is not a new paradigm as such, but implies a pluralistic openness to different paradigmatic approaches in conducting problem-driven and

complexity-sensitive research. It is not guided by specific theories or agnostic in terms of epistemological position (Cornut 2009).

Diminished policy relevance may not come as a problem to many scholars however. Adhering to a 'paradigm mentality' is even tempting since it increases scholars' scientific status and legitimacy (Walker 2010: 440) and since it helps them to play identity politics within academia (Jackson and Nexon 2009: 920). This leads to 'eristic' academic debates which are 'first and foremost about arguing for the sake of conflict, fighting and seeing who can yell the loudest' (Jørgensen and Valbjørn 2012: 9). As such, paradigm mentalities hinder scientific progress by encouraging hyper-specific 'Balkanization' and 'tribalism' (Walker 2010: 434; Rosamond 2006: 17). Paradigmatic insularity limits 'scholarly vision, curiosity, and creativity' and as such, becomes 'detrimental to healthy inquiry' (Walker 2010: 434). That is indeed a high price to be paid. Scholarly curiosity and creativity may be undermined by the fact that paradigmatic insularity increases the chance that analyses will suffer from the blackboxing of causal mechanisms, the resulting endurance of blind spots in explanations, and the failure to see possible connections between analyses across different paradigms as a way to eliminate such blind spots (Sil and Katzenstein 2010). The image of 'incommensurable' paradigms, mistakenly applying Kuhnian insights on international relations, acts as 'a block to scientific progress' (Waever 1996: 150).

The solution is however less obvious than seems at first sight. That inter-paradigmatic dialogue would somehow help scientific thinking is clear. It is much less clear what the exact purpose of such a dialogue should be. Should it limit its ambitions to the discouragement of the 'facile ignoring and dogmatic rejection of other theories and perspectives' (Lapid 2003: 131), or should it aim at a synthetic, unifying paradigm in the field?

Targeting a synthesis has indeed a number of advantages (Moravcsik 2003). The kind of problems with which scholars as well as policy-makers are confronted are complex, and such complex issues require comprehensive rather than uncausal explanations. Such explanations may also lead to the development of overarching assumptions that indicate the relative position of the elements borrowed from different paradigms in a multi-theoretical synthesis without requiring however that each subtheory in the synthesis would make identical assumptions about fundamental ontological matters (Moravcsik 2003). In addition, such a synthesis challenges the false impression, nurtured by the idea of incommensurability, that any theoretical approach is 'as valid and accurate as any other' (Moravcsik 2003: 136).³ However, there are also risks involved. A multi-theoretical synthesis may ultimately lead to what it originally wanted to avoid: subsumption and the emergence of a hegemonic paradigm. In social sciences the notion of objective 'truth' is far from univocal. The scientific validity of knowledge is the subject of inter-subjective debate among scholars. It is precisely this pluralism in scientific interaction that may be lost through the emergence of a hegemonic paradigm that synthesizes previous contending perspectives. Thus, not surprisingly, there is a lot of suspicion about attempts for inter-paradigmatic synthesis in the field (see e.g. Forum discussion in *International Studies Review* 2003: 5). An expressed intention to engage in multi-theoretical synthesis is easily seen as a hidden attempt by some to establish a new hegemonic paradigm. As such, the possibility of a real, reflexive dialogue among paradigms would be doomed even before it started yet.

This is even more so because several authors claim that the aim of such a synthesis would be based on a false (empiricist) assumption (Kratochwil 2000, 2003): that there is one truth out there; a truth that can be revealed through pointed empirical research. Reflectivists especially reject this notion however. There is not one social world out there. There are only different views of different social worlds and as such, there is no neutral ground on which to

judge rival accounts about the social world. In such a context, aiming at synthesis would imply that 'one theory gets protected by epistemological gatekeeping' (Smith 2003: 143). As such, paradigmatic hegemony would be inherent to multi-theoretical synthesis.

