**Choices under Epistemic Pluralism in Economics**

**Abstract:** At the core of the pluralist argument in economics, and elsewhere, is the rejection of the logical positivists’ reductionist ‘one size fits all’ approach to scientific research. Instead, pluralists argue that there are multiple ways of constructing knowledge and that we cannot decide on the one best methodology or epistemic principle; in short, pluralistic knowledge is all there is. Yet, epistemic pluralism implies the absence of a single conclusive final methodology or epistemological principle, and consequently choices of methods, theories and concepts run the risk of becoming relativistic under pluralism. In the light of the absence of objective choice criteria this paper argues that i) choices can be justified through consensuses in intellectual exchanges, ii) MacIntyrian epistemological crises are a suitable basis for consensus under pluralism, and iii) choice under pluralism, understood as migration between different frameworks, becomes a necessity for the development of framework-dependent narratives and resulting policy implications.

**Keywords:** epistemic pluralism, theory choice, economics, schools of thought, policy implications, methodology, relativism, knowledge, epistemological crises, cognitive aims and methodological norms

**JEL classification:** B50, B59

1. **Introduction**

At the core of the pluralist debate in economics lies pluralism about methods, theorising, explanations, perspectives or, more generally speaking, the acknowledgement that there are several different ways of ‘doing economics’, as opposed to a monist methodological approach based on, for instance, econometric modelling. The pluralists’ central argument rests on a rejection of logical positivism and the reductionist ‘one size fits all’ approach to research. This rejection was formally introduced into economics by Bruce Caldwell’s (1982) book *Beyond Positivism*, a comprehensive inquiry into the philosophical and methodological positions in the discipline, while similar criticism of more general methodological reductionism can also be found in the wider literature of philosophy of science (Kellert, Logino and Waters, 2006). One of the central conclusions of Caldwell’s (1982, p.250) book, which is important for both pluralism in economics and the remainder of this paper, is that there is “no universally applicable, logically compelling method of theory appraisal”. Hence, pluralism developed from this line of reasoning, where the absence of said principles not only implies the recognition but also the normative promotion of its opposites (Heise, 2017), forms the basis of many contemporary methodological debates in economics, especially among pluralist and heterodox economists.

However attractive, logical and well formulated the appraisal of pluralism in economics is, there are issues or consequences arising from pluralist arguments that require further attention. The call for methodological pluralism based on the ideal of bringing contrasting ideas, theories and perspectives together in a somewhat commensurable academic discourse (Caldwell, 1982; Samuels, 1997; Garnett, 2006) almost always arrives together with an epistemic pluralism in which there is no clear answer to the question of what knowledge is (McCloskey, 1994), how it can be formed (Dow, 2007), and what can be considered to be true (Negru, 2009). Warren Samuels (1997, p.67) summarises this for economics when saying that “the case for methodological pluralism ultimately rests on the necessity of choice in the absence of a single conclusive final methodology or epistemological principle”. This leads to two observations: first, any choice at the epistemic or methodological level must be made in an environment with a multiplicity of choice criteria. Second, at the epistemic level pluralism is not merely a characteristic of a (sub-)discipline’s specific advancement of knowledge; instead, pluralistic knowledge is all there is. This raises the central question for this paper: if there is a plurality of choice criteria under pluralism, not only on the methodological but also on the epistemic level, and “no final methodological or epistemological principle” (Samuels, 1997, p.67), how can pluralists justify choices at all? Or, asked differently, in the absence of such final principles is pluralism not leading to methodological and epistemic relativism?

Following these two questions the aim of this paper is to discuss the consequences of such an epistemic pluralism in the light of the problem of (theory) choice (Feyerabend, 1993). It suggests, with the help of a Laudanian (1979, 1987, 1996) reconceptualisation of schools of thought and the application of MacIntyrean (1977, 1988) epistemological crises, that choices under pluralism are not only justifiable but ultimately necessary for the argumentative advancement of narratives offered by different schools of thought or paradigm-like groups. In order to make this argument sections two and three will critically discuss the relativistic nature of epistemic pluralism and the absence of an objective meta-methodology for method, theory and concept choices. Based on the conclusions of sections two and three section four will argue the use of McCloskey’s (1983) rhetoric approach as an overall framework in combination with MacIntyre’s (1977, 1988) epistemological crises to propose a consensus-based justification for theory, method or concept choices. Specifically, it is argued that choice should be understood as migration between different framework-dependent narratives and becomes necessary in the light of the necessity to advance such narratives with the help of triggering MacIntyrean (1977, 1988) epistemological crises. Finally, section five will sketch out some of the policy implications of this ‘intentional clash of narratives’, pointing out that policies may need to be formulated more carefully as a result of pluralism in general, and section six will develop a conclusion for the argument developed here.

1. **Relativistic consequences of epistemic pluralism**

The argument for pluralistic knowledge, together with the non-universality of theory appraisal (Caldwell, 1982), appears to make pluralism inherently relativistic because “[t]here is no neutral algorithm for theory-choice, no systematic decision procedure” (Kuhn, 2012, p.200), but only “with the respect to the *same* subject matter, *competing* references frames” (Krausz, 2010, p.17). The multiplicity of ‘reference frames’, if understood as schools of thought etc., appears to be at the core of the pluralist debate in economics. However, this relativism should not be confused with a subjectivism claiming that every individual has her own reference frame or ‘lives in her own world’. Instead, relativism, as defined by Krausz (2010), allows reference frames to be shared between individuals and, in its local version, even permits some standards to be shared across frames. As said, if different schools of thought are to be understood as reference frames then the argument for local relativism appears to make some sense for pluralism.

