

FALLIBILISM, LIBERALISM AND STILWELL'S ADVOCACY FOR PLURALISM IN ECONOMICS

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This article examines avenues for resolving what appears to be an inherent tension in the fallibilist argument for pluralism in economics. Fallibilism is the strongest argument for pluralism because it recognises that any one theory is likely to be incomplete and may contain hidden errors. However fallibilism undermines itself in advocating paradigm pluralism because it implicitly accepts that scientific inquiry can lead to paradigm monism. We consider definitions of 'scientific' and the limits of liberal pluralism in resolving this tension, focusing on the contributions of Australia's foremost advocate of pluralism, Frank Stilwell (2002, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2011).

Arguments for Paradigm Pluralism in Economics

The topic of pluralism in economics has come to the fore in discussions about the nature and trajectory of the discipline (*e.g.* Garnett, Olsen & Starr, 2009; Fullbrook, 2008). Pluralism, as distinct from plurality, is essentially a normative term: it amounts to the *advocacy* of plurality. Pluralists maintain that a variety of perspectives, accounts, beliefs and approaches to action should exist and should be striven for. With respect to economics, one may advocate the plurality of *philosophical foundations* (preconceptions about the nature of reality, knowledge and ethical precepts *per se*), *methodological positions* (epistemic goals, rules and criteria of assessment), *theoretical frameworks* (elementary 'genetic' propositions characterising a theoretical worldview or general understanding of economic phenomena), *theories* (speculative accounts of certain economic phenomena), *models* (potentially quantifiable specifications of a theory), or *methods* (specific procedures for

constructing and testing theories and models). One may also advocate plurality with respect to various combinations of these entities. For example, one may advocate a plurality of theoretical frameworks on the grounds of ontological complexity, but be opposed to ontological pluralism. One may be opposed to methodological pluralism based on a naturalistic ‘unity of science’ thesis, but be in favour of a plurality of methods; and so on. It is possible to imagine a ‘plurality of pluralisms’ (Mäki, 1997).

The range of ‘pluralisms’ is best encapsulated in what may be called *paradigm pluralism*. ‘Paradigm’ here refers loosely to a web of relatively coherent ‘core’ propositions and practices – *viz.* a set of philosophical and methodological presuppositions informing a theoretical framework, in turn the basis for a network of possible theories (and perhaps models) that are constructed, fleshed out and tested using certain sanctioned analytical and empirical methods/procedures. This loose sense of ‘paradigm’ eschews debates in the philosophy of science regarding the commensurability of paradigms, their epistemological status and ontological presuppositions.

Note also that a paradigm *per se* does not preclude variety, disagreement, debate and change from within. For example, one can reasonably debate the scope of instrumental rationality (beyond formal market exchange or not) or the nature of individualism (methodological *vs* ontological) and still claim adherence to the neoclassical paradigm. What a paradigm does preclude is the wholesale rejection of all ‘core’ features that identify it at any given moment. For example, one cannot simultaneously claim adherence to the neoclassical paradigm *and* reject individualism, instrumental rationality and marginalism.

‘Paradigm pluralism’ then is the normative doctrine that a plurality of paradigms should be allowed to coexist within the economics discipline and, ideally, should be allowed to compete and/or cooperate with each other in a fair manner. Economists, especially those of a heterodox persuasion, have offered a range of arguments for paradigm pluralism. These arguments may be classified by their different focal points: ontological, epistemological, ethical.

Ontological arguments for paradigm pluralism are based on claims about the nature of reality *per se*. They typically appeal to the apparent complexity and ‘open-endedness’ of social reality. Pluralists insist that a diversity of theories and approaches is necessary to accurately represent

and adequately respond to this complexity (*cf.* Mayer, 1999; Kurz & Salvadori, 2000; Dow, 2004, 2007; Chick & Dow, 2005).¹ Some also argue that because economic institutions and problems are historically specific, economic theories must inevitably change too. Historically speaking, a variety of theories, each containing useful elements, tend to evolve over time; thus the goal of a single, unified universal paradigm – an anti-pluralism dream – is unwarranted (*cf.* Hodgson, 1996, 2001; Rothschild & King, 2009).

