

# Mechanism Design, Implementation Theory, and Higher Order Uncertainty

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# Motivating Example: Holmström and Myerson (1983)

- **Basic Environment:**

- Agents:  $I = \{1, 2\}$ .
- Payoff types:  $\Theta_1 = \Theta_2 = \{\alpha, \beta\}$
- Alternatives:  $X = \{A, B, C\}$ .

- **Preferences:** The following table displays the preferences

	$U_{1,\alpha}$	$U_{1,\beta}$	$U_{2,\alpha}$	$U_{2,\beta}$
A	2	0	2	2
B	1	4	1	1
C	0	9	0	-8

- **Information:** There is  $p \in \Delta(\Theta)$  which is assumed to be uniform, that is  $p = \{\frac{1}{4}, \frac{1}{4}, \frac{1}{4}, \frac{1}{4}\}$ . Interim beliefs are described by Bayes rule. In this setting, for every  $i \in I, (\theta_i, \theta_j) \in \Theta, p_i(\theta_j|\theta_i) = \frac{1}{2}$ .

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- $\alpha$ :  $A \succ_{\alpha}^1 B \succ_{\alpha}^1 C$  and  $A \succ_{\alpha}^2 B \succ_{\alpha}^2 C$
- $\beta$ : At  $\beta$ , 2 dislike C more relative to  $\alpha$ , 1's preferences reverse:  
 $C \succ_{\beta}^1 B \succ_{\beta}^1 A$ .

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The following social choice function maximizes ex-ante utilitarian welfare:

$f$	$\alpha$	$\beta$
$\alpha$	A	B
$\beta$	C	B

1. **Ex-ante:** No asymmetric information between the planner (we) and the agents.
2. **Interim:** Once every agent learns its type we have *asymmetric information* between the planner and players.

# Who is a Planner?

## Two perspectives:

- A physical entity with a well defined utility function. For ex. Auctioneer.
- Planner refers to the society  $I$ 
  - In this interpretation, society is treated separately from its individual members.
  - SCF referents societies objective from an ex-ante perspective. For ex. design of constitutions.

## Key take away:

*Ex-ante and Interim stage creates information asymmetry.*

# Question

1. Can planner design a game/contract that provides agents incentives to reveal the truth?
2. Agents know that their announcement affects the decision  $\implies$  the problem is non-trivial
3. Many senders and one receiver problem:
  - Receiver **designs** a *mechanism* and **commits** to it
  - senders send messages via the *mechanism*.
  - receiver selects an outcome for each message profile

## Mechanism:

- $\mathcal{M} = (\prod_{i \in I} M_i, g)$
- $M_i$ : Messages for each agent and  $g : M \rightarrow X$

## Definition

A SCF  $f$  is weakly-implementable by a mechanism  $\mathcal{M}$  if there exists a Bayes Nash Equilibrium  $\sigma = (\sigma_1, \sigma_2)$ , such that for every  $(\theta_1, \theta_2) \in \Theta$ , it holds that

$$g(\sigma_1(\theta_1), \sigma_2(\theta_2)) = f(\theta_1, \theta_2) \quad (1)$$



## Direct Mechanism:

- $M_i = \Theta_i$ , for every  $i \in I$
- $g = f$

## Weak-Implementation:

- Focus on direct mechanisms
- Focus on truth-telling strategies

## Example Continued

$f$	$\alpha$	$\beta$
$\alpha$	A	B
$\beta$	C	B

1.  $\sigma_i^t(\theta_i) = \theta_i$ : Truth-telling is an equilibrium  $\implies f$  is incentive compatible.
2.  $f$  is weakly implementable.

# Revelation Principle Fails: Part 1

$f$	$\alpha$	$\beta$
$\alpha$	A	B
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but....

- $\sigma'_1(\theta_1) = \theta_1$  and  $\sigma'_2(\theta_2) = \beta$  is also an equilibrium.
- $\sigma'$  undermines the planners goal.
- $\sigma'$ : Always  $B$  is selected.