This does not mean that 'anything goes'. Critics of paradigmatic synthesis are always quick to point out that pluralism should not be pursued for its own sake (see e.g. Cornut 2009; Jupille 2006: 213; Kratochwil 2003: 126). This is also true for reflectivists: even if they challenge the notion of an absolute truth waiting to be discovered, this does not mean that they reject the merits of scientific dialogue among different perspectives. Quite the contrary: total understanding never happens both among *and within* different paradigms. The notion of total commensurability within a scientific community rests on the problematic, romantic idea of an inner-culture where people understand each other while inter-cultural communication is impossible. Recognizing this should be a stimulus for dialogue, not an excuse for insularity. Otherwise we may fall back into the trap of incommensurability thinking, something which reflectivists seek to avoid (see Waever 1996: 171).

Then, what is the alternative to paradigmatic synthesis and anything goes? Different authors have pointed to a pragmatic middle ground between 'flabby pluralism' on the one hand, and multi-theoretical synthesis on the other hand: engaged pluralism (Lapid 2003: 128-131; Jackson and Nexon 2009: 921). In flabby pluralism (a term borrowed from Richard Bernstein), 'anything goes' as authors risk engaging in 'glib superficial poaching' (Johnson 2002: 245, citing Bernstein) or even worse, 'tolerant indifference' (Kratochwil 2003: 126). In engaged pluralism, the objective is in the first place to promote empathy across different paradigms (Burbules 2000), but with a particular purpose in mind: the explicit objective to develop complimentary and multidimensional understandings of political phenomena by seeking and establishing points of connection among paradigms in the search for a broader understanding of causal chains on the one hand, and more refined specifications of causal mechanisms (including their scope conditions) in these chains on the other hand. As such, there is no place for tolerant indifference here. Each paradigm and each theory within a paradigm needs to be assessed on its merits with regard to the objective of broadening and specifying the causal chain. Engaged pluralism does not require that consensus will be reached on these merits but at least that a focused debate (or a disciplined dialogue) on them takes place (Sil and Katzenstein 2010). It is through such a debate that scholars need to explicitly engage with arguments and analyses developed in other paradigms than the ones in which they themselves tend to operate. Ultimately, the purpose is to reduce the distance between empirical complexity and theoretical parsimony, but with an eye for the fact that different explanations may be incommensurable or that such an endeavor may yield contradictory explanations.

Specifically in the context of EU studies, Joseph Jupille (2006: 229) captures the delicate balance between sufficient search for synthesis and hesitance against hegemony through the metaphor of a parabola, speaking about 'the fruitful parabolic function linking excessively low and excessively high levels of scholarly consensus with low levels of knowledge production, and interim ranges of consensus, yielding higher knowledge payoffs.' This approach also corresponds with what Rosamond calls the 'pluralistic school' (as opposed to the 'mainstream school') in EU studies, where the solution is 'to facilitate communication without imposing one tribe's version of how research is justified and evaluated' (Rosamond 2006: 17). Engaged pluralism involves a 'reflexive dialogue' based on the recognition of a plurality of different but equal perspectives with an aim to 'promote a more advanced understanding of the other while at the same time catalyzing a self-reflection process leading to a better, less parochial self-understanding' (Jørgensen and Valbjørn 2012: 8).

This brings us back to Kuhn's paradigms, which was the starting point of this analysis. The plea for engaged pluralism corresponds more with Karl Popper's philosophy of science. According to Popper the Kuhnian perspective on paradigms and incommensurability leads to narrow specialization and uncritical thinking. Popper argues that only theoretical and methodological pluralism can foster the critical and innovative thinking that is necessary for scientific progress, and for the establishment of the open society that he had in mind (see Walker 2010: 438-440).

PIECES OF A JIGSAW PUZZLE

When it comes to the paradigms, this special issue uses the above-mentioned working definition and map as a heuristic devise. In most contributions, several paradigms are combined as the analyses skirt the limits of one paradigm by including elements of another. Across the special issue, there are then elements of material self-interests that are exogenous where utility maximization is central. There is also a strong attention for preferences that are endogenous as they are affected by ideas, cognitive beliefs, and power structures. There is equally attention for the interaction between structure and agency however, where preferences are supposed to be affected by ideas and cognitive beliefs, but where agents are considered to be able to actively affect such ideas and beliefs as well. As such, the combination of the different contributions points at a range of issues that have been dealt with extensively in IR in general and the study of EU trade policies in particular: the question of preferences, of institutions, and of power. The different accounts indicate that each of these three raises important questions, and that on top of this, the three may be mutually constitutive as well.