Such appeals to the particular nature of reality stand or fall on transcendental reasoning. As both Immanuel Kant and Roy Bhaskar have shown, ontological claims must either be eschewed or, if retained, deduced necessarily from value statements, given our incapacity to know the world independent of our experience (Kant, 1958; Bhaskar, 1978). Although the validity of transcendental arguments has been thematised to some extent in the philosophy of science (Stroud, 1968, 1977), the implications for economic methodology are yet to be considered. More thought needs to be given to this, however, at present we suggest that ontological arguments for pluralism are problematic insofar as they make claims about social reality that are unmediated by transcendental arguments.

Epistemological arguments for paradigm pluralism are premised on either human fallibility (*cf.* Hausman, 1992; Mayer, 1999) or methodological scepticism (*cf.* McCloskey, 1985; Caldwell, 1988; Samuels, 1997, 1998). Fallibilist arguments give prominence to our limited capacity to establish the truth of a theory (given some truth-criterion), whereas scepticism rules out the possibility of establishing truth to the methodological realm (that is, to the very notion of a universally acceptable truth-criterion). With regard to the methodology of

1 These arguments are discussed by King (2002). One may be tempted to regard the ontological arguments as actually epistemological in nature because it is our limited cognitive ability that prevents us from developing a single paradigm which gets a grip on economic reality in all its complexity and diversity. One may none the less classify the arguments as ontological in the sense that human cognitive abilities are capable of dealing with relatively simple, closed and unchanging systems; but when faced with higher level malleability, diversity and complexity, they fall short. The determining factor then is the nature of reality itself, not human cognitive abilities, which remain relatively stable.

economics, sceptics observe that all espoused positions contain flaws² which undermine their common goal of assuredly eliminating false theories to iteratively move towards the truth (*cf.* McCloskey, 1985; Caldwell, 1988; Samuels, 1997, 1998). Given that no universal rules exist which ensure that truth is achieved, one cannot rule out any particular paradigm on grand methodological grounds.

For sceptics, paradigm pluralism is effectively a default position rather than a positive or desirable state of affairs, given their in principle refusal to rule out any paradigm on methodological grounds. Paul Feyerabend, for example, connects this side-by-side accumulation with the innovative exploration of new roads to potentially useful theories (*cf.* Feyerabend, 1993). However this stance begs the question of the possibility of determining criteria of usefulness or indeed of accepting the substantive content of any sceptical argument. As has been long and widely argued, such global scepticism is in essence self-undermining (Ayer, 1956: 35; Passmore, 1970: 73-74).

Given these problems with scepticism, epistemological arguments for paradigm pluralism are more plausibly based on fallibilism. Assuming a fairly common representation of 'the scientific method' in economics (*cf.* Hausman, 1992), where abstracting and idealising are necessary to theorisation, and the testing of theories amounts to empirically checking central theoretical propositions and their falsifiable implications, it remains possible that an apparently justified theory is wrong or inferior. Empirically backed assumptions do not ensure the truth of a theory for a claimed domain because the assumptions must inevitably be selective, and the domain of phenomena to which a theory is supposed to be applied may change unexpectedly. Moreover, predictive success of a theory also does not establish with certainty that it is true – the fallacy of affirming the consequent always looms (*cf.* Boland, 1979). As it is always possible that a theory is false because its initial core and/or auxiliary assumptions are incorrect, it is rational to encourage the development of a range of theories arising out of different paradigms over a single economic phenomenon – still more over all phenomena (*cf.* Mayer, 1999).

2 These include Millian deductivism, logical empiricism, falsificationism, rationalist formalism, fictionalist predictivism, Bayesian empiricism and transcendental deductivism.

Note that the fallibilist argument for paradigm pluralism *implies* epistemic progress through critical engagement and interrogation. Given that paradigms may not possess the resources to criticise their own presuppositions, and that one paradigm may make empirical discoveries inaccessible to another, a critical engagement of paradigms facilitates the development of all (for better or worse of any one of them) (*cf.* Feyerabend, 1993). Further, the development of new paradigms may be better facilitated by the synthesis of the ‘best’ parts of different pre-existing paradigms. This would also contribute to epistemic progress (*cf.* Colander, 2009; Dobusch and Kepeller, 2012). In short, epistemic progress via competition and synthesis logically necessitates a plurality of paradigms. But epistemic fallibilism implies some sort of mind-independent reality *about* which our theories and impressions may be mistaken or revisable. Fallibilism therefore also implies at least the possibility of system and progress in our attempts to perceive and explain reality (*cf.* Bhaskar, 1978).