That being said we may use the reference frame concept to begin outlining the meaning of epistemic pluralism. Under epistemic pluralism a variety of shared but also framework-specific epistemic standards, which provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge, must be identifiable, as the existence of a “final (…) epistemological principle” (Samuels, 1997, p.67) or a final set of principles is rejected. For instance, the classical conditions of justification and truth have been extensively scrutinised to say that knowledge is not just ‘justified true believe’ (see, for instance, Gettier, 1963) because different reference frames may operate with different truth conditions and so on. On the other hand, a possible set of widely shared conditions may be found, i.e. fallibilism, minimal realism, intersubjective objectivity and minimal empiricism (Schurz, 2014). Under these conditions knowledge must be fallible (see Popper, 2002). Also, based on the ontological position that there is a reality independent of perception, statements about this reality must, in principle, be reproducible to ensure their validity, and the object under investigation, or parts of it, must be accessible for experience and observation.

A less shared principle found in some epistemological theories is ‘epistemic closure under deduction’, i.e. if a subject knows one thing and also knows that it (logically) entails a second thing, then the subject also knows the second thing. It remains controversial whether or not this is a necessary or sufficient condition for knowledge systems. Finally, normative epistemic principles such as ‘coherence’, ‘plausibility’ or ‘reasonableness’ may, in their definition or meaning, differ substantially from reference frame to reference frame. In summary, epistemic pluralism describes a situation where a variety of epistemic principles exist, where different reference frames use different sets of these principles and/or give different levels of importance to them, where there is no generally applicable and logically persuading single epistemic principle (Caldwell, 1982; Samuels, 1997), and where pluralistic knowledge emerges from these different sets of epistemic principles.

Giving some thought to this reference frame relativism, two questions emerge for the pluralist with regard to choice. First, can she only justify choices of theory, methods, concepts etc. through a reference frame that provides choice criteria? Second, how can she justify commitment to a specific reference frame and its choice criteria? In other words, is there a rational methodology with definitive choice criteria for framework choice or might commitment ultimately be based on ‘appeals to good reasons’ and rather arbitrary pre-scientific ideals and/or ideologies, where the scientist’s (intuitive) “idea of the goal of his [sic!] endeavours” (Popper, 2002, p.34) is the determining factor for commitment? If the latter is the case it appears that justification of choices of methodological and epistemic principles becomes very difficult and subject to possible criticism.

Dow (2007, p.3), for instance, warns that an “absence of [definitive] selection criteria” leads to an “unstructured pluralism” which must be rejected. As an alternative she proposes a structured pluralism which promotes only a finite range of methodological approaches based on an open-system ontology (Dow, 2004). This argument, however, relates to the questions from above; here the reference frame is her open-system ontology determining the range of methodological choices in her structured pluralism. Methodologies based on a closed-system ontology, e.g. the “mathematical-deductive modelling” (Lawson, 2006, p.492) found in mainstream economics, therefore lose candidacy as these prove to be incommensurate with open-system ontologies. Although there are good reasons to accept an open-system ontology if this ontology were to be rejected by someone, for whatever reason, her choice criteria for appropriate methodologies would simply become invalid in such a discourse. One might argue, of course, that dismissing this open-system ontology might be unreasonable and therefore will not occur. After all it appears to be justified by an argumentatively very strong intuitive-empirical appeal to our understanding of the complexity of our world, which ultimately makes objections unlikely.

However intuitively attractive the arguments in favour of an open-system ontology may be, though, they cannot serve as the globally objective rational reason for methodology or epistemic choices. The reason for this is the underlying appeal to sense data as good reasons by the likes of Dow and other open system ontologists. In other words, the way we experience the world, as complex, adaptive and non-linear, justifies the adoption of open-system ontology and the consequential rejection of methodologies not fitting into this framework. Yet, there are some minor issues with such an approach. Firstly, the counterintuitive descriptions of reality in quantum mechanics show that the way we experience the world is not necessarily the way the world might be, and consequently sense data emerging from perception cannot serve as the sole basis of our ontology. Secondly, even if we justify such an ontological position with reference to relevant empirical data or facts, we must recognise that i) “data, in the usual sense, cannot establish the superiority of one paradigm [or framework] over another because data themselves are perceived through the spectacles of one paradigm or another” (Putnam, 1991, p.128), and ii) the normative nature of epistemic standards such as ‘coherence’, ‘plausibility’ or ‘reasonableness’ does not allow us to judge the accuracy of an alternative set of epistemic standards because our judgement comes, again, “through the lenses of those very values” (Putnam, 2002, p33).