The different articles can therefore, be seen as different pieces of a jigsaw puzzle through which the EU's trade policies can be explained. Each piece tries to cover different elements in that explanation even if some overlap among the different contributions exists. Several contributions struggle with the realization that their explanation provides only part of the puzzle and that other complimentary explanations may be necessary. The question is then what the hierarchy between these explanations is. For some, additional explanations are just auxiliary but not really fundamental for understanding the EU's external trade policies. For others, there is the ready recognition that the residual variance unaccounted for by their own explanation requires input from theories that are rooted in other paradigms. For still others, other paradigms are plainly wrong and need to be replaced. As such, they consider themselves not to be complimentary to the others but as competing with them. It is here that the metaphor of the jigsaw puzzle may reach its limits. It is not that we believe that there exists one ultimate truth about the EU's external trade policies or about international political economy in general and that discovering the complementarities among existing paradigms will deliver such truth (the overall jigsaw puzzle). It is rather that not all pieces of puzzle are yet available on the one hand, and that some pieces cannot be considered (or don't consider themselves) as neatly fitting into the others simply because they are not compatible with those others. But it is still interesting to look at each of them as that deepens our insight in EU external trade policies, confronts us with elements in our own thinking that we may miss, or with insights that contradict those of our own.

When we try to foster a dialogue between these different accounts, we will consecutively discuss each author's main argument and in doing so we gradually engage the different contributions to each other. An interesting starting point is then the question: what drives EU policymakers when they are dealing with trade policy? The different accounts touch upon this question, albeit with different degrees of explicitness, on the basis of different ontologies, and thus with attention for different factors that may matter here. Let us for the

sake of argument, start from the notion that policymakers are utility maximizers and thus with Gerry Alons' article.

Alons' article deals with preference formation in (West) Germany on the agricultural negotiations during the Uruguay Round negotiations. In doing so, it shows how the notion of interests in such preference formation needs to be broader than just material interests. Preference formation is based on a combination of political, economic and ideational interests where the last refers to the ideas that are central to the state and that consequently, shape the beliefs of the state's decision-making elites. As such, it is far from certain that material interests will always trump ideational ones. The article illustrates this through the impact that the preservation of the Franco-German axis had on Germany's positions on the agricultural negotiations. Archival material shows indeed that Germany was prepared to support positions close to those of France, this for the sake of the Franco-German friendship, and even when these went against the pressures exerted by the U.S. or domestic German industrial interests.

Alons' analysis struggles with the exact relationship between material and ideational drivers of political behavior. It also opens up the intriguing question of socialization versus bargaining in negotiations among countries. The article skirts against the limits of a purely rationalist account and tries to respond to this by cautiously getting into an ideational argument, although it is perhaps too cautious in this. What is considered as 'ideational' here – the preservation or promotion of the Franco-German axis – can be seen as being material. As such, the article raises an important problem for inter-paradigmatic dialogue: the problem of conceptualization.

Maria Garcia provides a neo-realist perspective on the evolution of the EU's external trade policies since the end of the Cold War. She shows how a mixture of material and ideational motives has affected such policies with an increasing impact however of typically realist concerns with relative market power, access to promising potential export markets before competitors gets it (or at least in an attempt to be on par with such competitors), and efforts to create a level-playing field for the EU based on the EU's regulatory regimes. This increasing impact is explained by the EU's declining self-confidence in light of the rise of new economic giants, increased U.S. and Chinese activism on bilateral free trade agreements, and the Great Recession. This does not mean however that ideational factors don't matter anymore. They still do. The EU still prefers interregional approaches to strictly bilateral ones. And the EU continues to pursue normative values through trade agreements. In addition, its realist approach is also driven by the internalization of the conviction that development and competitiveness are served well by trade liberalization both in Europe and elsewhere. Overall therefore, continuity based on a mixture of realist and ideational factors explains EU trade policies since the end of the Cold War, even if realist concerns have always been prevalent over ideational ones, and even if this prevalence has become more outspoken as the EU feels less secure about itself.

