

## Representations and Robustly Collective Attitudes

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### Abstract

One argument against the existence of robustly collective cognitive states such as group belief and group knowledge is that there are no collective representations, i.e., representations held by groups rather than individuals. Since belief requires representation, so the argument goes, there can be no collective belief. In this paper, I reply to this argument. First, I'll scrutinize the assumption that belief requires representation and point out that it is in fact a substantive and controversial issue whether belief indeed requires representation and, if it does, how so. Secondly, I'll argue that even if we grant the above assumption, the argument can be resisted, since there is a natural way to make sense of collective representations. By drawing on the ideas of the extended mind and distributed cognition, I'll outline how we can conceive of collective representations and thereby undermine the argument against group cognitive states.

### 1. Groups with Attitudes

It is both common and natural to talk about groups having various sorts of mental attitudes. Facebook *wants to know* all about you. The U.S. government *believed* Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. My family *intended* to throw a surprise party. The jury *accepts* the defendant's alibi. The job search committee *feels* the female candidate will be a good fit. Some of this talk can be accounted for in purely metaphorical terms, for example as shorthand for large conjunctions of attitude ascriptions to individuals in the relevant groups. However, a sizable and growing number of philosophers argue that some collective attitude ascriptions ought to be understood more literally, as referring to *robustly collective attitudes* (RCAs), that is, attitudes that go beyond a mere sum of individual attitudes, are irreducible to individual attitudes (in a sense that's specified differently by different commentators), and hence have a metaphysically robust standing of their own. Typically, the sense in which RCAs are taken to go beyond sums of individual attitudes includes the possibility of groups having some attitude even when the majority – or even all – of the individuals in the group lack that attitude. So we find in the recent literature accounts of collective intentionality (Bratman 1993, 1999; Chant et al. 2014; Gilbert 2014), group belief (Gilbert 1987, 1989, 2002a, 2014; Tuomela 1992; Schmitt 1994, 2014; De Ridder (ms)), group knowledge (Tuomela 2004; Hakli 2007; Rolin 2008; Bird 2010; De Ridder 2014; Miller 2015; Lackey forthcoming), group acceptance (Hakli 2006; Wray 2001,

2007), collective emotion (Gilbert 2002b; Huebner 2011; Von Scheve & Salmela 2014), and general group agency (Pettit & List 2011; Tuomela 2013; Bratman 2014).<sup>1</sup>

A fundamental objection against such proposals is that groups are unsuited for having these sorts of attitudes, because they lack the requisite internal structure and organization required for it. In particular, the thought is that having RCAs requires having the right sort of *internal representations*, i.e., representations internal to the subject's mental life.<sup>2</sup> Having such representations, however, requires having a mental life of one's own and this is something that groups lack. They don't have *minds* of their own and, by implication, no mental life of their own. Hence, they aren't equipped for having RCAs.

In this chapter, I will develop this objection and argue that it is unsuccessful. The plan is as follows. The next section introduces the central example of an RCA that I'll use throughout the chapter, to wit that of group belief. I will present one influential construal of group belief in order to get a better grip on the idea of RCAs. Section 3 then lays out the objection against the existence of RCAs in more detail. Sections 4 and 5 offer two complementary lines of response to it. I consider various objections to my response and reply to them in section 6. Section 7 concludes the paper.

## **2. Group Belief**

An influential account of group belief is the so-called *Joint Acceptance Account* (JAA), due primarily to Margaret Gilbert (1987, 1989) and Raimo Tuomela (1992) and adopted and developed by several others (Schmitt 1994, 2014; Rolin 2010; Wray 2001, 2007; De Ridder ms). The basic picture behind the JAA is that of a deliberating collective, the members of which employ a procedure of their choosing in order to come to an agreement to accept a certain view as the group's view, that is: to go along with this view, to act as if it's true, to use it as a basis for further reasoning and for group action, and to hold each other to a policy of doing so (cf. Cohen 1989: 368).

On the JAA, then, what it is for a group to believe a proposition is for its members to accept that proposition as the group's view. Each individual's acceptance, however, is premised on the other group members similarly committing to accept the proposition in question conditionally. Group members accept the proposition if it is common knowledge in the group that the others do too. Margaret Gilbert offers this canonical statement of the view:

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, there are also those who resist these collectivizing tendencies (e.g., Kitcher 1994; Giere 2007; Fagan 2011).

<sup>2</sup> It's widely assumed that various mental attitudes, such as beliefs, wishes, intentions, or desires, are representational. This objection wouldn't apply to non-representational states, such as feelings or (possibly) emotions.

A group G believes that p if and only if the members of G jointly accept that p. Members of a group G jointly accept that p if and only if it is common knowledge in G that the individual members of G have openly expressed a conditional commitment jointly to accept that p together with the other members of G. (Gilbert 1989: 306)<sup>3</sup>

A lot more could be said about this view and various modifications could be made. For some groups, only *operative* members — and not all members — will have a say in what the group believes (Tuomela 1992). Perhaps further conditions are needed to make sure the account really is an account of group *belief* rather than group *acceptance* (Lackey ms; De Ridder ms). Such concerns need not deter us here, however, since regardless of what JAA's merits are in the final analysis, it provides us with a convenient working example of an (alleged) RCA.

I want to make a few observations, both to clarify the account further and to draw attention to aspects of it that will become important in the discussion below. First, note that the JAA is indeed an account of a *robustly* collective attitude, one that goes beyond a mere sum of the group members' individual attitudes. Universally shared and mutually recognized belief among the members is neither necessary nor sufficient for group belief. Groups can believe things that none of their members believe. Instead, it is crucial that the group has gone through its designated procedure in order to accept a proposition as its view. A decision at the collective level is thus required for group belief. Thus, the JAA exemplifies one way in which a collective attitude really goes beyond the attitudes held by the group members and is irreducible to them. (Of course this isn't to say that RCAs float free of the group members' attitudes; individual attitudes influence RCAs in partial and indirect ways.)

Second, because joint acceptances depend on the group's members being mutually aware of each other's commitment to accept a given proposition as the collective's view, and because reaching agreement requires a decision procedure in which the proposition in question is held up for consideration, there cannot be group beliefs that the members aren't aware of.<sup>4</sup> If a group has a belief that p, all the individuals in it will be aware of this and they will have consciously endorsed p as the group's view at an earlier time.

Third, just like individual belief, group belief can and will typically be the basis for behavior. If a group believes that p, it will be disposed to act in ways that are relevantly in line with this belief. Groups might *assert that p* either among their members or publicly, *use p as a premise* in their practical or theoretical deliberations, *express surprise or disagreement* when someone else suggests that not-p, etc. It is virtually impossible to spell out in detail what sort of behavior will be manifested in what sorts of contexts, since so much depends on the particulars of the

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<sup>3</sup> In more recent work (Gilbert 2002a, reprinted in Gilbert 2014), Gilbert notes that she now prefers to speak of a group "jointly [committing] to believe that p as a body" (2002a: 45). This is still to be understood in the sense that group members are supposed to act as 'mouthpieces' of the group's position.