With regard to i), Caldwell (1982) likewise argues that, at the least, empirical criteria themselves are not sufficient for a definite choice among competing theories, and demonstrates framework dependency by reference to the traditions of instrumentalism and confirmationism in economics, which both appear to be incommensurate due to their application of different choice criteria for theory preferences. Investigations into the history of science have further shown that preferences for, and ultimately choices of, methodological rules, but also theories and concepts, are historically not as straightforward as some might suggest but are, in fact, rather complex, and not always solvable, endeavours ( see, for instance, Quine, 1951; Lakatos, 1970; Duhem, 1991; Feyerabend, 1993; Chang, 2012). Feyerabend (1993) can be given a special role here as he not only highlights what issue the so-called problem of theory choice really is but also, as Caldwell (1983, p.224) summarises, “Feyerabend repeatedly argues (…) that the attempt to evaluate theories according to ‘objective’ rules is not only chimerical, but dangerous”. Ultimately, Dow’s (2007) fears appear to be reinforced and we are truly left without “a convincing set of criteria for choosing between scientific alternatives” (Negru, 2009, p.14).

1. **A reflection on paradigms and the persuasiveness of economic narratives**

Yet, not everything is lost. Kuhn (2012), for instance, recognises that good, persuasive cases can be made for theory choices, despite the otherwise conventional nature of methodological rules. While he remarks that scientific logic, and especially experiments, cannot solve disagreements over paradigmatic choices, as these are themselves embedded in paradigms, the debate, according to Kuhn (2012), shifts its focus onto the premises used for persuasion, and specifically their rejection. It is McCloskey (1983, p.482; 1994) who applies such a rhetorical approach in economics, where persuasion is not merely achieved by submission to specific methodological rules but, on the contrary, economists “argue about the aptness of economic metaphors, the relevance of historical precedents, the persuasiveness of introspections, the power of authority, the charm of symmetry, the claims of morality” and so on. In Robert Garnett’s (2006, 2011) eyes such rhetoric pluralism, understood as a ‘disciplined conversation’ (McCloskey, 1983), becomes a necessity for a critical and liberal conversation between economists, and promotes the intellectual freedom required for the advancement of the discipline. With pluralism acknowledging, and even promoting, different frameworks, theory, method and concept choices can be made through the persuasive power of these disciplined conversations. This also shields pluralism against charges of subjectivism, in which an individual’s own unique perspective or experience of the world prevents the formation of common grounds regarding the representation of the world (Krausz, 2010), without claiming to have found the one methodology that will solve the ‘problem of theory choice’ (Feyerabend, 1993). Instead, the intersubjective consensus emerging from this conversation may be the best solution to the problem of choice we can hope for.

Finding a consensus, however, does not come without problems. The first that comes to mind is the incommensurability of paradigms, especially after a scientific revolution generating a ‘Gestalt switch’ (Kuhn, 2012). Such a switch implies an inability to carry out inter-paradigm conversation due to the complete reconceptualisation of the world it tries to emulate. Hence, consensus between members of different paradigms seems impossible; as Max Planck (1949, pp.33-34) famously remarked, “a new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die”. However, in the case of theory comparison Feyerabend (1993) shows that something like inter-paradigm conversation has, historically, occurred and that, generally, it is the assumed preconditions of theory-comparability which lead to incommensurability (D’Agostino, 2014). Moreover, Kuhn (2012) himself recognises that a paradigmatic understanding of social sciences may make little sense due to the lack of general consensus among social scientists about anything. He remarks that he “was struck by the number and extent of the overt disagreements between social scientists about the nature of legitimate scientific problems and methods” (Kuhn, 2012, p.viii), something he was not familiar with in the communities of natural scientists.

As a result, we may dismiss the concept of discrete paradigms in social sciences, and economics, and replace it with something that recognise the possibility of consensus emerging. In the following it is suggested that social-scientific and specifically economic frameworks be defined with the help of Laudanain (1978, 1987, 1996) means-end relations between cognitive aims and methodological norms, in order to conceptualise the possibility of consensus in an environment of conventional methodological rules. In addition, the use of MacIntyrian (1977, 1988) epistemological crises as a consensual basis for theory, method and conceptual choices will be argued for. It will also be argued that both Laudan (1979, 1987, 1996) and MacIntryre (1977, 1988) allow us to i) gain a different perspective on the nature of schools of thought in economics, their communalities and distinctive characteristics, and ii) provide us with a intersubjective rule for theory choice.

1. **Choice and consensus as migration between cognitive aims and methodological norms**
	1. *Identifying schools of thought with cognitive aims and methodological norms*

According to Laudan (1978, 1987, 1996) academic communities and their frameworks can be identified by their cognitive aims and methodological norms, which come in the form of hypothetical imperatives such as ‘if your [cognitive] aim is E, you ought to do M’. The central assumption of frameworks is that M promotes E better than existing alternatives, which allows us to distinguish different frameworks, or schools of thought, from one another. For instance, in the Marxist framework a rough example of a pair of a cognitive aim and methodological norm could be formulated as: “if your aim is to develop a theory of capitalism, you ought to do a class analysis”. Additional support for distinction is provided by the unique sets of cognitive aims and methodological norms of these frameworks, while it seems that some other sets might be shared, which explains the general difficulty in drawing exact lines between different schools of thought. It must be said, however, that Laudan (1978, 1987, 1996) remains careful by suggesting that these imperatives are merely hypothetical in nature, while Kaiser (1991, p.438) remarks that there are instances where the imperatives are more straightforward and “function much like social norms”. He points to the importance of publications in academia with regard to “acceptable additions to scientific knowledge” and career development. He argues that such norms must be obeyed and that any “deviation requires extensive justification” (Kaiser, 1991, p.440).

