



COMMENTS ON POSLAJKO'S "GROUP MINDS AND THE METAPHYSICS OF BELIEF"

JULIANA LIMA – AZIM PREMJI UNIVERSITY
juliana.lima@apu.edu.in

The Nature of Belief
May 20, 2023

OVERVIEW

- ❖ First comment: responsibility as motivation for group beliefs
- ❖ Second comment: understanding the substantial notion of belief and group minds
- ❖ Third comment: empirical generalizations
- ❖ Fourth comment: defending the functionalist account

FIRST COMMENT: RESPONSIBILITY AS MOTIVATION FOR GROUP BELIEFS

- At the beginning of the paper, Poslajko explains that the motivation to ascribe group beliefs to groups is so that we can hold groups morally responsible for their actions. This is based on the fact that intentional actions are motivated by a pair of belief/desire.
- Poslajko argues that groups can't have beliefs.
- QUESTION: Does Poslajko not think that groups can be morally responsible for their actions? Does he think there are no group actions? What does he think are the consequences of denying that groups have beliefs?

SECOND COMMENT: UNDERSTANDING THE SUBSTANTIAL NOTION OF BELIEF AND GROUP MINDS

- It's unclear what a group belief (as in the corporation case) would be according to the substantial notion. So, it's unclear how it can be a viable proposal.
- Guess: the substantial notion of belief and group minds would have to accept that groups have some physical structure (brain) that when configured in a specific way (brain states) represents that grass is green.
- QUESTION: Is this what Poslajko has in mind?

THIRD COMMENT: EMPIRICAL GENERALIZATIONS

- If groups have beliefs (in any sense), then they are just like beliefs in individual. And that empirical generalizations that are true about beliefs in individuals should also be true about beliefs held by groups.
- But here are two other ways of understanding the phenomenon that empirical generalizations about individual beliefs don't apply to group beliefs.
 - **First:** we need to revise our concept of belief. At present, it only applies to beliefs held by individuals. But we have good evidence to believe that groups have beliefs. This sort of adjustment is not unheard of. Philosophers used to think that animals couldn't have perceptual states because they defined perception as involving a conceptual apparatus that some animals do not have. But, since we had good reason to believe that animals have perception, then we had to change the definition of what perception is.
 - **Second:** we accept that groups do not have beliefs like individual beliefs and add a new mental state, a we-belief. We-beliefs obey different generalizations. But they are close enough to individual beliefs in terms of their general role or most important properties that makes sense to still use the term 'belief'.
 - Tuomela's strategy to talk about group intentions, known as we-intentions.
- **QUESTION:** Does Poslajko think one of the two options are viable?

FOURTH COMMENT: DEFENDING THE FUNCTIONALIST ACCOUNT

- First objection: functionalist accounts of group beliefs are too liberal; they ascribe group beliefs to more groups than we would like to. That is, some groups of people are said to have beliefs when they haven't, *because* they exhibit a certain behavior.
- Gilbert holds that a joint/group intention is a commitment to intend something as a body; a commitment to constitute as far as possible a single body that intends to ϕ .
- Similarly, group belief is a commitment to believe something as a body; a commitment to constitute as far as possible a single body that believes that p .
- In Poslajko's paper, there's no specific example of a group of people who would be considered to have a group belief according to a functionalist view, but that in fact doesn't. But the idea of commitment in Gilbert's view gives an idea of how not only outward behavior warrants attribution of group belief. More specifically, in her view, the creation of a group intention/belief requires a mutual agreement among the members of the group. So just because a set of people are acting in a way that looks like a group action, that doesn't mean that they are and that they can be truly said to have a joint action.



Thank you!