

From plurality to pluralism in social science: What can we learn from *International Political Economy*?

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A scientific discipline might show plurality, i.e., a multiplicity of approaches/schools/paradigms, while at the same time the individual researchers in that discipline might all be monists. Is the discipline in that case subscribing to scientific pluralism? This question raises two further questions. First, what does *scientific pluralism* mean? Second, how does a discipline *subscribe to* scientific pluralism? Is there any tool, framework or manual to subscribe to or implement pluralism, to go from plurality to pluralism?

I will deal with these questions of articulating scientific pluralism and its implementation in scientific practice by using a case study taken from the (relatively young) discipline of *International Political Economy (IPE)*. In recent years there has been very lively debate triggered by a paper of Benjamin J. Cohen (2007), which offers us a way of slicing up the field (a dichotomy of American versus British approaches to IPE) as well as a proposal for the future development of IPE as an academic discipline. The many reactions this paper provoked (more than 25 articles in journals up to now), provide us with an clear insight into how a discipline understands and wants to (or not) implement pluralism (see, e.g., Hveem 2009; McNamara 2009; Palan 2009; Phillips 2009; and the collection Phillips & Weaver 2011).

This case-study will: (a) demonstrate that the question of pluralism is a hot topic among social scientist themselves as well as clarify what social scientists themselves consider as the ideal approach towards the multiplicity of approaches in their field ('schools', models, research programs, ...), as the best understanding of scientific pluralism (or rejecting pluralism); (b) show how scientist themselves would translate that ideal into practice, how to implement pluralism (or not); (c) help us to test and further our philosophies of social science, both by articulating the different understandings of (the ideal of) scientific pluralism in the contributions of participants to the IPE-discussion and comparing them with philosophical accounts of scientific pluralism (e.g., Mitchell, 2009; Van Bouwel, 2009a and 2009b) as well as by explicitly addressing the question of implementation. Scientific practitioners do talk a lot about having a *genuine dialogue* between different schools, approaches, etc., but an explication of what such a dialogue would look like (e.g., the structure of interaction, who participates, what is the exact goal of the dialogue, ...) is lacking. Addressing this lack, I will combine the findings of the case-study with philosophy of science literature, *i.a.*, Longino (2006) and Van Bouwel and Weber (2008), in order to elaborate a better account of the issue of implementation and how to shape the pluralist mind; helping scientific practitioners to move from plurality to pluralism.

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