In comparison with Alons' account, Garcia digs deeper into the preferences themselves, specifically with regard to the different roles that these may play. Preferences may be about the ends one wants to achieve, whether material (personal welfare, company market shares, a country's relative economic power) or ideological (a world that reflects the mixture of values predominant at home). They may also be about the means to achieve these ends. In the latter case, causal beliefs are important and with it, the causal potential of ideas and ideologies. Garcia provides a number of examples of such preferences-on-means. One is the EU's ideational belief in trade as a vehicle for development and in trade liberalization as a way to increase competitiveness inside the EU. Another is the EU's belief in regional integration as a key element for stability, economic growth and eventually, democracy. The consequences for analyzing EU trade policy-making are clear. Even if we assume that

policy-makers engage in utility maximization and we know what their utility function consists of, what they will exactly target through their trade policies may remain indeterminate given that different means to reach an end are possible. We need to know more therefore about the factors that affect a policy-maker's cognitive linking of ends with means, that is, with certain courses of action.

If we accept that several means may lead to a similar end, or at least, that policy-makers can plausibly think about different means towards an end, the role of socialization and convincing becomes potentially larger. In addition, different degrees of causal uncertainty may matter here. It is where uncertainty about the best courses of action is highest that the potential for socialization and convincing – and for the entrepreneurs that drive socialization and engage in convincing – is largest. There may thus be issues that by their very nature lend themselves to causal uncertainty, and thus to a higher receptivity of trade policy-makers for socialization and convincing. Several new trade issues are considered to belong to this category such as intellectual property rights protection and its exact effects on inequality, development and innovation, and investment regulation and its impact on FDI, technology spillovers and local development.

Johan Adriaensen and Montserrat González-Garibay's article tries to explain the EU's reliance on different kinds of trade incentives (sanctions, rewards) for the promotion/enforcement of labour standards in developing countries. In doing so, the authors react to the normative power Europe argument that has been used to explain the trade-labour linkage in EU trade policies. By comparing the costs and levels of effectiveness of multilateral, bilateral, and unilateral approaches to the trade-labour linkage, they conclude that two factors explain the outcome: the institutional rules that apply to the EU Council and the related (in)ability of individual member states to block coercive provisions on the trade-labour linkage on the one hand, and the varying impact of systematic opposition from the (larger) developing countries and the resulting variance in the EU's reluctance to go for coercion on the other hand. Overall, the article makes clear that an identity-based explanation of EU behaviour cannot solve the puzzle why in one case the EU acts coercively on the trade-labour linkage and why on other cases it doesn't. Rational explanations seem to be able to do so however.

Adriaensen and González-Garibay add an important element to the previously discussed articles. With respect to Alons' article, it pays more explicit attention to the impact of the EU's institutional rules on trade policy outcomes. When unanimity rules in the Council, the lowest common denominator becomes more probable than in case QMV applies. This may be assumed to be the case when the political sensitivity of an issue becomes more important for the most recalcitrant member states. The roots of that sensitivity may vary: they may be located in the strength of an ideological conviction, the fear of setting a precedent that can be used for politically more important issues, or the material consequences of a decision at home.

An important question that is left open here is, what the conditions are under different rules, ie: unanimity and QMV; and when QMV as a last resort would not be politically acceptable. The Alons' article raises this issue. Under what conditions is QMV as a last resort beyond reach even if formally available? As such, the combination of the Adriaensen-González-Garibay's and the Alons' articles shows how the interplay between institutions and preferences – and specifically preference intensities – is fundamental. Options may be formally available. It remains a question whether they are available in practice. If they are not, the question needs to be answered why they aren't. The logic of appropriateness, pointed at by Garcia, certainly enters the picture here but in a procedural sense. In case that it is considered to be inappropriate to isolate and outvote an individual member state, the EU outcome should be close to the lowest common denominator, despite a formal QMV.

Note that Adriaensen and González-Garibay claim that in case a denominator was generated on the trade-labor linkage, the outcome reflected the 'underlying norms upon which the EU is built'. As we will see, the reference to such underlying norms opens the door to an analysis that takes such norms and their roots seriously.

