

Multi-attractedness (or “multiple voices inside one person”)

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Tässä artikkelissa tarkastellaan, miten henkilön taipumus tulla keskenään ristiriitaisten asenteiden tai uskomusten puoleensa vetämäksi vaikuttaa päätöksentekoon ja yhteisten päätösten hyväksymiseen. Kutsun tällaista taipumusta moniviehäytyneisyydeksi. Kyseisen taipumuksen tunnistaminen ja tutkiminen on tärkeää päätöksenteon teorian kehittämiseksi ja ymmärryksen lisäämiseksi kilpailevien näkökohtien vaikutuksesta päätöksentekoon. Tässä raportoitavan tutkimuksen empirisenä aineistona on etiikan ja yhteiskuntafilosofian kurssin opiskelijoille Vaasan yliopistossa vuonna 2016 tehty kysely sekä siihen liittyviä haastatteluja. Tulokseksi saadaan, että moniviehäytyneisyys on tunnistettavissa oleva ominaisuus – ”monta ääntä yhdessä persoonassa” – johon liittyy enemmän etuja kuin ongelmia päätöksenteon kannalta. Haastattelujen perusteella moniviehäytyneisyys auttaa ymmärtämään paremmin vastapuolen näkökulmaa ja vahvistaa kompromissintekokykyä, mikä on tärkeää tehokkaalle ja harkitsevalle päätöksenteolle. Moniviehäytyneillä on käytettävissään seuraavat päätöksentekostrategiat: synteisin etsintä, vaihtoehtojen poissulkeminen, vaihtoehtojen mukaan ottaminen, uusien itsenäisten vaihtoehtojen etsintä sekä valitsemasta pidättäminen.

Keywords: Attitudes, decision-making, decision-making strategies, multi-attractedness

1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to study how a person’s propensity to be pulled by conflicting beliefs and attitudes influences his/her decision-making and acceptance of common decisions. I have baptised that propensity as “multi-attractedness”. To identify and examine multi-attractedness is important for enhancing theories of decision-making and adding to the understanding of the impact of competing considerations on decision-making. Based on the data collected in this study, the propensity of multi-attractedness leads to an improved understanding of the opponent’s viewpoint and improved ability to compromise, which play a pivotal role in effective and deliberative decision-making.

It is a trivial fact that people have multiple interests. This is shown in the fact that practically everyone is interested in a myriad of things like food, music, sports, travelling, and tinkering. These are just a few examples of the general phenomenon. Another common fact is that the interests of different people may conflict. Accordingly, we have distinctive voices that create separation between us. These conflicts of interest are not only restricted to interpersonal situations, but can also be intrapersonal. In fact, a key feature of multi-attractedness, as it is understood here, is a “cross-draught of likings”; in other words, an internal conflict of interests. Such a conflict can occur in various situations, e.g. when

deciding between electoral candidates, choosing an activity in one’s spare time, or making economic decisions.

In this paper, I continue developing the concept of multi-attractedness, utilising, among other things, the idea and metaphor of *multiple voices inside one person*. What is this idea and phenomenon like? Is it an internal cacophony that scrambles thought, a well-compiled medley performed by one artist or a chorus with harmony and synthetic concord? I discuss these options, partly based on empirical data from a study of students’ social and political attitudes. This discussion contributes to developing a better understanding of the role of attitudes in decision-making. Moreover, the division between different decision-making strategies is a central result of this paper, having both theoretical and practical importance.

2 Opposites and neighbouring concepts to multi-attractedness

Refining a concept can be enhanced by exploring its opposites and neighbouring concepts. As we can see below, multi-attractedness has several opposites. However, I start by paying attention to *tolerance* and *cognitive dissonance* which are neighbouring concepts to multi-attractedness.

