



SOUTHASIA INSTITUTE FOR HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

A COURSE ON NEW HUMANITIES

Economics and Its Alternatives

Nischal Regmi

Course Objectives

This course explores whether economics can be classified as a 'science'. It examines limiting cases that attempt (but fail) to fully capture the complexities of the human mind and behaviour. It also makes students familiar with alternative approaches to reconfiguring the discipline in view of the challenges faced by contemporary societies.

Total Duration: 5 sessions (10 hours)

Mode: Lectures and collaborative discussions

Introduction

Class 1 You can't escape economics; Defining economics; Economic theory; data and model; Prediction and explanation; Defining rationality; Rationality in the dominant (neoclassical) economic thinking

Rationality and Mathematization

Class 2 Collective rationality: Mass irrational behaviours (Tulip mania, the Great Depression, the Dot-Com Bubble); revisiting the assumptions of (neoclassical) economics

Individual rationality: Historical outline of psychology (psychology as science of mind and behaviour); Behavioral economics; Representation of psychological states

Class 3 Explaining non-economic phenomena (utility and cost-benefit analyses); Limits to mathematization (commodification of health and education; Emotions, cognitive biases, norms, morality)

Pragmatic Economics

Class 4 A necessary evil? an indispensable tool? Case Study I (Fishermen and mobile phones); Case Study II (Tools of customer manipulation); Methodological pluralism (experimental and behavioral economics, randomized control trials, doughnut economics); Issues of scale and inclusion of probabilities; dominantly a positivist paradigm; challenges in modelling (non)human societies

Normative Economics

Class 5 Normative Approaches I (value-free economics, normative assumptions behind neoclassical economics, social rationality, ethical rationality); Normative Approaches II (question of sustainability: Gandhi and Schumacher, question of utopia and vision: Tagore, issues of empowerment: Yunus); Normative Approach III Case Study: Gross Happiness Index

Assessment: Participation, engagement, inputs and reception; Group discussions

Assignment: Short readings and collaborative models

Auditing: Observational feedbacks and peer-discussions