

Economics and The Humanities: GECO 5302 (CRN:17879)

The New School for Social Research

Fall 2025 (January 2026 intensive Course, 3 credits)

This version of syllabus: January 19th, 2026

Basic Information:

Class Time: 9 a.m. through 1 p.m. daily, Monday through Friday, January 5th, 2026 – January 16th, 2026.

Instructor: Prof. Sanjay G. Reddy, Dept. of Economics

Office hours: by appointment.

Email address: [reddys1@newschool.edu](mailto:red dys1@newschool.edu) (Preferred means of communication)

Please read this syllabus in full so as to avoid subsequent questions for which answers are given here.

Course Description:

What is the relation between the Social Sciences and the Humanities? In an era in which interest in the humanities has precipitately decreased, is there an argument to be made that this decline threatens the social sciences too? Do the social sciences and humanities involve two utterly different ways of making sense of the world or do their ways of seeing ‘cross’ at crucial points? Can the humanities inform the social sciences? And what about the other way around?

The course will explore ways in which the humanities can illuminate the role in economic argumentation of rhetoric and narratives; of contextual and perspectival judgments; of ethical motivations and their sources, including objectivity, subjectivity, empathy and sympathy; and of different modes of scientific understanding, including the statistical and the ethnographic. This course will have a particular focus on economics and literature, although it may also refer to other areas of the social sciences and humanities. The course is experimental and will center on collective discovery and discussion. It will therefore adopt a seminar format. Given its intensive nature, some reading materials may be circulated in advance. Knowledge of technical economics will be helpful in drawing connections central to the course but those without such knowledge may take the course with the permission of the instructor.

Prerequisites:

There are no formal prerequisites for the course but the course is aimed at graduate students in the social sciences and the humanities, and some formal background in economics at the

graduate level is desirable. If in doubt about the suitability of their background, students should contact the instructor.

Aims:

The aim of this course is to introduce students to conceptual and methodological problems involved in demarcating the social sciences from the humanities and in understanding their relationship, with a special focus on how economics can be informed by the humanities, in particular literature. It is hoped that this course will enable the student to become better economists and social scientists.

Methods of Learning:

The primary methods of learning will be in-depth class discussion of texts, individual and group in-class exercises to deepen critical perspectives, and writings (brief response papers and final paper).

Methods of Evaluation:

Evaluation is based on active, informed and prepared involvement in general class discussion (50%), oral presentations of readings (20%) and written assignments (30%). Each student will do a brief presentation (10-15 minutes) of one of the assigned readings. A sign-up sheet will be circulated on the first class day or prior. The written assignment grade will be based on a 2000-2500 word final paper due on January 21st. The final paper should relate to one of the themes discussed in the class or another agreed with the instructor. The final paper can be handed in at any time up to January 21st, and should be uploaded to Canvas. Extensions will not normally be granted.

Readings:

Readings for each topic are available via links on this syllabus or via Files on Canvas. At this time, no student expense is anticipated. Readings may be added or subtracted as the course proceeds. The readings are generally placed in the sequence of the most important readings being first but this is only a rough guide, You should do the readings for each day during the afternoon or evening of the previous day. This Is **extremely** important as this is a discussion-based seminar course.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will gain a deeper understanding of the relation between the humanities and the social sciences, with a special focus on economics. Students will in the process hone their methodological and conceptual understanding of the field.

Plagiarism Policy:

It's bad. Don't do it. But seriously, students are expected to have read the New School policy on academic integrity (see here under Plagiarism: <https://www.newschool.edu/about/university-resources/policies/>).

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools:

Students may not use ChatGPT or other generative artificial intelligence tools to aid them in any way in producing written assignments. Shortcuts only harm yourself.

Students with Disabilities:

In keeping with the university's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student with a disability who needs academic accommodations is welcome to request a private meeting with the instructor. Students requesting any accommodations ought also to contact Student Disability Service (SDS). SDS will conduct an "intake" and, if appropriate, the Director will provide an academic accommodation notification letter for you to bring to the instructor.

Topics, Dates and Readings:

January 5th: Introduction: The Problem

January 6th: The Social Sciences

- Max Weber, "[Science as a Vocation](#)", 1919.
- John R. Searle, [The Construction of Social Reality](#), Chs. 2 and 3. Free Press, 1995.
- Alasdair Macintyre, [After Virtue](#), Chapter 8, "The Character of Generalizations in the Social Sciences and the Lack of their Predictive Power" (p.88)
- Lewis, D., Rodgers, D., & Woolcock, M. (2008). "[The Fiction of Development: Literary Representation as a Source of Authoritative Knowledge](#)". *The Journal of Development Studies*, 44(2), 198–216.

January 7th: The Humanities

- John Henry (Cardinal) Newman, The Idea of a University, 1852, Discourse 7, "[Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Professional Skill](#)"
- Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, Chapter 3, "[Barbarians, Philistines, Populace](#)", 1869.