<sup>4</sup> For a more radical conception of a collective attitude that relaxes even this individual awareness requirement, see Alexander Bird's (2010) conception of social knowledge.

context and the belief. Whether or not I will assert that, say, I forgot to return your book to the library depends on factors like how many times such a thing has happened before, how important it was that I return it in time, our exact relationship, etc. At best, we can indicate fairly general connections between beliefs and behaviors, which will include ineliminable references to normal conditions and *ceteris paribus* clauses.

For group belief, moreover, further factors mediate the connections between belief and behavior: the nature of the group and the purposes for which it exists. Unlike individuals, collectives don't acquire beliefs spontaneously and automatically. Groups aren't all-purpose believers. In so far as they form beliefs, they have to do with the group's aims. A political party's financial committee, for instance, will only form beliefs that concern the party's financial situation. A job search committee will only form beliefs relevant to selecting the right candidate. Whether or not a group will act on something it believes will depend not just on whether the relevant normal conditions obtain and on whether other things are equal, but also on whether this particular group is such that it performs certain kinds of actions in the first place, as well as on whether the actions fit the group's aims.

Fourth, group beliefs, like individual beliefs, will typically be formed in response to characteristic stimuli. What sort of stimuli prompt belief will again depend on the nature of the group and its purposes. As we just observed, groups aren't all-purpose believers; any beliefs they acquire will be directly or indirectly derivative of its purposes. So the range of stimuli prompting group belief is going to be much narrower than that for individuals.

### **3. Against Robustly Collective Attitudes**

Now that we have some grip on RCAs in general and group belief in particular, it's time to turn to the objection against RCAs that is the central topic of this chapter. We'll start by looking at how Paul Thagard (2010) presents the objection and then I'll formalize it slightly in order to structure the discussion that follows in the next sections.

Thagard discusses economical explanations of the financial crisis in 2008 and observes, as we did above, how common and natural talk of collective representations is.<sup>5</sup> Economists refer unapologetically to what banks, regulatory agencies, and governments believed, knew, wanted, intended, etc. A straightforward reading of this supports the idea that there are RCAs. Thagard wants to resist this conclusion, however, and considers six possible accounts of collective representations, one of them a realist account which maintains that "collective representations are real functional properties of social groups" (*ibid.*: 266). The account he ends up favoring is what he calls the 'metaphorical pointers' account, according to which talk of a group representation can be a useful metaphor that points to "complex, interlocking social and

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<sup>5</sup> Note that Thagard writes about collective *representations* rather than *attitudes*. I'll get back to this in due course.

psychological mechanisms that potentially provide scientific explanations of the occurrence of social phenomena such as economic crises” (ibid.: 267).<sup>6</sup> Hence, his conclusion is that speaking of collective representations is perfectly acceptable and even potentially helpful, as long as it’s not taken literally.

For present purposes, his argument against the realist account is most important. The argument is contained in the following passage.

If mental representations in humans result from neural mechanisms, then we have a strong reason to reject the claim that groups such as banks and governments have them, because groups do not have neural processes. Groups have brains only to the metaphorical extent that the individuals in them have brains. Hence, I reject the realist claim that social organizations such as banks actually have beliefs, desires, intentions, and emotions, since these require brains. Functionalists argue that we should not rule out the possibility that computers and other thinking things that are biologically very different from us could also have mental representations, but their representations would likely be very different from those in humans; so I see no reason to call them beliefs, desires, intentions, or emotions. (ibid.: 275)

In short: Mental representations are implemented in neural mechanisms in brains. Groups don’t have brains in any literal sense. Therefore they cannot have mental representations either. To put it more generally, groups aren’t the sort of things that can be the subjects of mental representations, because they lack the make-up and internal structure required for it.

There is something obviously right in this. A group doesn’t have a brain or mental life of its own, over and above the brains and mental lives of its members. In that sense, they indeed lack a mind and mental life of their own.<sup>7</sup> The question, however, is whether this truism is sufficient to establish the conclusion that there can be no RCAs. Can mental attitudes exist *only* if implemented in the neural mechanisms of individual persons? Before I address that question below, I want to flesh out the objection further.

The first thing to note is that Thagard writes about collective *representations*, whereas I have been talking about collective *attitudes*. Various mental attitudes are indeed representational and thus involve representations: mental imagery, linguistic or conceptual structure. Everyone can confirm this from personal experience, although it is an open question how such representations

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<sup>6</sup> The emphasis on scientific explanation in this passage might suggest that positing collective representations would be explanatorily redundant. This is a rather different argument against a realist construal of collective representations than the one Thagard gives explicitly and which I’ll focus on below. For a strong rejoinder to an argument from explanatory redundancy, see Huebner (2008). For a similar discussion focused exclusively on Gilbert’s construal of group belief, see Gilbert (2000) and Fagan (2011).

<sup>7</sup> Even those who defend the idea that groups have ‘minds of their own’, such as Pettit (2003) and Tollefsen (2006), grant this.

are implemented exactly. Having the right kinds of internal representations is thus assumed to be a necessary condition for having a belief (or some other representational attitude). This is what Thagard assumes too: the examples he gives of collective representations include attitudes like beliefs, desires, intentions, and emotions<sup>8</sup> (*ibid.*: 268–9). So it looks like the claim that attitudes necessarily involve representations figures as an implicit premise in Thagard’s reasoning. If attitudes necessarily include representations, then an argument against collective representations automatically is an argument against collective attitudes. However, this assumption is not completely harmless, because it is neither uncontroversial that attitudes must include representations, nor is it obvious what the nature of these representations must be. We’ll have occasion to consider the possibility that attitudes do not need representations in the next section.

Second, Thagard insists that mental representations must ‘result from neural mechanisms’ and, hence, that they require brains. The second half of the quote confirms this: Representations that are implemented differently, ‘in computers or other thinking things’, aren’t the real deal. This is a somewhat surprising stance, for it is common to think of representations as functional states (e.g. Fodor 1968; Putnam 1975). What it is for something to be a representation is determined by the functional roles it plays — for instance, being caused by characteristic inputs from the environment or in turn causing certain behavior — and not by its physical implementation. The plausibility of this derives from the fact that mental states are multiply realizable and the intuitively very compelling thought that beings with radically different physical constitutions from our own could nonetheless have minds, including the full gamut of mental states (Fodor 1974; Putnam 1975). So in the spirit of charity, I propose we weaken Thagard’s claim somewhat in order to come up with a less controversial way of objecting to RCAs. Rather than requiring that representations result from neural mechanisms, we could see him as requiring that they be closely tied to a mind with its own mental life, regardless of how this is realized physically. The thought would then be that, because groups don’t have a mental life of their own, they cannot have representations and attitudes either.

