

# Social Choice and Democratic Theory

Political Science 473  
University of Notre Dame  
Prof. Gerry Mackie  
Fall 2003

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## PURPOSE

Is there a public good? A prevalent view in political science is that democracy is unavoidably chaotic, arbitrary, meaningless, and impossible. Such skepticism began with Condorcet's paradox of voting in the 18th century, and continued most notably with Arrow's impossibility theorem and Riker's Liberalism against Populism in the 20th century. We'll examine and challenge these long-standing doubts about democratic governance (among them cycling, agenda control, and multidimensional manipulation). The course will provide a nontechnical introduction to social choice theory (formal analysis of the problem of preference aggregation in general, and of alternative voting rules). The tools of social choice will be illustrated in several close analyses of Congressional deliberation and voting. Most importantly, we'll critically investigate the conceptual and normative foundations of social choice theory as it relates to current democratic theory.

Students with any kind of interest in social choice theory, ethics, normative political theory, history of political thought, and American politics might enjoy the course. Material will be presented in a nonformal and student-friendly fashion.

## CONTACTS

My office is at 405 Decio Hall, tel. 631-7570, email [gmackie@nd.edu](mailto:gmackie@nd.edu). Office hours are 3:30-5:00 Wednesday and Thursday, or by appointment. I encourage you to take advantage of the opportunity for office consultations.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Riker, *Liberalism against Populism*

Saari, *Decisions and Elections*

Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values* (recommended, not required)

Reading packet, part I, for purchase at Copy Center, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor O'Shaughnessy Hall

## ASSESSMENT

There will be a take-home problem set in the first half of the course (33%). In the second half of the course, you will write up a five-page encounter with one week's readings, or on some related topic in democratic theory on instructor's consent (33%). There will be a take-home final, with a choice among essay questions, total answers not to exceed five pages (33%).

## PERFORMANCE

All the usual requirements about attendance, preparation, and academic honesty apply. You should be current or ahead of readings as listed in the syllabus, and you should participate actively in discussion. Some of the material is difficult, and you are definitely not expected to master or understand everything in a reading (almost no one does); what you should do is make a good-faith effort to get through the reading, and come with questions. Also, please come to class anyway if for some extraordinary reason you are not fully prepared.

The most important part of this course is working together to understand the materials. Thus, frequent absences would hamper course objectives, and at a certain point result in serious grade reduction. Also, frequent lack of preparation or nonparticipation may lower a grade by a minus, although I expect no problems from the people in this course.

## SCHEDULE

### *SOCIAL CHOICE THEORY*

W Aug 27, Introductory, Mackie Ch. 1

M Sep 1, Jon Elster, Introduction (to *Rational Choice*), Green and Shapiro, The Nature of Rational Choice

W Sep 3, Riker, pp. 8-19, Saari, pp. 1-20 (introductory)

M Sep 8, Riker, chs 3-4 (on different voting rules)

W Sep 10, Mackie, ch. 3 (on different voting rules)

M Sep 15, Riker, ch. 5 (on Arrow)

W Sep 17, Saari, 21-56, McLean, Sen (on Arrow's theorem)

M Sep 22, Saari, 81-101 (independence condition)

W Sep 24, Mackie, ch. 6 (independence condition)

M Sep 29, Saari, 157-193 (resolutions), Mackie, 86-99, 113-122 (ditto)

W Oct 1, SLACK

M Oct 6, Mackie, ch. , Strategic Voting and Agenda Control

W Oct 8, Mackie, ch. , Multidimensional Chaos

M Oct 13, Mackie, ch. 12, part of ch. 13 (election of Lincoln)

W Oct 15, Riker, ch. 8, Mackie, selections (liberalism against populism)

BREAK

### *DEMOCRATIC THEORY*

M Oct 27, Nino, Alternative Conceptions of Democracy (*The Constitution of Deliberative Democracy*)

W Oct 29, Elster, The Market and the Forum; Manin, Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy (*Political Theory*)

M Nov 3, Sunstein, Democracy and Shifting Preferences (in *The Idea of Democracy*); Dryzek, Minimal Democracy, The Social Choice Critique (*Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*)

W Nov 5, Cohen, An Epistemic Conception of Democracy (*Ethics*); Coleman and Ferejohn, Democracy and Social Choice (*Ethics*)

