

Faculty of Economic, Social and Political Sciences



ECON2253 Philosophy and epistemology of economic science

[30h] 4 credits

This course is taught in the 2nd semester

Teacher(s): Christian Arnsperger
Language: French
Level: Second cycle

Aims

The aims of the course are twofold:

- to encourage students to step back from the frequently 'automatic' and 'it-goes-without-saying' practice of theoretical analysis, and accordingly to question some of the theoretical presuppositions implicit in neo-classical theoretical analysis;
- to demonstrate that fundamental philosophical thought is fertile and that, if we are prepared to renounce certain methodological dogmas, it can open up new perspectives within economic theory itself.

Main themes

Involvement in economic science is, in a way, tantamount to claiming an understanding of economic and social reality. But a kind of understanding is never 'neutral'. This course aims to discuss some of the 'hidden' aspects that are inherent in the way we know about contemporary economists. It will focus on three distinct, but closely linked, issues:

- (1) What is social science? And in what way does economic science form part of it?
- (2) What makes us 'lose' the mathematisation of economics? What does it enable us to gain?
- (3) Is contemporary economic science an ideology? Does it serve a 'neo-liberal' view of the social world?

These questions reflect contemporary concerns both of economics students when they have to explain to non-economists about what they are studying, and of decision-makers who have studied economics, and who are rightly or wrongly - it is something we will have to determine - dubbed servants of a 'neo-liberal' ideology that use the mathematical tool as a 'veil of scientificity' to conceal their collusion with 'those in positions of power'.

Content and teaching methods

The course is in three parts:

- I. basic notions about the philosophy of sciences and the epistemology of science (is economic science a science? What is an economic model?);
- II. a philosophical approach to optimisation in economics (this will mainly involve discussion of individualist dimensions in economics);
- III. a special question: a particular question to be dealt with, if possible, on the basis of the critical reading of articles, for example:
 - o does altruism have any meaning in an optimising framework?
 - o is economic theory capable of thinking through the nature of talent?
 - o is optimisation a criterion of rationality?

As a lecture course, it will be as 'interactive' as possible.

Other information (prerequisite, evaluation (assessment methods), course materials recommended readings, ...)

None.

On the basis of written work, on a subject determined by the teacher, that will be defended orally. This oral defence will also be an opportunity to test students' knowledge of the course's subject matter (including additional reading).

A reading list will be provided at the beginning of the course.

Other credits in programs

| | | |
|----------------|---|-------------|
| ECON21 | Première licence en sciences économiques | (4 credits) |
| ECON22 | Deuxième licence en sciences économiques | (4 credits) |
| ECON2M1 | Master en sciences économiques, orientation générale | (4 credits) |
| ETES9CE | Certificat universitaire en éthique économique et sociale | (4 credits) |
| ISP20 | Licence à durée réduite en philosophie | (4 credits) |
| ISP22 | Deuxième licence en philosophie | (4 credits) |