We are now in a position to state the objection to RCAs more formally.<sup>9</sup>

- (1) Groups don’t have an internal mental life of their own. (premise)
- (2) If groups don’t have an internal mental life of their own, they cannot have internal representations (premise).
- (3) Groups cannot have internal representations (from 1, 2)
- (4) RCAs require internal representations.<sup>10</sup> (premise)

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<sup>8</sup> Emotions might not be the best example, as it is somewhat controversial that they are representational.

<sup>9</sup> Since I’ve done some reconstructing of Thagard’s brief argument, I’m not sure he would agree fully with this way of formulating the objection. Nonetheless, it is clearly inspired by what he writes.

<sup>10</sup> A more fine-grained rendering of the argument could make this premise the conclusion of a separate modus tollens, as follows: (4.1) If individual attitudes require internal representations, then RCAs do too.

- (5) Groups cannot have RCAs. (from 3, 4)
- (6) Hence, there are no RCAs. (from 5)

Premise (1) should be read as the uncontroversial claim that there is no mysterious, independent group mind (or brain) that has a life of its own, floating free from the minds of the group members. I take it that this premise will be eminently acceptable, especially to philosophers who value the scientific respectability of their metaphysics, and that it hardly needs further defense.<sup>11</sup> Premise (2) is the weakened claim I distilled from Thagard's argument. Premise (4) is the suppressed premise in his reasoning I identified earlier. The argument is clearly valid.<sup>12</sup>

By taking a step back, we can see that this objection exemplifies a general strategy which could be employed to mount similar objections to RCAs. Start from the observation that groups don't have a literal mind and brain of their own. Then look for some feature of an individual mental attitude that is closely tied to the mindedness of individuals, show that an alleged collective attitude lacks this feature, since it has no mind or brain of its own, and argue that this difference is so significant that it undermines the claim that the alleged collective attitude really is real. Thagard uses the fact that individual attitudes result from neural mechanisms, but one can try to come up with other potentially deal-breaking differences.

For instance, individual mental attitudes (or at least important parts thereof) are located *inside the heads* of individuals. This is clearly true on internalist views about mental content, but also on standard content externalism understood along the lines of Putnam (1975) and Burge (1979, 1986). RCAs, in contrast, wouldn't be located exclusively inside the head of any one individual. (Although this would hardly make for a good objection all by itself, because this is the very point of invoking *collective* attitudes.) The most that can be said for RCAs on this score is that they are fully grounded in the mental attitudes of the individuals in the collective, all of which will be inside the heads of those individuals. Another difference is that individual mental attitudes are accompanied by *internal phenomenology*. For an individual to believe occurrently that *p*, for instance, involves that individual being aware of *p* and for *p* to strike her as true. Not so for RCAs. Since a group lacks a mental life of its own, it's unclear how it could have its own phenomenological awareness of a proposition and its seeming truth. The possibility for

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(4.2) Individual attitudes require internal representations. Hence (4) RCAs require internal representations. As I cannot think of ways to challenge (4.1) separately, I will explore the prospects of denying (4) directly in the next section, mainly by considering whether reasons for denying (4.2) can be employed to deny (4). Thanks to Emanuel Rutten for alerting me to this option.

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps proponents of ontologically emergent properties or entities would want to take issue with premise (1), although I am not aware of any of them defending the possibility of genuinely emergent group minds.

<sup>12</sup> The conclusion, (6), follows from (5) since groups are the only candidate subjects for RCAs. If they cannot have them, there are none.

*introspective awareness* is another potentially relevant difference. Individuals can become aware of (some of) their mental attitudes through introspection. Since introspection is intimately tied to having a mental life of one's own<sup>13</sup>, this would also be something groups couldn't do, at least not literally and in exactly the same way as individuals.

Merely pointing to these differences isn't enough. It has to be argued that the feature had by the individual attitude but lacking in the collective case is essential: something the attitude cannot lack. This is not the place to explore the prospects of objections to RCAs modeled on this strategy; I merely note that there is ample room for further research here.

In the next section, I will take issue with premise (4) and explore the idea that RCAs do not require representations. In section 5, I will contest premise (2) and suggest that we can make sense of collective representations without positing anything as metaphysically suspect as real group minds.

#### **4. Do Attitudes Require Representations?**

Can there be RCAs without representations? That depends on the kind of attitudes we're talking about. The most difficult cases will obviously be those attitudes that are paradigmatically held to be representational. I will focus on one such attitude, to wit that of belief. If a case can be made that belief doesn't require representation, there's reason to think that the same goes for other attitudes.

The literature on belief contains five main accounts of the nature of belief (Schwitzgebel 2015).<sup>14</sup> First, traditional *representationalism* holds that belief that *p* necessarily involves (but is not limited to) having some sort of internal representation of *p* in one's mind. What the nature of this representation is, in turn, is filled in differently. Second, *dispositionalism* maintains that what it is for a state to be a belief depends entirely on the actual and potential causal-functional relations that state stands in. To believe that *p*, a dispositionalist says, is to be disposed in certain ways characteristic of belief that *p*, such as acting on *p* or asserting that *p* (when the circumstances are right). Third, *functionalism* likewise maintains that a state's actual and potential causal relations are what makes it a belief. It differs from dispositionalism, however, by taking into account not just forward-looking roles (i.e., dispositions), but also backward-looking roles, such as the state's causal origins in perception or thought. The final two accounts are skeptical. Fourth, according to *interpretationalism* someone has a belief that *p* when we can

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, some philosophers distinguish mental states from physical ones in terms of the possibility for introspective access (cf. Swinburne 2013).

<sup>14</sup> In the interest of brevity, I have omitted further references to works in which these five views are expounded; they are easily retrievable from Schwitzgebel (2015).

best make sense of and predict her behavioral patterns by ascribing this belief to her.<sup>15</sup> Fifth and finally, *eliminativism* and *instrumentalism* claim that there really is no such thing as belief, but that it can be useful (for the time being) to speak as if there is. Eliminativists typically tell a story about how the scientific study of the mind will gradually overthrow and replace folk psychological notions of belief and other mental states, while instrumentalists are more willing to grant the enduring usefulness of belief-talk.<sup>16</sup>

In the rest of this section, I will focus on dispositionalism, although I will say something brief about functionalism towards the end. I will return to representationalism later, because the question whether groups can have representations is on the agenda when we take another look at the premise (2) of the objection in the next section. The skeptical views are irrelevant in the present dialectical context, in which it is assumed that there are individual mental attitudes, but questioned whether there are RCAs.

Dispositionalist views of belief are motivated by the thought that belief is ultimately an issue of actual and potential behavior. What it is for someone to believe that *p* is for that person to act, or be disposed to act, in a variety of ways befitting *p*: asserting *p* when prompted, assenting to *p* *sub voce* when considering *p*, acting in ways that assume the truth of *p*, using *p* as a premise in practical or theoretical reasoning, etc. Support for dispositionalism comes from considering what we would say of someone who claims to believe that *p* but is never disposed to act in ways that fit this belief. The natural response in such a case would be to question whether that person really believes that *p*.

