

**University of Pennsylvania**  
**Prof. Jack Nagel**

**Fall 2009**

**Political Science 475-402**  
**Philosophy, Politics and Economics 475-402**  
**SOCIAL CHOICE AND DEMOCRATIC THEORY**

**Class Meeting Time and Place**

Wednesdays, 2:00 - 5:00, Room 320 (in Suite 300), 3440 Market St.

**Office Hours and Contact Information**

Fridays, 9:30 - 11:00, Room 308 (in Suite 300), 3440 Market St.  
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**Course Overview**

The purpose of the seminar will be to explore two radically different images of democratic politics that have emerged from social choice theory, the formal study of how individual preferences aggregate to make collective decisions.

If political choice occurs across one dimension (such as the traditional left-right ideological spectrum), the theory yields a majority choice at the position favored by the median voter, which, under certain circumstances, will also be a winning, equilibrium strategy in elections and other decisions made by voting. This result has powerful practical, normative, and scientific implications. It advises politicians to adopt centrist programs, endorses such policies as democratically desirable, predicts that policies in the vicinity of the median will remain stable unless and until voters' preferences shift, and explains political change by looking to forces—typically exogenous to politics—that influence median preferences (e.g., demographics, economics, culture, ideas).

On the other hand, if political choices are shaped by multiple, cross-cutting issue dimensions, then majority voting will rarely produce a stable equilibrium. Politicians can win by manipulating issues opportunistically. The will of the people becomes a debatable and perhaps empty notion. Political outcomes, unless constrained by institutions, are likely to be unstable, whether or not underlying preferences change; and political explanation depends on close attention to historical sequence and conjunction and to inherently political causes, such as the skill and strategy of leaders.

This course is intended primarily as a capstone senior seminar for majors in either Political Science or Philosophy, Politics, and Economics; and priority for enrollment will be given to those students. If space is available, the seminar will also be suitable for senior majors in related

programs, such as Economics or Philosophy. In addition, graduate students in Political Science are welcome. Other interested students should confer with me before enrolling. Although there is a huge formal literature on social choice theory, the seminar is about its political and philosophical implications and applications, rather than the formal analysis per se. Willingness to work through occasional moderately technical expositions will be necessary, but there are no mathematical prerequisites.

## **Materials**

Three paperback books are available for you to purchase at the Penn Bookstore, 36<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Sts., as “required” books:

Gerry Mackie, *Democracy Defended*, Cambridge University Press, 2003

Anthony McGann, *The Logic of Democracy*, University of Michigan Press, 2006

William H. Riker, *Liberalism against Populism: A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*, Waveland, 1982

In addition, two other paperbacks have been ordered in smaller numbers as “recommended” purchases:

Paul E. Johnson, *Social Choice: Theory and Research*, Sage, 1998

William H. Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation*, Yale University Press, 1986

A copy of each of these five books will also be placed on reserve in the Goldstein Undergraduate Study Center (formerly Rosengarten Reserve Room) in the Van Pelt Library.

A coursepack containing required readings from sources other than the books above will be available for purchase from the Campus Copy Center, 3907 Walnut St. However, for some sessions, you will have a choice of readings (varying, for example, in technical difficulty), and the syllabus also includes numerous optional readings. You will not find such items in the coursepack, but instead must resort to the Goldstein Study Center, the Van Pelt stacks or Current Periodicals Room, or (for some journals) on-line sources.

## **A Note on Textbooks**

As far as I know, no textbook on social-choice theory that would be ideal for this course is available. Therefore, you will have various options for learning about basic concepts and results. You’ll find presentations about most of them in the three required course books by Riker, Mackie, and McGann, but each of these authors is mainly concerned with making a larger normative argument, rather than with providing a neutral analytic exposition. Many texts in this

area are written by and for mathematicians, economists, or logicians. If you have an affinity for such work, you may want to seek out and use source books that are not on the syllabus. Otherwise, I recommend that you rely on one or more of the following texts:

- Paul E. Johnson, *Social Choice: Theory and Research*, Sage, 1998. I have ordered copies of this book as a recommended purchase, because it is inexpensive, in print, and generally clear. However, it is also terse and abstract, even though the author is a political scientist.
- Norman Frohlich and Joe A. Oppenheimer, *Modern Political Economy*, Prentice-Hall, 1978. Very good on some topics, but too old to include others—and no longer in print.
- Wulf Gaertner, *A Primer in Social Choice Theory*, Oxford, 2006. By an economist and primarily for economists. Covers only some of the key ideas in our course.
- Nicholas R. Miller, *Committees, Agendas, and Voting*, Routledge, 2001. A lucid exposition by a political scientist who is one of the leading contributors to this field. Unfortunately, the book is available only in hardback at the exorbitant price of \$195.
- Kenneth A. Shepsle and Mark S. Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions*, Norton, 1997. Intended for undergraduates and easy to follow; however, the book only partially overlaps with the concerns of our course.
- Gerald S. Strom, *The Logic of Lawmaking: A Spatial Theory Approach*, Johns Hopkins, 1990. Probably the best source for our purposes on the topics it covers, but no longer in print. Some affordable used copies are available through Amazon.com.