There is a significant body of literature discussing cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957; Aronson 1992; Thibodeau & Aronson 1992). Such dissonance arises when an individual holds opposing or contradictory beliefs or attitudes. This leads to a negative and uncomfortable state that the person aims to reduce or eliminate. According to Elliot Aronson, dissonance is greatest when it involves cognition about the self and one’s own behaviour that violates that self-concept (Aronson 1992: 305). Dissonant behaviour is regarded as a manifestation of conflicting interests (Gregory-Smith et al. 2013: 1202, 1205). For example, many consumer behaviour studies indicate that consumers have favourable attitudes toward sustainable consumption choices, but their actions do not necessarily or logically follow these good intentions (Black 2010; McDonald et al. 2012; Gregory-Smith et al. 2013). This difference or the so-called green-gap is much discussed, for example, in ethical consumption studies. Even if the green-gap and the attitude-behaviour gap are related to conflicts of interest, it is important to understand the difference between cognitive dissonance and multi-attractedness. When people recognise cognitive or emotional dissonance in themselves, they tend to feel anxious, guilty or embarrassed (Gregory-Smith et al. 2013: 1203–1205, 1211–1215). The multi-attracted, in turn, take their conflicting preferences as a sign of a positive pluralism of options and therefore as a possibility rather than a problem. Thus, emotional reactions to cognitive and behavioural dissonance are basically negative, whereas reactions to multi-attractedness can be largely positive. This is what my pilot study tells us and will be presented in detail below.

The difference between tolerance and multi-attractedness can be explained by attending to the difference between bisexuality and homo-/heterosexuality. Bisexuals have a stronger personal pro-attitude to same-gender and different-gender sex than heterosexuals or homosexuals, who have a tolerant attitude towards homosexuality or heterosexuality respectively. Thus, we should distinguish multi-attractedness as a sympathetic attitude that involves a relatively stable attachment to opposites (e.g. conflicting views and practices) and tolerance, but not an attachment to opposites. It is easy to see that there is a difference between being attracted and being tolerant, e.g., in politics and economics. Based on the data of this study, being attracted is basically a more active orientation than being tolerant.

Multi-attractedness has three opposites that are instructive to explore (Table 1). First, the concept of mono-attractedness can be used to refer to persons who are straightforward and inflexible. In the mono-attracted person's opinion, there is no need to compare rival options because one's preference is convincingly good and rational (Peterson 2009: 52). Apathy and indifference are also opposites of multi-attractedness. Apathy, in Stoic philosophy, is the condition of being free from emotions and passions, such as pain, fear, desire and pleasure caused by false evaluations. Even if multi-attractedness does not entail an opposition to emotions, it should be noted that multi-attractedness is not primarily an emotion but a cognitive propensity. The Stoic wise man, being harmoniously or uncontradictedly attracted is also the opposite of multi-attracted, as it is defined as being equally attracted to conflicting options.

Table 1. Opposites of multi-attractedness

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| 1. | <i>Mono-attracted</i> |
| 2. | <i>Apathetic or indifferent</i> |
| 3. | <i>Harmoniously or uncontradictedly attracted</i> |

Especially the last item in Table 1 can make one willing to criticise multi-attractedness for incoherence and irrationalism. This is the more so because normative decision-making theories commonly assume that rational decision makers are consistent in their preferences. This is something that the concept of multi-attractedness problematises by expanding the palette of equally attractive options to conflicting cases.

Although multi-attractedness confronts multiple traditional assumptions on decision-making, there are also features to which it conforms. It has been assumed that decision-makers need to take into account what others are doing. In such cases, rational decision-makers have to make trade-offs between conflicting aims, such as mutual benefit and risk minimisation (Peterson 2009: 8, 10). For various reasons (including ethical ones), this must be assumed to apply to the multi-attracted as well. Although multi-attracted persons could strive to realise all of their personal interests if their decisions were to affect only

themselves, in such social contexts as group and joint actions, they must take other people’s interests into account and be ready to compromise and make trade-offs. Additionally, rational agents are assumed to gather as much evidence as possible and do so in an unbiased way – they do not only seek evidence that will support their favoured views (Hedden 2015: 188). This must also concern the multi-attracted insofar as they are rational.

Based on these assumptions, we can initially distinguish two rational decision-making strategies available to the multi-attracted (Table 2). First, the multi-attracted can try to form a synthesis or new option based on or inspired by the original options. This strategy is especially suitable for the multi-attracted by nature because it attempts to preserve at least something of the original options. With regard to the above-mentioned metaphor of voice, this strategy can be compared to an attempt to create a well-compiled medley or a chorus with harmony and synthetic concord. Second, the multi-attracted person can also try to find additional evidence or new arguments to support the discrimination between competing alternatives. If successful, this strategy can lead to a decision in which one option is found to be better, or at least more recommended, than the others.