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- $\sigma'$ : Always  $B$  is selected.

## Definition

A SCF  $f$  is *fully*-Bayesian implementable by a mechanism  $\mathcal{M}$  if for (a) BNE exists and (b) every Bayes Nash Equilibrium  $\sigma = (\sigma_1, \sigma_2)$  and for every  $(\theta_1, \theta_2) \in \Theta$ , it holds that

$$g(\sigma_1(\theta_1), \sigma_2(\theta_2)) = f(\theta_1, \theta_2) \quad (2)$$

## Example Continued

Solution: Indirect Mechanism:

$g$	$\alpha$	$\beta$
$\alpha$	A	B
$\beta$	C	B
$\alpha'$	B	A
$\beta'$	B	C

Two Equilibrium.

- $\hat{\sigma}^t$ : Truthtelling
- $\hat{\sigma}_1(\alpha) = \alpha'$ ,  $\hat{\sigma}_1(\beta) = \beta'$  and  $\hat{\sigma}_2(\alpha) = \beta$ ,  $\hat{\sigma}_2(\beta) = \alpha$

## Augmented Revelation Principle: Mookherjee and Reichelstein (1990)

- Start with a direct mechanism:  $M = \Theta$ ,  $g = f$
- 'Augment' it
  - $\hat{M}_i = \Theta_i \cup \mathbb{C}$ ,  $\mathbb{C}$  is some countable set
  - Extend  $g$  to  $\hat{M}$  such that no bad equilibrium remains.
- Implementation theory: provides condition on  $f$  that ensure that such an augmentation is possible.

Goal: To provide a brief overview of this literature by minimizing the details.

1. **Incomplete Information:** Assymmetric information (*a*) among the players and (*b*) between the players and the planner.
2. **Complete Information:** No Assymmetric information among the players but between the players and the planner
  - 2.1 For every  $(\theta_1, \theta_2) \in (\Theta_1, \Theta_2)$ , it holds that

$$p(\theta_2|\theta_1) = p(\theta_1|\theta_2) = 1$$

- 2.2 Every  $(\theta_1, \theta_2) \in (\Theta_1, \Theta_2)$  is common knowledge among the agents



# Complete Information

- Simplest non-trivial set up to analyze the implementation problem.
- Conceptually, extension to general information structures is similar.
- My view: complete information and  $I \geq 3$  is a *tool* to develop conceptual grip at this literature.

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# Complete Information

- Simplest non-trivial set up to analyze the implementation problem.
- Conceptually, extension to general information structures is similar.
- My view: complete information and  $I \geq 3$  is a *tool* to develop conceptual grip at this literature. **But can't escape the Bayesian setup.**
- Information structure matters: Palfrey and Srivastava (1987) provide interesting examples.

# Maskin's Theorem

- Basic Environment:  $I$ ,  $\Theta$ , and  $X = \{A, B, C\}$
- Preferences:  $\theta \in \Theta$ :  $u_i^\theta : X \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$
- Complete Information: For every  $\theta \in \Theta$ : Everyone knows  $\theta$ , everyone know that everyone knows  $\theta$  and so on...
- Example:  $\Theta = \{(\alpha, \alpha), (\beta, \alpha), (\alpha, \beta), (\beta, \beta)\}$
- $\mathcal{M}$  is a game form and  $(\mathcal{M}, \theta)$  is game of complete information.
  - $NE(\mathcal{M}, \theta)$ : Set of Nash equilibria at  $\theta$ .

# Nash Implementation

## Definition

A SCF  $f$  is Nash implementable by a mechanism  $\mathcal{M}$  provided that for every  $\theta \in \Theta$ , it holds that

$$\bigcup_{m \in NE(\mathcal{M}, \theta)} g(m) = f(\theta) \quad (3)$$

At every state  $\theta \in \Theta$ ,

- $NE(\mathcal{M}, \theta)$  unique in outcomes.
- Multiple equilibria not ruled out.