All of these books should be available on reserve in the Goldstein Study Center. In some weeks, the syllabus lists as alternative sources selections from several of these books. I encourage you to use whichever ones work best for you.

## Requirements

Assessment of your work will be based on three sets of requirements: **class participation, reflection papers, and either a research paper or two essays.**

### *Class Participation*

Because this course is intended to be a true seminar, active involvement by all members will be crucial to the learning experience. I expect you to attend all sessions, to arrive well prepared—having read and thought about all required readings, and to contribute thoughtfully and constructively to discussions.

### *Reflection Papers*

During the semester, you will be asked to write **four** reflection papers at more-or-less regular intervals. (We'll work out a schedule during the first week or two of the course.) In these papers, I ask you to reflect on ideas in one or more of the readings *for that week* –e.g., by raising questions about aspects that puzzle you, challenging ideas with which you disagree, applying concepts that seem to you useful, or connecting course ideas to something you have previously learned or observed.

I plan to organize a substantial part of each seminar around ideas in reflection papers. To make that feasible, you must send your paper to me (as an email attachment) no later than 10 p.m. on the Tuesday before the class for which you are writing. If you wish, you may also send any or all of your reflection papers to classmates via our listserv. You are encouraged but not required to read papers that classmates make available. In seminar discussions, we won't assume that everyone has read the papers.

Reflection papers should be about 1000 to 1500 words long (approximately 2-3 pages single-spaced, with standard margins and font). If you would like editorial feedback, please send me a double-spaced version.

### *Research Paper or Two Essays*

PPE majors must write a research paper. Other members of the class will have a choice between writing one research paper or two essays.

(a) The *research paper* should be 15-25 standard double-spaced pages. It will be due by 5 p.m. on December 22, the last day of the exam period, but you are welcome to submit your paper earlier. The paper may be on any subject, provided it is related to themes or ideas from the course. As the name implies, research papers must involve significant use of sources beyond the required readings. I will suggest topics, but you may also devise your own, subject to my approval. If you choose the research paper option, you must give me a paper proposal (just a paragraph or two will do) by November 11. We will then schedule an individual meeting to discuss your research plans. To help avoid incompletes, late research papers will be penalized one full grade. Toward the same end, you will have the option of submitting a preliminary draft of your paper, in which case you may revise and resubmit—with the possibility of a grade change—any time before April 15 in the Spring semester. Eligible students may also expand the research paper into an Honors thesis to complete in the spring.

(b) Each *essay* will be on a theme of your choosing related to one of the major sections of the course. Students choosing the essay option must write separate essays in response to **two** of the three syllabus sections. Due dates for essays are October 28 for Section I, November 18 for Section II, and December 22 for Section III. Essays may or may not involve research beyond the required readings, but in any case they must demonstrate significant independent thought and

analysis. Each essay should be 8-13 standard double-spaced pages. Late essays will be penalized. I will not offer a revise-and-resubmit option for essays.

A research paper or essay may take off from a topic you first explored in a reflection paper. However, if ideas or writing from a reflection paper are incorporated in a longer paper, my expectations for it will increase commensurately.

## **Assessment**

Semester grades will be based on an equal weighting of grades for class participation, the set of four response papers, and the research paper or two essays. However, you must receive a passing grade for all three components in order to pass the course; and if you choose the option of writing two essays, you must receive a passing grade for both essays.

All papers will be graded using the conventional grading system. I will explain criteria for assessing papers in class or in a handout if desired. Class participation will be based on points converted into letter grades. That system will be explained in class.

## **Reading Assignments**

*Readings marked by an asterisk (\*) are optional.* I encourage you to look over such items and to read those that interest you. They may also be useful in writing essays or research papers. Other readings are required; however, if two or more readings are connected by ‘**or**’, they are alternatives. Read at least one of them.

