Pluralistic summativism about group belief

Fernando Broncano-Berrocal

(University of Barcelona - LOGOS)

1. Introduction

Attribution of beliefs to groups is widespread. Below are some examples from the Internet:

1. Among *committees* that believed "science isn't sexist," those which implicitly associated science more with men promoted fewer women.[1]

2. The *legislature* believes that it is the duty of this state to improve the well-being of African Americans.[2]

3. The *board* believes this agreement is in the best long-term interest of BP and its shareholders.[3]

4. If a *jury* believes a law is unjust or unfair, it can reject that law.[4]

5. Almost half the *Russian population* believes that they would have a difficult time surviving without government assistance.[5]

6. German museums may have thousands of looted relics from China's Imperial Palace, *research group* believes.[6]

7. *Catholics* do not allow same-sex relationships, as they believe that marriage and sexual relationships should take place between a man and a woman.[7]

8. The *market* is finally starting to believe that Elon Musk will buy Twitter.[8]

9. The *Biden administration* believes that China is gauging the U.S. response to Ukraine as a proxy for Beijing's actions against Taiwan.[9]

10. The *mob* believes that they are punishing the victim for doing something wrong.[10]

What are the truth conditions for these ascriptions? Or more generally:

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[1]https://news.ubc.ca/2019/08/26/hiring-committees-that-dont-believe-in-gender-bias-promote-fewer-women/

[2]https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.113.005

[3]https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/gulf-of-mexico-oil-spill-bp-finally-gets-disaster-closure-with-18-7bn-payout-10362877.html

[4]https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/jury/

[5]https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/60849

[6]https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/01/25/german-museums-may-have-thousands-of-looted-relics-from-chinas-imperial-palace-research-group-believes

[7]https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zqcrpbk/revision/7

[8]https://qz.com/2162498/the-market-finally-believes-that-elon-musk-will-buy-twitter/

[9]https://twitter.com/business/status/1492450680820441088?lang=en

[10]https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/legally-speaking/mob-lynching-a-desecration-of-the-rule-of-law/

Group belief question: In what sense do groups have beliefs?

The group belief question is an important question in social epistemology, but not a simple one. Any plausible answer should be consistent, for example, with the fact that we ascribe beliefs to groups as diverse as committees, boards, juries, research groups, populations, religious communities, markets, governments, and even mobs. Some of these groups exhibit a high degree of social integration (e.g., governments, committees, and boards), while others do not (e.g., populations, markets, or mobs). Given this diversity of groups, it is unclear whether there is a univocal answer to the group belief question: perhaps groups can have different kinds of beliefs (*pluralism*), or perhaps all group beliefs are of the same kind (*monism*) (see §2).

Another notorious difficulty in giving a plausible answer to the group belief question is that it is also unclear whether group beliefs are to be explained by an aggregation of the individual beliefs of the group members (*summativism*) or are to be understood as collective beliefs held independently of them (*non-summativism*), and if the former view is true, it is unclear what proportion of the group members must believe the proposition in question for the group to believe it (see §3).

Finally, any positive answer to the group belief question (whether pluralist, monist, summativist, or non-summativist) commits one to the more general view that groups can believe propositions (*believism*), but one must first consider the alternative view that the question has no positive answer and that groups cannot believe propositions at all, i.e., one must consider the view that only individual agents can have beliefs (*rejectionism*) (see §4).

The aim of this paper is to provide a positive answer to the group belief question, and in particular an account of group belief that combines pluralism and summativism about group belief (in short, *pluralistic summativism*). In doing so, it critically assesses the three main debates in the literature—the disputes between monism and pluralism (§2), summativism and non-summativism (§3), and believism and rejectionism (§4)—and draws a general methodological lesson for the summativism/non-summativism debate—namely, that intuitions about cases alone are not enough to adjudicate between views of group belief, and that the debate would benefit from a reflective equilibrium approach (§5).[11] All of this serves as motivation for the novel pluralist and summative view presented in §6, which has some advantages, for example, when it comes to moral evaluation (§7). §8 draws some implications for the debates on group knowledge and justified group belief.

2. Monism and pluralism

The first dispute about the notion of group belief revolves around the question of whether all group beliefs are of the same kind and, if so, whether the same truth conditions apply to all group belief ascriptions. One can take either a monist or a pluralist approach to this question:

> **Group belief monism**: Group beliefs are of one kind and it is in principle possible to offer a unified account of them that provides truth conditions that apply to all group belief ascriptions.
>
> **Group belief pluralism**: There is more than one kind of group belief, each requiring different accounts that provide different truth conditions that apply to some but not all group belief ascriptions.

[11] One debate not addressed here is the metaphysics of group beliefs, which revolves around the idea that the beliefs of a group supervene on or are exhaustively determined by the mental states of the individual members of the group. See Bird (2010) and Epstein (2022) for a rejection of this idea.