A key question for dispositionalism is what sort of dispositions feature in the analysis of belief: only those for publicly observable behavior or also those for internal mental behavior. Traditional dispositionalism insisted on the former, as it was closely allied with logical empiricism in philosophy and behaviorism in psychology and thus sought to eschew talk of unobservable mental events.

On such a view, positing group beliefs is relatively unproblematic. Groups can (be disposed to) act in various ways, depending on their exact nature and purposes. They can assert propositions, do things that assume the truth of a proposition, or use propositions as premises in their reasoning. These are exactly the sorts of actions that befit belief and so it would be obvious that groups can have beliefs.<sup>17</sup>

This traditional view, however, faces well-known objections. First, the connection between belief and observable behavior isn't straightforward at all. It is typically mediated and modified

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<sup>15</sup> Strictly speaking, then, interpretationalism isn't an account of the nature of belief, but an account of when we are warranted in ascribing belief to someone. Interpretationalists might add that this is the best we can do and that further questions about the nature of belief are moot.

<sup>16</sup> Another way to think of instrumentalism, then, is as a kind of *fictionalism* about belief.

<sup>17</sup> Note that in the present dialectical context, this easy victory for group belief is not very significant. Those with behaviorist sympathies wouldn't have been very likely to raise the objection that group beliefs require collective representations in the first place.

by a subject's other mental states (Chisholm 1957). For instance, suppose you believe that there is beer in your fridge. Whether you assert this might depend on such states as your other beliefs about me (e.g., have I been known to overstay my welcome, am I a notorious drinker?), your desires (e.g., do you want me to stick around, to share a drink with me?), or your intentions (e.g., did you plan to get some work done, did you intend to go to bed early?). The same will go for the connection between group belief and behavior. Even if it were in principle possible to spell out all the complicated connections and interrelations between these diverse mental states and behavioral dispositions, the problem is that we would be stuck with ineliminable references to other mental states, rather than only dispositions for observable behavior.

Second, the connection between belief and observable behavior can be very loose or even absent. Putnam (1963) famously imagined a society of 'super-spartans', who refrain from acting on their beliefs in any specific<sup>18</sup> ways even though they feel pain and hence believe they are in pain. It is just as easy to imagine groups that form beliefs but do not act on them in any way — a philosophy seminar room inadvertently comes to mind.<sup>19</sup>

Because of these problems, most philosophers today who sympathize with dispositionalism go in for the second option. They adopt more a liberal version of the view, which relaxes the requirement that only dispositions for observable behavior can feature in the analysis of belief. Eric Schwitzgebel's (2002) phenomenal-dispositional account is as good an example as any.<sup>20</sup> According to Schwitzgebel, beliefs are associated with *dispositional stereotypes*, i.e., clusters of dispositional properties that we standardly associate with beliefs. Because not everyone will associate the same dispositions with a belief, we should think of these clusters as containing some central dispositions that (almost) everyone will associate with a given belief and a broad margin of more or less loosely associated dispositions. Every belief has its own dispositional stereotype, so there are infinitely many stereotypes, some of which will never have been consciously entertained by anyone. The belief that I am out of flour, for instance, will be associated with dispositions like being surprised when I find flour in my cupboard after all, internally assenting to the claim that I am out of flour, saying 'no' when you ask me if I have any

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<sup>18</sup> I say 'specific', because they might try to avoid pain, but avoidance behavior isn't specific enough to make it a uniquely identifying behavior for pain.

<sup>19</sup> Although one might object that, since groups aren't all-purpose believers but only form beliefs that are relevant to their purposes and practical projects, they would never form beliefs and not act on them. (Thanks to René van Woudenberg for raising this objection.) Perhaps there's something to this objection when we consider real-life groups — although it seems pretty plausible to me that groups of philosophers or other academics and members of book clubs or similar discussion groups sometimes form beliefs without acting on them — but it is easy enough to imagine purely passive belief-forming groups. Surely such groups are *possible*.

<sup>20</sup> Schwitzgebel (2013) extends the account into a fully general account of all kinds of mental attitudes. See Price (1969), Audi (1972), and Baker (1995) for other forms of liberal dispositionalism.

flour left, writing ‘flour’ on my grocery shopping list, feeling disappointed when I intended to bake bread, etc.

Schwitzgebel identifies three classes of dispositions that go into belief stereotypes: (a) behavioral dispositions for verbal and nonverbal behavior, (b) phenomenal dispositions, i.e., dispositions to have certain sorts of conscious experiences associated with the belief, and (c) cognitive dispositions, i.e., dispositions to enter various mental states that aren’t conscious experiences, such as drawing conclusions or forming desires based on the belief. The difference with traditional dispositionalism is obvious: The second and third categories are unacceptable on the traditional view.

On this account, belief becomes a graded phenomenon — something Schwitzgebel advertises as a virtue of his account. Someone who exhibits all of the central dispositions associated with a belief that *p* is a clear case of someone who believes that *p*. However, some people might have only the behavioral dispositions and not the phenomenal and cognitive dispositions (cf. Gendler 2008) or vice versa; or they might have a few of the central dispositions rather than most of them. For such subjects, it is vague whether they have the belief or not.

Liberal dispositionalism avoids objections to traditional dispositionalism. It has no problems with the mutual interdependence of beliefs and other mental attitudes. These other attitudes simply factor into the dispositions that are associated with belief, since there is no ban on using other mental attitudes in analyzing belief. Similarly, the account can accommodate super-spartans and other real or imagined atypical cases. Although super-spartans lack the behavioral dispositions associated with pain beliefs, they will still have all or most of the central phenomenal and cognitive dispositions. Hence, they have pain beliefs.

The crucial question for our purposes, however, is whether liberal dispositionalism can help the friend of RCAs to resist premise (4) of the objection — the claim that attitudes require representations. Unfortunately, the answer is no. By taking onboard phenomenal and cognitive dispositions, liberal dispositionalism has embraced internal representations again. Conscious experiences or cognitive actions and habits that are associated with belief that *p* require internal representations. For instance, if *p* seems true to you, surely you must have *p* internally represented in some way. Similarly for a cognitive disposition to form another belief on the basis of your belief that *p*. If you’re inferring *q* from *p*, you must have represented *p* to yourself somehow.

There is a loophole in the view, which might be thought to offer an escape from this worry. Schwitzgebel is explicit that no single disposition in the stereotypical cluster is necessary: any one of them can be absent, as long as enough (central) dispositions from the cluster are still present. A friend of RCAs who adopts Schwitzgebel’s dispositionalism might propose that groups have beliefs even though they lack all those dispositions that involve internal representations. As long as a sufficiently high number of central and marginal dispositions from the stereotype remain, the group has the relevant belief even though it lacks internal representations.