Fallibilism is thus preferable to sceptical arguments and less problematic than (implicitly) transcendental ontological arguments. However, as an argument for pluralism, fallibilism is itself problematic. The notion of progress through critical engagement implies paradigms either being progressively eliminated, subsumed into or synthesised with other paradigms. It would seem that paradigm pluralism is advocated on epistemological grounds as a means for eliminating pluralism. The tension is illustrated in Frank Stilwell’s arguments for pluralism.

Tensions in Fallibilist Pluralism

Stilwell (2006a) offers four reasons for paradigm pluralism, two of which focus on ‘coping’ with the present state of economics and two directed at the future progress of the discipline. The arguments can be summarised as follows:

(1) *The Way Station Argument*: Paradigmatic pluralism is the most reasonable stance in the face of the current parlous ‘pre-scientific’ state of economics. Economics has not (yet) discovered agreed-upon empirically robust theories to account for any economic phenomena, nor even a single set of methods, so the most sensible course of action is to be open-minded to all manner of theoretical alternatives and methods.

(2) *The Political Openness Argument*: Economic paradigms are always ideology-laden and, when applied, tend to serve particular interests in society. Since neoclassical theory is so dominant, this tends to skew the perceived range of ideological perspectives available, thereby giving undue weight to neoliberal policy stances. In an ‘open society’, many ideological positions (associated with different paradigms) should be available to choose from. Thus paradigm pluralism is not only counter-hegemonic at present, but facilitates freedom of political thought.

(3) *The Epistemic Progress Argument*: Paradigm pluralism provides a means of economics progressing beyond its pre-scientific state. ‘Real science’ utilises a variety of different theories and methods to increase verisimilitude. This is achieved (a) by different theories competing or combining with each other, and (b) by using different theories and research methods best suited to specific phenomena and problems. Thus, economics could progress to a greater extent than it otherwise would if a plurality of paradigms could be juxtaposed and/or synthesised in seeking to understand and rationally respond to the myriad economic problems societies face.

(4) *The Critical Creativity Argument*: Having access to a plurality of paradigms facilitates critical comparisons and creative syntheses of paradigms, which guards against ‘tunnel vision’ and unreflective ‘cloning’. Paradigm pluralism would also incline economists to greater reflection upon methodological concerns – chiefly, the criteria for assessing where and why paradigms are incompatible, complementary and incommensurable, and in what circumstances they may be judged to be useful. Thus paradigm pluralism tends to undermine dogmatism and increase the capacity to think critically and creatively.³

3 Stilwell (2006a: 53) sees these four arguments as possessing ‘a discernible sequential logic’. Paradigm pluralism highlights the controversy over competing paradigms and encourages critical reflection on this contest of ideas (*i.e.* 4), recognises that the theoretical, methodological and policy controversies presuppose ideological conflicts that should not be hidden or suppressed (*i.e.* 2), holds that openness to competing theoretical approaches and methods is useful to dealing with a complex and changing world (*i.e.* 3), and thus provides a ‘way station’ on the path to a genuine economic science in the long run (*i.e.* 1). Note that, for Stilwell, paradigm pluralism should operate not just at the level of the discipline. He sees paradigm pluralism as being internalised by *individual* economists; economists should be able to critically compare, contrast and creatively combine different paradigms for themselves.

Stilwell (2006a: 47, 49) occasionally appears to flirt with methodological scepticism as a means of defending paradigm pluralism,⁴ but the general tendency of at least three of his arguments is fallibilist. Stilwell's 'Way Station' argument supposes that economics should be scientific but that any paradigm currently claiming this status would be mistaken. Stilwell does not provide an explicit stipulation of what 'scientific' means, but he does give some large hints. A scientific economics would provide a 'comprehensive understanding of the economic characteristics of the world around us.' 'Understanding' is commonly associated with knowledge of how something works, how it 'functions', thereby apparently entailing epistemic realism; that is, the provision of objective causal explanations via 'laws of motion' is an essential and achievable goal. A 'comprehensive understanding' is one that demands knowledge of the essential components of something and how they are related; that is, detailed objective knowledge of something as a structured whole ('as a system'). Stilwell's disciplinary object of interest is 'the economic characteristics of the world around us', implying a world containing its own investigator-independent existence, properties and 'laws of motion' which the scientist seeks to discover and understand and about which the scientist may be mistaken.

