

Economics 2082

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TF: Ria Granzier-Nakajima

Fall 2020

Slightly revised (September 2020)

Wednesdays 12:45 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.

SOCIAL CHOICE THEORY
Syllabus (September 2020)

A basic course in social choice theory and its analytical foundations. The subject matter will include possibility theorems in voting and in welfare economics. Attention will be paid to voting, implementation theory, the theory of justice, analyses of law, liberties and rights, and interpersonal comparisons.

We will limit the number of students taking the course for credit to about 20. If you wish to enroll for credit, please email your Harvard (or undergraduate) transcript together with a brief cover note explaining your background and reasons for taking the course to asen@fas.harvard.edu and emaskin@fas.harvard.edu by August 17, the first day of course registration for the fall. Auditors are welcome to attend the course, but discussions priority will be given to questions and observations from those enrolled for credit.

Topics

1. Arrow's Impossibility Theorem
2. Collective Rationality
3. Voting Systems
4. Implementation Theory
5. Theory of Justice
6. Liberty and Rights
7. Interpersonal Comparisons and Aggregation

Even though there is no specified prerequisite for this course, it will be essential to have considerable familiarity with logical and mathematical modes of reasoning, as the course will involve extensive analytical and formal arguments.

The requirement (for those enrolled for credit) for the course, in addition to regular attendance, is one term paper of about 20-25 pages, which must be submitted by December 9. The topic of the term paper must be discussed and cleared beforehand, and a proposal of one or two pages must be received by us by the time of the class on November 18.

Contact Details and Office Hours:

Eric Maskin

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Tuesdays, 11:45-12:45 or by appointment.

Amartya Sen

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Email (assistant): cri@fas.harvard.edu

Tuesdays 10-11, by appointment only.

Wednesdays 11-12, walk-ins, no appointment needed.

Ria Granzier-Nakajima

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Teaching schedule:

1.	Introduction	September 9	Maskin & Sen
2.	Arrow's Impossibility Theorem	September 16	Maskin & Sen
3.	Voting Systems I	September 23	Maskin
4.	Implementation I	September 30	Maskin
5.	Collective Rationality	October 7	Sen
6.	Voting Systems II	October 14	Maskin
7.	<i>Liberty and Rights</i>	<i>October 21</i>	<i>Sen</i>
8.	<i>Law, Constitution and Originalism</i>	<i>October 28</i>	<i>Sen</i>
9.	<i>Ideas of Justice</i>	<i>November 4</i>	<i>Sen</i>
10.	Implementation Theory II	November 11	Maskin
11.	Voting Systems III	November 18	Maskin
12.	Interpersonal Comparisons and Aggregation	December 2	Maskin & Sen

General references:

Social choice theory has now become such a vast subject that there is no general textbook that spans the whole field. Readings will be assigned as the course proceeds for each topic covered in class. It is recommended to have some familiarity with the pioneering - and classic - contribution in the field that initiated modern social choice theory:

Arrow, Kenneth J., Social Choice and Individual Values (New York: Wiley, 1951; 3rd edition, with a Foreword by Eric Maskin, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

The closest thing to a comprehensive text is:

Sen, Amartya, Collective Choice and Social Welfare, Expanded Edition, Penguin Books Ltd., UK, Harvard University Press, USA, 2017.

A good (though less comprehensive) recent textbook is:

Feldman, Allan and Serrano, Roberto, Welfare Economics and Social Choice Theory, 2nd edition (Springer, 2005).

An elementary introduction may be helpful as a way of entry in the field:

Gaertner, Wulf, A Primer in Social Choice Theory (Oxford University Press, 2006).

Another one is:

Kelly, Jerry, Social Choice Theory: An Introduction (Oxford University Press, 1987).

Two elementary lectures on The Arrow Theorem, together with some related articles and an introduction by Prasanta Pattanaik can be found in:

Maskin, Eric and Sen, Amartya, The Arrow Impossibility Theorem (Columbia University Press, 2014)

A general reference dealing with the foundations and basic problems of social choice theory are:

Suzumura, Kotaro, Rational Choice, Collective Decisions and Social Welfare (Cambridge University Press, 1983)

The literature until the mid-1980s was surveyed in:

Sen, Amartya, "Social Choice Theory," in K. J. Arrow and M. Intriligator, eds., Handbook of Mathematical Economics, vol. III (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1986), and

The later literature is examined in several collections of essays, including:

Arrow, Kenneth J., Sen, Amartya, and Suzumura, Kotaro, eds., Social Choice Re-examined (London: Macmillan, 1997).

Arrow, Kenneth J., Sen, Amartya, and Suzumura, Kotaro, eds., Handbook of Social Choice and Welfare, vol. I (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 2002), and vol. II (2011).

Specific readings for each topic will be announced at least a week before the corresponding class.