

Nobel-winning economist Thomas Schelling dies at 95

14 December 2016, by Ben Nuckols



In a Monday, May 25, 2009 file photo, Professor Thomas Schelling, co-recipient of the 2005 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his seminal work in the application of game-theory, is given a honorary Doctor of Social Science degree at the Yale University commencement in New Haven, Conn. Schelling, a longtime Harvard University professor who finished his career at the University of Maryland, died Tuesday morning, Dec. 13, 2016, at his home in Bethesda, Maryland, said Richard Zeckhauser, a Harvard colleague who knew Schelling for 58 years. The cause of death was not immediately confirmed and no autopsy was conducted, Zeckhauser said. (AP Photo/Douglas Healey, File)

Thomas Schelling, an economist who won a Nobel Prize for using game theory to explain nuclear strategy, has died, a colleague said Wednesday. He was 95.

Schelling, a longtime Harvard University professor who finished his career at the University of Maryland, died Tuesday morning at his home in Bethesda, Maryland, said Richard Zeckhauser, a Harvard colleague who knew Schelling for 58 years. The cause of death was not immediately confirmed and no autopsy was conducted,

Zeckhauser said.

Schelling was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics in 2005, along with Robert Aumann, "for having enhanced our understanding of conflict and cooperation through game-theory analysis," the Nobel committee said

Schelling's best-known book was "The Strategy of Conflict" (1960), in which he used game theory, the mathematical analysis of strategies used in competitive situations, to analyze negotiations between nuclear powers. He argued that a negotiating party can sometimes strengthen its position in a counterintuitive way, by eliminating some of its own options. His work made him a leading intellectual on the subject of nuclear war and peace.

An article he wrote about the prospect of an accidental nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union attracted the attention of director Stanley Kubrick, The New York Times reported. Kubrick ended up adapting a novel on the subject into "Dr. Strangelove," his satirical masterpiece about nuclear war, and Schelling was a consultant on the movie.

Schelling also used game theory to study what led white homeowners to flee mixed-race cities for the suburbs. His ideas were later popularized by Malcolm Gladwell in his best-selling book "The Tipping Point."

Schelling continued his studies into his 90s and was planning to give two talks on global climate change, Zeckhauser told The Associated Press.

"He had as clear and incisive a mind as anybody you would ever meet," Zeckhauser said, "and did not have a modicum of pretense about him."

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