

Philosophy-Economics Network

Newsletter n° 2, June/July 2013

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News

Expansion of the network to Europe

In this second newsletter¹ of the *Philosophy-Economics Network* the major event is unquestionably the expansion of the network to Europe on May 27th.

We are thrilled to announce that we already had 75 non French-speaking members (on 27th June). For them as well as for all our 264 members, the following is a short reminder about the main development steps of the network:

- at the end of November 2012 launch of the preliminary and French-speaking version of the network,
- in early January 2013, online publication of the French-speaking website (<http://philo-eco.eu>),
- by the end of February, online publication of the English version of the website (at the same address),
- late May, expansion to all Europe by sending a letter² to a list of scholars likely to be interested in the network.

In the space of seven months, the network has grown up to a scale that his promoters had not anticipated. However, the communicative energy and the enthusiasm of Jean-Sébastien Gharbi led us to get ahead of schedule – and it is without doubt a good thing. We are thrilled of the result obtained in such a short time because the diagnosis that we made at the French-speaking level seems to be confirmed at the European level: an important community of scholars interested in the interaction between philosophy and economics exists³.

Of course, our initiative can be only conceived as a complement and a relay of what already exists. As an illustration of this remark, Ricardo Crespo the current secretary-treasurer of INEM (*International Network for Economic Method*) spontaneously offered, and we thank him for that, to forward our launching letter to the members of INEM which

1. The first network newsletter is available (in French) on the site (tab “newsletters”).

2. The link to this launching letter can be found on the site (tab “about the network”).

3. We notice also registrations of non European members who are interested in what is done in Europe on these issues.

organised his 11th *Annual Conference* in June at Rotterdam (further information on the network site, category “Conferences”).

Our network now has a triple aim at the European level:

- gather and share information in this international community,
- arouse discussions on questions of common interest,
- identify in Europe “precursor” places (the more ancient) or “promising” one (the more recent) of the dialogue between economists and philosophers.

For these purposes, the parallel coexistence of the English and the French versions of the website and the newsletters will be maintained.

Such a fast development in this triple direction has to be controlled as far as possible and that poses both a fundamental question and an organizational issue.

1°) **The fundamental question is about the delimitation of the field of interaction between philosophy and economics.** And this question arose at least three times in the last months. As a matter of fact several members of the network asked for information about some very interdisciplinary events to be posted on the site philo-eco.eu (events ranging from the border of philosophy and political science to the relation between economics and literature, or between management and ethics).

We hesitated before eventually deciding not to circulate information each time that one of the disciplines which are our main centers of interest was either absent or quite marginal. Without denying at all the interest of the three above mentioned events, it seemed necessary for us, in this delicate step of network launching, to adopt a sufficiently restrictive definition of an already very large domain (epistemology and economic methodology, moral and political philosophy and normative economics, history of philosophy and history of economic thought). Failing that, the risk was too big to transform little by little the interaction philosophy-economics in a kind of epistemological “black hole” which would end by absorbing all the matter of social sciences.

Such a position does not mean a closure in regard to neighboring disciplines, as far as the philosophical questioning and the link with economics are clear: it is the case for instance concerning the recurrent debate in France about the distinction between “economic sciences” and “management sciences”. In other countries, the debate was solved by putting the practice of management in firms and organizations out of the academic field and by removing the theoretical distinction between economics and management, because of the porosity of these two fields. Here there is a nice debate to suggest to our management science colleagues under the kindly gaze of philosophers...

2°) **Another pitfall to avoid in the development of the network is obviously the logistical problem of its organization.** For now, we maintain the flexible solution of interactivity, at least as long as it is compatible with an efficient functioning. Nevertheless two difficulties have to be mentioned:

- Contrary to what we first hoped, since the launch of the network we have received a rather small number of information spontaneously sent to the secretariat (secretariat@philo-eco.eu) by the network members. Yet this is an indispensable point of the interactivity we

have favoured until now, because the secretary cannot provide the site in news alone. That is why we renew the call of the first newsletter, in the aim that each of us thinks to relay (even local) information which could interest the entire network.

- The interactivity depending above all on the current secretary's availability risks reaching a limit, and that especially as the expansion of the network to Europe, if this success is confirmed, will strongly increase his task. It is necessary to already think of a sturdier and therefore more collegial way of organizing the network in order to ensure its management over time. **In this regard, the debate is open and all the suggestions are welcome, up to and including the question of backing the network by an association which would be to be created or its integration in a European structure already existing which would accept to host it.** We will probably come back on this question in the next newsletter scheduled for the end of November/begin of December.

