Dealing with plurality in scientific practice: The case of International Political Economy.

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Scientific pluralism, a normative endorsement of the plurality or multiplicity of research approaches in science, has recently been advocated by philosophers (e.g., Chang, Longino, Mitchell, Waters and Wylie) as well as social scientists. Comparing these accounts of scientific pluralism, one will encounter quite some variation.

First, we want to clarify the variety of philosophical versions of scientific pluralism by showing how they incarnate different models of democracy (e.g., aggregative, deliberative, participatory, agonistic or antagonistic) – stipulating the desired social-epistemic interaction among the plurality of research approaches in different ways.

Second, we analyze the recent debate about the desired interaction among the plurality of research approaches, or ‘schools’, in the discipline of International Political Economy (IPE). This debate was triggered by a paper of Benjamin Cohen (2007) in which he presents a way of slicing up the field of IPE in different schools as well as a proposal for its future development. The many reactions this paper provoked provide us with a clear insight into how scientific pluralism is understood by social scientists and how to implement it (see, e.g., the collection of papers in Phillips and Weaver (2011) and the 20th anniversary issue of the Review of International Political Economy (2013); also see Sil and Katzenstein’s (2010) account of analytic eclecticism).

Scrutinizing this debate will clarify what social scientists themselves consider to be the ideal interaction among the multiplicity of research approaches (schools, theories, models, …). Further, the confrontation with the different philosophical accounts of scientific pluralism discussed in the first part of the paper enables us to make the social scientists’ accounts more explicit as well as evaluate and refine the strengths and weaknesses of the philosophical accounts – helping us to spell out more carefully how different research approaches interact in the most productive way possible.

References