Moreover, it appears that not only is there a dichotomy between hypothetical and straightforward cognitive aims and norms but that, with Kaiser’s (1991) example in mind, they can be found at different levels of abstraction, ranging from universal over paradigm-like to non-universal cognitive aims and methodological norms as illustrated in figure one below (Shweder, 1986; reference to be added if/when accepted). This means that some cognitive aims and methodological norms are shared across communities such as schools of thought and even paradigmatic groupings such as heterodox and orthodox economics. For instance, Shweder (1986, p.180) defines the universal cognitive aims and methodological norms as rational processes such as “common patterns of hypothetical reasoning, means-ends analysis, causal analysis, and experimental reasoning”, which can be allocated to our conceptual schemes (Case, 1997; Rescher, 2008), while non-universal aims and norms at a lower level of ‘paradigmatic groups’ are less-shared rational concepts. In economics, for instance, those could be open- vs closed-system ontologies (Lawson, 1997, 2003; Dow, 2000). They could also be the mainstream insistence on “mathematical–deductive method[s]” (Lawson, 2006, p.493) or “the rationality hypothesis, methodological instrumentalism, methodological individualism, marginalism or the equilibrium hypothesis” (reference to be added if/when accepted). Another possibility is the usefulness “of economic metaphors, the relevance of historical precedents, the persuasiveness of introspections, the power of authority, the charm of symmetry, the claims of morality” (McCloskey, 1983, p.482), some of the (normative) epistemic principles mentioned above and so on. Finally, the non-universal cognitive aims and methodological norms allow us to more or less distinguish between specific schools of thought, for instance with regard to the role of uncertainty in Post-Keynesian Economics, the causal efficacy of institutions in Institutional Economics or class in Marxist Economics to name but a few.



I.e. Marxists class analysis

I.e. “common patterns of hypothetical reasoning, means-ends analysis, causal analysis, and experimental reasoning” (Shweder, 1986, p.180).

I.e. “mathematical–deductive method[s]” (Lawson, 2006, p.493) or the rationality hypothesis, methodological instrumentalism, methodological individualism, marginalism or the equilibrium hypothesis.

Universal rational processes on the level of conceptual schemes.

Paradigm-like group specific rational processes.

Non-universal rational processes on the level of schools of thought.

Figure 1: Proposed layers of cognitive aims and methodological norms (reference to be added if/when accepted)

* 1. *Defining choice as migration between cognitive aims and methodological norms*

By applying the Laudanian (1978, 1987, 1996) conception we can now define theory, method and concept choice as migration between different sets of cognitive aims and methodological norms, with ease of migration between these sets depending on the level they are situated in. For instance, Readon (2008, p189) shows that heterodox economists are capable of easily migrating into mainstream cognitive aims and methodological norms, at least temporarily, by remarking that “[a] total of 95 percent of mainstream papers [by heterodox economists] sent to mainstream journals were accepted”, despite the fact that “heterodox economists and orthodox economists speak different languages, have different priors, have a different knowledge base, often work with different methodologies”. It becomes more difficult, however, with migration between Shweder’s (1986) universal cognitive aims and methodological norms. It can be said that certain patterns of hypothetical or logical reasoning are so engraved in our conceptual schemes that leaving them behind seems both impossible and unnecessary (reference to be added if/when accepted). On the other side, we remain able to migrate between, for instance, a plurality of ontological positions, and to appreciate their different epistemological and methodological consequences.

It may be reasonable to assume that choices between methodologies, theories, concepts etc. mostly happen at the levels of schools of thought and paradigm-like groupings, while there are no cases in which Shweder’s (1986) universals are scrutinised in the same way as methodologies. For example, after the financial crisis the number of arguments for alternative methodologies in economics has increased substantially (see, for instance, Lee and Lavoie, 2012; Lavoie, 2014; Jo and Lee, 2015; Lee and Cronin, 2016) but there is little to no debate about alternatives to concepts such as causality, hypothetical and logical reasoning or history. Especially in the case of the latter concept, the central problem of the philosophy of history appears rather to be how history can be conceptualised and not if it has to be. While economists apply different methodologies to give an account of the fundamental causes of the financial crisis, nobody discusses alternatives to the idea that this event has a specific historical nature, i.e. it has a specific temporal characteristic, and it can be argued that this is not even necessary. The underlying ontological consensus between different frameworks sets the discourse well enough and does not need to be scrutinised if everyone agrees.

However, this consensus does not prove the objective, i.e. framework independence, the nature of history itself. That is to say that an inter-framework consensus does not logically prove framework independence. In the case of history it is possible to make reference to the conceptual scheme of the Pirahã people in South America, which appears to have no elaborate concept of history as we know it (Everett, 2010), to prove the framework dependency of the concept, even if it is highly unlikely that members of the Pirahã people will ever participate in the academic discourse about the financial crisis. Nonetheless, the argument is that conceptual framework independency does not exist even for the most fundamental concepts we can think of, and as a result of the different levels of cognitive aims and methodological norms we must find candidates for consensus-based choice criteria that are situated on levels above the one where the choice is to be made. One possible candidate suggested here will be MacIntyrian (1977, 1988) epistemological crises, and while admittedly there may be more candidates out there, such as an appeal to empiricism, it will be argued that this candidate is a highly suitable concept for a wider consensus for economists.

