

Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Economics (EIPE)

Ph.D. Graduate: Dr. Altug Yalcintas

Thesis title

Institutional Economics and Historical Analysis: An Inquiry into Path-dependence and Cumulative Causation

Supervisors

prof. Jack Vromen and prof. Deirdre McCloskey

Project description

The central thesis of the dissertation is that historical small events play significant roles in the path dependent evolution of intellectual ideas. "Intellectual paths" or "intellectual path dependence" means that initial conditions of certain ways of thinking sometimes lock us in to particular pathways. Such pathways occur when the follow-up of small events catch the intellectuals in its complex web irreversibly and grow into big in the future.

The distinctive property of such conditions is that evolution of ideas does not necessarily lead to any pre-defined end point. Small events trigger shifts in the course of events and this causes positive or negative effects that move the system away from its systematic course. After small events taking place, complex webs of scholarly life function in either of the two ways: as a short-cut to a better state which could only be reached within longer time spans if there had been no interruptions or as a hindrance that would disallow intellectuals to proceed further and achieve intellectual advancement. When historical small events lead to a hindrance, a little uncorrected mistake feeds back a negative cumulative effect on the progress of scientific knowledge. When they operate as a short-cut, however, the conditions that turn an event into a starting point of a new path can be the breaking point of an old path as such that they unlock the old course of events bearing path dependent properties and perhaps leading to more complex evolutionary pathways.

To put it differently, within intellectual paths, setting a new start in motion is not easy (or even impossible) for a number of reasons - such as positive feedback loops - but, as the theory of path dependence states, such uneasiness (or impossibility) could be a chance for the improvement (that is, further sophistication) of the evolution of ideas as well. The direction of the evolution of events after such bifurcation points depends completely on the conditions that take place afterwards.

E-mail

a.yalcintas@chello.nl

Personal website
<http://ayalcintas.blogspot.nl/>