From these statements one can derive a thumbnail sketch of what a genuine science of economics would amount to: it would ideally be a discipline that sought a complete, objective account of the 'laws of motion' which would causally explain the 'characteristics' and 'function[ing]' of the investigator-independent economic 'system' in its parts and as whole. Although this conception of an economic science does not deny ontological complexity and diversity and does not deny human fallibility, it does lend itself to an ultimately *monistic* paradigmatic vision of the future of the economics discipline. After all, surely the goal of such a science would be to seek after the most comprehensive understanding of the economy. Surely a paradigm offering a less comprehensive understanding of the economic system's functioning would be judged inferior to, and would naturally be 'overruled' by, a paradigm offering a more comprehensive understanding.

4 Stilwell favourably cites McCloskey's assertion that 'economic inquiry in practice actually proceeds by way of "conversations" in which an eclectic mix of modes of investigation and argument is adopted'. He also favourably cites Samuels' 'openness to alternative methodologies'.

This implication is bolstered by Stilwell's Epistemic Progress argument and, to some extent, by his Critical Creativity argument. Of course, the Epistemic Progress argument demands paradigm pluralism in the short run – the weaknesses in one paradigm can be revealed by means of the theoretical insights and empirical discoveries arising out of a different paradigm. Stilwell's conception of pluralism is in this sense not one of autarkic paradigms lying side-by-side in quietistic contemplation. Paradigms should continuously engage with each other, thus facilitating scientific progress and critical creativity. Interaction can be collaborative, competitive or some combination of the two.

Without discounting the possibility of friendly cooperation, especially between heterodox schools, Stilwell takes combative competition between all paradigms to be the major mode of interaction: '... progress in understanding and changing the world is more likely to come from the clash of ideas rather than the linear accretion of theory-dependent knowledge' (Stilwell, 2002: 365). Stilwell evidently sees the major paradigms as being not merely different, but irreducibly at odds on fundamental grounds: they typically hold to incompatible conceptions of human nature, social relations and the state, and incompatible ideological prescriptions (Stilwell, 2002: 355-366). One may further add that, as paradigms are normally populated by 'advocates' ('believers') rather than mere 'users', conflict is the most likely form of engagement.

Whereas pluralism is crucial for epistemic progress in the short term, what of the long-run tendencies? For Stilwell, the engines of progress are *competition between* and *synthesis of* rival paradigms. Regarding fair competition between paradigms, this implies critical comparisons and unbiased judgements about 'winners/losers' in a contest to provide rival comprehensive understandings of given economic phenomena. Assuming that 'progress' entails ever-greater verisimilitude over an ever-wider range of phenomena, one would expect (*ceteris paribus*) competition to lead to a gradual whittling down of alternatives as one approaches the ideal of *the most* comprehensive understanding of an economic system. The synthesis of rival paradigms implies pluralism in the short run, but also harbours a tendency to monism in the long run. If verisimilitude is increased by the combination of different paradigms creating a new, superior paradigm, then over time (*ceteris paribus*) the number of paradigms will inevitably diminish as one approaches *the most* comprehensive understanding of the economy.

If this interpretation of Stilwell's arguments is correct, the anarchy of 'anything goes' and the self-undermining of methodological scepticism is certainly avoided. However, it also foreshadows a long-run tendency towards the destruction of paradigm pluralism and the concomitant rise of paradigm *monism* in its place.

It may be possible to move beyond this impasse by re-examining the two presuppositions informing the scientific tendency to paradigm monism. Presupposition (1) is that for economics to be 'scientific' it must satisfy a set of well-defined necessary and sufficient conditions. Presupposition (2) is that long-run scientific 'progress' is marked by the elimination of inferior rival paradigms from the cognitive and disciplinary landscape. An alternative approach to paradigm pluralism must break with at least one of these presuppositions to avoid epistemic chaos on one side and a too narrow exclusivity on the other.