- Tibor Scitovsky, "[Culture is a Good Thing: A Welfare-Economic Judgment](#)". *Journal of Cultural Economics*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (June, 1989), pp. 1-16
- Bill Readings, [The University in Ruins](#), Chs. 1-6
- Amit Chaudhuri, "[The Piazza and the Car Park: Literary Activism and the Mehrotra Campaign](#)", in *Literary Activism*, OUP, 2017.
- John Maynard Keynes, "[Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren](#)", 1930.

January 8th: Rhetoric and Narratives in Economics

- D. McCloskey, "[The Rhetoric of Economics](#)", *Journal of Economic Literature*, June 1983, pp 481-517.
- Robert J. Shiller, "[Narrative Economics](#)", *American Economic Review*, 2017: 107(4), pp. 967-1004
- Ashwath Damodaran, [Narrative and Numbers: The Value of Stories in Business](#), 2017, pp. 10-23 (ch.2) and pp. 36-51 (ch. 4).
- Fredric S. Lee, "[The Oxford Challenge to Marshallian Supply and Demand: The History of the Oxford Economists' Research Group](#)", *Oxford Economic Papers*, Volume 33, Issue 3, November 1981, Pages 339–351.
- Milton Friedman, "[The Methodology of Positive Economics](#)", *Essays in Positive Economics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953. Also in Files on Canvas.
- C.B. Macpherson. *The Political Economy of Possessive Individualism*, selection, in Files on Canvas.
- Mary S. Morgan and M. Norton Wise, "[Narrative science and narrative knowing. Introduction to special issue on narrative science](#)", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A*, Volume 62, 2017.

January 9th: Objectivity and Subjectivity in the Social Sciences and in the Humanities

- Amartya Sen, "[Positional Objectivity](#)", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 22, No.2 (Spring 1993). Also in Files on Canvas.
- [Max Havelaar or the coffee auctions of the Dutch trading company](#) by Multatuli
- Dallmayr, F. (2001). "Conversation Across Boundaries: Political Theory and Global Diversity". *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 30(2), 331-347. In Files on Canvas.

January 12th: Empathy, Sympathy, Ethics and Interpersonal Comparisons

- Adam Smith, [The Theory of Moral Sentiments](#), Part I, Section 1 (chapters I through V)
- Lionel Robbins, [Interpersonal Comparisons of Utility: A Comment](#), *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 192 (Dec., 1938), pp. 635-641
- Amartya Sen, "[The Possibility of Social Choice](#)", Nobel Lecture in Economic Sciences, 1998.
- Martha Nussbaum, [Love's Knowledge](#), chapter 12, "Narrative Emotions: Beckett's Genealogy of Love".

- Catherine Wilson, “[Literature and Knowledge](#)”, *Philosophy*, Oct., 1983, Vol. 58, No. 226, pp. 489-496

January 13th: Practical Judgment and Counterfactuals in the Social Sciences and in the Humanities

- David Lewis, *Counterfactuals*, Wiley-Blackwell, 1973, especially Chapter 4, “[Foundations](#)”.
- Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, Harvard University Press, 2009, especially Introduction and Chapter 1. In Files on Canvas.
- Caryl Phillips, “Why Read?”, *The Threepenny Review*, Winter 2026, <https://www.threepennyreview.com/why-read/>
- Ursula K. LeGuin, “[The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas](#)”
- Also refer back to Cardinal Newman reading (insofar as he mentions the relevance of broad learning for the formation and application of practical judgment)

January 14th: Polyphony, Pluralism and Perspective in the Humanities and in the Social Sciences

- Feyerabend, P., *Conquest of Abundance*, Introduction. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1999. In Files on Canvas.
- Amartya Sen, “[Description as Choice](#)”, *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Nov., 1980), pp. 353-369
- Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, Indiana University Press, 1984, Chapter 2, “The Language of the Marketplace in Rabelais”
- Chantal Mouffe, “[Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?](#)”, *Social Research*, Vol. 66, No. 3, Fall 1999, pp. 745-758

January 15th: Rational Choice?

- Amartya Sen, “[Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioural Foundations of Economic Theory](#)”, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Summer, 1977), pp. 317-344.
- Leo Tolstoy, “[How Much Land Does a Man Need ?](#)”
- Max Weber on Verstehen [[Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry](#) on Max Weber, section 5.1]
- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper and Row, New York. [Ch. 1,4,7]. In Files on Canvas.
- Michael Piore, *Beyond Individualism*, Chapter 4, “[A Cognitive Approach to Economics](#)”, in Files on Canvas.
- Amartya Sen, “[Is the Idea of Purely Internal Consistency of Choice Bizarre?](#)” in James, E., Altham, J. and Harisson R., editors, *World, Mind and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, in Files on Canvas.

- Kirman A, Livet P, Teschl M. "[Rationality and emotions](#)", Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B: Biological Sciences, 2010 Jan 27; 365(1538), pp 215-9.
- "[Book forum: global libidinal economy](#)", Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory, March 2024. In Files on Canvas.

January 16th: Presentation and Discussion of Student Paper Topics and Round-up