* 1. *Epistemological crises as a candidate for inter-framework consensus on migration*

MacIntyre (1977, 1988) argues that it is the framework’s inherent justifications for its own success or necessity which allows its members to identify the point at which their framework is no longer capable of solving a growing number of the issues it faces. This is an argument similar to Kuhnian (2012) anomalies causing a paradigm shift. The only solution to these issues, which he calls epistemological crises, is “the invention or discovery of new concepts and the framing of some new types of theory” (MacIntyre, 1988, p.362). This will allow groups of researchers to migrate into a new or alternative framework. This framework needs, however, to meet the following three criteria:

First (…) [it] must furnish a solution to the problems which had previously proved intractable in a systematic and coherent way. Second, it must also provide an explanation of just what it was which rendered the tradition, before it had acquired these new resources, sterile or incoherent or both. And third, these first two tasks must be carried out in a way which exhibits some fundamental continuity of the new conceptual and theoretical structures with the shared beliefs in terms of which the tradition of enquiry had been defined up to this point. (MacIntyre, 1988, p.362)

This is a specific reference to framework-dependent rationality, the fact that the members of any framework realise, by their own standards and the use of their own intellectual resources, that they will no longer be able to solve the epistemological crises they face (Flett, 1999; MacIntyre, 1988). This makes epistemological crises possible candidates for an inter-framework consensus on choice. In other words, theories that begin to fail to satisfy the framework-specific criteria a researcher holds, and are therefore more likely to be rejected by her, is a criterion itself which may be shared across different frameworks, thus being a suitable candidate for inter-framework consensus.

There is, however, still room for objections. MacIntyre (1977, 1988), for example, does not offer an explanation of how one can distinguish between a framework, or theory, that has failed by its own standards or one that is just showing temporary weakness due to some unforeseen anomalies. Lakatos (1970, pp.99-100), on the other hand, acknowledges this problem, distinguishing between “progressive and degenerate problemshifts”, where the latter merely provide “post-hoc explanations either of chance discoveries or of facts anticipated by, and discovered in, a rival programme” and give justification for a migration from one framework to another. The problem is, however, to identify when exactly we have a progressive or degenerate problemshift; hence, quick migration based on a perceived failure to meet framework-dependent standards may be premature. In the case of economics, for instance, the financial crisis may in fact only be a temporary issue for the mainstream, which would not justify abandoning the mainstream framework. Secondly, even if this problem can be overcome and we can make a quick decision on the success and failure of a theory, it remains unclear whether success and failure should be the dominant criteria for a normative rationality to begin with. Miner (2011) argues that it is possible that two incommensurable theories, A and B, come from two different frameworks with different standards. While theory A faces simple standards which are easily met, theory B has much harsher criteria for success and might therefore fail. In economics we can see this problem concerning the acknowledgement of theory failure in cases where a heterodox critique of a lack of representational adequacy is met with a Friedmanian (1953) instrumentalism that rejects the need for appropriate representation as long as the predictive power of a theory is supported by empirical evidence.

* 1. *Using epistemological crises proactively to frustrate framework-dependent narratives*

Yet, we do not have to give up epistemological crises as a basis for consensus regarding theory, concept or method choices, even if migration might be premature or, if based on framework-dependent, and thus diverging, success criteria, inadequately motivated. The argument put forward here is that, instead of being merely reactive to an epistemological crisis, without knowing if it is progressive or degenerative in a Lakatosian (1970) sense, the pluralist might adopt a more proactive stance by trying to purposefully trigger these crises. This intentional pursuit of such crises will constantly frustrate any framework-dependent theory and narrative, forcing frameworks to develop to avoid falling into the “post-hoc explanations” of which Lakatos (1970, p.100) speaks. In the absence of framework-independent choice criteria, proactive triggering of epistemological crises means frustrating one framework narrative with elements from other frameworks. This means that migration into different frameworks becomes aim-oriented, justifiable, and may facilitate constructive and fruitful discourses between members of different frameworks (reference to be added if/when accepted). Furthermore, this frustration can take place on various levels of cognitive aims and methodological norms, leading to the scrutiny of methods, theories and concepts, as well as the abovementioned success criteria alike. What remains to be done is to establish a consensus among (pluralist) economists for applying epistemological crises and migration between cognitive aims and methodological norms, as described, to represent suitable choice criteria for different frameworks.

1. **Some policy implications of choice understood as aimed migration**

With the argument for migration and the proactive use of epistemological crises outlined, the implications for pluralism and policy recommendations can now be explored. One may argue that, under epistemological pluralism, where knowledge is constructed by different frameworks, related policy recommendations are equally subject to specific frameworks. Weintraub (1991, p.150), for instance, remarks that any claim in economics is nothing more than inviting someone else “to participate in a (Wittgensteinian) language game”. Ultimately, he argues, economists ‘seeing’ phenomena, as in “Solow sees a market failure [or] Lucas sees rational competitive activity” (Weintraub, 1991, p.150), is a mere “construction” by economists for the sake of persuasion and “not a representation in the sense of a discursive act that is closer to the Truth than any other construction”. As a consequence, policy recommendations based on these framework-dependent discourses may only be evaluated in terms of their persuasiveness and not in terms of truthfulness. Persuasiveness, however, becomes interesting when policy recommendations are formulated when seemingly incommensurate framework discourses come together which, by their own standards, may arrive at totally different recommendations if left alone.