Table 2. Two major decision-making strategies for the multi-attracted

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| 1. <i>A synthesis or new option based on or inspired by the original options</i> |
| 2. <i>Additional evidence or new arguments to help find the best option among the existing ones</i> |

Below, I will refine these strategies into a more detailed set of approaches for multiple-choice situations.

3 Pros and cons of multi-attractedness

We have already seen that the possible value of multi-attractedness, from a decision-making point of view, lies in the agent’s ability to understand different options from inside as well as a readiness to reach a balance between them. Thus, multi-attractedness contributes to an appreciation of different options and an understanding why they may be worthy of being chosen.

Multi-attractedness can thus: (1) support learning about different options by keeping them present and relevant, (2) help look for decisive differences between different options and (3) encourage combining different options, thereby inciting the formation of a synthesis and creating the basis for new solutions (cf. a well-compiled medley or a chorus with harmony and synthetic concord). Deliberation and genuine dialogue between decision makers is greatly needed in all of these steps. Genuine dialogue normally requires at least two voices, each with its own perspective. However, multi-attractedness creates a need for the evaluation of different options in a person’s internal dialogue. As a result of such

dialogue, conflicting options can merge together through the unifying synthesis when forced by the fact that the multi-attracted are inclined to find solutions and decisions that keep all options alive. Even more importantly, multi-attractedness is information-intensive in the sense that it encourages careful and critical comparison between different options based on the best available information.

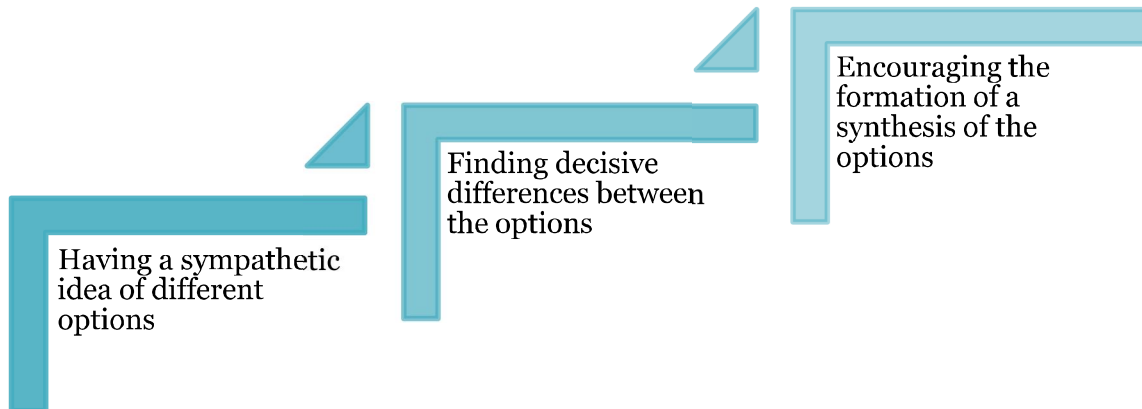


Figure 1. The benefits of multi-attractedness for decision-making

The benefits presented in Figure 1 suggest that much more is at stake in multi-attractedness than mere utility maximisation and disutility minimisation (or harm avoidance), that are commonly assumed to be the key functions of rational decision-making. The key benefit of multi-attractedness in terms of decision-making is its capacity to help identify and sympathise with different options.

4 Empirical study

I carried out a preliminary study on multi-attractedness at the University of Vaasa in January and February 2016. The results of the study are promising and demonstrate the empirical potential of the concept. Before presenting the course of the preliminary study, it is necessary to introduce an attribute related to the empirical identification of multi-attractedness. Let us call this attribute, for lack of a better term, the ‘multi-attractedness value’ (mav). The value can be determined by asking respondents whether they: (1) strongly disagree, (2) moderately disagree, (3) moderately agree or (4) strongly agree with conflicting claims such as “More refugees should be welcomed in Europe” and “More refugees should be deported” or “Income distribution should be equal” and “Income distribution should reflect individual contribution to what is produced”. The above claims form conflicting pairs that can be used to measure the informants’ degree of multi-attractedness. Please remember that a conflict of interests (in terms of being motivated by

competing considerations) is the key feature of multi-attractedness. (The no response (0) option was left out here because first, it is ambiguous and can mean either “Undecided” or “Indifferent”, and second, it is unclear whether those answers should obtain the numerical value 0 or, for example, 2.5.) The sum of the values given to such opposing claims, divided by the number of the claims, gives the multi-attractedness its value. This quotient can be interpreted as follows: the higher (i.e., closer to 4) the quotient, the stronger the multi-attractedness. Here we use the integers 1 to 4. However, the scale could also be different. Moreover, it can be agreed that the respondents should get, for example, a value greater than 3 in order for them to be reasonably identified as multi-attracted in terms of the claims made. Of course, the limiting value must be decided from case to case. The existence of multi-attractedness can thus be empirically investigated in terms of the multi-attractedness value, provided that we can study people’s attitudes to a given set of claims.