This offers no solace. For the feasibility of this response hinges on the assumption that there would be enough dispositions left from the stereotype once we take out all those dispositions that involve representations. But why should we think that's plausible? After all, it is essential to (most) phenomenal and cognitive dispositions that they do involve representations. For what else could plausibly make for conscious experiences associated with belief that if not things that involve representations of *p*? Similarly, what sort of cognitive behavior could be associated with belief that *p* if it doesn't involve representations of *p*? It follows that, once we leave out all dispositions that involve internal representations, we're left with little else than behavioral dispositions. But even if we're willing to grant that having all and only the behavioral dispositions associated with belief that *p* is enough to qualify as a vague case of believing that *p* – and that is a big if – it is at best a degenerate, borderline form of belief. The only result we would have secured is that groups can have degenerate, borderline instances of beliefs. This is nothing for the friends of RCAs to be sanguine about, or so say I.

The upshot so far, then, is that rejecting premise (4) of the above argument isn't very attractive. Adopting traditional dispositionalism would enable you to do it, but the cost is significant. The view is plagued by serious objections and is, for that reason, not very popular anymore. Liberal dispositionalism is much more plausible, but to put it to work in an account of group belief or other RCAs, we need group representations after all and thus end up accepting, rather than rejecting premise (4).

Before we consider the possibility of group representations when we look at premise (2) in the next section, I want to make one observation on the fate of dispositionalism, for I don't think that what I've said is necessarily the last word on the view in connection with RCAs. If you are not prepared to embrace the necessity of internal representations, but want to stay in the spirit of dispositionalism, *functionalism* might well be the way to go. Adding backward-looking functional relations to the set of dispositions associated with beliefs can help support the idea that there are RCAs without representations.

One reason to think this is promising is that adding such backward-looking relations gives you more resources to individuate attitudes. As we saw above, traditional dispositionalism had two crucial problems: the connection between belief and behavior (a) is mediated by other mental attitudes and (b) is often very loose. Another way of glossing these problems is that merely spelling out a set of behavioral dispositions isn't enough to get a handle on the belief. This is why adding backward-looking causal relations, such as a belief's characteristic etiology, could be helpful. For perceptual beliefs, for instance, a relevant causal relation could be that perceptual attention to features of an object (in conditions favorable to perception) typically causes perceptual beliefs about those features.

This bodes well for group beliefs, since their etiology is typically very well circumscribed. As we observed before, groups only form beliefs relevant to their purposes, so there will be a relatively clear and limited set of circumstances in which they form beliefs. Moreover, on the JAA, groups will have a recognizable and mutually recognized procedure for forming beliefs,

which constitutes the proximate cause of their beliefs. This should make it comparatively easier to spell out the relevant backward-looking causal relations for group beliefs than it is for individual beliefs, although the project will also be plagued by the usual difficulties of specifying normal conditions and *ceteris paribus* clauses. But if a functionalist account of individual belief looks promising, then so should a functionalist account of group belief. This, then, might be a way of salvaging the idea that RCAs do not require internal representations. If being a belief amounts to standing in the right causal relations to the state's origins and various sorts of relevant behavior, then internal representations aren't necessary.

However, people might well doubt the accuracy of such an account of belief — in fact, I myself do. Have we really captured what it is for a state to be a belief once we've spelled out its typical causal origins and the kinds of behavior it typically causes in turn? And, just as important, is it really possible to do this without invoking phenomenal and cognitive dispositions — and hence the notion of representations — at any point? I cannot help but think that if we leave out the conscious experience and cognitive behavior usually associated with belief, we're left with a very impoverished account of belief at best. This, however, is not the occasion to attempt to settle these issues.<sup>21</sup> I now want to consider whether we can make sense of group representations. If so, we can counter the objection to RCAs in another way.

## **5. In Defense of Collective Representations**

Premise (2) of the objection states that groups cannot have internal representations because they lack a mental life of their own. Is that right? According to the traditional representationalist view about the nature of belief, to believe that *p* entails having a representation in one's mind with *p* as its content. Philosophers differ on what the exact nature and structure of the representation is supposed to be and they also differ on what more is required for a state to be a belief. Since representationalism is noncommittal about the nature of representations, the crucial question is whether there is anything that goes into group attitudes that qualifies as a group representation.

Motivation for a negative answer, we saw in section 3, comes from the observation that groups don't have a brain or mental life of their own. But it is important to note that most representationalist don't think that representations are anything like images on a screen in a Cartesian theater, to be observed by the 'mind's eye' or a similar internal homunculus.<sup>22</sup> To the extent that the motivation for accepting premise (2) relies on such thinking, we can reject it out

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<sup>21</sup> Nor is their space to explore how Radical Enactivism and like-minded approaches (e.g., Chemero 2009; Hutto & Myin 2013). As Orestis Palermos pointed out, these recent theoretical approaches have been very well-received in philosophy of mind and cognitive science. Since one of their key tenets is that mental attitudes don't require internal representations, they are of considerable interest to those who want to reject premise (4).

<sup>22</sup> To borrow Dennett's (1991) captivating phraseology.

of hand. Representationalism isn't wedded to Cartesian dualism. In fact, many representationalists are also physicalists of sorts and they accept that what it is to be a representation, ultimately boils down to standing in the right sorts of causal relations with the world and with other mental states.

In what follows, I'll argue that there are group representations. But before I can do so, we face a methodological question. Since there are bound to be *some* differences between individual and group representations — that much at least follows from the observation that groups don't have literal brains or minds of their own — we'll need a well-founded criterion to decide whether or not something is a group representation: a way of deciding whether some state or process that is part of the group's life is a representation or not. To provide this, I propose to take a cue from extended mind theorists. As I'm sure readers of this volume will know, Andy Clark and David Chalmers (1998; see also Clark 2008, 2010) claim that the mind can extend into the world and incorporate nonbiological resources.

A key thought in their argument is that if some part of the outside world plays a functional role in a subject's cognitive functioning that is strongly similar to a role played by things inside the head, it should count as part of that subject's cognitive process. A leading example is a comparison between Inga, who has properly functioning memory, and Otto, who suffers from memory loss and thus carries around a notebook to keep track of things he needs to remember. Since Otto's notebook plays the strongly similar functional roles as Inga's memory, it is part of Otto's cognitive process. The general idea is captured in the *Parity Principle*:

(PP) If, as we confront some task, a part of the world functions as a process which, were it to go on in the head, we would have no hesitation in recognizing as part of the cognitive process, then that part of the world is (so we claim) part of the cognitive process. (Clark & Chalmers 1998: 8)

All by itself, PP is too liberal. It would include all manner of nonbiological items that we use for momentary and occasional information-processing in cognitive processes. Minds would become not just extended, but elusive and fragmented. Hence, Clark and Chalmers give four additional criteria that a resource must satisfy to qualify as part of a subject's cognitive process (ibid.: 17; cf. also Clark 2010: 46):

1. *Reliable availability and typical invocation*: the resource must be reliably available to the subject and typically invoked in the relevant circumstances; it is a constant in the subject's life.
2. *Easy access*: information in the resource should be accessible as and when needed, without difficulty.