For now, we are waiting for your reactions, commentaries and suggestions (secretariat@philo-eco.eu) concerning all the questions mentioned in this first section of our newsletter, and also without forgetting your opinion on the debate we are opening in the following one⁴.

The network managers

Claude Gamel (Aix-Marseille University)

Jean-Sébastien Gharbi (Sciences Po Grenoble)

Patrick Mardellat (Sciences Po Lille)

4. See also the information about the next network conference in the last section.

Debate

The readers of our first newsletter (available in French on the site in tab “newsletters”) will remind of our project to organize a debate within the network, concerning the best way to name the interaction between philosophy and economics, which is our common interest.

We asked our colleague the philosopher Egidius Berns to try presenting in few pages the essential terms of the debate in the light of his long-standing reflexion on the topic. We warmly thank him for having accepted this challenge and for writing an original dialog between two symbolic characters (the “philosopher” and “the economist”). Egidius Berns has also had the kindness to edit our English translation (the original text is in French).

Good reading, but do not forget that this is about launching a collective reflexion. You can share your reactions to this text on the new site section “debate” which was created for this occasion on the network site.

Which name for the interaction between philosophy and economics?

Egidius Berns⁵

Translated from French by Momtchil Karpouzanov and Jean-Sébastien Gharbi
(all emphasis in the original)

The Philosopher: You certainly heard about this network which has been recently established, following an international conference in Lille (France), and gathering philosophers and economists together.

The Economist: Yes, I do. But I would rather say it brings together economists and philosophers, given that the former are majority.

The Philosopher: What can I say? The philosophical discourse was built up on the resistance to the economy. Any attempt at understanding it is already considered as a betrayal by many philosophers. Those joining this network are certainly viewed as poor philosophers by many of their fellows.

The Economist: The same is somehow true for those economists who participate to it. Too soft in the eyes of the profession, too much inclined to consider generalities and not enough concentrated on technique and specific competence of a field in which reality challenges principles. And this is a pity. Indeed, historically speaking economists often used to be erudite people, sensible to the historical and doctrinal dimension of their subject and in this regard

5. Egidius Berns is Emeritus Professor at the Tilburg University in the Netherlands. He has recently published *La porosité, Essai sur la relation entre économie et politique*, Editions Ousia, 2012. English translation *The porosity, An essay on the relation between economy and politics* forthcoming.

similar to philosophers. Economics wants to present itself as a positive knowledge. I am not certain this is truly a progress. Economists kept rather silent when the crisis kicked in. And now that it is here to stay they go rather cacophonous.

The Philosopher: You exaggerate. I do believe that it would be wise to distinguish between the scientific discourse and reality, between *economics* and the *economy*⁶. Both share the culture of numbers. But it is advisable not to confuse the noise made by the economic and political actors with the *economics*. Nowadays true economists are recognisable at their modesty. They doubt and rediscover the historical and moral content of their object.

The Economist: So this network comes at the right time.

The Philosopher: I do think so. Furthermore, philosophers themselves realise that their denial of economics is silly. This new-found awareness however is more due to the invasion of everyday life by the economy than to the consideration of *economics*.

The Economist: So the debate that the network aims at promoting between these two fields might end up being a dialogue of the deaf.

The Philosopher: This is always possible. Although there is an absolute necessity to distinguish between *economy* and *economics*, it still holds that for the majority of philosophers these two have in common the usage of what Hegel calls “*Verstand*” and that could be translated as “understanding” as opposed to the Reason. I am by the way always struck when I listen to people who make the “economy” either in the theoretical field or practically to see how much they share an attitude both profoundly humane and with no mercy. This attitude is extremely difficult to circumscribe because it clearly fits/takes a multitude of social forms. It concerns a world and forms of action both necessary and calculable.

The Economist: Do you mean that the interaction between economists and philosophers inside this network may find its support, its intermediary in this calculating attitude and in this world of necessity that the philosopher seizes as a subdivision of Reason and of which the economist deploys the internal logic?

The Philosopher: Yes this will certainly satisfy philosophers. And it could be named “economic philosophy”. The philosophical tradition has undeniably produced some great philosophies about the economy. To demonstrate this it is enough to mention Aristotle and the first book of his *Politica* or Hegel in the second chapter of the third part of his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. The Aristotelian gesture is absolutely essential in the eyes of philosophers as it constitutes what we call “economy”. Ever since the economy is an independent object, even a natural one according to many. The term “economic philosophy” will therefore designate the philosophical theorisation of a specific object, namely the economy, just as moral philosophy is the philosophical theory dealing with morality. Moreover this economic philosophy will set the frame for the economist’s work, as it places itself at the totalising and funding point of view of Reason.

