Program of PhD course at Norwegian University of Life Sciences on
Critical Realism, Environmentalism, Interdisciplinarity and the Critique of Economics (September 29 – October 1, 2014)

Course content: Informed by critical realist ontology, the course will shed light on the nature and causes of three different, but strongly interconnected crises currently ravaging contemporary societies worldwide: an economic crisis, an ecological crisis, and a normative crisis of an unjust and profoundly inequitable distribution of wealth, resources and life-opportunities. In order to grasp the multifaceted aspects of this combined economic, ecological, social and moral/political crisis, an interdisciplinary approach is crucial. Whereas many of the most influential positions within the philosophy or meta-theory of science, if taken seriously, prohibit or at least strongly hamper interdisciplinarity, critical realism readily accommodates it. Indeed it emphasizes the necessity of bringing in knowledge from a variety of disciplines, each of which usually deals with only one or at best a small number of the multitude of causal mechanisms that together produce the complex phenomena we observe in the natural and the social world. The course will take as its point of departure two different, but complementary, theoretical approaches: a critique of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of economic theory leveled at it from the position of critical realism, and a critique of the ways in which economic theory deals with nature and ecological systems, based on theoretical contributions from the field of critical environmental studies. As a basis for the first approach, key tenets of the philosophy of critical realism will first be presented. Bridging two above-mentioned theoretical positions, some lectures will elaborate on different concrete aspects of the global crisis.

Paper: Participants should submit a paper of approximately 3000-4000 words related to the topic of the course. The paper should be submitted electronically no later than 26th September to petter.nass@nmbu.no Participation in at least 70% of the lectures and seminars during the course is required.

Location: Dept of International Environment and Development studies: Thor Heyerdahl meeting room

Day 1 (Monday September 29)
9.00 opening (by Petter Naess)
09.30 Roy Bhaskar: central concepts and assumptions of critical realist philosophy of science [transcendental realism]
11.00 Roy Bhaskar: central concepts and assumptions of critical realist philosophy of social science [critical naturalism and the theory of explanatory critique]
12.00 lunch break
13.00 Roy Bhaskar with Leigh Price: applied critical realism and the general theory of interdisciplinarity
14.30 Roy Bhaskar: wrap-up on basic and applied critical realism: critique of alternative theories of (social) science, and the advantages of critical realism
15.00 workshop/discussion on basic and applied critical realism
15.30 tea/coffee break
16.00 Petter Naess: the environmental critique of economics (followed by discussion)
17.15 student/participant presentations
Day 2 (Tuesday September 30)
10.00 RB: the further development of critical realism [dialectical critical realism and the philosophy of metaReality]
11.30 RB: critical realism and the critique of the discourse of modernity
12.00 lunch break
13.00 RB: forms of critique of mainstream (broadly neo-classical) economics
13.30 PN: critical realism and the critique of cost-benefit analysis
15.00 David Graeber (London School of Economics): Debt and the critique of economics - by video
15.45 tea/coffee break
16.00 Jin Xue (University of Aalborg): Arguments for and against economic growth
16.45 Jin Xue: Modernisation and Growth in China
17.30 Roy Bhaskar with David Graeber: metaReality and economics
18.00 workshop on the meta-theory of the social sciences and the critique of economics as a discipline
19.00 approximate close

Day 3 (Wednesday October 1)
10.00 RB: [historically and socially] contextualising the market (including the failures of Soviet communism and social democracy/labourism and the current crisis system)
11.00 PN: the unsustainability of growth and capitalism
12:00: symposium on the contours of the crisis system and the intersection of its various (including financial/economic, ecological and social-normative {moral, political}) aspects
13.00 lunch
14.00 Roy Bhaskar: the meta-ethics of change – on explanatory critique of the neo-liberal project, concrete utopianism and the theory of transition
14:30 workshop on alternatives to the present economic system
16:00 tea/ coffee break
16:30 wrap-up and discussion of the way forward and future work
17:15 reception for participants
18:00 approximate close

Optional:
Day 4 (Thursday October 2)
TBA: possibility of one-on-one consultation with Roy Bhaskar

Pensum:
Roy Bhaskar, “Contexts of Interdisciplinarity”, in Roy Bhaskar, Cheryl Frank, Karl Georg Hoyer, Petter Naess and Jenneth Parker, Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change, chapter 1, Routledge 2010

Additional and Background reading:  
Roy Bhaskar with Mervyn Hartwig, The Formation of Critical Realism, Routledge 2010  