The students enrolled in the Ethics and Social Philosophy course at the University of Vaasa formulated pairs of attitudinal claims as group work. I chose and edited 52 claims (or 26 pairs) for the survey. I mixed the pairs so the opposing claims would not arise one after the other. The course participants answered the survey anonymously.

I assumed that the multi-attractedness value received by the informant would be close to 2.5. This value would be the result if one of the opposing claims always received the value 1 (“strongly disagree”) and the other the value 4 (“strongly agree”) $[(1 \times 26 + 4 \times 26) / 52 = 2.5]$. I also supposed that the advance information regarding the aim of the survey might have influenced the results. Therefore, I only told the participants that the purpose was to determine the existence and nature of multi-attractedness after completion of the survey.

The average and median of all the informants was 2.79 in the pilot study. Based on this, the attitudes of the Ethics and Social Philosophy course participants are not completely straightforward. There were 53 informants, of which 35 were women (66 %) and 18 were men (34 %). The highest multi-attractedness value was 3.31, and the lowest was 2.52.

The survey confirmed the results of earlier studies on attitudes, according to which the social attitudes of individuals are more inconsistent than, for example, the platforms of political parties (Bouchard & McGue 2003; Jost 2006). Platforms form such complete programme wholes that human attitudes and preferences do not form by nature (Jokela 2014: 252). The more contradictory the answers, the higher the number the multi-attractedness value is.

4.1 Interviews

I conducted individual interviews with the six informants who had received the highest values. One of them was male. The highest values in the above-mentioned four-step scale were between 2.96 and 3.31, thus close to 3. This pilot study is too narrow to serve as a basis for the claim that 3 is, in general, the limit of multi-attractedness.

The interviews confirmed the results of the survey, and multi-attractedness appeared to be a recognisable feature. Five of the six interviewees considered themselves multi-attracted. An interviewee (mav 2.96) said that she can “put herself in the shoes of another” and can understand different points of view, but she does not consider herself multi-attracted. She said that she is empathetic and tough as well as strong in her opinions. Hence, a high multi-attractedness value is not enough to confirm multi-attractedness; other reasons are also needed. Furthermore, based on the interviews, empathy and tolerance are the neighbouring concepts of multi-attractedness. However, the empathetic and tolerant are not necessarily multi-attracted.

The interviewees considered multi-attractedness as positive and useful because it supports a versatile evaluation of different options and helps them understand different points of view. Multi-attractedness also helps to make things proportionate and perceptible in a new light. On the other hand, the interviewees mentioned that multi-attractedness also hinders decision-making. Some said that their friends or spouse wonder why decision-making takes so much time. Thus, the interviewees represented the deliberate form of multi-attractedness rather than the indecisive type. A related subject for further study would be to examine how strongly the ability to make rapid decisions correlates with weak multi-attractedness. Furthermore, how does the rightness of decisions correlate with the decision maker’s multi-attractedness?

The multi-attracted declared that they often stop to think about whether they should have made a different choice. Still, all but one considered that they have been able to make consistent decisions bearing critical consideration. Unsurprisingly, the interviewees named knowledge, reason, and emotions as the basis of their decisions. The interviewee who said he had made many wrong choices stated that he mainly acts based on emotions.

One interviewee (mav 3.31) said that multi-attractedness had appeared in her only after puberty; she had been more straightforward in her childhood. Another interviewee (mav 2.96) spoke of the gradual development of her multi-attractedness and linked this to the widening of her worldview. Other multi-attracted interviewees said they have been attracted to different mutually opposing options related to hair dyes, as well as political opinions, for as long as they could remember. It turns out that such multi-attractedness that is non-specific and does not concentrate on any particular field of life or action also exists.