Resolving the Tension in Fallibilist Pluralism: Defining 'Scientific' in a Liberal Context

Turning first to Presupposition (1), rather than thinking of 'science' as the satisfaction of a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, one may instead interpret 'being scientific' in an imperative mood – that is, in terms of regulatory principles or prescriptive rules rather than propositions with supposed truth-values. First, with respect to its characteristic *aim*, science should not be thought of as a set of epistemic *products* (findings, results, truths). Rather, it should be conceptualised as a purposive *practice*: to be scientific is to strive for the unending *production* of new coherent, comprehensive knowledge of the existent world. But such a practice must adhere to some elementary *metaphysical principles* to be operational – *viz.* realism (seek to discover the nature and operation of phenomena as they 'really are'), naturalism (attend to material/natural, *contra* supernatural, phenomena only), causality (seek to explain phenomena, that is, seek after the causes of phenomena) and causal constancy (seek to establish the one type of cause for the one type of effect, *ceteris paribus*) (Suchting, 1995).

Failure to adhere to these metaphysical principles would render a discipline non-scientific as currently understood by most practitioners. For example, creationism is denied scientific status by all and sundry because it posits and purports to discover supernatural causes of worldly

phenomena – it openly opposes naturalism. As to the *methodological principles* intended to facilitate knowledge production, taking disciplinary exemplars such as physics, chemistry, biology and geology, one can only say that they collectively manifest a *family or web* of vague methodological rules such as: ‘be logically consistent in theory construction and the treatment of evidence’, ‘where possible, empirically check synthetic postulates’, ‘where possible, empirically test claims about previously unexamined cases’, ‘seek coherence with relevant pre-existing empirically established propositions’, ‘eliminate redundant theoretical propositions’, and ‘avoid manipulation of results based on personal or institutional preferences or interests’. Certainly different disciplines and even different paradigms within a discipline will (and do) give different *weights* to each of these methodological principles, but no genuinely scientific endeavour would openly deny or self-consciously flout any of them. It must also be recognised that the above methodological principles are not, in their particular concrete manifestations, ahistorical or beyond revision and abandonment; nor is some particular configuration of principles sacrosanct. It is now a commonplace that the methodological standards and procedures of even the ‘hardest’ sciences change though time. Moreover, at the abstract level, the principles are sufficiently vague as to naturally enable new interpretations and new instantiations of them in different circumstances (*cf.* Chalmers, 1985, 1990, 1999; Suchting, 1995).

This way of conceptualising science (including economic science) does leave considerable room for a variety of practices and it certainly does not give special preference to any particular paradigm by smuggling certain theoretical precepts into its definition. On the other hand, it is not so vague as to prevent objective assessment of a paradigm on its own terms or comparisons between rivals. Nor does it prevent objective regulation of the synthesis of potentially complementary paradigms. In short, such a conception of (economic) science allows for paradigm pluralism without jettisoning the notion of objective evaluation.

In short, it is possible to articulate a perfectly respectable conception of science that both preserves its chief aim and virtue – the production of objective knowledge of the world – and yet is not so closely aligned to a particular paradigm as to rule out rivals *a priori* as ‘unscientific’. That is, Presupposition (1) can be set aside without having to forego an uncontroversial conception of objective scientific practice nor of paradigm pluralism.

What of Presupposition (2)? The question now is whether, in the name of ‘progress’, the metaphysical and methodological principles/rules which enable objective (albeit complex and tentative) evaluations to be made of competing paradigms necessarily entail the *elimination* of ‘inferior’ rivals from the disciplinary battlefield. The answer offered here is ‘no’.

To make the case for retaining a permanent plurality of paradigms one may turn to an unlikely source: liberal pluralism and, in particular, John Stuart Mill’s (1859) *On Liberty*. This book is best known as a foundational politico-ethical statement of liberalism, but in Chapter Two – ‘Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion’ – Mill offers arguments for the preservation of doctrinal pluralism without denying the aim or the importance of objective evaluations of knowledge claims (*cf.* Feyerabend, 1981a: 139-145; 1981b: 89-98; Marqués & Weisman, 2010). Indeed this chapter is arguably the rationale bridging Mill’s social and ethical philosophy with *The System of Logic*’s conception of science as rationally progressive inquiry (Mill, 1949).

