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## Rhetorics of Failure: Deconstructing Economic Development

A LECTURE BY



**FRANCESCO BOLDIZZONI**

*University of Turin and Clare Hall, Cambridge*

**Wednesday, 18 March, 6 p.m. /Room 203, Nador u. 9**

The rise of neoinstitutionalism in the social sciences, and especially in economics, led many practitioners to “historical agnosticism”, a term used by Wolfgang Streeck to describe not only the atemporal character but also the loss of historical complexity in neopositivist, operational representations of human behaviour. However, objectification of subjectivity and quantification of the qualitative have proved to be deceptive strategies. Far from expelling the ideological element from the analytic toolbox, they have exacerbated it, often unconsciously.

The lecture considers recent interpretations of economic development as a paradigmatic case-study, contrasting path dependent accounts of the success and failure of nations to a genuinely historical understanding of social processes. It argues that, in order to renew itself, social science history should not seek reassurance in the simplicity of linear explanations but sail the rough waters of dialectic and interpretation. It concludes that development, as a concept, is urgently in need of redefinition.

**Francesco Boldizzoni** is research professor of economic history at the University of Turin and a life member of Clare Hall, Cambridge. He has held visiting appointments at several academic institutions in Europe and the United States, including the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Dartmouth College, the London School of Economics and the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies. Boldizzoni's main interests are the history of capitalism, with forays into the fields of welfare and development, and the history of economic ideas, concepts and ideologies. Over the past few years, he has also contributed to the philosophy of history and the study of non-European historiographies in the context of a broader reflection on the power and limits of historical explanation.

Boldizzoni's chief publications include *Means and Ends: The Idea of Capital in the West, 1500-1970* (Macmillan 2008), *The Poverty of Clio: Resurrecting Economic History* (Princeton University Press 2011), “On History and Policy: Time in the Age of Neoliberalism”, *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 9.1 (2015) and the *Routledge Handbook of Global Economic History*, co-edited with Pat Hudson. He is currently completing a book titled *Earthly Justice: A History of the Welfare State*, to be published by Polity Press in 2016, and an essay on political economy in the nineteenth century for the *Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*, ed. by Warren Breckman and Peter E. Gordon.