3. *Automatic endorsement*: information retrieved from the resource must be automatically endorsed, deemed about as trustworthy as information retrieved from internal biological sources, and not usually be subject to critical scrutiny.
4. *Past endorsement*: the information in the resource has been consciously endorsed in the past and is there because of this endorsement.<sup>23</sup>

I will argue for the existence of group representations by using a very similar principle. The following *Modified Parity Principle* provides a systematic criterion for deciding when something is a collective representation:

(MPP) If, as a group confronts some task, a part of the group's life functions as a state which, were a state in the head of an individual to function similarly to it, we would have no hesitation in recognizing as a mental representation, then that part of the group's life is a collective representation.

Roughly, then, the idea is that if some state in the group's life functions in much the same ways as a mental representation does in someone's individual cognitive life, then we should conclude that this state is a collective representation. As with the original PP, the underlying thinking is a kind of common-sense functionalism, which holds that if something behaves in many or most significant ways like an X, it is an X. For similar reasons as above, a putative collective representation must also be integrated into the group's life. That is, the state in question must satisfy Clark & Chalmers' three (or four) further conditions. States that do not satisfy these criteria would be too elusive or fragmented to count as real parts of the group's 'mental life'.

A few remarks to clarify and motivate MPP further. First, what is it for something to be 'a part of a group's life'? I won't attempt to offer a precise definition here, but the intuitive idea is that everything that a group does *qua group* and everything that the group members do *qua group members* is part of the group's life. Depending on the group's nature and purposes, this might be carrying out certain actions, deliberating about those actions, forming views, weighing considerations, etc. To illustrate, consider a committee meeting in which one of the group members scratches her nose in the process of raising her hand to vote on a proposal under consideration. The scratching is not part of the group's life, whereas the voting is. Or all the members of a group might happen to be at a conference attending the same talk, while doing so has nothing to do with the group's goals or purposes. Even though there is a sense in which the group attended the talk, it didn't do so *qua group* and therefore this event wasn't part of the group's life.

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<sup>23</sup> They state that this fourth criterion is less central and that the first three by themselves are sufficient (Clark & Chalmers 1998: 17; Clark (2010: 46) leaves it out).

Second, the original PP laid down a criterion for when the mind *extends into the world*. My MPP has a seemingly different purpose: deciding when something is a collective representation. So why think this is a legitimate adaption of PP? Although the tasks seem different at first, they actually have a lot in common. In both cases, we face the question whether elements of cognition extend beyond the skull of individuals. With PP, the question was whether cognition includes nonbiological entities in the world. With MPP, the question is whether an element of some cognitive processes — representations — is also found at the level of groups. Hence, much of the plausibility of PP carries over directly to MPP. If there is something that guides the group's internal and external behavior and reasoning in the same ways as a representation guides an individual's behavior and reasoning, then that state can figure in explanations of the group's behavior and deliberating, group members can reflect on it, consider it, etc. Hence, there are ample grounds for saying that that state is a representation. What's more, once the possibility that cognition extends to nonbiological entities outside the skull is taken seriously, it is but a small step to think that cognition might also include other minds (cf. Tollefsen 2006 for this). In fact, the step to thinking that cognition includes other *minds* might even be smaller than that to thinking it includes nonbiological entities.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, I think the plausibility of MPP, like that of PP, comes down to a judgment call about whether differences in physical realization matter less than strong functional similarities.

Third, let me forestall a potential objection: I ended the previous section by expressing doubts about a functionalist account of belief. Doesn't this conflict with my present endorsement of the functionalist thinking behind the MPP? No. First, my doubts about functionalism didn't concern all possible versions of functionalism, but just one: to wit that which analyzes belief in terms of functional relations specified at the crude level of everyday behavior and cognition. That this version of functionalism fails (if indeed it does) as an analysis of belief, doesn't mean that other versions couldn't be right. Perhaps one that analyzes belief in terms of more fine-grained functional relations at the level of (future) cognitive neuroscience will be feasible.<sup>25</sup> Next, beliefs and representations are different things, so we cannot infer from the failure of functionalism about *belief* that functionalism about *representation* fails too. More precisely, if representations are parts of beliefs, or constitutive of them, then there's nothing objectionable about thinking that, although the whole thing (i.e. belief) cannot be accounted for in purely functional terms, some part of it (i.e., representation) can. Finally, MPP isn't supposed to be an *analysis* of collective representations, but merely a way of identifying collective representations. In adopting a functional criterion to identify collective representations, I'm not committed to the idea that collective representations can be wholly accounted for in functional terms.

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<sup>24</sup> Especially for those who object to the inclusion of nonbiological entities in cognition on the grounds that such entities lack 'intrinsic content', such as Adams & Aizawa (2001, 2009, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> But see Sprevak (2009) for an argument that fine-grained individuation of functional roles doesn't sit well with extended cognition.

So is there anything in the lives of groups that functions like a mental representation? That of course depends on what sort of group we're dealing with, but if we consider a group that forms beliefs on the model of the JAA, an affirmative answer is very plausible. On this account, groups come to have beliefs by jointly accepting a proposition  $p$  as the group's view. As I noted in section 2, this means that all group members will have considered the content of the group's belief explicitly: They are all mutually aware of each others' willingness to let  $p$  stand as the group's view and group members will have thought about  $p$  in reaching their decision to accept  $p$ . So  $p$  is shared content in the group, group members share an accepting attitude *vis-à-vis*  $p$ , and group members are aware of all this being so.<sup>26</sup> Thus,  $p$  can function as the basis for things that the group does or that its members do qua group members. The group can assert that  $p$  or communicate it otherwise (either among its members or externally), it can use  $p$  as a starting point in further decision-making, employ  $p$  as a premise in its reasoning, or simply contemplate and reflect on  $p$ , if so doing fits the group's purposes. The complex state of affairs of the group members' all having been or being aware of  $p$ , having a relevant propositional attitude towards  $p$ , and being aware of each others' being aware of  $p$  and accepting it, functions like a mental representation in an individual. The relevant content (i.e.,  $p$ ) is represented internally, it is the object of a propositional attitude, and the individual has been or is aware of it.

Moreover, Clark & Chalmers' further conditions are also straightforwardly satisfied in the case of group beliefs as understood by the JAA. (1) When a group believes that  $p$ ,  $p$  will be *reliably available* to the group and its members — if an individual group member doesn't remember  $p$ , she can easily ask another member about it. Perhaps the group's view has been laid down in official documents or files that are available to its members. As long as the group doesn't abandon its belief,  $p$  will be available and can, moreover, be *invoked* whenever the group sees the need to do so. (2) *Easy access* is guaranteed. Unlike the nonbiological external resources that feature in the extended mind and which might take some effort to access, collective representations consist in the mental states of the various group members and they are thus easily accessible to individual group members and thereby to the group as a whole. (3) It is obvious that  $p$  will be *automatically endorsed* by the group. That is straightforwardly entailed by the JAA. If a group believes that  $p$ , it is common knowledge in the group that this is so and group members have committed to this. (4) By the same token, *past endorsement* is entailed by the JAA. A group comes to believe that  $p$  by considering  $p$  and deciding to accept  $p$ , so if it indeed believes that  $p$ , it must have endorsed  $p$  in the past.

