

Consensus and Group Judgments: Perspectives from Philosophy and Economics

Seminar WiSe 2026/27

LECTURERS

Prof. Dr. Stefan Napel

Prof. Dr. Olivier Roy

SYNOPSIS AND OBJECTIVES

Attitudes like beliefs and preferences are routinely attributed to groups. A jury can be said to believe the accused to be guilty, or a professional board can officially voice its disapproval of certain practices by its members. There are two main paradigms in philosophy and economics for the formation of such collective attitudes: the deliberative and the aggregative views. According to the deliberative view, group attitudes stem from a consensus reached after a structured exchange of opinions. According to the aggregative view, group attitudes are formed by putting together the possibly diverging views of individuals, through a formal voting procedure for instance.

The aim of this seminar is threefold. First, the students will understand the respective importance of the deliberative and the aggregative view in the broader philosophical landscape, especially in political philosophy and epistemology. Second, they will gain familiarity with various mathematical and economic models of, and results about deliberation and aggregation. Finally, they will be able to assess the philosophical significance of these models and results for our understanding of collective attitudes.

TARGET GROUP

Advanced Bachelor's students – and for selected topics also Master's students – from:

- Philosophy & Economics
- Economics
- Internationale Wirtschaft & Entwicklung / Governance

SEMINAR PLACES

- 16

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION/ASSESSMENT

- Seminar: English
- Written work: English

DATES AND DEADLINES

- Introduction and Organization Sessions: **October 14th, 2026, 15:00 c.t, H26 (GWI).**
- Seminar: **January 29th to 30th, 2027.**
- Submission of seminar papers: **March 10th, 2027.**

Deadlines are final and will be strictly enforced.

ASSESSMENT

Philosophy & Economics:

- SI/SIO seminar 5 cp: presentation, comment, participation + 3500-4000 word seminar paper.
- CP4*/CP5* seminar 2 cp: presentation, comment, participation.

Economics, IWE

- SPEZ 1-3/Mikroök. Seminar, VET7 5 cp: presentation, comment, participation + 3500-4000 word seminar paper

ENROLMENT/REGISTRATION:

The registration proceeds in two steps.

1. Course Registration on CampusOnline. You will then be automatically placed on the “waiting list” for the course.
2. Topic selection by contact with the lecturers (Napel and Roy). Topics will be allocated on a **first-come-first-served** basis.

Registration is complete when the topic has been agreed on and you have been assigned a place on CampusOnline. ^[L]_{SEP}Deadline for a complete registration: **January 8th, 2027, 12:00.**

SEMINAR INSTRUCTIONS

1. Time allowed: presentation of 45 min., comment of 5 min, discussion of 30 mins.
2. Presentations should be a concise and systematic overview of the topic in the form of a “teaching lecture”.
3. Each presentation will be assigned to one other participant, who is to comment on/ initiate the discussion of the contents of the presentation. Presenters are required to send their presentations to *both instructors* and the respective *commenter at least seven days* before the seminar session.
4. The literature given below is a *starting point* for your lecture. You are typically expected to find additional material yourself.
5. The order of presentations need not correspond to the ordering of topics found below. All participants shall be ready to give their presentation on the first seminar day.

SEMINAR PAPERS

Your *seminar paper* should be on a well-defined issue related to your presentation topic. The focus and the intended key references/data sources of your seminar paper must be coordinated with the instructors before you start writing.

Please make sure when writing your paper that you maintain scholarly standards of presentation and citation (incl. consistent typesetting of text *and* references, careful spell-checking, an informative title page, consecutive numbering of sections/subsections, etc.). Use the within-text “... Author and Author (year) ...” Harvard-style referencing system. Double-check that your reference list is in alphabetical order of surnames and that it uses consistent capitalization, italics, and so on. Add a declaration confirming that you have written your paper by yourself and that you have not used help (including from generative AI tools) or sources other than those that are explicitly acknowledged in the paper. For guidance, you may consult any of the research papers that can be found on either of our websites.

MANDATORY READING FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

Elster, Jon (1997), "The market and the forum: three varieties of political theory", in *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, pp. 3-34.

All participants will discuss this paper during the first session.

THEMES

P = Philosophical paper.