* 1. *Exemplary frustration of quantitative research findings with qualitative data*

One simple example of how, for instance, quantitative and qualitative methodologies may lead to different policy recommendations can be found in Brown, Charlwood, Forde and Spencer (2007), who assess pre-crisis job quality surveys in the light of New Labour policies in the UK in 1998 and 2004. The main focus of their paper is “to provide a theoretical as well as empirical assessment of the job quality debate in the context of the record in ofﬁce of the New Labour government” (Brown et al., 2007, p.942). The central findings by Brown et al. (2007) are threefold. First, the results from the Work and Employment Relations Surveys (WERS) survey suggest, with the exception of one measure, that job satisfaction increased in the UK between 1998 and 2004. Secondly, WERS data, in combination with British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) data, show a U-shaped relationship between job satisfaction and income quintiles, meaning that workers at the lower end of the income distribution, as well as at the higher end, are more satisfied than workers from the middle-income range. Based on these findings alone one might formulate a labour market policy recommendation or justification of existing policies inspired by the high job satisfaction of low paid workers in the UK, especially when a straightforward relationship between job satisfaction and job quality is assumed. However, and thirdly, looking at qualitative research into job satisfaction Brown et al. (2007, p.959) find that different expectations and norms play an important role in explaining the U-shaped relationship between income and satisfaction. Meanwhile, the premise of the economics of happiness, i.e., “subjective measures of job satisfaction directly reﬂect the subjectively deﬁned well-being (‘cardinal utility’) of workers”, is rather unsupported. This means that workers in the lower income range are not objectively more satisfied than the middle class but their satisfaction is determined by a different set of expectations and norms. As Brown et al. (2007, p.966) conclude, “these workers are not irrationally expressing satisfaction, but rather are making the most of a disadvantaged socio-economic position”, i.e. being satisfied with having a job rather than being unemployed. Their findings indicate that the frustration of quantitative findings with qualitative research, or how the latter causes a small epistemological crisis for the former, may lead to either different, more carefully formulated policy recommendations or a review of existing labour market policies altogether.

* 1. *Exemplary inter-framework frustration of interpretations of NAIRU*

A more complex case of policy-relevant reciprocal framework frustration in economics may be the ongoing debate about the non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment (NAIRU). This is specifically where, as Stockhammer (2008, p.480) observes, “there is substantial disagreement over the theoretical interpretation of (…) the basic assertion that there is some unemployment at which inflation is stable (at least in the short run)”. This range of interpretations can be attributed to the mainstream synonymisation of NAIRU with the Friedmanian (1968) natural rate of unemployment (Ball and Mankiw, 2002) over New Keynesian (Krugman, 1994; Siebert, 1997) and Post-Keynesian (Sawyer, 1996; Rowthorn, 1999; Sawyer, 2002; Stockhammer, 2004; Arestis and Sawyer, 2005) models, and even to a Marxist version of NAIRU (Goodwin, 1967; Rowthorn, 1977). Stockhammer (2008) concludes that NAIRU is consistent with the theoretical narratives of different schools of thought, although it is sometimes also entirely rejected by members of these schools of thought too (see, for instance, Gordon (1987) or Pollin (1998) for a Marxist rejection of NAIRU). Where acceptance can be found, however, differences appear to be mostly conceptual; for instance, “Marxists would speak of factors influencing the relative power of workers in class struggle rather than, like New Keynesians, about labor market institutions influencing workers’ bargaining power” (Stockhammer, 2008, p.506). Table 1 provides an overview of the interpretations of NAIRU and the relevant policy recommendations of the schools of thought selected by Stockhammer (2008).

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| *School of Thought* | *Selected contributions* | *Interpretation of NAIRU* | *Policy recommendations* |
| Monetarist (mainstream) | Bell and Mankiw, 2002 | Very similar to Natural Rate of Unemployment, actual unemployment will only deviate if there is unexpected inflation, which causes shift in Philips curve. | Mostly monetary policy, but other policies too, should focus on price stability only. Neither monetary nor fiscal policy can influence natural unemployment (seen as structural phenomena) |
| New Keynesian | Krugman, 1994, Siebert, 1997 | Starting from natural rate of unemployment labour market institutions, welfare state characteristics and market power of firms cause short-run disequilibria and consequently inflation changes. | As inflexible labour markets and excessive welfare states have caused the problem, labour markets have to be deregulated and welfare states limited. |
| Post Keynesian | Sawyer, 1996, 2002; Rowthorn, 1999; Stockhammer, 2004; Arestis and Sawyer, 2005 | Effective demand determines level of output and employment. Inflation is caused by distributional effects and monetary policy can stabilise inflation, unemployment and therefore NAIRU, which means it is a policy-induced phenomenon following actual unemployment. | Traditional Keynesian demands for active fiscal and monetary policy, such as price and exchange rate stability, sufficient liquidity etc. |
| Marxist | Goodwin, 1967; Rowthorn, 1977; Harvey, 1982 | No real NAIRU theory despite work on inflation and unemployment. Inflation, however, linked to i) class conflict, ii) monopolies and underconsumption or excess money supply (Saad Filho, 2002)., The reserve army of labour can be linked to NRU/NAIRU, formulated within a profit-led economic model and providing a stable equilibrium. | Increase wages, strengthen bargaining power of labour through relevant labour market institutions. |

Table 1 Interpretations of NAIRU and policy recommendations of selected schools of thoughts (based on Stockhammer, 2008).