4.2 Group discussion

These results were widened and elaborated upon by the group discussion that was executed before the survey. The group discussion considered whether or not a refugee centre should be founded in a municipality. The eight-person groups discussed this question from the basis of the following assumptions: The representatives of a municipality with a population of circa 20,000 have come together to consider the draft resolution according to which a refugee centre will be founded in the municipality. The neighbouring municipalities have rejected the refugee centre, and the nearest equivalent countries – Denmark, Germany, and Sweden – are tightening the conditions for refugee acceptance. The discussants were urged to simply be themselves and represent the values and attitudes they have in reality.

The discussion was conducted and the draft resolution was put to a vote in nine groups in which the chairs recorded the course, content, and tone of the discussion. The reports shed light on the basis of consensus and reasons for disagreement. I used this data to provide background for the interviews and to obtain an initial idea of the role played in group discussion by participants who received a high multi-attractedness value.

Interestingly, three groups voted for the refugee centre, four groups voted against, one cast an empty vote, and one group decided to organise a referendum. One of the interviewees (mav 2.96) was from a group that voted against the refugee centre, yet his own vote was placed in favour of it.

This pilot study gives reason to accept multi-attractedness as an empirical concept and real characteristic.

5 Multiple-choice situations

In the beginning of this paper, I characterised multi-attractedness as a person’s propensity to be pulled by opposing considerations. Thus, different considerations may be equally valued and significant for a multi-attracted person, even if they may encompass conflicting or incommensurable realities. What could be a suitable starting point to consider decision-making situations where conflicting options exist? Let us follow a good philosophical habit of looking at the history of ideas.

The Hegelian dialectic (understood in a wide sense and not restricted, for example, to the formula “thesis-antithesis-synthesis”) is especially suitable for our purposes. According to the Hegelian dialectic, contradiction acts as a positive moving force in human reasoning and paradoxes compel humans to seek new points of view. In multiple choice situations, the following approaches are available (Table 3):

Table 3. Different approaches in multiple-choice situations

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| 1. | <i>Seeking a synthesis</i> : the emergence of new ideas through the synthesis of opposing views a) by combining parts of different options to form a new whole b) by creating a new option inspired by the original options, but not directly based on them |
| 2. | <i>Exclusion of options</i> : choosing and focusing on one of the given options, which can happen based on a new piece of evidence or through the fact that the decision-maker (an individual or a community) revises the strength of his or her desires or beliefs concerning different options |
| 3. | <i>Inclusion of options</i> : hanging on to different options and trying to practice all of them |
| 4. | <i>Search for new independent options</i> : deciding to choose something else, irrespective of the original options |
| 5. | <i>Passivity</i> : refraining from choosing |

As has been noted, the first approach can be characterised metaphorically as creating a well-compiled medley or a chorus with harmony and synthetic concord, whereas a suitable metaphor for the third approach is cacophony. All of the approaches above are compatible with multi-attractedness, but Approaches 1 and 3 are especially relevant because they emphasise the (equal) value or attractiveness of different options. Multi-attractedness can contribute to all of these approaches in different ways: (1) Multi-attractedness can support the first approach by holding a sympathetic attitude to different options, which encourages the seeking of a synthesis. (2) On the other hand, even if many options are excluded, multi-attractedness can maintain a constructive attitude – even to the rejected options – and make their exclusion more tolerable and informed. (3) The third alternative represents an extravagant approach by keeping all alternatives in play, which nicely dovetails with multi-attractedness. (4) Multi-attractedness may also support finding entirely new options – this approach is recommendable if no synthesis or consensus based on or inspired by the original options is achievable. (5) In some cases, passivity or not choosing at all may be a wise choice. This is especially the case if the decisive grounds for a decision are lacking or inconsistent, or if a decision is not absolutely necessary. In all of the numbered cases – but especially in 1, 3 and 4 – discussion and deliberation are important for decision-making (which is an issue that has been closely considered in discussions about deliberative democracy). In Cases 1 and 4, open discussion and deliberation are important as the basis for new creation. In Case 3 it is an important requirement for coordination. Case 2 (*exclusion of options*) is typically based on a voting result and majority decision. However, revising the strength of one’s desires or beliefs concerning different options can also benefit from discussion and deliberation with other people.