# Maskin Monotonicity

## Definition

$f$  satisfies Maskin monotonicity provided that for every  $(\theta, \theta') \in \Theta \times \Theta$

$$\forall i \in I, L_i(f(\theta), \theta) \subseteq L_i(f(\theta), \theta') \implies f(\theta) = f(\theta')$$

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Lower contour set:

$$L_i(f(\theta), \theta) = \{x \in X \mid u_i^\theta(x) \leq u_i^\theta(f(\theta))\}.$$

$$L_i(f(\theta), \theta') = \{x \in X \mid u_i^{\theta'}(x) \leq u_i^{\theta'}(f(\theta))\}.$$

## Definition

$f$  satisfies Maskin monotonicity provided that for every  $(\theta, \theta') \in \Theta \times \Theta$

$$\forall i \in I, L_i(f(\theta), \theta) \subseteq L_i(f(\theta), \theta') \implies f(\theta) = f(\theta')$$

## Definition

$f$  satisfies No Veto Power (NVP) provided that for every  $\theta \in \Theta$  if there is an alternative  $x \in X$  such that  $|\{i \in I | x \in \underset{z}{\operatorname{argmax}} u_i(z, \theta)\}| \geq I - 1$ , then

$$f(\theta) = x$$



## Theorem

1. *If  $f$  is Nash implementable, then  $f$  satisfies Maskin monotonicity*
2.  *$I \geq 3$ . If  $f$  satisfies Maskin monotonicity and No Veto Power, then  $f$  is Nash implementable*

# Maskin's Theorem

- Maskin Monotonicity
  - becomes restrictive with the size of  $\Theta$ .
  - $I \geq 2$ ,  $X \geq 3$  and  $\Theta$  is large. If  $f$  satisfies MM, then  $f$  is constant or dictatorial.
- NVP
  - not necessary but is consider 'mild'.
  - NVP is vacuous in economic environments.
  - NVP is restrictive when  $I = 2$ .

# Maskin's Theorem

*Maskin's Theorem: Suppose  $I \geq 3$ . Maskin monotonicity is necessary and 'almost' sufficient for Nash implementation.*

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*Maskin's Theorem: Suppose  $I \geq 3$ . Maskin monotonicity is necessary and 'almost' sufficient for Nash implementation.*

- 'almost': No mathematical content.
- Unfortunate language used in this literature. I try to avoid it. Let the reader decide whether the gap in the characterization is small or not.

## Bayesian Implementation:

- Bayesian Monotonicity: Postlewaite and Schmeidler (1986) Palfrey and Srivastava (1987), Palfrey and Srivastava (1989a), Jackson (1991).
- Augmented Revelation Principal: Mookherjee and Reichelstein (1990)

## Nash Implementation:

- Full Characterization: Moore and Repullo (1990), Dutta and Sen (1991), Sjöström (1991).
- Full characterization for Bayesian Implementation: Open Problem.
  - Issue: Characterization will involve information structure.
  - Jackson (1991): Bayesian Monotonicity + Bayesian No Veto Power not enough.

# Key Take Away

- Information structure matters.
  - Complete Information: Pareto Efficiency is Nash Implementable in complete information environments
  - Incomplete Information: Ex-ante, Interim, Ex-post are not (Palfrey and Srivastava (1987)).
- Full *Bayesian* implementation is restrictive in *static* games

Solution \ Game form	Static	Extensive
BNE	✓	SPNE, Sequential
Refinement	Undominated, Trembling Hand	NA

Use stage game mechanisms + Equilibrium Refinement

## **Subgame Perfect Implementation:**

- Theory: Moore and Repullo (1988), Abreu and Sen (1990).
- Experiments: Fehr et al. (2021), Aghion et al. (2018).