On this conceptual level it may be difficult to decide which narrative is right or wrong on a merely empirical basis, especially if these narratives use the same empirical data to develop their narratives (Stockhammer, 2008). Instead, a range of cognitive aims and methodological norms may contribute to the overall persuasiveness of the arguments presented, which are both unique to and shared by different schools of thought depending at the same time. Thus, the different aims and norms found in, for instance, Marxist Economics or New Keynesian or Post-Keynesian economics will frustrate each other in the ongoing debate, forcing each school of thought to develop and refine its approach. Resistance to doing so would mean i) disengaging from the constructive, ‘disciplined conversation’ (McCloskey, 1983), and ii) members of schools of thought being merely reactive to any potential epistemological crises, e.g. those triggered by new empirical tools allowing unemployment rates to be measured more precisely or differently, not knowing whether they are just temporary issues or justify complete migration.

To further illustrate the frustration outlined above consider the following two examples: Stockhammer (2008) concludes that there is little potential for a Marxist theory of NAIRU, because within Marxist economics there are mainly three theoretical directions that explain inflation, namely “distributive conflict, monopoly power and state intervention on the dynamics of credit money” (Saad Filho, 2002, p.99), or a combination thereof (see, for instance, Harvey, 1982). Out of these three it appears that the first one is the most promising candidate for the development of a Marxist theory of NAIRU, because it has the clearest links between inflation and employment. Here, Stockhammer (2008) highlights the, in his evaluation underappreciated, work by Rowthorn (1977) as exception within the Marxist literature, who develops a ‘conflict theory of inflation’ based on distributional income differences of workers and capitalists for living standards and profit as result of wage negotiations. Similarly, Harvey (1982, p.313) argues that the capitalists’ attempt of wage depression, which is part of class struggle, is easier achieved through inflation rather than direct wage cuts, and that “a massive industrial reserve army” may be an additional necessity for inflation to achieve wage depression. However, this is far as he goes to link unemployment and inflation without getting close to anything that resembles a NARIU theory.

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On the other hand, some Monetarist, New and Post-Keynesians will argue that a, empirically supported, short-run Phillips curveis arguably needed for the development of a NAIRU theory, and that without the combination of inflation and unemployment Marxist interpretations will remain incomplete. Secondly, we will be able to formulate the, potentially shared, cognitive aims and methodological norms within Monetarism, New and Post-Keynesianism, devoting detailed approaches incorporating a Phillips curve relation between inflation and unemployment to the analysis of NAIRU, independently of the precise formulation of individual theories of inflation within each school of thought. Following the reasoning from above, the cognitive aims and methodological norms of Monetarism, New and Post-Keynesianism with regard to NAIRU frustrate the Marxists’ lack thereof. This means that Marxists can either adopt cognitive aims and methodological norms to develop a stronger link between inflation and unemployment for a NAIRU theory, as Rawthorn (1977) seems to do, or disengage from the conversation altogether.

On the other hand, contemporary Marxists formulate their policy recommendations with a strong normative leaning towards labour. As Marx (1976, p.275; as quoted in Stockhammer, 2008, p.504), writes “the determination of the value of labor power contains a historical and moral element”, which can result in morally justified pro-workers policy recommendations from contemporary Marxist. This is not to say that all Marxists base all of their analyses in morality nor that all non-Marxist are not motivated by moral judgements. Instead, it is argued that there are cognitive aims and methodological norms within Marxism that may frustrate the policy recommendations of the Monetarists, Neo and Post-Keynesians, who currently lack such normative focus. In the case of Post-Keynesians the frustration would be relatively minor as Post-Keynesians and Marxist alike acknowledge the power difference between capitalists and wage labour (Stockhammer, 2008). Specifically in the case of Lavoi (2002) and Cassetti’s (2003) concept of ‘conflict inflation’ the frustration with Marxist normativity may be less significant as in the case of Monetarists, Neo-Keynesians NAIRU policy recommendations, especially those which promote deregulations of labour markets which is contrary the idea of strengthening bargaining power of wage labour (see Table 1).

On a more conceptual level more radical Marxist may frustrate Post-Keynesians more substantially. As Stockhammer (2008) summarises, Post Keynesian policy recommendations are built on the conclusion that institutional interference in markets, which are in constant disequilibrium, causes some (temporary) stability. Yet, these policy recommendations, especially if aimed at setting “the parameters of the market in such a way that the economy served broadly egalitarian ends” (Miller, 1991, p. 407) through these interference, can be frustrated by some radical Marxist normativity. Cohen (1991, 1995, 2000, 2009; Miller, 2014), for instance, argues that markets always create distributive injustice and social division, and therefore any egalitarian ideals of equality is inconsistent with market based policies. In summary, the introduction of these Marxist cognitive aims and methodological norms could shape Post-Keynesian policy recommendations differently by extending their aim from creating labour market stabilising institutions that have an even stronger consideration for the unequal power distribution and conflict (Lavoi, 2002; Cassetti, 2003). Additionally Post-Keynesians could, following Cohen (1991, 1995, 2000, 2009), reconsider the underlying cognitive aims regarding why labour market stabilising institutions should be suggested through policy recommendations in the first place, especially if these are based on egalitarian ideals of equality, or show that markets do not necessarily lead to distributive injustice and social division.

