

**CAHUC Pierre, ZYLBERBERG André. 2016.
Economic Negationism & How to Get Rid of It. Paris:
Flammarion, 240 p.**

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économique et comment s'en débarrasser ?, Paris: Flammarion, 240 p.**

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The book written by the authors Pierre Cahuc and André Zylberberg addresses the scientific truth in the public space in the face of stakeholders who identify themselves as experts (academics, politicians or representatives of private interests) and who influence the decision making process of public policies. The main argument of this book is the importance of developing a scientific truth based on generating evidence using the experimental method. In addition, the book contains a series of empirical examples of a natural experimentation in different topics such as energy, education or tax policies, among others.

During the last years, research has revolutionized, particularly in economics, which can now be considered an exact science by the authors, such as medicine or biology. The development of modern information technology has allowed the creation and management of many databases in parallel with the development of highly sophisticated information processing techniques. The authors shed the light on the development of a methodology based on the experimentation protocol. The use of this method in economics makes it easier to obtain results by comparing groups. Generally, a “test group” where reforms or the program of public policies is compared with the other control group, without the effect (p.14). According to them, this research method based on the medicine transforms the economics in an experimental science, not due to its subject matter of study but to its method.

The use of a scientific work method is reflected through the dissemination of results worldwide that ensures its quality, like publication of articles in academic journals reviewed by peers and high-impact journals.

If this perspective has been generalized, it is not recognized by all the academics. The debate in France has deep roots; the book highlights the long tradition against science and economics of liberal influence, illustrated by emblematic authors such as Pierre Bourdieu or Jean-Paul Sartre who criticize its representation as a tool of domination. According to the authors, the heterodox academics perpetuate this critical tradition against globalization or international finances without strong empirical supports.

They are the representatives of groups that promote a certain way of plurality of methodological contributions of the economics, such as the journal *Alternatives Economiques* or the French Association for Public Economics. Moreover, this association promotes the development of a new section recognized by the National University Council (CNU, by its Spanish initials) that allows hiring professors of economics considered as heterodox and of other disciplines, such as history. The authors criticize the influence of this group and its regular contribution to mass media. In addition, the review goes beyond the strict academic field to be addressed against the representatives of economic interest who claim to be experts and according to the authors, prefer to hide the empirical evidence to guarantee their interests, such as the tobacco industry against smokers' cancer from the 50s, or the oil industry against the existence of the climate change.

The two authors of the book are professors of economics recognized with a major in labor market (Paris-1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University) and represent a group that are intellectually close to people like Jean Tirole (holder of the Nobel Prize in Economics). The publication of the book in September 2016 revealed an intense and interesting debate in France among several representatives of the economics discipline. In addition, the use of the experimental methodology is not applied yet to the entire research field in economics. Actually, these types of experimentation are difficult to develop and are subject to mistakes due to data limits. They are relevant in case of reduced samples and in a well-delimited perimeter to limit the biases. The economics of development has several examples illustrated in the book. In macroeconomics, comparing the effect of a same reform such as minimum wage increase to reduce unemployment between two countries is more difficult since each one has its own special feature.

The words used in the book reveal a very critical and antagonistic will against the position of the authors considered heterodox. They claim the use of the term negationism (*négationnisme* in French) in the title and description of a parallel between a scientific negationism, that is, that rejects

the evidence based on the use of a scientific methodology, and a negationism historically represented by the Nazis on the existence of the holocaust during the Second World War. Moreover, if the discussion is necessary, the use of words with an extremely strong symbolic dimension does not contribute to give a clear view of the different arguments.

The presence of several thinking schools has been always an important characteristic of economics (Marxian, Keynesian, neo-classical, among others), the reduction of this diversity and its influence on the publication of articles in academic journals have been ineluctable in the last years. However, the return of an intense debate between economists in the public space implies the need to play down this argument of positivist domination.

References

Cahuc, P., & Zylberberg, A. (2016). *Le Négationnisme économique et comment s'en débarrasser?*. Paris: Flammarion.