

Proposal for a PhD mini-course on “Distributive justice and liberal principles”

The mini-course (6 hours) aims to expose students to the axiomatic method that is standard in social choice theory while adopting an interdisciplinary approach at the frontier of normative economics and political philosophy.

The course will start examining a range of canonical results and then progress to the more recent literature in economics and political philosophy.

1. Introduction to the axiomatic method (2 hours). Discussion of some of the classic results of social choice – including Kenneth Arrow’s impossibility result and Amartya Sen’s impossibility of the Paretian liberal. Examination of the canonical characterisations of the main distributive approaches in social choice theory and normative economics (utilitarianism, maximin, prioritarianism/Nash).
2. Liberal principles of Non-Interference: treading a fine line between possibility and impossibility (2 hours). Discussion of John Stuart Mill’s *Harm Principle* and its axiomatic representation as the Principle of Non-Interference. Discussion of the conflict between liberalism and standard efficiency and fairness properties. Examination of the liberal foundations of egalitarian principles of distributive justice – such as the maximin and the leximin – based on a restricted version of Non-Interference. Extension of the analysis to the intergenerational context with an infinite number of generations.
3. Liberal principles of Non-Interference: allocating opportunities and threshold approaches to justice (2 hours). Introduction of the notion of opportunities as chances whereby agents’ opportunities are measured as the probability that they will succeed in life (without any mention of effort and skills). Normative, axiomatic analysis of allocations of profiles of chances focusing in particular, albeit not exclusively, on liberal principles of Non-Interference. Characterisation of the well-known Nash and utilitarian social welfare orderings. Formal analysis of some new theories of distributive justice – namely sufficientarianism and limitarianism – that identify critical thresholds in the allocation of welfare.

Reading list

- Alcantud, J.C.R., Mariotti, M. and R. Veneziani (2022), “Sufficientarianism.” *Theoretical Economics*, 17, 1529—1557.
- d'Aspremont, C. and L. Gevers (2002), “Social welfare functionals and interpersonal comparability” in *Handbook of Social Choice and Welfare*, Vol. 1, pp.459-541.
- Frankfurt, H. G. (1987), “Equality as a moral ideal.” *Ethics*, 98, 21–43.
- Lombardi, M. and R. Veneziani (2016), “Liberal egalitarianism and the harm principle.” *Economic Journal*, 126, 2173–2196.
- Mariotti, M. and R. Veneziani (2011), “Allocating chances of success in finite and infinite societies: The utilitarian criterion.” *Journal of Mathematical Economics*, 48, 226–236.
- Mariotti, M. and R. Veneziani (2013), “On the impossibility of complete noninterference in Paretian social judgements.” *Journal of Economic Theory*, 148, 1689–1699.
- Mariotti, M. and R. Veneziani (2018), “Opportunities as chances: Maximising the probability that everybody succeeds.” *Economic Journal*, 128, 1609–1633.
- Mariotti, M. and R. Veneziani (2020), “The liberal ethics of non-interference.” *British Journal of Political Science*, 50, 567–584.
- Robeyns, I. (2022), “Why limitarianism?” *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 30, 249—270.
- Roemer, J.E. (1996), *Theories of Distributive Justice*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Sen, A.K. (1970), “The Impossibility of a Paretian Liberal.” *Journal of Political Economy*, 78, 152—157.