

Introduction to the special issue “Beliefs in Groups” of Theory and Decision

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This symposium in the overlap of philosophy and decision theory is described well by its title “Beliefs in Groups”. Each word in the title matters, with one intended ambiguity. The symposium is about *beliefs* rather than other attitudes such as preferences; these beliefs take the form of *probabilities* in the first three contributions, binary yes/no beliefs (‘judgments’) in the fourth contribution, and *qualitative probabilities* (‘probability grades’) in the fifth contribution. The beliefs occur *in groups*, which is ambiguous between beliefs *of groups as a whole* and beliefs *of group members*. The five contributions – all of them interesting, we believe – address several aspects of this general theme.

Where contributions address beliefs of group members, the central question is that of belief *revision*: how should individuals revise their beliefs after learning those of others? This question is of obvious interest in the context of deliberation and exchange of opinions. By contrast, where contributions address beliefs of the group as a whole, the central question is that of aggregation: how should the beliefs of group members be merged into collective beliefs? The two questions are interconnected in many ways. For one, revising one’s beliefs may take the form of aggregating them with learnt beliefs of others – for instance through averaging probability assignments, something analysed in depth in the first three contributions. This approach reduces revision to aggregation. A converse reduction is also imaginable, though not common. One might argue that the right aggregate beliefs are those beliefs which would emerge as consensus beliefs through suitable deliberation and belief revision by the group members, be it in one revision round, finitely many revisions rounds, or a converging infinite sequence of revision rounds. However, whether or not one is ready to reduce revision to aggregation or vice versa, the two phenomena are definitely complementary in an obvious sense: deliberation and belief revision by group members is often the first step, which (when it does not result in consensus) may be followed by an aggregation of the post-deliberation beliefs. All this emphasizes the importance of studying both phenomena in connection to one another. Doing this is the purpose of this symposium.

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