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The phenomenon of the cost of food in order to determine its epistemological criteria of validity

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Abstract

The paper analyzes various theories of value, shows the possibilities and limitations of their application in the process of philosophical rethinking of the phenomenon of the cost of food in modern conditions. Also in the article, based on the generalization of the ontogenesis of the fairness of the cost of food, it is shown that food producers and sellers have greater market power in relation to buyers. Sellers are represented by large agro-industrial enterprises, often multinational. Buyers cannot actually influence the price, which determines the key problem of determining a fair price – the need to take into account all the elements of the phenomenon of the cost of food. Thus, the ontological components of the food value phenomenon include the categories of goods, means of exchange, dimensions of the medium of exchange, and food needs.

The practice of setting food prices is currently dominated by pricing methods based on the cost theory of value. Moreover, in some branches of the agro-industrial complex and at enterprises, the use of pricing based on the marginal theory of value is legally prohibited. Such industries include the food industry in the part that produces products that are included in the consumer basket, related to child nutrition and socially dangerous products. The above-mentioned industries and sub-sectors of the national economy are forced to take their own costs and the average level of profitability as the basis for pricing, since according to the law, they do not have the right to set a price that significantly exceeds the cost of production, and the appointment of an enterprise price below its costs will very soon lead it to bankruptcy.

In addition, most often enterprises whose pricing is regulated by the state produce products with inelastic demand, which also negatively affects the company's profit when the price decreases.

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Keywords

Theory of value, cost of food, validity criteria, price equity, value as a phenomenon.

Introduction

In the modern economy, there is an incredibly significant disparity in the availability of food for the population of different countries. Thus, according to several studies, one of the main causes of hunger and malnutrition in the world is the lack of access to food markets, including in terms of the problem of setting prices. Therefore, a philosophical rethinking of the phenomenon of the cost of food is very important for determining the criteria for its validity, since in modern economic theory there are two theories of value, the provisions of which partially contradict each other: the cost theory of price, the origin of which is associated with the philosophical and economic teachings of Adam Smith, David Rickard and Karl Marx, and the marginal theory of price, the basis of which are Paul Samuelson, Hermann Heinrich Gossen and his followers. The purpose of this work is to study the ontological components of the theory of value in relation to each of these theories to determine approaches to the formation of epistemological criteria for the validity of the cost of food.

Main content

To identify the ontological components of the theory of value, we will determine the essential characteristics of the cost of food. The cost theory of price is based on the labor theory of value and is reduced to determining the value of a commodity by the amount of labor spent on its production and sale. The labor theory of value was first put forward by William Petty and Pierre Boisguillebert in the early 18th century. Thus, in the "Treatise on Taxes and Fees", A. Smith developed this theory and confirmed it with the following statement: "a commodity that is constantly subject to fluctuations in its value (gold and silver – E. A.) can in no way be an accurate measure of the value of other goods. < ... > labor is the only universal, as well as the only precise, measure of value, or the only measure by which we can compare the values of various goods at all times and in all places" [Smith, 2007, 94]. A. Smith also argued that all the income from which the price is formed has a labor origin: "rent is the first deduction from the product of labor spent on cultivating the land; profit is the second deduction from the product of labor spent on cultivating the land; wages – the product of labor, which <...> is a natural reward for work" [ibid, 54].

David Ricardo, mostly agree on the question of value from Adam Smith, presented their model prices as the cost of living and materialized labor, i.e. "the labor spent on weapons, tools, and buildings that contribute to this work" [CIT. by: Zamyatnin, 1964, 120].

K. Marx, in chapter 1 of Volume I of Capital, introduced the concept of "socially necessary working time", meaning "the working time required to produce any use value under existing socially normal production conditions and at the average level of skill and intensity of labor in a given society" [Marx, Engels, 1960, 47]. Socially necessary working time is formed from living labor (the labor of workers engaged in the production and sale of this product) and past labor, embodied in raw materials, materials, fuel, equipment, vehicles used for the production and sale of this product.

Value according to Marx is characterized quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative expression of value can be defined as the sum of the values of the means of labor spent, the objects of labor consumed, the product created for oneself (wages), and the product created for public consumption (income). It forms the consumer value of the product. The qualitative side of value acts as an expression of production relations between people exchanging goods. It follows from this that the value is possessed by the product of labor, which can be exchanged for another product. The process of exchange transforms the product of labor into a commodity, and its consumer value into an exchange

value. A commodity represents its value as a certain quantity of another commodity (in commodity-money relations, in a certain quantity of a universal commodity-money).

Based on the cost theory, the pricing model involves identifying the public need for various goods in general and food. The social need for food must be met through the centralization of commodity production.

In modern conditions, assuming private ownership of land as a means of food production, there is a centralization of commodity production, which means a state decision: a clear distribution of what, in what quantities, what quality and in what period it is necessary to produce, is not possible, which implies a fundamentally different approach to the fair distribution of such a resource as food.

The main systemic limitation of this theory is the underestimation of market demand as a concept of resource allocation, both in terms of food demand and food availability. Another disadvantage is the recognition of productive only of the labor that is spent on the production of material goods. If we proceed from this definition, then soon, due to the development of scientific and technological progress, most people will be engaged in unproductive labor, since due to the increasing automation and mechanization of production, a significant part of the labor force is moving from the production of material goods to the production of intangible goods and the service sector.

