

Rational Choice Theory
Philosophy 780 – Spring 2009
M. Weber

Course Description:

This course is a sophisticated (though largely non-technical) introduction to rational choice theory. It will examine rational choice theory both as a normative theory of choice, and as a descriptive/predictive theory in the social sciences.

Course Requirements:

Papers: Two papers are required. The first, which will count 20% towards the final grade, should be between 1200-2000 words. The second, which will count 60% towards the final grade, should be between 3000-4500 words.

Class Participation: Students are expected to carefully read all assignments before class and to be prepared to contribute to class discussion. Class Participation will count 20% towards the final grade.

Reading Assignments:

1/15 – No Reading

1/22 – *The Theory of Choice*, Hargreaves, Heap, eds., pp. 3-11

John Broome, “Should a Rational Agent Maximize Expected Utility?”

David Velleman, “The Story of Rational Action”

1/29 – *The Theory of Choice*, Hargreaves, Heap, eds., pp.14-17, Chapter 6

John Broome, “Can a Humean Be Moderate?”

Christine Korsgaard, “The Normativity of Instrumental Reason”

2/5 – Jean Hampton, “Rethinking Reason”

2/12 – *The Theory of Choice*, Hargreaves, Heap, eds., pp. 36-49

John Broome, from *Weighing Goods*, pp. 90-120

Michael Weber, “The Resilience of the Allais Paradox”

2/19 – Larry Temkin, “Intransitivity and the Mere Addition Paradox”

- 2/26 - *The Theory of Choice*, Hargreaves, Heap, eds., pp. 17-20
Michael Slote, from *Beyond Optimizing*, pp. 1-46
Michael Weber, "A New Defense of Satisficing"
- 3/5 - *The Theory of Choice*, Hargreaves, Heap, eds., pp. 340-2
Robert Nozick, "Newcomb's Problem and Two Principles of Choice"
David Gauthier, "In the Neighborhood of the Newcomb-Predictor"
- 3/19 - David Gauthier, "Assure and Threaten"
- 3/26 - David Velleman, "Deciding How to Decide"
- 4/3 - Milton Friedman, "The Methodology of Positive Economics"
Kenneth Arrow, "Economic Theory and the Hypothesis of Rationality"
- 4/10 - Gary Becker, "An Economic Approach to Human Behavior"
Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Prospect Theory"
- 4/17 - Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, pp. 3-19, 36-50
Amartya Sen, "Rational Fools"
- 4/24 - - Donald Green and Ian Schapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice*, pp. 1-71
Stephen Quakenbush, "The Rationality of Rational Choice Theory"
- 4/31 - - *The Theory of Choice*, Hargreaves, Heap, eds., Chapter 14
Elizabeth Anderson, "Beyond Homo Economicus: New Developments in Theories of Social Norms"
Elizabeth Anderson, "Should Feminism Reject Rational Choice Theory?"