From the literature and these two specific examples above it can be further concluded that debates about NAIRU are held on at least two different levels of cognitive aims and methodological norms. First, a debate about the mere existence or empirical adequacy of NAIRU independently of specific schools of thought, and secondly a discussion about the theoretical interpretations across different schools of thought. The apparent observation here is that the latter discourse requires the first one to i) come to a conclusion or ii) not engage with it for the sake of making an argument regarding the theoretical interpretations. Any exchange regarding the intellectual interpretation of NAIRU requires participants in this exchange to agree to the “assertion that there is some unemployment at which inflation is stable” (Stockhammer, 2008, p.480) or else the debate will fail due to incommensurate positions. This becomes especially important if, for instance, any theoretical approaches to NAIRU are built upon the acceptance of a (short-run) Phillips curve while the empirical support for the proposed relationship remains weak or is said to be non-existent (see, for instance, Reichel, 2004; Rudd and Whelan, 2005; Hall and Hart, 2012; Forder, 2014). Likewise, any policy recommendations based on the theoretical interpretations of NAIRU require acceptance of this basic assertion.

However, independently of the level of discussion, the persuasive power of arguments, i.e. whether or not NAIRU exists or what interpretation and models are more appropriate, can, as is argued, only emerge and develop when being persistently frustrated by opponents via epistemological crises. In summary, pluralists should therefore intentionally choose the cognitive aims and methodological norms offered in different schools of thought in economics to purposefully trigger these crises in order to facilitate the ‘disciplined conversation’ of which McCloskey (1983) speaks. This is especially important when empirical falsification is not feasible due to underdetermination of theory (Quine, 1951; Duhem, 1991), i.e. discourses with different concepts or theories happening on the same empirical basis. Consequently, choices under pluralism are not merely a desirable option for the few but rather become a necessity for the sake of intellectual exchange and progression in the discipline itself.

It seems that an intra- and especially inter-framework debate, and the way different schools of thought could frustrate each other’s narrative, may not only be beneficial for the argumentative advancement in each framework but could also have a substantial impact on related policy recommendations. Here one can agree with Dow’s (2013, pp.18-19) argument that pluralism, e.g. the use of analytical tools from different schools of thought, “is particularly important for exercising judgement” in the political context, and that under pluralism “this judgement would be reached on the basis of an understanding of the range of possible analyses and policy stances and the willingness to defend the final choice”. Consequently, the pluralist would not adopt different analytical positions at the same time but instead would be capable of defending her own position against those of others by either constantly refining her argument or shifting towards criticism of presuppositions (Kuhn, 2012). Any policy recommendation born out of this ‘conflict zone’ may thus gain a contextual and temporal nature and, just like in the case of methodological pluralism, one-size-fits-all policy approaches may be given up for good.

1. **Conclusion**

This paper contributes to the discussion of pluralism, by proposing that objective rules for choices of theories, methods and concepts cannot be formulated but instead must be based on intersubjective consensus among participants in scientific discourses, participants who may come from different frameworks. In the absence of framework-independent meta-methodological rules for choices this paper argues that epistemological crises (MacIntyre, 1977, 1988), i.e. events which frustrate a framework-specific narrative and its ability to solve problems, could play an important role in an intersubjective consensus on what should be used to determine the need and justification for choices of different theories, methods, concepts or even schools of thought. It is acknowledged that epistemological crises themselves require consensus, especially as there are other criteria which can be applied to justify choices, for instance career aspirations (Readon, 2008). However, this paper claims that epistemological crises are suitable candidates for being an intersubjective basis of consensus as their purpose may be accepted within a wide range of different frameworks, especially since they work under the assumption that each framework will be capable of identifying failures of theories or narratives against the benchmark of its own success criteria.

Moreover, it is suggested that pluralists should actively trigger these epistemological crises by choosing between different sets of cognitive aims and methodological norms (Laudan, 1978, 1987, 1996), which are used to define schools of thought and paradigm-like groupings, and the relating framework-dependent narratives, in the absence of said objective meta-methodological rules for decision making. This is especially important due to the fact that success and failure criteria may vary between different frameworks, and because of the difficulties of distinguishing between temporal or total failure (Lakatos, 1970). Hence, it is argued that both progress in specific narratives and resulting policy recommendations can only be achieved when continuously frustrated with other narratives.

As a result the paper concludes that choice under pluralism becomes a necessity with regard to the development and securing of the persuasive power of any theoretical and policy-relevant narrative engaged in intellectual conversations (Garnett, 2006). Meanwhile, justification for choices based on framework-dependent criteria, i.e. research questions, empirical adequacy, ontology, model allegiance, career aspirations etc., may lead to issues of incommensurability.

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