The availability of readings is indicated as follows:

- T** = in a course text that you can buy at the Bookstore
- C** = included in the coursepack that you can buy at Campus Copy
- R** = reserved in Goldstein/Rosengarten
- H** = handout to be distributed in class

Despite the number of optional and alternative items, what follows is only a small fraction of a huge literature. If you know of, or come across other items that you think are especially relevant to the concerns of this course, please call them to my attention.

Please note that references from book chapters may not be included in the coursepack. In such cases, you might want read from your coursepack in the library, with the book itself handy. I recommend such a practice not only for checking references, but also for getting an overall idea of a book and for browsing in it.

## 9/9: Introductory and Organizational Meeting

### I. BASIC IDEAS

#### 9/16: Historical Background

**C, R** Iain McLean and Arnold B. Urken, eds., *Classics of Social Choice*, University of Michigan Press, 1995, ch. 1 (pp. 1-63). \*I also encourage you to browse in the other chapters by the original authors, such as chs. 7 and 8 by Condorcet (particularly pp. 122-43).

**T, R** Johnson, *Social Choice*, Preface and ch. 1 (pp. ix - 8).

**C, R** William Poundstone, *Gaming the Vote*, Hill and Wang, 2008, ch. 1

\* **R** Duncan Black, *The Theory of Committees and Elections*, Kluwer, 1987 (orig. 1958), Part II

#### 9/23: Arrow's Theorem

**T, R** Johnson, pp. 9-30

or **T** Riker, *Liberalism*, ch. 5 (pp. 115-36)—\* chs. 3 and 4;

or **R** Frohlich and Oppenheimer, *Modern Political Economy*, Prentice-Hall, 1978, ch. 1

or **R** Shepsle and Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics*, Norton, 1997, chs. 3 and 4.

or **R** Gaertner, *A Primer in Social Choice Theory*, ch. 2

There are also numerous more technical expositions and critiques of the Arrow theorem, but if you find the presentations listed here too elementary (or if you have absorbed them), I suggest you proceed to the original source:

\* **R** Kenneth J. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., John Wiley, 1963 (first edition, 1951). I especially recommend Arrow's reply to his critics on pp. 103-20.

\***T, R** Mackie, pp. 72-85

\*Charles R. Plott, "Axiomatic Social Choice Theory: An Overview and Interpretation," ch. 12 in (**R**) Brian Barry and Russell Hardin, eds., *Rational Man and Irrational Society?*, Sage, 1982; also in *American Journal of Political Science* 20:3, 1976, pp. 511-27.

### **9/30: Black's Median Voter Theorem**

**T, R** Johnson, ch. 5 (pp. 49-59) plus refer back to ch. 4 as necessary to understand basic concepts, especially unidimensional and multidimensional spatial models and single-peakedness  
**or R** Gerald S. Strom, *The Logic of Lawmaking*, chs. 1 and 2  
**or R** Shepsle and Bonchek, pp. 82-91.  
**or R** Gaertner, ch. 3

**C, R** Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Harper and Row, 1957, ch. VIII (but also look at pp. 54-69)

\* **R** Black, *Theory of Committees and Elections*, esp. chs IV and VII.

### **10/7: Interlude: Are we barking up the wrong tree? (or is the tree an elephant's leg?)**

**C, R** Drew Westen, *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*, Public Affairs, 2007, ch. 2 and 3

**H** Michel Balinski and Rida Laraki, *Majority Judgment: Measuring, Ranking, and Electing*, manuscript, 2009, forthcoming from MIT Press, chs. 6 and 7

\* Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory*, Yale University Press, 1994, ch. 7

### **10/14: Manipulation of Voting Systems, Strategic Voting, and Vote Trading**

**C, R** Shepsle and Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics*, pp. 166-77

**C, R** Strom, *Logic of Lawmaking*, ch. 3

**C** Allan Gibbard, "Manipulation of Voting Schemes: A General Result," pp. 355-66 in (**R**) Barry and Hardin, eds., *Rational Man and Irrational Society?* (Originally from *Econometrica*, 41, 1973, pp. 587-94)

**C, R** Frohlich and Oppenheimer, *Modern Political Economy*, pp. 123-40

**T, R** Mackie, ch. 7 (pp. 158-72)

\* William H. Riker and Steven J. Brams, "The Paradox of Vote Trading," *American Political Science Review*, 67:4, December 1973, pp. 1235-47