## **Equilibrium Refinements:**

- Players do not play weakly dominated strategies.
- Palfrey and Srivastava (1991), Palfrey and Srivastava (1989b).

## Key take away:

1. Maskin monotonicity and Bayesian monotonicity can be avoided
2. Any incentive compatible social choice function is implementable
3. Augmented Revelation Mechanisms: required

## Jackson's critique: Jackson (1992)

- Any  $f$  is implementable if players do not play weakly dominated strategies.
- Implementing mechanism must be 'bad' if  $f$  is not dictatorial.



## Literature Surveys:

1. Papers: Maskin and Sjöström (2002), Jackson (2001), and Palfrey (2002)
2. Book: Palfrey et al. (2020)

# Higher Order Uncertainty

## Two Common Knowledge Assumptions

1. Equilibrium: Strategy profile is common knowledge  $\implies$  no strategic uncertainty.
2. Information Structure is common knowledge  $\implies$  no 'structural' uncertainty.

# Complete Information: 'structural' uncertainty

1.  $\theta \in \Theta$  is common knowledge. What if  $\theta$  is 'almost' common knowledge?
2. Two views:
  - **weak**: Nature announces  $\theta$  to everyone simultaneously but with an error (Monderer and Samet, 1989)
  - **strong**: Nature announces  $\theta$  to everyone sequentially but with an error (Rubinstein, 1989)

# Complete Information: 'structural' uncertainty

1.  $\theta \in \Theta$  is common knowledge. What if  $\theta$  is 'almost' common knowledge?
2. 'almost' common knowledge
  - **weak**: Everyone knows  $\theta$  with high probability, everyone knows that everyone knows  $\theta$  with high probability and so on... (Monderer and Samet, 1989)
  - **strong**: Everyone knows  $\theta$  with high probability, everyone knows that everyone knows  $\theta$  with high probability and so on upto some finite but large  $k$ . (Rubinstein, 1989)

## Revisit Implementation

Chung and Ely (2003)

- Robustness: Full implementation is required on all models *nearby* complete information in the sense of (Monderer and Samet, 1989).
- Result: Suppose players do not play weakly dominated strategies and implementation is required to be robust: *Maskin monotonicity is necessary*.
- The positive implementation results with refinement purely driven by complete information assumption.

Aghion et al. (2012)

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Fun fact: Aghion et al. (2012) only QJE in the literature!



## Revelation Principle Fails: Part 2

Oury and Tercieux (2012)

- Relax the full implementation requirement to weak implementation, that is, mechanism design.
- Strengthen the robustness requirement to strong
- Implementing equilibrium must be robust to small deviations from the information structure (complete information here).
- This requirement is called continuous implementation

Result:

- if  $f$  is continuously implementable, then it must be fully implementable in rationalizable strategies.
- rationalizability:
  - Complete information: Bernheim (1984), Pearce (1984)
  - Incomplete Information: Battigalli and Siniscalchi (2003), and Dekel et al. (2007)

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Oury and Tercieux (2012)

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Result:

- if  $f$  is continuously implementable, then it must be fully implementable in rationalizable strategies
- revelation principle is not robust to higher order uncertainty
- Mechanism design + Higher order uncertainty  $\implies$  implementation in rationalizable strategies

## Two Common Knowledge Assumptions

1. Equilibrium: Strategy profile is common knowledge  $\implies$  no strategic uncertainty.
2. Information Structure is common knowledge  $\implies$  no 'structural' uncertainty.

Takeaway: if we want to relax (2) we need to relax (1).