The formation of the price in the margin theory is linked to the consumption of the product, that is, considering how much the need for the product or good under study will change when adding a unit of this product (good).

The marginal price theory is based on the category of marginal utility. For the first time, this category was justified and applied to the analysis of consumer behavior in the middle of the XVIII century by several scientists: Hermann Heinrich Gossen, Johann Heinrich von Thunen, Jules Dupei.

In his work "The development of the laws of social life and the resulting rules of human activity", G. Gossen justified the principles that are known in modern literature as the first and second Gossen laws.

Gossen's first law (the law of diminishing marginal utility) states: "in one continuous act of consumption, the utility of the subsequent unit of good, consumed decreases; in a repeated act of consumption, the utility of each unit of good decreases in comparison with its utility in the initial consumption" [cit. according to: Makhovikova, 2009, 16]. According to Gossen's second law, the optimal structure of consumption is achieved when the marginal utilities of all consumed goods are equal.

By marginal utility, we mean "additional utility, or satisfaction extracted by the consumer from one additional unit of a particular product" [Zakharchenko, Kuznetsov, 2008, vol. 2, 24]. The size of such utility is determined by the additional output of products as a result of an increase in demand for it.

Since the main factor influencing the process of price formation according to the marginal theory of price was demand, the impact on the pricing of the cost of production of goods was significantly reduced. To account for this factor, marginalists put forward the theory of imputing the utility of consumer goods to the material resources that were used in the production of these consumer goods. Thus, raw materials, machines, and labor costs receive an assessment of their usefulness not by themselves but based on the utility of the goods they produce. Production costs in the framework of the theory of marginal utility are future, potential utilities. Labor in the marginal theory is represented as a "negative" utility, as a burden for a person.

The main drawback of the marginal theory of price is the complexity of calculating the value of the product, and, consequently, the price, since food pricing, based on marginal utility, involves many factors that affect the size of the price.

It is also necessary to note another significant drawback of the marginal theory of price – namely, the accounting of factors of production through the imputation of the utility of consumer goods. The real situation shows that the dependence in the price of the produced commodity and the means of its production is directed in the opposite direction than the proponents of the marginal theory of price assumed. So, often the price of finished products changes under the influence of prices on production factors, and not vice versa. This is especially true for science-intensive industries and products that use advanced technologies in their production.

Conclusion

We should not lose sight of the fact that production resources also have an independent utility. This utility lies in the qualitative characteristics of the production resources used, which affect the efficiency of their use, i.e., the level of production costs. For example, raw materials may have different content of useful substances, machines may have different technical and technological parameters that allow you to produce products of higher quality, with less material and energy consumption.

Thus, the value of the means of production is largely independent. It is transferred to the finished product, and not imputed depending on the value of the final consumer items.

The definition of labor only as a burden for a person, as a "negative" utility, is not universal. Quite often, work gives a person joy, satisfaction, and even pleasure.

Analyzing the theories of price formation discussed above, we can conclude that neither the cost theory of price nor the margin theory of price is the only correct and objective ones.

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Феномен стоимости продовольствия с целью определения его эпистемологических критериев обоснованности

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Аннотация

В работе проанализированы различные теории стоимости, показаны возможности и ограничения их применения в процессе философского переосмысления феномена стоимости продовольствия в современных условиях. Также в статье на основе обобщения онтогенеза справедливости стоимости продовольствия показано, что производители и продавцы продовольствия обладают большей рыночной силой по отношению к покупателям. Продавцы представлены крупными агропромышленными предприятиями, часто транснациональными. Покупатели фактически не могут влиять на цену, что определяет ключевую проблему определения справедливой цены – необходимость учета всех элементов феномена стоимости продовольствия. Таким образом, к онтологическим компонентам феномена стоимости продовольствия относятся категории товара, средства обмена, измерения средства обмена, потребности в продовольствии.

На практике установления цен на продовольствие в настоящее время преобладают методы ценообразования, в основе которых лежит затратная теория стоимости. Более того, в некоторых отраслях агропромышленного комплекса и на предприятиях законодательно запрещено применение ценообразования, основанного на маржинальной теории стоимости. К таким отраслям можно отнести пищевую промышленность в той ее части, которая производит продукцию, входящую в потребительскую корзину, относящуюся к детскому питанию и социально опасным продуктам. Вышеперечисленные отрасли и подотрасли народного хозяйства вынуждены принимать за основу ценообразования собственные издержки и среднеотраслевой уровень рентабельности, так как по закону цену, значительно превышающую затраты на производство продукции, они не имеют права назначать, а назначение предприятием цены ниже своих затрат очень скоро приведет его к банкротству.

К тому же чаще всего предприятия, ценообразование которых регулируется государством, выпускают продукцию с неэластичным спросом, что также отрицательно сказывается на прибыли предприятия при снижении цены.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Теория стоимости, стоимость продовольствия, критерии обоснованности, справедливость цены, феномен стоимости.

Библиография

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