The Adriaensen-González-Garibay's article engages with the article by Garcia in another way as well. Both have an interest in the external context of EU trade policy-making. Whereas Garcia's analysis focuses on the strategic role that such a context plays in the preferences of the EU policy-makers, Adriaensen and González-Garibay pay attention to the cost that the external context may generate for the EU's trade policy decisions, and for the extent to which this cost matters in the calculations that EU trade policy-makers make. The issue seems straightforward: with larger trading partners, the cost of trade policy decisions disliked by these partners is higher for the EU. But Adriaensen and González-Garibay add another element, perception; the external cost is affected by the perception that the EU's partners have of the intentions behind its decisions. In this respect, Adriaensen and Gonzalez-Garibáy point to perceptions as a preliminary assumption of bounded rationality (Jervis 1976; Oddell 2009). Here, perceptions are regarded as causal variables that intervene between reality and the reactions to that reality. As such, the prisms through which policy-makers look at reality and the constitution of these prisms need to be taken seriously. Once again, a potential for critical theory, but also for constructivism, shows up here.

In their article, David Bailey and Fabienne Bossuyt deal with a puzzle: scholars continue to be surprised by the recurrent discrepancy between the EU's rhetoric as a 'progressive force for good' and its trade policy outcomes. They explain this by the insufficiently critical methodology that scholars tend to use when assessing the EU's rhetoric and adopt a more thoroughgoing conceptualization of EU trade policy, applying a critical social science approach. The objective is to highlight mechanisms of domination and to reveal the illusions that enable the continuing existence of these mechanisms. The authors identify three such mechanisms and show how DG Trade uses these with respect to a range of free trade agreements. Moreover, DG Trade uses internal divisions in the EU to explain why significant redistributive policies fail to enter the FTAs that it negotiates and to lower public expectations with regard to them. As such the authors claim, the EU may be a conflicted trading power as Sophie Meunier and Kalypso Nicolaïdis (2006) once remarked, but then a conveniently conflicted one that presents itself as a counter-hegemon, but that conveniently claims to be inhibited here by its internal divisions.

This analysis provides a way to deal with the gaps left in Alons' and Garcia's contributions, and deals with the perceptual issues that showed up in Adriaensen and González-Garibay's contribution. Bailey and Bossuyt focus on the underlying mechanisms that direct the EU in its external trade policies and on the mechanisms that drive EU policymakers, either consciously or unconsciously, in this field. These mechanisms are defined as mechanisms of domination rooted in two internal characteristics of the EU: its internal neoliberal agenda (resulting in a growing dominance of capital over labor), and the EU's democratic deficit. There are three such mechanisms of domination: the expansionary market mechanism, the othering of the target of expansion, and the de-politicization of policy-making. There is an interesting distinction that can be made between these three however, or rather, between the first one and the other two. The latter talk about strategies: what the EU's political elites do to ensure their continued rule over (and domination of) the EU citizenry. The former deals with a mixture of motivation and strategy. The strategy consists of market expansion. The motivation derives from the Marxist argument on which such market expansion is based. It is through the equalizing effect of market competition combined with the capitalist requirement of profit realization that pressure is generated in favor of continuous market

expansion. Why policymakers respond to this pressure is the most intriguing question. They may do so because they politically depend on the beneficiaries of market expansion. It may also be the case that they themselves directly profit from this (which implies that political and economic elites largely overlap). But it may also be the case that they barely realize what is going on just like the many scholars that are criticized by critical social science. Despite the controversy that exists with regard to the substance of the argument put forward by Bailey and Bossuyt, the merit of their approach clearly is that it digs deeper into the preferences and resulting strategies of trade policymakers in Europe. The complementarity vis-à-vis Alons' and Garcia's approach is clear. Alons focuses on the actions of the different trade policymakers during trade negotiations and the kind of trade-offs that guide these actions. Garcia does the same with more explicit attention to the role of preference orderings in these trade-offs. Bailey and Bossuyt shed light on the preferences behind these trade-offs and on the possible roots of these preferences. Both Alons, and Bailey and Bossuyt deal with strategies, with Alons' argument about the tied-hands strategy conducted by France, and Bailey's and Bossuyt argument about othering and de-politicization.