\***T, R** Riker, *Liberalism Against Populism*, chs. 2, 6

\***R** Poundstone, *Gaming the Vote*, chs. 3, 5, 6

### **10/21: The Chaos Theorems: Disequilibrium in Multidimensional Politics**

**T, R** Riker, *Liberalism Against Populism*, ch. 7

**T, R** Johnson, pp. 60-80

or **R** Strom, *Logic of Lawmaking*, ch. 4

or Scott L. Feld and Bernard Grofman, "Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for a Majority Winner in n-Dimensional Spatial Voting Games: An Intuitive Geometric Approach," *American Journal of Political Science*, 31, 1987, pp. 709-28

**T, R** Johnson, pp. 93-6

or (**R**) Strom, ch. 7 (both on the uncovered set)

**T, R** Mackie, ch. 8 (pp. 173-96)

\*Nicholas R. Miller, Bernard Grofman, and Scott L. Feld, "The Geometry of Majority Rule," *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 1:4, October 1989, pp. 379-406

\*Richard D. McKelvey, "General Conditions for Global Intransitivities in Formal Voting Models," *Econometrica*, 47:5, September 1979, pp. 1085-1112

\*Nicholas R. Miller, "A New Solution Set for Tournaments and Majority Voting," *American Journal of Political Science*, 24:1, February 1980, pp. 68-96

\*Richard D. McKelvey, "Covering, Dominance, and Institution-Free Properties of Social Choice," *American Journal of Political Science*, 30, May 1986, pp. 283-314

\*Gary W. Cox, "The Uncovered Set and the Core," *American Journal of Political Science*, 31:2, May 1987, pp. 408-22

## **II. EMPIRICAL EXTENSIONS AND APPLICATIONS**

### **10/28: Structure-Induced Equilibrium** [SECTION I ESSAYS DUE]

**T, R** Johnson pp. 80-93

or **R** Strom, ch. 6



C Kenneth A. Shepsle and Barry R. Weingast, "Structure-induced Equilibrium and Legislative Choice," *Public Choice*, 37, 1981, pp. 503-19

C William H. Riker, "The Justification of Bicameralism," *International Political Science Review*, 13, 1992, pp. 101-16

\*George Tsebelis and Jeannette Money, *Bicameralism*, Cambridge University Press, 1997

\*T, R McGann, ch. 5

\*Andrew Caplin and Barry Nalebuff, "On 64%-Majority Rule," *Econometrica*, 56:4, July 1988, pp. 787-814; and "Aggregation and Social Choice: A Mean Voter Theorem," *Econometrica*, 59:1, January 1991, pp. 1-23

\*James Douglas, "How Actual Governments Cope with the Paradoxes of Social Choice: Some Anglo-American Comparisons," *Comparative Politics*, 17, October 1984, pp. 67-84

\*Keith Krehbiel, *Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking*, University of Chicago Press, 1998

\*Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, Yale University Press, 1999

#### **11/4: Heresthetic**

C Riker, "Political Theory and the Art of Heresthetics," in Ada W. Finifter, ed., *Political Science the State of the Discipline*, American Political Science Assn., 1993, pp. 47-67

T Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation*, Preface, ch. 1, and Conclusion, plus at least one of the following chapters: 2, 4, 5, 6, and 10

C Jack H. Nagel, "Populism, Heresthetics and Political Stability: Richard Seddon and the Art of Majority Rule," *British Journal of Political Science*, 23, 1993, pp. 139-74.

C Kenneth Shepsle, "Losers in Politics (and How They Sometimes Become Winners): William Riker's Heresthetic," *Perspectives on Politics*, 1:2, June 2003, 307-15

C Iain McLean, "Review Article: William H. Riker and the Invention of Heresthetic(s)," *British Journal of Political Science*, 32:3, July 2002, pp. 535-45 (The remaining pages of this article will be more relevant on 11/25.)

\*Riker, "The Heresthetics of Constitution-Making: The Presidency in 1787, with Comments on Determinism and Rational Choice," *American Political Science Review*, 78, March 1984, pp. 1-16

\* R Strom, ch. 5

**11/11: Historical Applications** [RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSALS DUE]

T Riker, *Liberalism Against Populism*, ch. 9

\* Barry R. Weingast, "Political Stability and Civil War: Institutions, Commitment, and American Democracy," in Robert H. Bates *et al.*, *Analytic Narratives*, Princeton University Press, 1998, pp. 148-93.

