

Collective Choice and Social Welfare

Spring 2022

Instructor: Gerard Rothfus
Classroom: ???
Day/Time: ???
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Description

This course invites students to explore the basics of social choice theory and formal approaches to the measurement of social welfare with an emphasis on these fields' significance for moral and political philosophy. The course is structured as a guided tour of Amartya Sen's classic text, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, from which the course takes its title. Along the way students will be introduced to basic formal concepts from logic, rational choice theory, voting theory, and welfare economics. Select topics covered include Arrow's Impossibility Theorem, Sen's Liberal Paradox, interpersonal comparisons of utility, Rawls' theory of distributive justice, and Harsanyi's utilitarianism.

Learning Objectives

This course will equip students to enter the exciting world of social choice theory and political philosophy by providing a foundational understanding of classic methods and results in these fields.

Course Materials

The required text for the course is Amartya Sen's *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, 2nd edition (2017), a classic in the field of social choice theory. All additional readings will be made available over ILIAS.

Course Structure

This course will be organized around a weekly lecture/discussion period, where various topics in social choice theory will be explored and discussed in person. You are encouraged to do the suggested readings before each lecture in order to be better prepared to engage and ask questions, make suggestions in discussion, etc. Periodically, I may also release short, pre-recorded videos to the ILIAS site (as well as YouTube), summarizing different ideas covered in the course. You may view these videos to help with homework problems or just to get a better grip on key ideas in the course.

I will also hold office hours on after class until ???. Feel free to come to office hours and ask any questions you may have about the course! If you are unable to make this time any week, you are welcome to set up an appointment for another time. In these office hours, I am happy to go over past homework assignments or discuss questions about upcoming assignments, new material, etc. Whether in or out of office hours, please feel free to reach out to me any time!

Course Assignments

Homework will be due at the start of class every few weeks (dates listed below). Students are encouraged to discuss homework problems with other students and work together, though every student must write/type out their own homework. Your lowest homework grade will be dropped.

If you wish to write a term paper for the course, this is certainly possible, though it is not required as grading will be based solely on your homework performance. Feel free to reach out to me about this possibility!

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Though collaboration among students is encouraged, any work a student turns in must ultimately be their own. Students who have any questions or uncertainty about this policy are responsible for meeting with the instructor to discuss the policy.

Disabilities

Please notify me in advance of the need for accommodation of a University verified disability. I will gladly provide the required accommodations. If you have any questions or concerns about disability accommodations, please don't hesitate to speak with me; I am happy to help out.

Course Outline

Week:	Topic:
Week 1	<p>Preference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The logic of relations, preference, choice functions, Sen's α and β <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Collective Choice and Social Welfare</i>: Ch. 1/1*, "Introduction/Preference Relations". <p>Homework One Due Week 3</p>
Week 2	<p>Unanimity and Pareto Principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collective choice rules, Pareto dominance, the Kaldor and Scitovsky compensation tests <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Collective Choice and Social Welfare</i>: Ch. 2/2*, "Unanimity/Collective Choice Rules and Pareto Comparisons".
Week 3	<p>Social Welfare Functions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrowian social welfare functions, Arrow's Impossibility Theorem <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Collective Choice and Social Welfare</i>: Ch. 3/3*, "Collective Rationality/Social Welfare Functions". <p>Homework Two Due Week 5</p>
Week 4	<p>Social Decision Functions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social decision functions, a way around Arrow's theorem? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Collective Choice and Social Welfare</i>: Ch. 4/4*, "Choice Versus Orderings/Social Decision Functions".

Week:	Topic:
Week 5	<p>Value Judgements (and Voting Theory)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normativity, Sen on value judgments, May's theorem <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Collective Choice and Social Welfare</i>: Ch. 5/5*, "Values and Choice/Anonymity, Neutrality, and Responsiveness". <p>Homework Three Due Week 7</p>
Week 6	<p>The Liberal Paradox</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sen's impossibility theorem, an objection to Pareto <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Collective Choice and Social Welfare</i>: Ch. 6/6*, "Conflicts and Dilemmas/The Liberal Paradox".
Week 7	<p>Interpersonal Comparison of Utility I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measurement scales, ordinal vs cardinal utility <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Collective Choice and Social Welfare</i>: Ch. 7/7*, "Interpersonal Aggregation and Comparability/Aggregation Quasi-Orderings". <p>Homework Four Due Week 9</p>
Week 8	<p>Interpersonal Comparison of Utility II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal comparison of utility, partial comparisons <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Collective Choice and Social Welfare</i>: Ch. 8/8*, "Cardinality With or Without Comparability/Bargains and Social Welfare Functions".

Week 9	<p>Bargaining Theory I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bargaining problems, the Nash bargaining solution <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Collective Choice and Social Welfare</i>: Ch. 8/8*, “Cardinality With or Without Comparability/Bargains and Social Welfare Functions”. <p>Homework Four Due Week 11</p>
Week 10	<p>Bargaining Theory II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kalai-Smorodinsky and egalitarian solutions, another impossibility result <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Collective Choice and Social Welfare</i>: Ch. 8/8*, “Cardinality With or Without Comparability/Bargains and Social Welfare Functions”.
Week 11	<p>Justice I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rawls on justice as fairness, the veil of ignorance, maximin <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Collective Choice and Social Welfare</i>: Ch. 9/9*, “Equity and Justice/Impersonality and Collective Quasi-Orderings”. <p>Homework Five Due Week 13</p>
Week 12	<p>Justice II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rawls vs Harsanyi behind the Veil of Ignorance <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Collective Choice and Social Welfare</i>: Ch. 9/9*, “Equity and Justice/Impersonality and Collective Quasi-Orderings”.
Week 13	<p>Majority Choice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Method of Majority Decisions, Avoiding the Condorcet Paradox <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Collective Choice and Social Welfare</i>: Ch. 10/10*, “Majority Choice and Related Systems/Restricted Preferences and Rational Choice”.
Week 14	<p>Final Discussion</p>