I am happy to see another crop of interesting papers which enliven this issue. Indeed, the variety of papers submitted has prompted us to add a section of Communications for papers which are essentially commentaries, and another section of Work on Progress where people can report their current work in the field of methodology with the hope to promote exchange of ideas before the final product is published.

It is a well-known fact that economists have talked about falsification for a long time but seldom practised it. What makes falsification so difficult in economics? This is answered in Klaut’s paper on refutability which points out that due to the protective belt of additional hypotheses, only specific models are refutable. This complexity of economic theories, resulting from their having to deal with real world problems, leads to a higher degree of theoretical pluralism than physics. In fact, this applies to the entire social science sphere where human perceptions and actions have to be taken into consideration. Using the Iraqi conquest of Kuwait as an example, Samuels elaborates on what he calls the matrix of significances in the social field which is so complex that there is a question whether the criteria of explanation found useful in the physical sciences can be meaningfully and usefully applied in the social sciences. From a pragmatic or problem-solving orientation, Dennis in his communication piece believes that time is long overdue for economists to devote more attention to developing a working version of systematic principles governing inquiry which are better suited to their own field. In a similar vein, there are outrages among agricultural economists as seen in Napier’s communication.

At the philosophical level, Jacobi, using a taxonomic approach, relates various metaphilosophical positions in the philosophy of science to various methodologies of theory creation and theory acceptance. Economists are urged to examine their metaphilosophical commitments and determine whether they are appropriate for economics given the nature of its domain of interest. In his paper, Woo warns us of the danger of dogmatism inherent in philosophical reduction. Although economics is very much against philosophical reductionism, it has been unwittingly rendered a reductionist research program in the sense that its explanatory resources become gradually confined to concepts and principles within the economic sphere. A broader interface with its neighborhood disciplines is called for.

Dissatisfaction with mainstream methodology opens many doors to alternatives. On the one hand, if individuals are not to be reduced to agents without character, there is room for interpretation in understanding the social and economic world. Two papers, one by Boettke and the other by Pruchitko, represent this ‘interpretive’ point of view as part of the growing hermeneutics literature. On the other hand, as activities at the micro level do not exist in a vacuum, there is no reason for analysis to run from micro to macroeconomics alone. Should there be also a macro-foundation for microeconomics, as asked in the paper by Gerber, Singh and Frantz?

In this issue, we have also papers on more technical and theoretical matters. Lin and Parley write on new developments in qualitative economics which, coupled with the advancement of artificial intelligence applications in qualitative physics, will have great potentials for practical implementation in dealing with real world problems. In neoclassical economics, Nicolaides questions the possibility of consistent preferences under the condition of imperfect information, while Langlois adds time to the analysis of monopoly pricing. Speaking about time, we have it in economics since Marshall, but it has little to do with real history. Take a look at Gans’ communication on time in economics via physics.

And, we have Colander’s very interesting paper on appraising current developments in economics. He advocates the use of interviews, surveys and bibliometrics in addition to textual analysis. He also stresses the importance of pre-published works. Mayer’s report on his ongoing work, though in skeleton form, should be a step in that direction.

In view of the wide range of methodological
questions in economics, we had the idea of concentrating on specific themes in separate issues of this Bulletin. Judging from the response, it is now time to do so. We plan to devote a full section of the coming issue to the status of economics as a science. We welcome papers specifically on this theme. Of course, other papers and suggestions of themes for the future are also welcome.

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