\* T, R Riker's *Art of Political Manipulation* includes several more cases that have to do with heresthetics and race (chs. 1, 2, and 11)

C Jack H. Nagel, "Social Choice in a Pluralitarian Democracy: The Politics of Market Liberalization in New Zealand," *British Journal of Political Science*, 28:2, April 1998, pp. 223-67

C Gary Miller and Norman Schofield, "The Transformation of the Republican and Democratic Party Coalitions in the U.S.," *Perspectives on Politics*, 6:3, September 2008, pp. 433-50

\* Gary Miller and Norman Schofield, "Activists and Partisan Realignment in the United States," *American Political Science Review*, 97:2, May 2003, 245-60

\* D. Sunshine Hillygus and Todd G. Shields, *The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns*, Princeton University Press, 2008, ch. 5

\* Edward Carmines and James Stimson, *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics*, Princeton University Press, 1989

\* Iain McLean, *Rational Choice and British Politics: An Analysis of Rhetoric and Manipulation from Peel to Blair*, Oxford University Press, 2001; any chapters

\* Andrew Taylor, "Stanley Baldwin, Heresthetics and the Realignment of British Politics," *British Journal of Political Science*, 35:3, July 2005, 429-63

\* Leif Lewin, *Ideology and Strategy: A Century of Swedish Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, ch. 5

### III. NORMATIVE INFERENCES AND DEBATES

#### **11/18: William Riker's Challenge to Democratic Theory** [SECTION II ESSAYS DUE]

**T, R** Riker, *Liberalism Against Populism*, chs. 1 and 10

**T, R** Mackie, ch. 2 (pp. 23-43)

\* **R** Poundstone, *Gaming the Vote*, ch. 10

\*Albert Weale, "Review Article: Social Choice Versus Populism? An Interpretation of Riker's Political Theory," *British Journal of Political Science*, 14, 1984, pp. 369-85

\*Peter C. Ordeshook, Douglas Rae, and William Riker, symposium in the *American Political Science Review*, 74, June 1980, pp. 447-58; \*preceded by an article by Riker that can be read as a supplement to his chapter above. This symposium, including Riker's article, also appears in Peter C. Ordeshook and Kenneth A. Shepsle, eds., *Political Equilibrium*, Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1982, Part I.

\*William H. Riker and Barry R. Weingast, "Constitutional Regulation of Legislative Choice: The Political Consequences of Judicial Deference to Legislatures," *Virginia Law Review*, 74, 1988, pp. 373-401

\*Jules Coleman and John Ferejohn, "Democracy and Social Choice," *Ethics*, 97, October 1986, pp. 6-25

#### **11/25: Gerry Mackie's Impassioned Rebuttal**

**T, R** Mackie, chs. 1, 12, 13, pp. 378-96, and ch. 18. Also, optional: \*chs. 9, 10, 11, 17

**C** McLean, "Review Article: William H. Riker and the Invention of Heresthetic(s)," pp. 545-58

#### **12/2: Miller and McGann: Pluralistic Majoritarianism**

**C** Nicholas R. Miller, "Pluralism and Social Choice," *American Political Science Review* 77, 1983, pp. 734-47

**T, R** Anthony McGann, *The Logic of Democracy*, ch. 1, 2, 4, 9 (\*chs. 3 and 8)

**12/9: Additional Attempts at Synthesis**

C Michael D. McDonald, Silvia M. Mendes, and Ian Budge, "What Are Elections For? Conferring the Median Mandate," *British Journal of Political Science*, 34:1, January 2004, 1-26

\*G. Bingham Powell and Georg S. Vanberg, "Election Laws, Disproportionality and Median Correspondence: Implications for Two Visions of Democracy," *British Journal of Political Science*, 30:3, July 2000, pp. 383-411 **or** Powell, *Elections as Instruments of Democracy*, Yale University Press, 2000, Part III.

C Jack Nagel, "Occam No, Archimedes Yes," in Judith Bara and Albert Weale, eds., *Democratic Politics and Party Competition*, Routledge, 2006, pp. 143-58

C John S. Dryzek and Christian List, "Social Choice Theory and Deliberative Democracy: A Reconciliation," *British Journal of Political Science*, 33:1, January 2003, 1-28

**T, R** McGann, pp. 130-41 (\* remainder of chs. 6 and 7 optional)

**H** Jack Nagel, "Salvaging Heresthetic: Six Theses on the Riker Program," Paper presented at the Public Choice Society Annual Meeting, San Antonio, March 2001 [I hope to have a new version of this paper ready in November]

C Iain McLean, "Review Article: In Riker's Footsteps," *British Journal of Political Science*, 39:1, January 2009, pp. 195-210

**12/22: RESEARCH PAPERS AND SECTION III ESSAYS DUE BY 5:00 P.M.**