

PS 132: Formal Theories in Political Science

Fall 2000-2001

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In this course we will examine formal theoretical models of political decision making. In the first part of the course (covering the first week and one half), we will examine several methods of assessing the collective well-being or welfare of a society. We will examine questions such as: What objectives might a society might have in making collective decisions? How does one operationalize and measure concepts like fairness and equality? The second part of the course (the bulk of the course) will consider models of political decision making, with specific attention to how individual preferences can be aggregated to reach a collective decision. We will first examine some fundamental difficulties in aggregating the preferences of a heterogeneous society. We will then examine the properties of a variety of voting methods and focus on some analyze specific public decision settings.

There are two texts for the course.

Hervé Moulin, *Axioms of Cooperative Decision Making*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991 (paperback edition).

Kenneth Shepsle and Mark Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior and Institutions*, Norton 1997 (paperback edition).

There will be homework assignments that are given approximately every other week and a take-home final examination. Grading will be 2/3 dependent on the assignments and 1/3 on the final. Late homeworks will only be accepted if you have cleared them with me *prior* to the due date.

An outline of the material we will cover in the course is as follows. The numbers below do *not* correspond to weeks in the term and so I will keep you informed of what you should be reading for each class.

Syllabus

I. Introduction

0. *Reasons for Making and Analyzing Collective Decisions; Rationality*

S.-B. Chapters 1 and 2, M. Introduction.

II. Objectives and Measurements of a Society's Welfare

1. *Egalitarianism and Utilitarianism: Classical Philosophies on Welfare Orderings.*

M. Chapter 1.

2. *Social Welfare Orderings and Measurements of Inequality*

M. Chapter 2.

III. Methods for Political Choice: Collective Decision Making

3. *Aggregating Individual Preferences: Dictators and Arrow's Theorem*

S.-B. Chapters 3 and 4. M. Chapter 11 (sections 1-4).

4. *Restricted Domains of Preferences: Single Peaked Preferences, Median Voters, the Core, and Public Good Decisions*

M. Chapter 11 (sections 5-8).

5. *The Spatial Model of Political Decisions and Core (Non-)Existence*

S.-B. Chapter 5.

6. *Models of Strategic Voting and the importance of Agendas*

S.-B. Chapter 7, M. Chapter 9.

7. *Incentives in Collective Decision Making: Strategy-Proofness and the Core Revisited*

S.-B. Chapter 6, M. Chapter 10.