E = Econ/tech paper.

* = Advanced paper.

T1. Deliberation and consensus: goals, aims, pitfalls.

(P) Dryzek, John S., and Christian List (2003), "Social choice theory and deliberative democracy: a reconciliation", *British Journal of Political Science* 33, 1-28.

(P) Hansen, Pelle G. and Vincent F. Hendricks (2014), *Infostorms*, Springer, chap. 2.

(P) List, Christian, Robert C. Luskin, James S. Fishkin, and Ian McLean (2013), "Deliberation, Single-Peakedness, and the Possibility of Meaningful Democracy: Evidence from Deliberative Polls", *Journal of Politics* 75, 80–95

(P) Rad, Soroush Rafiee, and Olivier Roy (2021), "Deliberation, Single-Peakedness, and Coherent Aggregation." *American Political Science Review* 115, 629-648.

(E/P) Riker, William H. (1982), *Liberalism against Populism - A Confrontation between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*, Waveland Press; chaps. 1, 5, 10.

T2. Models of Deliberation and Consensus

(E) Aumann, Robert J. (1976), "Agreeing to Disagree", *Annals of Statistics* 4, 1236-1239.

(E) Geanakoplos, John D., and Heraklis M. Polemarchakis (1982), "We Can't Disagree Forever", *Journal of Economic Theory* 28, 192-200.

(P*) Stewart, R. and Nielsen, M. (2019), "Another Approach to Consensus and Maximally Informed Opinions with Increasing Evidence", *Philosophy of Science* 86, 236-254.

(E*) Ottaviani, Marco, and Peter Sorensen, (2001), "Information aggregation in debate: who should speak first?", *Journal of Public Economics* 81, 393-422.

T3. DeGroot Model of Consensus Formation

(P) Bradley, Richard, (2007), "Reaching a consensus", *Social Choice and Welfare* 29, 609-632.

(P) Hartmann, Stephan, Carlo Martini and Jan Sprenger (2009), "Consensual Decision Making Among Epistemic Peers", *Episteme* 6, 110-129.

(P) Lehrer, Keith, and Carl Wagner (1981), *Rational Consensus in Science and Society*, Reidel, part 1.

(P) Steele, Katie (2012), “Testimony as Evidence: More Problems for Linear Pooling”, *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 41, 983-999.

T4. Models of Aggregation

(E) Dietrich, Franz (2006), “Judgment aggregation: (im)possibility theorems”, *Journal of Economic Theory* 126, 286-298.

(E) Gaertner, Wulf (2003), *A Primer in Social Choice Theory*, Oxford UP, chap. 2 and 5.

(P) List, Christian and Philip Pettit (2002), “Aggregating Sets of Judgments: An Impossibility Result”, *Economics and Philosophy* 18, 89-110.

(E*) Maskin, Eric (2025). “Borda’s rule and Arrow’s Independence Condition”, *Journal of Political Economy* 133(2), 385-420.

T5. Wisdom of crowds

(P) Cohen, Joshua (1986), “An Epistemic Conception of Democracy”, *Ethics* 9, 26-38.

(P) Dietrich, Franz and Kai Spiekermann (2013), “Independent opinions? On the causal foundations of belief formation and jury theorems”, *Mind* 122, 655-685.

(P) Estlund, David (1997), “Beyond Fairness and Deliberation: The Epistemic Dimension of Democratic Authority”, in James Bohman and William Rehg (eds.), *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, MIT Press, pp. 173-204.

(E) Feddersen, Timothy and Wolfgang Pesendorfer (1998), “Convicting the innocent: the inferiority of unanimous jury verdicts under strategic voting”, *American Political Science Review* 92, 23-35.

(P) List, Christian and Robert E., Goodin (2001), “Epistemic democracy: Generalizing the Condorcet Jury Theorem”, *Journal of Political Philosophy* 9, 277-306.

(E*) Nitzan, Shmuel and Jacob Paroush (1982), “Optimal decision rules in uncertain dichotomous choice situations”, *International Economic Review* 23, 289-297.

(E) Young, H. Peyton (1988), “Condorcet’s theory of voting”, *American Political Science Review* 82(4), 1231-1244.