- M Nov 10, Miller, Deliberative Democracy and Social Choice (*Political Studies*); Knight and Johnson, Aggregation and Deliberation: On the Possibility of Democratic Legitimacy (*Political Theory*)
- W Nov 12, van Mill, The Possibility of Rational Outcomes from Democratic Discourse and Practices (*Journal of Politics*); Radcliff, Liberalism, Populism, and Collective Choice
- M Nov 17, Radcliff, The General Will and Social Choice Theory (*Review of Politics*); Radcliff, Preference Aggregation, Functional Pathologies and Democracy (*Journal of Politics*)
- W Nov 19, Pildes and Anderson, Slingshot Arrows at Democracy... (*Columbia Law Review*)
- M Nov 24, Pildes and Anderson, continued
- W Nov 26, Susan Hurley, excerpt from *Natural Reasons*; Bird, The Possibility of Self-Government (*American Political Science Review*)
- THANKSGIVING**
- M Dec 1, List and Dryzek, Social Choice Theory and Deliberative Democracy: A Reconciliation (*British Journal of Political Science*); author???, Democracy Before Social Choice
- W Dec 3, Weale, Social Choice versus Populism? An Interpretation of Riker's Political Theory (*British Journal of Political Science*); Weale, William Riker and the Theory of Democracy (*Democratization*)
- M Dec 8, McLean; William H. Riker and the Invention of Heresthetic(s) (*British Journal of Political Science*); Nagel, Salvaging Heresthetic: Six Theses on the Riker Program
- W Dec 10, Risse, Arrow's Theorem, Indeterminacy, and Multiplicity Reconsidered (*Ethics*); Saari, Capturing the Will of the People (*Ethics*); Risse, rejoinder

## **FURTHER READING**

You aren't expected to look at any of the material below; the references are provided for your convenience.

### **Social Choice**

- Jon Elster, ed., *Rational Choice* (anthology of r.c.)
- Donald Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory* (critique of r.c.)
- Shaun Hargreaves Heap, *Theory of Choice: A Critical Guide* (introductory, critical)
- Paul Johnson, *Social Choice: Theory and Research* (introductory and simple, e-book at UND library)
- Gerald Strom, *Logic of Lawmaking* (clearest introduction of Rochester p.s., I think)
- Norman Frohlich and Joe Oppenheimer, *Modern Political Economy* (introductory)
- Melvin Hinich and Mike Munger, *Analytical Politics* (introductory)
- Kenneth Shepsle and Mark Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics* (introductory, use with caution)
- Daniel Hausman and Michael McPherson, *Economic Analysis and Moral Philosophy* (introductory on broader themes, by a philosopher and an economist)
- Brian Barry and Russell Hardin, eds. *Rational Man and Irrational Society* (some seminal readings in social choice, some astute commentary)

Iain McLean and Arnold Urken, *Classics of Social Choice Theory* (prehistory of s.c., original Condorcet, etc.)  
 Iain McLean, *Rational Choice and British Politics* (Rikerian analysis of British political episodes done correctly)  
 Jane Mansbridge, ed., *Beyond Self-Interest* (anthology)  
 Donald Saari, *Chaotic Elections* (primer, but different material than his *Decisions and Elections*)  
 Donald Saari, *Basic Geometry of Voting* (more technical, but not super-tough)  
 Saari's most formal work: inquire  
 Christian List, *Mission Impossible*, D.Phil thesis, on internet (more formal challenge to conventional social choice theory)  
 Amartya Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare* (to begin formal work, start here)  
 Amartya Sen, *Choice, Welfare and Measurement* (continue formal work here)  
 Hannu Nurmi, *Comparing Voting Systems* (comparing logical properties of voting rules)  
 Hannu Nurmi, *Rational Behaviour and the Design of Institutions* (similar)

### **Deliberative Democracy**

David Held, *Models of Democracy* (standard and valuable intro to empirical democratic theory)  
 David Estlund, ed., *Democracy* (reader in normative democratic theory)  
 Helena Catt, *Democracy in Practice* (simple, short, good)  
 John Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond* (nicely opinionated survey of democratic theory)  
 Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (deliberative and inclusionist)  
 Jon Elster, ed., *Deliberative Democracy* (anthology)  
 James Bohman and William Rehg, eds., *Deliberative Democracy* (anthology)  
 Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference* (anthology)  
 James Bohman, *Public Deliberation* (philosophical, accessible)  
 Carlos Santiago Nino, *The Constitution of Deliberative Democracy* (legal theorist)  
 Juergen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (his recent democratic theory)  
 Simone Chambers, *Reasonable Democracy* (introduction to Habermas)  
 Elizabeth Anderson, *Values in Ethics and Economics* (analytic-philosophical interrogation of assumptions of economics)

These are not exhaustive. Ask me for leads on any topic.

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