

Abstract

Economic methodology is now a well-established sub-discipline within economics. The overriding goal of economic methodological work is to influence the further development of economics as a social science. Within the sub-discipline of economic methodology there are, however, differing views as to how this goal can best be achieved. The purpose of this thesis is to make constructive contributions to this debate. Special emphasis is placed on the possibilities for utilising philosophical arguments and philosophical reflections in economic methodological work.

The thesis is divided into three parts. In part 1 the development of the economic methodological thinking in the period after World War II is traced with special emphasis on the developments in the period after 1980. The economic methodological thinking is found to have undergone substantial changes in this time period. Consequences of these changes are discussed and proposals for a more constructive and productive organisation of economic methodological thinking and of the more concrete economic methodological work are offered. Philosophical reasoning and argumentation has a key role in these proposals.

In part 2 questions connected to philosophically grounded economic methodological thinking and economic methodological work is further elaborated upon. The key issue here is the necessary role philosophical stances play in more or less all forms of work within economics as a social science. The kinds of philosophical questions involved are traced out and the consequences of alternative answers to these questions are discussed. This is followed up by a proposal for a special form of economic methodological analysis; philosophically grounded descriptive-critical analysis. The purpose of this kind of analysis is to uncover and discuss in a systematic way the philosophical stances that are built into economic theories and, consequently, also into various uses of these theories. Moreover, the possibilities for utilising philosophical reasoning in the form of ontological theories in the development of economic theories and economic analysis are discussed. The question of how to develop standards and criteria for scientific practice within the discipline of economics is also discussed here from a philosophical point of view.

Part 3 of the thesis is devoted to practical examples of philosophically grounded economic methodological work. The proposed descriptive-critical mode of analysis from part 2 is illustrated by an analysis of a part of a well-known textbook in economics. The possibilities for utilising philosophical reflection in the development of economic theories and analysis is exemplified by introducing a kind of ontological theory called 'transcendental realism'. This kind of theory is discussed in relation to the domain of economics and the possibilities and consequences of utilising the theories are considered. In an epilogue the possibilities of influencing the development of economics as a social science through these kinds of economic methodological work is discussed and concluded in the positive.

Keywords: *Economic methodology; Rhetoric; Social science contributions; Philosophical reasoning; Ontology; Logic; Epistemology; Ethics; Analytic philosophy; Descriptive-critical analysis; Realism; Critical realism; Transcendental realism; Standards and criteria.*

Bjørn-Ivar Davidsen, Høgskolen i Østfold, Os Allé 9, N-1757 Halden, Norge. Tel. + 47 69 21 52 34,
Fax + 47 69 21 52 04, e-mail: Bjorn.I.Davidsen@hiof.no.
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