My analysis suggests that different perspectives and considerations are to be brought together in a single decision using one or another of the approaches presented in Table 3. In order for these approaches to be effective, the following requirements must be fulfilled. First, decision makers should be able to identify different perspectives, values and beliefs that the available decision options represent and are based on (*the identification of premises for decision-making*). Second, different decision-making perspectives must be put in

dialogue with each other by paying special attention to their similarities and differences as well as strengths and weaknesses (*the evaluation of different decision-making perspectives*).

The above five approaches shown in Table 3 represent different routes from two or more equally attractive options to the best possible choice. Deciding on the best choice is a complex and case-specific issue. A choice can be the best possible in terms of utility, truth and evidence, ethics, or emotional satisfaction, among others. In rational decision-making theories, utility (interpreted as a measure of preferences over some set of goods and services, or as satisfaction experienced by the consumer of a good) is commonly considered to be the major criterion, even if other criteria may also be relevant.

The multi-attracted can use different strategies in multi-attribute decision-making. The strategies can be condensed into the following (see Table 4): (a) a synthesis of options; (b) added evidence or further argumentation on the basis of which an informed choice can be made, e.g. based on risk-minimising or utility-maximising objectives; (c) an attitudinal change in the decision maker, with a new emotional basis for the decision, in favour of one option or another; and (d) apart from one option all other options losing attractiveness for objective or subjective reasons, including cognitive and affective reasons.

Table 4. The strategies of multi-attribute decision-making for the multi-attracted

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| (a) | A synthesis of options |
| (b) | Added evidence or further argumentation for one or another option |
| (c) | An emotional change in favour of one option or another |
| (d) | Apart from one option all other options losing attractiveness |

Obviously, strategies (b), (c) and (d) are closely related because added evidence and further argumentation can be decisive reasons for an attitudinal change in the decision maker as well as behind why an option loses its attractiveness.

6 Conclusion

In light of the present study, the value of multi-attractedness lies primarily in its ability to improve the quality and caution of the whole decision-making process. Thus, the (expected positive) impact of multi-attractedness on decision-making is discursive (communicative or persuasive) and rests on the sympathetic attitude toward different options and understanding their grounds. To achieve this one does not necessarily need many multi-attracted persons in a decision-making body – one communicative person may suffice to bring the desired effects of multi-attractedness, one of which is bridge-building between different views.

Based on the above, the following conclusions can be drawn. The decisive question for the multi-attracted person is: “What decision should I make and on what other basis than my desire?” Different strategies of multi-attribute decision-making (presented in Table 4) represent different ways to answer this question. Routes (a) and (b), i.e., a synthesis of options and adding to evidence, are the most attractive in terms of rationality (as was anticipated in Table 2). A synthesis adds a new option while trying to combine the best features of other options, whereas adding evidence seeks to give cognitive or risk-minimising and utility-maximising bases for the decision among existing alternatives. The question of the interlocutors of the multi-attracted, in turn, is: “How should I negotiate with a multi-attracted person?” Approaches 1 and 3, in multiple-choice situations, pave the best ways for such negotiations (see Table 3). Seeking a synthesis and the inclusion of options are thus routes that can genuinely take multi-attractedness into account in multiple-choice situations

In view of the aforementioned, the following main types of multi-attractedness should be distinguished: A. Those multi-attracted individuals who are cautious and disciplined follow ethical values (or well-founded standards of right and wrong) and are consistent in their decisions, despite being attracted to a diversity of views. B. Those who falter in their opinions represent uncritical and undisciplined multi-attractedness; they may even be unaware of their preferences (Peterson 2009: 206) (see Table 5).

Table 5. The main types of multi-attractedness

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| A. | Cautious and disciplined multi-attractedness |
| B. | Uncritical and undisciplined multi-attractedness |

Type A of multi-attractedness is recommendable, if for no other reason than the ability to make considerable decisions among alternatives (including the decision to draw lots or toss a coin if nothing else helps).

I have argued in this paper that the utility of multi-attractedness comes about through a better understanding of opponents’ interests and concerns as well as the ability to compromise and adapt to common decisions. As a result, those who are multi-attracted are more ready to compromise because for them making concessions does not mean renouncing their own interests. Thus, multi-attractedness contributes to deliberation that takes various views and preferences into account. When opposing preferences are difficult or impossible to realise simultaneously, it can lead to the necessity of choice as well as seeking reasons, combining options or creating other solutions. In view of that, it is right to characterise multi-attractedness as “multiple voices, in need of harmonisation, inside one person”.

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