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Hahn and Economic Methodology

Thomas A. Boylan and
Paschal F. O'Gorman



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Hahn and Economic Methodology

Frank Hahn maintained a relentless critical attitude to economic methodology throughout his career, regarding it effectively as a fruitless activity that should be avoided. Yet, paradoxically, this did not inhibit Hahn from propounding a prescriptive approach to economic theorizing and the role and status of economic theory. In *Hahn and Economic Methodology* we provide the first book-length study of Hahn's overall position on methodology, including his strident critique of certain methodological positions, and his positive methodological prescriptions and their rationale.

Hahn and Economic Methodology addresses two fundamental questions: (1) what is distinctive about economic theorizing; (2) what is the cognitive value of the outcome of this activity of economic theorizing? i.e. economic theory? We will argue that, for Hahn, economic theorizing is distinctive with respect to four dimensions. First, the aim of economic theory is neither to describe nor to explain the real economic world, as in the physical sciences. Rather, the aim is to achieve objective, but non-scientific, understanding. Second, the central question for economic theory remains, for Hahn, how to understand, but not to predict as in physics for instance, how decentralized choices interact and perhaps get co-ordinated. Third, Hahn identifies 'three commitments,' without which, he argues, economic theorizing for him is not possible. Finally, economic theorizing has a distinctive approach, which Hahn calls its 'grammar of argumentation.'

The two fundamental questions and these four dimensions of economic theorizing constitute both the holding frame of our investigation, and the central subject matter of this book, at the end of which readers should have a clearer overall view of Hahn's reflections on economic methodology, which are always subtle, at times tantalizingly elusive, but always intriguing.

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Both Professors have collaborated over the last 20 years and have co-written and co-edited a number of books (all with Routledge), and they have published extensively in an array of international journals.

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