Lucy Ford focuses on the political and economic enclosures that underpin the EU's trade policies. With enclosures, emphasis is put on the 'universe of the undiscussed' that guides such policies and that contains the mantra of ever faster economic growth as a solution to problems such as sustainable development and poverty reduction. Ford shows how these enclosures steer EU trade policies, and in doing so, maintain the existing bias in favour of the most globalized sections of European capital. Opposition to this approach is partly co-opted by accommodative policies in favour of social and environmental protection and equity. But through this, the fundamentals have remained the same. Nature remains subordinate to growth, and liberalization policies are defended even when they generate destructive consequences on nature and society.

Ford's contribution is similar to the one of Bailey and Bossuyt but adds two important elements: it stresses the role played by enclosures, and looks at the added value of a global political ecology perspective. Both analyses start from the observation that ideas and conceptual frameworks are consequential for trade policy-making and trade policy, and the fact that these ideas and frameworks are created and sustained by particular social forces. As such, dominant preferences on trade policy-making in the EU are rooted in an economic orthodoxy of neoliberalism where trade liberalization is seen as the very engine of economic growth and where such growth is seen as an end in itself. Given the underlying power relations that generate this orthodoxy however, the orthodoxy itself serves the interests of those who dominate, that is, of the European capitalist class. This does not mean that the resulting trade policies cannot change. It does mean however that change is determined by shifts in the thinking of the European capitalist class, by the need of that class to accommodate the preferences of other social forces, or by its need to present its policies in terms of a universal or general interest.

Fundamentally intriguing is the concept of enclosure, specifically where it gets close to the Neo-Gramscian notion of hegemony. Here, enclosure refers to the process in which knowledge is re-constituted and reformed in a way that preserves dominant power relations. The concept is intriguing because it raises the question about who the real deciders are in the case of EU trade policy-making. Do the formal players belong to the European capitalist class, or do they unconsciously act in a way that serves the interests of that class while not belonging to it? In the latter case, strategic behavior by these policy-makers in the sense analyzed by Alons can be seen as a kind of blinded rationality. Such rationality is akin to bounded rationality but with the important distinction that the boundaries themselves stem from the fact that policy-makers are blinded in their thinking

by a knowledge that has been re-constituted by the European capitalist class. Rationality is then, not only severely constrained but also unconsciously directed at the preservation of dominant power relations. Then, representatives from different EU member states may act differently, as they are only different in the margins. Fundamentally, what they are doing serves the existing order.

One does not need to go that far – in the sense of power-preserving knowledge re-constitution – to see the potential validity of this argument. Policy-makers act on the basis of what they believe to be true. Part of that belief is based on the kind of socialization to which policy-makers – such as other human beings – are exposed. Part of that socialization is related to the kind of goals that we believe to be worthwhile and part to our causal beliefs, that is, to the kind of means that we believe are necessary for the attainment of our goals. In this sense, a full understanding of EU trade policy-making requires at a minimum that the roots of trade policy-makers' preferences are scrutinized as much as the strategic choices they make in order to achieve these. The search for these roots must help in the identification of who the real deciders are and what the extent of their reach into trade policy-making really is. It must certainly help in answering the question: aren't we looking at the wrong players in our attempts to understand EU trade policy-making?

Gabriel Siles-Brügge deals with the question why the EU's trade policy agenda continues to be neoliberal even if rationalist explanations such as collective action dynamics and institutional insulation would suggest otherwise. These latter approaches expect indeed a move in a more protectionist direction rather than a consistently neoliberal one. Siles-Brügge seeks the explanation in ideas and the way in which they are used strategically by the European Commission's DG Trade. He distinguishes between the internalization of neoliberal ideas by DG Trade, and the strategic use of a neoliberal discourse by the same agency. Both seem to be present. A study of DG Trade internal communication indicates that DG Trade officials are truly convinced that market liberalization is necessary for the future prosperity of the EU, but that given the political resistance that exists against it, the EU needs to carefully pursue such a policy by the strategic use of reciprocity as leverage. By offering to open the markets of its still protected (but politically highly sensitive) sectors, the EU can pry open the markets of its most rapidly growing trading partners. DG Trade's outside communication stresses however much more that import-competing sectors in the EU need to be opened more to international competition. By referring to this need, DG Trade legitimizes market opening in the face of growing opposition to such moves. An ideational strategy, partly but not completely rooted in a sincere conviction, explains then why and how DG Trade is able to push a liberalizing agenda in times of severe economic crisis in Europe.