Mill (1859: 34ff, 64ff, 95) offers four reasons for retaining a variety of incompatible doctrines (for us, paradigms). The first is a now familiar ethical and somewhat risk-averse epistemic argument. As no-one is infallible, it is at least possible that a currently justified belief is wrong and a belief currently deemed unreasonable is correct. Thus the latter should be kept ‘on the books’ and pursuit of it should not be prohibited just in case it turns out to be true, or implies previously unknown truths. Second, Mill sees contestation as the crucible in which obscured and overlooked truths may be revealed. As it is likely that no doctrine represents the *whole* truth on any given matter, and competing doctrines are each likely to contain at least *some* truth of which others are ignorant, ‘it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied’. Third, even if a widely held doctrine is completely true, if it is not challenged by alternatives it is likely to atrophy into a dogmatic ‘prejudice, with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds’. By being challenged, a true doctrine’s original justification is recalled and its further justification is motivated. Thus even entirely false doctrines are necessary for the generation and rejuvenation of knowledge. Finally, such challenges to a true doctrine are also necessary to maintain or revive its psychological significance (its ‘meaning’ and ‘vital effect on the character and conduct’), thereby preventing it from descending into ‘a mere formal profession’.

In our terms, because paradigm pluralism is the *means* to the ultimate *goal* of paradigm improvement such pluralist means must be ever-present because one can never be certain that a currently superior paradigm will remain so, and because (perhaps temporarily) inferior rivals still serve a justificatory purpose. Even abandoned paradigms may be retained if they prevent accepted paradigms from atrophying into unreasoned dogmas and empty mantras.

This Millian approach to doctrinal diversity resonates with Stilwell's 'Open Society' argument for pluralism in economics. Here Stilwell seems to champion the idea of tolerating ideas and approaches, regardless of their apparent merits as science: 'A range of political economic perspectives, though sometimes perplexing, is the hallmark of an open society' (Stilwell, 2002: 366). Both recognise fallibility as the default epistemic state for all perspectives. Both see the clash of ideas as being epistemically fruitful for much the same reason: a different perspective may have access to truths unseen by another and reveal unacknowledged falsity in another; by critical engagement, strengths and weaknesses of rival approaches are most likely to be revealed. Further, both recognise that contestation gives vitality to paradigms and drives them to improve themselves.⁵ Finally, although Stilwell recognises that basic methodological differences between paradigms may be irreconcilable, he, like Mill, none the less holds that sound methodological criticism and objective verdicts about paradigms can be reached: 'It is better to live with the diversity, sorting out facts, judgments, and ideals as systematically as we can and with as much cool objectivity as possible in practice' (Stilwell, 2002: 366).

Limits of Liberal Pluralism

A well-known problem with Mill's pluralism (and liberalism in general) is that it ignores the pre-existing institutional environment in which it is supposed to operate. It sanctions the *existence* of diversity in principle, but is effectively silent on the composition of that existence by ignoring

5 Stilwell does not explicitly identify this virtue as Mill does, but it is implicit in his practice: in almost all his own writings, Stilwell's advocacy of heterodox perspectives is earnestly motivated in part by the perceived failings of neoclassicism.

the means by which diversity is to be produced and disseminated (*cf.* Meyer, 2007).

A plurality of paradigms in economics obviously *exists* at present. As Stilwell (2006a: 44-45; 2010) points out and most advocates of paradigm pluralism acknowledge, the discipline-wide problem is that the reproduction and distribution of various paradigms throughout the discipline is highly unequal. Neoclassical theory and methodology still constitutes an overwhelming hegemonic orthodoxy that tends to transform its most cherished theoretical propositions into *a priori* regulatory concepts that are then taken as definitional of 'economics' *per se* (*cf.* Jones, 1994). Heterodox paradigms, as per the appellation, exist as dissenting fringe dwellers and radical underground movements bereft of resources, attention, access or students.

Answering the question of how to increase the production and thence more equitably distribute a variety of paradigms across the discipline is no easy matter – especially in the face of a dominant paradigm that shows no sign of relinquishing its monistic conception of itself as the royal road to scientific truths. Certainly something more powerful than additional journal articles, books, public pleas and organisations is required. Over the course of the 20th century and into the 21st, there have been strident calls for reform by Sveriges Riksbank ('Nobel') Prize winners, past Presidents of the American Economic Association, student petitions and protests, and the formation of academic organisations and journals devoted to pluralism and heterodox economics.