The upshot is that, by the lights of MPP, groups with beliefs indeed have collective representations. Part of the complex collective state of affairs that the group is in if it has a

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<sup>26</sup> Further qualifications and provisos could be added to deal with groups that depart from this ideal: e.g., groups in which a subset of operative members determine what the group believes, groups in which most but not all members accept  $p$  or in which most but not all members are aware of the other members' commitments *vis-à-vis*  $p$ , etc. In the interest of space and readability, I ignore such complexities here.

belief, plays the functional roles that a mental representation in an individual plays. It is a readily available object of awareness, it is the object of a propositional attitude, it can be held up for consideration by the group, it can guide the group's reasoning and various kinds of actions, and so forth. It might be difficult to spell out exactly what the 'intrinsic nature' of this complex state of affairs that makes up a collective representation is, but the same is true for mental representations in individuals. Apart from the fact that they're somehow implemented in neural networks in our brains, we cannot (yet?) say in any detail what particular representations are.

Although I have made my case primarily by looking at group *beliefs*, nothing stands in the way of generalizing the conclusion to other sorts of collective representational attitudes. Surely, it would take some effort to investigate whether the accounts of other attitudes similarly fit the demands laid down by MPP and the four additional conditions, but the present result offers hope for optimism. I must leave such investigations to another occasion.

The conclusion of the argument in this section allows us to reject premise 2 of the argument against RCAs. In spite of the fact that groups don't have a mental life of their own, they can and do have collective representations. The argument against RCAs thus fails. In the next section, I will consider and respond to various worries about my proposal.

## 6. Objections and Replies

Although the extended mind thesis has gained considerable support, it is certainly not without its detractors. Below, I will consider whether some of the central objections against the extended mind carry over to my argument for collective representations, but it will be helpful to start this section by looking at how my proposal is both less and more radical than the extended mind thesis.

The crucial idea of the extended mind thesis is that cognitive processes extend outside the skull and into the world. It is this idea that has attracted the fiercest criticisms. The claim that nonbiological resources can be cognitive or, more precisely, part of cognitive processes, is a bridge too far for many.<sup>27</sup> My proposal is less radical in that it doesn't require accepting this idea. Nothing in the MPP or the rest of the argument forces you to buy into the thought that nonbiological items can be proper parts of cognitive processes. On my construal, collective representations — or, more precisely, all their parts — are located inside the heads of the group members. And, speaking figuratively, they are also inside the 'cognitive life' of the group and do not extend outside the group.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> This is the gist of the 'marks of the cognitive' objection pushed by Adams & Aizawa (2001, 2009, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> This being said, there is also nothing in my argument so far that *prevents* one from accepting the extended mind thesis. In fact, doing so might perhaps make it easier to accept that there are collective representations in the following way. Many groups will typically record their views in more or less official documents and files: minutes, statements, statutes, press releases, etc. Some of these may well play a highly integrated functional role in the group's life and this might provide sufficient grounds for claiming

At the same time, my proposal could be deemed more radical than the extended mind thesis because it involves *collective* representations that are located in the minds of *several individuals*, whereas extended mind theorists have focused their attention on how the mind of an individual is extended. Collective representations are shared in the group and are accessible to all group members, at the very least in the sense that they have been communicated among the members. None of this involves anything spooky at the collective level, because on my proposal collective representations are ultimately realized in the minds of the individual group members. Moreover, my proposal bears important similarities to an idea that has commanded wide endorsement in philosophy of mind for quite a while, to wit externalism about mental content (cf. Putnam 1975; Burge 1979, 1986 for classic statements). According to this view, mental content is partially constituted by environment that a thinker or speaker is in. On Tyler Burge's social externalism, in particular, an individual's social environment partially determines the content of her concepts and explains how content can be shared in a community. In similar fashion, my proposal is that individuals in a group can share representations — in the way described in the previous section — so as to form collective representations.

Several objections to the extended mind thesis draw attention to differences between allegedly extended cognitive processes or states and 'proper' internal cognitive processes, which are then claimed to be so significant that they invalidate the claim that a cognitive state or process really is extended.<sup>29</sup>

First, a number of prominent objections hinge specifically on the *externality* or *nonbiological nature* of the resources that are supposed to extend the mind. Kim Sterelny (2004) points out that the behavioral dynamics of Otto and his notebook are very different from those of Inga and here proper biological memory. To mention but a few salient differences: Otto's 'memory' can get wet, it is not as easily accessible in the dark, and it can be replaced by a prankster. Next, Fred Adams and Ken Aizawa have repeatedly accused extended mind theorists of committing the 'coupling-constitution fallacy' (Adams & Aizawa 2001, 2009, 2010): from the fact that an external resource is strongly coupled with a cognitive process by interacting with it continuously, we should not conclude that the resource constitutes part of the cognitive process. Another prominent objection, also due to Adams and Aizawa, is that nonbiological resources simply aren't the kinds of things that can be cognitive, or be part of a cognitive process, because they lack the 'mark of the cognitive'. Since my proposal for understanding collective representations doesn't (necessarily) involve external props, these ways of objecting to it are all nonstarters.

Second, it has been pointed out that even though Otto's notebook may fulfill many the same course-grained functional roles as Inga's memory, there are also notable differences in verbal

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that these documents are part of the group's cognitive processes. Thanks to Andy Clark for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>29</sup> Note that, in discussing these objections against the extended mind thesis, I'm not endorsing them. My interest is merely to see whether they translate into good objections against my own proposal.

and non-verbal behavior between them (Bernecker 2014: 5–6; Preston 2010). For instance, before consulting his notebook, Otto would not say that he remembers or believes the things in them, whereas Inga might say this about the things stored in her memory. Otto could never act immediately on the information in his notebook, Inga can. In a similar vein, one might try to argue that, although some part of the group’s life may function like a representation in individuals, it doesn’t play *all* the same coarse-grained functional roles. Note first that some of the default worries about the Inga/Otto case don’t carry over to collective representations. A group will immediately affirm its beliefs and invoke its representations in the relevant circumstances and can also act on it without first performing some other action. But perhaps there are other significant differences in functional roles. A collective representation, for instance, cannot be action-guiding in the same *direct* way as an individual representation, since for a group to act, at least one of its members has to perform an action that will enable, promote, or carry out the group’s action. In fact, any sort of role that a collective representation plays will always have to be mediated through the representations, attitudes, and actions of the individual group members. While this seems correct, it is insignificant in the present context. Surely, when we would look more closely at a neuroscientific account of an individual brain, we would find intermediate steps between representations and actions as well.