Siles-Brügge's argument relies on constructivism and its claim that ideas matter in international political economy because – following Hay (2004) – 'they are treated by actors as though they were material straightjackets'. The relationship with critical approaches to the EU's trade policies – such as those presented by Bailey and Bossuyt and by Ford – becomes strong with the observation that in the EU's trade policy 'neoliberal tenets are increasingly treated as "normalized", that is, as reflections of a reality in which the rational homo economicus is the main determinant of social outcomes'. Such normalization does not happen spontaneously however. It is the consequence of strategic discursive behavior by actors irrespective of the question whether they themselves believe in the veracity of these tenets or not. Siles-Brügge's analysis suggests however that in the case of the EU, officials from the Commission's DG Trade did believe (or came to believe) in these tenets but that on top of that, they acted strategically in order to present policies based on these beliefs as necessary, given the claimed inexorability of globalization and its growing constraints on the EU economy.

The added value of Siles-Brügge's work lays in his attention for both the internalization of ideas by policy-makers and the way in which discursive strategies are deployed to promote the internalization of these ideas by others. Ideas may be out there, but for them to play a role in policy-making, active and strategic deployment of discursive strategies is necessary. There are indeed not many ideas that are inherently so powerful that they become internalized and normalized spontaneously across a political system (although the idea of the *homo economicus* has proved to be relatively powerful). However, when these ideas are internalized across such a system, they are significantly empowered. What is still lacking is an account of the conditions under which internalization becomes likely.

The strategic empowerment of ideas and the resulting power of such ideas, as discussed by Siles-Brügge, open the door to many of the other analyses in this special issue: the Franco-German axis in Alons' work and the internalization and normalization of the importance of that axis by former generations of West German politicians; and Adriaensen and Gonzalez's analysis that can be equally studied from that perspective. In a multilateral context, the EU has until now lost its struggle to change developing countries' perception about the relationship between the trade-labour linkage and protectionism. Their analysis provides a number of clues why this is the case.

More importantly, Siles-Brügge's analysis suggests that neoliberalism as a widely normalized ideational framework is not inexorable in itself. Ideas may have a life span that risks coming to an end when they are confronted with competing frames that are successfully normalized through discursive strategies. Even if they remain alive, it still needs to be addressed how these ideas continue to be resilient.

Ferdi De Ville's article builds on this question with his reliance on critical historical institutionalism. Based on this approach, ideas may be empowered by institutionalized decisions taken in the past. Such decisions create what historical institutionalists have called 'path dependencies', and De Ville prefers to label as 'reactive sequencing'. The institutionalized nature of these decisions benefits continuity over change, even if, as critical historical institutionalism stresses, unintended consequences may show up. Such consequences may not only steer policies in a different direction than the one intended by the original decision-makers, they may also trigger countermobilization against the original decisions and their current manifestations.

Following Baastian van Apeldoorn, De Ville illustrates how the depoliticized nature of the new trade issues in the Uruguay Round enabled a limited number of EU players to direct the EU's external trade policies in the direction of neoliberalism, and why this represented a decisive victory of neoliberalism over neomercantilism in the EU. Important is here however, that critical historical institutionalism relies on a social ontology, which means that perceptions and discursive strategies to affect these perceptions matter. It is not just a matter of biases that have been created by setting policies in stone in the past (or at least by trying to do so), but also by strategies aimed at what Siles-Brügge would call 'normalization'. As De Ville phrases it, 'While structures empower and constrain agents, this influence is always dependent on how agents interpret structures, which is mediated by discourse.'

Arne Niemann's article uses a revised neofunctionalist framework to explain the revision of the Treaty provisions on trade policy in the Lisbon Treaty. In doing so, the author deals with the puzzling observation that the negotiations leading to the Lisbon Treaty accomplished what the negotiations leading to the Maastricht Treaty, the Amsterdam Treaty, and the Nice Treaty failed to do, despite the fact that according to existing exogenous factors one would have expected stronger revisions in these treaties than in the Lisbon Treaty. A revised neofunctionalist framework provides the answer as it enables the author to take into account

functional spillover pressures from the pending enlargements, the cultivation of these pressures by the European Commission and the European Parliament by making use of the beneficial environment that the Constitutional Convention provided for that purpose, and the fact that this environment also enabled social learning and socialization to play a more prominent role. Countervailing forces that affected these revisions in the past – such as domestic constraints for the member state representatives, the sovereignty-consciousness of some member states, or the countervailing national bureaucratic pressures – were not able therefore, to overcome the pro-integrative dynamics that the convention method brought with it in the run-up to what ultimately became the Lisbon Treaty.