6. Note from the translators: in English in the original.

The Economist: What you say here sounds peculiar to me, as I understand something completely different when I hear the words “economic philosophy”. In my view, the adjective “economic” placed alongside the noun “philosophy” means that the philosophy in question understands the totality from an economical point of view. Economics are then appealed to explain both theoretical and practical rationality. It seems to me that Marx is often understood this way. The ontological importance it gives to the economy is flattering us of course. However it is also frustrating because it deprives us of our scientific object and turns us into philosophers. In my opinion this is the proof that such a proposition does not work. It is – as often the case in philosophy – way too pretentious and turns a deaf ear to economists’ concerns.

The Philosopher: So, at the end what you want is not really an “economic philosophy”, but rather “philosophical economics”.

The Economist: Exactly. By dint of becoming more and more a technique - often very mathematised and more and more specialised - the economic sciences have lost sight of the doctrinal principles they are built upon as well as the epistemological constraints of their enunciations. Ever since Kuhn’s paradigms and Foucault’s *epistemes* we know that our knowledge implies historical *a priori*. But nowadays economists do not possess the hermeneutic knowledge to unravel them. The same can be said about the logical and epistemological structures of the economic theories, especially if they prove to be historical. In both cases a philosophical contribution could be beneficial to *economics*. In my view the “philosophical economics” aims at improving the economic sciences.

The Philosopher: What you say there reminds me of this famous sentence by Heidegger: “*Die Wissenschaft denkt nicht (Science does not think)*”. This of course is indefensible as soon as a given science proves to be the deployment of an idea and logic that evoke to philosophy. So there is some philosophy to be found in economics.

The Economist: Yes I would agree with that. But shall we not do an extra step and say that philosophy itself does not escape positive knowledge? If it holds true that there is philosophy in economics, there is also economics in philosophy. The self-sufficiency of philosophy, just as that of politics, is not longer credible in the age of globalisation. When I rejected earlier the suggestion of “economic philosophy” I undoubtedly wanted to stress as well that the pretension of a totalising and funding rationality is no longer appropriate, if it has ever been. Philosophical knowledge is fragments as Mardellat would say following the Kierkegaard’s critic of the Hegelian system.

The Philosopher: I fully agree. Philosophy goes through economics just like economics does through philosophy. These subjects are porous, with holes. Even the Aristotelian gesture establishing the economy is not pure.

The Economist: I observe indeed that nowadays some economic publications are penetrated by philosophy and some philosophical publications by economics. It is getting harder and harder to distinguish philosophical theorisation from scientific theorisation especially in such

little falsifiable sciences as those concerned with the economy. And I must say I do not like this.

The Philosopher: Neither do I. It is not necessary to be Derridian to know that even a discourse in fragments hides some totalising and funding design that can always be deconstructed. This is the fate but also the honour of the philosophical concept. Although no longer appropriate, as you mentioned it just now, the totalising and funding rationality is at the same time inevitable.

The Economist: But this would mean that these two types of knowledge are not only with holes but also heterogeneous.

The Philosopher: Indeed it seems to me that a synthesis of those two is neither possible nor desirable. Any “solution” establishing continuity in between those two fields can only be wobbly. Their interaction cannot be named “economic philosophy” nor “philosophical economics”. Even “philosophy and economics” expresses too much harmony. I would prefer “philosophy of economics” as the genitive leaves the question unanswered if it is an objective or subjective⁷ one. But I am afraid it is still too subtle and too little readable. Hence I’d rather simply suggest the hyphen between philosophy and economics: “philo(sophy)-eco(nomics)” as it has already been decided in the emergency. The only problem is that “eco” also waves toward the ecology.

The Economist: And why not “economics-philosophy”? After all economics is what brings us all, both philosophers and economists together and ultimately what is at stake.

The Philosopher: Perhaps. I cannot prove you wrong.

7. I allow myself to refer to my article “Philosophie de l’économie” published in *Rue Descartes*, 28, Paris: P.U.F., 2000.

Information

Network conference date (Strasbourg, 2014)

Within the “Economic Philosophy” Conference held in Lille (June 2012) a round-table was organized in which was proposed not only the idea to create an academic “Philosophy-Economics” network, but also the idea to create a biannual conference hosted by the network.

The next conference will held in Strasbourg (France), under the initiative of two of the network’s “promoters” who accepted to be in charge of it namely Ragip Ege (University of Strasbourg) and Herrade Igersheim (CNRS).

The date of the conference is already scheduled for October 9th and 10th, 2014. Further information and notably the call for papers will be the topic of a special section in the next network newsletter (n° 3, end of November/begin of December).