Third, Rupert (2004) has pointed out that, notwithstanding coarse-grained functional similarities between regular and extended cognitive processes, more fine-grained analysis reveals numerous differences. To continue using the example of memory: unlike a notebook, actual memory is not a passive recording device, but rather an active system that is subject to various kinds of cognitive effects and biases. It doesn’t just collect information untouched, but rather reconstructs it under the influence of continuing interaction with our beliefs, desires, and moods. Nothing of the sort goes on with a notebook.

In considering whether this objection carries over to collective representations, it is again important to note that my collective representations don’t involve external artifacts.<sup>30</sup> So any differences between those and cognitive states and processes inside the brain do not affect my proposal. Nonetheless, it must be granted that collective representations aren’t subject to the *exact same* cognitive effects as individual representations. But social psychologists have shown that deliberating groups are subject to *similar sorts* of effects, biases, and heuristics as individuals — as is well documented in psychology textbooks and their more popular renderings (e.g., Ariely 2008; Baron 2008; Kahnemann 2011). This takes much of the sting out of the objection. If the worry is that extended cognitive processes don’t behave sufficiently like internal ones when we look closely, then it doesn’t apply to my proposal. The mere fact that group representations are subject to somewhat different cognitive effects than those in individuals doesn’t make for a fundamental difference between the two. After all, there is considerable

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<sup>30</sup> At least not as I have construed them here. If one were to suggest that official documents produced and used by a group are collective representations, then the situation would be different. Cf. note 28 above.

variation between individuals in this respect as well. Not everyone is subject to the exact same cognitive effects and not everyone is subject to them to the same extent.

The upshot so far, then, is that several prominent objections to the extended mind thesis don't transform into objections against my proposal. This is reason for some optimism, but my proposal might have problems of its own. I'll consider two potential worries next.

First, many individual attitudes involve phenomenal experiences. As we noted above, this was a serious problem for traditional dispositionalist and functionalist analyses of belief. In response to it, liberal dispositionalists such as Schwitzgebel introduced phenomenal dispositions into their account of belief. Arguably, the same goes for mental representations: To have a representation of *p* involves some sort of experience of *p*, an experience with *p* as its conceptual content. It might be a 'picture' of *p* before one's mind's eye or something less tangible, but it will involve phenomenal seemings of some sort. If this is so, the objection continues, it should be clear that there cannot be genuine collective representations, because collectives cannot have phenomenal experiences: There isn't something it is like for a collective to represent *p*.

In response to this objection, I want to begin by pointing out that saying that 'collectives cannot have phenomenal experiences' is ambiguous between two readings.<sup>31</sup> On one reading, it is a claim about the individuals in a collective, taken together. The claim would then be: 'The individuals in a collective taken together cannot have (the same) phenomenal experiences.' This, it seems to me, is clearly false. Individuals can certainly have phenomenal experiences and given that socially shared mental content is widely assumed to be possible, it should also be possible for individuals to have the same phenomenal experiences. On another reading, however, it could be a claim about the collective *apart from*, or *in addition to*, the individuals in it. It then says that a collective cannot have phenomenal experiences *of its own*, i.e., apart from the phenomenal experiences of the individuals in it. On this reading, the claim is obviously correct, because of the simple fact that groups do not have literal minds — and hence no phenomenal consciousness — of their own.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Another line of response might be to push back against the claim that representations essentially involve phenomenal experience. This only gets one so far, because even if representations don't require them, other mental attitudes, such as belief, surely do. Hence, the worry would resurface as an objection to group beliefs.

<sup>32</sup> Note, however, that there is room to argue for the existence of an interesting parallel of phenomenal experiences at the collective level. Phenomenal experiences are often characterized in terms of exclusive first-personal access. Only I have access my phenomenal experiences, they are essentially private. As Darrell Rowbottom suggested to me in conversation, it is perfectly possible for groups to exhibit verbal or non-verbal behavior that is also essentially private, i.e., only manifested within the group and thus only accessible to group members. This suggestion, however, is unlikely to satisfy those who insist on the

So whether the objection is compelling depends on which of the two readings is meant. If the former, then there is no serious problem. Collectives have phenomenal experiences in virtue of most or all of their members having them. If a collective has a representation of *p*, its members will have *p*-relevant phenomenal experiences in virtue of having considered *p*. If the latter, however, then collectives indeed cannot have phenomenal experiences and hence no representations. Now is there reason to push the second reading? I don't see why, unless one wants to insist that anything that is not *exactly the same in every respect* as an individual representation cannot be a representation. To do so at this point, however, would be misguided. We have granted from the very beginning that if there are collective attitudes and collective representations, they are going to be different in some respects from individual mental states because groups lack literal minds of their own. Hence, the relevant question is not whether there *are* differences, but whether they are *significant enough* to undermine the claim that an alleged collective attitude is a real one. This, I think, is not so in this case. Given (a) that there are strong functional similarities between individual mental representations and the complex collective state that groups with beliefs (and presumably other representational attitudes) are in, and (b) that collectives can have the phenomenal experiences that are relevant to having representations in an indirect way in virtue of their members having them, it is unclear why having representations would require additional distinctly collective phenomenal experiences, separate from those of the individual members. It seems to me that imposing such a requirement displays an unjustified individualistic bias that disregards the naturalness and ubiquity of talk about collective attitudes.

One final objection would be to insist that, no matter how impressive the functional similarities between individual representations and (allegedly) collective ones, collective representations aren't made of the right stuff. Individual representations are implemented directly in human brains; supposedly collective attitudes consist of complex ensembles of individuals and their brain states.

This strikes me as a desperate move. It is widely assumed that mental states are multiply realizable and that the kind of matter in which they are implemented isn't essential to their being the mental states they are. To insist, then, that a representation *must* be realized in an individual human brain is unsustainable.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, there is a sense in which collective representations are realized in human brains. As I suggested in the previous section, the part of the cognitive life of groups that functions as a representation will surely include individual representations. Thus, collective representations are ultimately realized in the brains of individuals.

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necessity of collective phenomenal experiences, since such essentially private group behavior would still be quite different in kind from 'real' phenomenal experiences as had by individuals.

<sup>33</sup> Unless, perhaps, one is a mind-body substance dualist. On that view, it might be thought essential to mental states that they are immaterial entities or states.

## 7. Conclusion

A growing number of philosophers countenance the existence of collective attitudes like group belief and group knowledge, and thus the existence of RCAs. Against this, it has been objected that RCAs cannot exist, because their existence would require that there are collective representations and these, in turn, do not exist. In this chapter, I have offered two complementary lines of reply to this objection. First, dispositionalists and functionalists about mental attitudes can deny that RCAs require representations. This will not make everyone happy, however, since dispositionalism and functionalism are not without problems. Second, then, I have argued that there are collective representations by building on ideas introduced by proponents of the extended mind. I conclude that the objection fails. RCAs might still be controversial, but one shouldn't reject them because there are no collective representations.<sup>34</sup>

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