Alas, these noble interventions have not resulted in the seismic disciplinary shifts required. At best they may have marginally slowed and slightly diverted a long-run monistic trajectory evident in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Witness the near obliteration of the history of economic thought from mainstream thought and the discipline, the shifting of heterodox economic discourse into other disciplines such as history, industrial relations, sociology, cultural studies and politics, the apparently unquenchable demand for greater formal 'rigour' (mathematisation) in theory construction and empirical 'testing', and the imperialist drive to 'model' all human behaviour (from derivatives investment to child-rearing to suicide) as instrumentally rational optimisation. All of this has been recently accompanied by the claim that mainstream economics is intrinsically flexible and/or pluralist, thereby

apparently blunting external calls for pluralistic reform (*e.g.* van Dalen, 2003; Colander, Holt and Rosser, 2004; Coyle, 2007).

Stilwell's awareness of the limits of liberalism in this regard renders his advocacy of pluralism as much a push for institutional and political reform as a set of arguments (Thornton, 2012). Stilwell's advocacy of pluralism extends to and beyond the entire range of practices comprising the discipline of economics. He suggests that the paradigms should draw upon and integrate interdisciplinary content into their understanding of economic phenomena. For example, historical, sociological, ecological, and political content should be synthesised as necessary to more fully understand economic phenomena. Further, paradigms should integrate the concerns of trans-disciplinary and trans-academic movements such as feminism and environmentalism (Stilwell, 2010: 338-339).

Stilwell is intensely aware of the fact that there are substantial institutional barriers to the instantiation of 'fair' contestation between paradigms. Unlike some other advocates of paradigm pluralism, he does not see fair treatment of heterodox paradigms as being ushered in by a 'dispositional' change on the part of heterodox schools. That is, being polite, respectful, conciliatory and accommodating of the dominant paradigm is unlikely to cut much ice (*cf.* Colander, 2009; Dobusch and Kepeller, 2012): 'The contest of ideas takes place, not on purely intellectual terrain – a 'level playing field of economic ideas' – but within institutions that systematically favour some viewpoints and marginalise others. Most prominent among these institutions are schools and universities, the public service, the media, 'think-tanks', and, of course, the institutions of corporate capital itself' (Stilwell, 2002: 367). The academy plays a central role in skewing the playing field towards various iterations of neoclassicism, because it intellectually and psychologically shapes professional applied economists who go on to directly influence public policy and regulations (Stilwell, 2010). With respect to the academic economics discipline in particular, Stilwell (2002: 368-369) points to the powerful factors of inertia, authority structures and professional socialisation to explain the grip that the neoclassical paradigm (*cf.* Earl, 2010). It remains to be seen how long this can last. Perhaps a pluralist movement from within the discipline can force open a wedge through which a multiplicity of ideas could flow. Or perhaps, in an increasingly commodified tertiary education sector, an economics profession dominated by idealised and mathematised ideological fictions

will slowly but surely be strangled by its own irrelevance (*cf.* Jones, 1994; Lodewijks and Stokes, 2014).

Conclusion

Paradigm pluralism is increasingly being advocated by heterodox economists. However, there appears to be a basic tension in the arguments for this type of pluralism since they seem to lead to paradigm monism as a long-run outcome. This tension is exemplified in some of Stilwell's arguments for pluralism. According to Stilwell, pluralism fosters scientific progress by providing new theoretical and empirical insights and facilitating critical thought. However, the long-run outcome would seem to be the elimination of epistemologically inferior paradigms as the discipline progresses towards an ever-more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the economy. Paradigm pluralism thus would seem to end in its own destruction.

We have argued that this apparent tension can be resolved. One can maintain the ideal of objective science with respect to the evaluation of paradigms without having to commit to the goal of eliminating alternatives. Mill provides the key in positing motivational reasons for 'keeping alive' rival alternatives. Mill's arguments allow for paradigm pluralism in both the short run and the long run without having to sacrifice the ideal of objective scientific testing and evaluation. In short, the apparent tension in the advocacy of paradigm pluralism is resolved.

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