## Solution concept

- $\mathcal{S}_i^{\mathcal{M},\theta}$ : set of rationalizable strategies for  $i$
- $\mathcal{S}^{\mathcal{M},\theta} = \mathcal{S}_1^{\mathcal{M},\theta} \times \mathcal{S}_2^{\mathcal{M},\theta} \dots \times \mathcal{S}_I^{\mathcal{M},\theta}$  : set of rationalizable strategy profiles
- $\mathcal{S}_i^{\mathcal{M},\theta}$ : Iterated elimination of never best responses

$$\mathcal{S}_i^{\mathcal{M},\theta} = \bigcap_{k \geq 1} \mathcal{S}_{i,k}^{\mathcal{M},\theta}$$

# Solution concept

When  $k = 0$ , let  $\mathcal{S}_{i,0}^{\mathcal{M},\theta} = M_i$

Never Best Response

- Step  $k = 1$ 
  - $m_i$  is never a 1-best response if there is no belief  $\lambda_i \in \Delta(M_{-i})$  such that  $m_i$  is a best response to  $\lambda_i$ .
  - Remaining strategies:  $\mathcal{S}_{i,0}^{\mathcal{M},\theta}$ , for every  $i$
- Step  $k = 2$ 
  - $m_i$  is never a 2-best response if there is no belief  $\lambda_i \in \Delta(\mathcal{S}_{i,1}^{\mathcal{M},\theta})$  such that  $m_i$  is a best response to  $\lambda_i$ .
- Iterate!

## Solution concept

When  $k = 0$ , let

$$\mathcal{S}_{i,0}^{\mathcal{M},\theta} = M_i$$

When  $k \geq 1$ , let

$$\mathcal{S}_{i,k}^{\mathcal{M},\theta} = \left\{ m_i \in \mathcal{S}_{i,k-1}^{\mathcal{M},\theta} \mid \begin{array}{l} \exists \lambda_i \in \Delta(\mathcal{S}_{-i,k-1}^{\mathcal{M},\theta}) \text{ such that} \\ m_i \in \underset{m'_i \in M_i}{\operatorname{argmax}} \sum_{m_{-i} \in \mathcal{S}_{-i,k-1}^{\mathcal{M},\theta}} \lambda_i(m_{-i}) u_i(g(m_i, m_{-i}), \theta) \end{array} \right\}$$

## Definition

A mechanism  $\mathcal{M}$  implements an SCF  $f$  in rationalizable strategies if for every  $\theta \in \Theta$ ,

1.  $\mathcal{S}^{\mathcal{M},\theta} \neq \emptyset$
2.  $\bigcup_{m \in \mathcal{S}^{\mathcal{M},\theta}} g(m) = f(\theta)$

## Definition

$f$  satisfies Maskin monotonicity\* provided that there exists a partition  $P_f$  of  $\Theta$  such that  $f$  is measurable with respect to  $P_f$  for every  $(\theta, \theta') \in \Theta \times \Theta$

$$\forall \hat{\theta} \in P(\theta), \exists i \in I, L_i(f(\theta), \hat{\theta}) \subseteq L_i(f(\theta), \theta') \implies \theta' \in P(\theta)$$

1. Maskin monotonicity\*  $\implies$  Maskin monotonicity
2. Maskin monotonicity  $\not\Rightarrow$  Maskin monotonicity\*: Jain (2021).
  - Condorcet rule on Condorcet domain (Healy and Peress (2015)).



## Theorem

$I \geq 3$ ,  $f$  satisfies Maskin monotonicity\* and NWA\*, then  $f$  is implementable in rationalizable strategies.

Full characterization:

- $I \geq 3$ : Xiong (2021), strict Group Monotonicity\*\*
- $I \geq 2$ : Jain et al. (2021), Iterated monotonicity (IM)
- IM endogenize the Partition that appears in  $MM^{**}$  and strict Group Monotonicity\*\*.

- **Basic Environment:**

- Agents:  $I = \{1, 2, \dots, I\}$ .
- Payoff types:  $\Theta_i$  and  $\Theta = \prod_{i \in I} \Theta_i = \Theta$
- Alternatives:  $X$ .