Just like in critical historical institutionalism, Niemann's revised neofunctionalism stresses the importance of diachronic analysis. Past decisions generate consequences – among which unintended ones – that affect the preferences that policy-makers develop later in the process. Preferences are thus partly endogenous to that process. But in their formation, both socialization through deliberation, and supranational entrepreneurship matter significantly. The role that these can play is however, contingent on a range of other factors such as the frequency and intensity of the interactions, the absence of a hierarchy among the participants in the deliberative process, and the informational advantages for the supranational players.

There is an interesting complementarity between the analysis provided by Niemann, and the contributions by De Ville, and a critical theory approach (Bailey and Bossuyt; Ford). Niemann's account seeks to focus on the micro- and meso-political mechanisms that affect changes in perceptions. It tries to define the conditions under which perceptions (and as a consequence, preferences) may move in a certain direction in an interactive-intensive and institutionalized context (deliberation). Bailey and Bossuyt, Ford, and De Ville use a macro-political perspective. They look at the establishment of and eventual change in perceptions in a context that is not by definition interaction-intensive. Both are crucial for the understanding of the processes through which perceptions affect policies, and through which perceptual entrepreneurs may bias EU trade policy-making (or policy-making in any other field) one way or the other.

CONCLUSION: ENGAGED PLURALISM THROUGH A CAUSAL CHAIN

The different contributions allow us to depict a causal chain that may point us at the factors and causal mechanisms that together affect the EU's external trade policies. That chain starts with the roots of the preferences that trade policy-makers entertain, and ends with the concrete choices they make when deciding on trade policies. The roots point at the role that normalized ideologies play, whether these serve existing power disparities or not. Such ideologies narrow the lens through which policy-makers identify problems and solutions to those problems. They blind them with respect to certain policy alternatives and with respect to the possible negative consequences of these for certain groups in society. They may also make them indifferent to such consequences even if they see them.

The ideologies that affect the perceptions of policy-makers may also change. They may change in response to a major crisis and the proven inability to deal with it; or they may change because of countermobilization against the dominant policy paradigm; finally, they may change because the structural position of a country (or the EU as a whole) changes either in the international security system, in the international economy, or both. Policy-makers' perception may, however, also change as a consequence of intensive interaction, and the socialization through deliberation that it may entail. Problems may be seen in a different perspective, or new solutions may be discovered with regard to them. At the end

of the chain, policy-makers may be expected to want to maximize the utility as they define it. They may also be expected to target the means that they believe will help them best in reaching that utility. Nonetheless, an environment of intensive interaction may limit policy-makers inclination to resort to any possible mean that could be available to them. This may be due to the iterated nature of their involvement with each other. It may also be due to beliefs about appropriate and inappropriate courses of action.

By connecting the different paradigms used in this special issue through the idea of a causal chain, we have aimed to illustrate that a dialogue between diverse approaches can be fruitful to gain a deeper understanding of EU trade politics. Ours is not an attempt to develop a new paradigmatic synthesis on these politics, neither to establish a new hegemonic paradigm. Our intention is just to show how – despite the gaps among them – a constructive dialogue among analyses rooted in different and sometimes conflicting paradigms, may be fruitful for what we all have in mind as scholars: a better understanding of politics.

¹ In fact, Kuhn himself qualified the incommensurability thesis in his later work.

² The neo-neo-synthesis in international relations goes back to the 1970s. In the field of EU studies a similar rapprochement of liberal-oriented 'supranationalist' and realist-oriented 'intergovernmentalist' schools took place in the early 1990s, leading to 'supranational institutionalism' and 'liberal intergovernmentalism' respectively.

³ Moravcsik's own liberal-intergovernmentalist synthesis for studying European integration does combine different perspectives (theories of liberal preference formation, intergovernmental state bargaining, and delegation) in an innovative way, but all these are firmly rooted in rationalist social theory.

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