- **Preferences:**

- $u_i : X \times \Theta \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ , expected utility

- **Information:**

- $\mathcal{T} = \prod_{i \in I} \mathcal{T}_i$
- $\mathcal{T}_i = (T_i, \hat{\theta}_i, \hat{\pi}_i)$ , where  $\hat{\theta}_i : T_i \rightarrow \Theta_i$ , and  $\hat{\pi}_i : T_i \rightarrow \Delta(\Theta_{-i})$
- $\mathcal{T} = \prod_{i \in I} \mathcal{T}_i$

The largest type space  $\mathcal{T}^*$ : Universal type space

- Nice topological structure
- The idea of closeness can be defined using metric spaces
- Topology on types: Dekel et al. (2005), Chen et al. (2010), and Chen et al. (2017)

Baseline type space  $\bar{\mathcal{T}}$ :

- Bayesian Implementation: fixed type space  $\bar{\mathcal{T}}$ , classical literature
- Local Robust: implementation on all type spaces nearby  $\bar{\mathcal{T}}$ 
  - Oury and Tercieux (2012)  $\implies$  Interim Rationalizable implementation
- Global: implementation on all type spaces  $\mathcal{T}$ :
  - Bergemann and Morris  $\implies$  ex-post version of rationalizability

# Rationalizable Implementation

$$\mathcal{M}^{Aug} \text{ and } M_i = \Theta_i \cup \mathbb{C}, \theta \in M \implies g(m) = f(\theta)$$

$\mathbb{C} \setminus$ Robustness	Robust	Interim- $\mathcal{T}$	Comp Info- $\mathcal{T}^{CI}$
No Restriction	BM(2011, GEB) KS(2020, WP) work in progress	OT(2012, ECTA) KSS(2020,WP) work in progress	BMT(2012, JET) Xiong(2021,WP) JKL(2021,WP) Jain (2021,GEB)
Finite-Virtual	BM (2009,TE)	AM(1992,WP)	AM(1992, ECTA)
Finite-Exact			CKSX(2021, GEB)
Direct	BM(2009,ReS)		HM (2012, TE)
Direct	OP(2019, AER)	OP(2019, AER)	OP(2019, AER)

BM: Bergemann-Morris; BMT: Bergemann-Morris-Tercieux; OT: Oury-Tercieux; KS: Kunimoto-Saran; KSS: Kunimoto-Saran-Serrano; AM: Abreu-Matsushima; HM: Healy-Mathevet; OP: Ollar-Penta; CKSX: Chen-Kunimoto-Sun-Xiong; JKL: Jain-Korpela-Lombardi.

## Rationalizable Implementation: My favourite

$$\mathcal{M}^{Aug} \text{ and } M_i = \Theta_i \cup \mathbb{C}, \theta \in M, g(m) = f(\theta)$$

$\mathbb{C} \setminus$ Robustness	Robust	Interim- $\mathcal{T}$	Comp Info- $\mathcal{T}^{CI}$
No Restriction	BM(2011, GEB) KS(2020, WP) work in progress	OT(2012, ECTA) KSS(2020, WP) work in progress	BMT(2012, JET) Xiong(2021, WP) JKL(2021, WP) Jain (2021, GEB)
Finite-Virtual	BM (2009, TE)	AM(1992, WP)	AM(1992, ECTA)
Finite-Exact			CKSX(2021, GEB)
Direct	BM(2009, RES)		HM (2012, TE)
Direct	OP(2017, AER)	OP(2017, AER)	OP(2017, AER)

Oury and Tercieux (2012); Abreu and Matsushima (1992); and Ollár and Penta (2017).

## Concluding Remarks

- Rationalizability is more than a solution concept
- It is a tool to perform robust equilibrium analysis.
- Battigalli and Siniscalchi (2003): 'tractable way to implement robust Bayesian Nash analysis'
- This is just the tip of the ice-berg. Many other frameworks on which Maskin (1999) has been studied.
- Almost all models follows the same basic insight.
- Single valued rules: What about  $F : \Theta \rightarrow 2^X \setminus \{\emptyset\}$ ?

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