Most views of group belief (e.g., paradigmatic summative and non-summative views, as we will see in the next section) are monist. However, some scholars take a pluralist approach and distinguish between different types of group beliefs and explain them in different ways. Nevertheless, all pluralist views on the market make the same assumption:

> **Group kind/group belief kind correspondence:** Kinds of group beliefs are to be distinguished in correspondence to kinds of groups.

Pluralists have used different terms to refer to different types of groups and group beliefs, but their distinctions are very similar, if not the same, and all assume a correspondence between group kinds and group belief kinds. To illustrate, Tuomela (1992), List (2014), and Meijers (2002) respectively hold that *social groups* (i.e., those that are capable of action in a member-binding sense), *group agents* (i.e., appropriately organized collectives with goals and intentions that they pursue through their actions; cf. List 2016), and *structured wholes* (i.e., groups with collective intentions) have a type of group beliefs. These authors use different terms to refer to this type of group beliefs: respectively, *proper group beliefs* (Tuomela), *corporate beliefs* (List), and *agreement-based beliefs* (Meijers). In short, according to these pluralists, governments, supreme courts and boards of directors have one kind of group beliefs, whatever you call them. In contrast, passengers on a train, the population, or the market. i.e., groups that lack the structure and functional organization of the former, have other types of group beliefs: either *aggregate beliefs* (List 2014) or *opinion poll-type beliefs* (Meijers 2002), i.e., "a summary of the beliefs of the individual members of the collective, produced by some aggregation rule or statistical criterion" (List 2014: 1603), or else *common beliefs* (List 2014) or *shared we-beliefs* (Tuomela 1992), i.e., beliefs "held by all individual members of the group, where their holding them is a matter of common awareness" (List 2014: 1609). In sum, these pluralists believe that aggregates, whether or not they meet common knowledge or awareness conditions, have different types of group beliefs than more organized or structured groups.

Group kind/group belief kind correspondence is *committed* to a particular taxonomy of groups in which the dividing line between group kinds has to do with their degree of structure and functional organization. Although this may be a natural distinction (see, e.g., Ritchie 2013; 2015), some scholars working on the metaphysics of groups have argued against classifying groups into such simple typologies (e.g., Epstein 2019). Thus, because the metaphysics of groups is far from uncontroversial, a noncommittal view such as the one I will present in §6 is *prima facie* preferable, that is, a view of group belief that is compatible with any way of classifying kinds of groups.

3. Summativism, non-summativism, and (the devaluation of) the method of cases

Another important dispute in the literature is between summative and non-summative views of group belief. The terms 'summative' and 'non-summative' were first introduced by Anthony Quinton (1975/6) to refer to two kinds of statements about social objects. According to Quinton, summative statements of the form 'Group G is F' are equivalent in meaning to statements of the form "all or most or the most influential people who are [G] are F" (Quinton 1975/6: 9) (e.g., 'The French middle class is thrifty'). Non-summative statements, on the other hand, are predicable of G but not of the people who constitute G (e.g., 'The British aristocracy is hierarchically arranged'). In the case of mental states, Quinton argues that their attribution to groups is summative: "[t]o ascribe mental predicates to a group is always an indirect way of ascribing such predicates to its members" (Quinton 1975/76: 17). Following Quinton's ideas, Margaret Gilbert refers to this view as *summativism* about group belief, which she generally characterizes as follows:

> The existence of a group 'belief that p' is on this view a function simply of the existence of a certain set of *correlative individual beliefs*, that is, beliefs held by individual persons to the effect *that p*. (Gilbert 1989: 239).

As we shall see in §3.1, summativism can be formulated in different ways, depending on which set of group members is supposed to hold the relevant correlative beliefs. However it is formulated, as Gilbert acknowledges, summativism enjoys "evident initial plausibility" to the extent that "a form of summativism is often what comes to mind when the nature of collective beliefs is mooted." (Gilbert 1989: 243). Nevertheless, following her lead, several authors in the literature have advocated forms of *non-summativism*, i.e., views that hold that group beliefs do not depend on the existence of a set of correlative individual beliefs (but are to be explained by appeal to other notions such as joint acceptances or joint commitments).

These general characterizations of summativism and non-summativism show where the main point of contention between summative and non-summative views lies: the principle that Gilbert calls correlativism.

> **Correlativism**: If a group G believes that p, then at least one member of G believes that p.

All summativists about group belief are committed to some form of correlativism. But to be clear: summativism is *not* the view that group beliefs can be explained only by individual factors, for they are free to use other non-individual factors to explain group beliefs, e.g., aggregation procedures or relationships between group members or their beliefs. Similarly, non-summativism is *not* the view that group beliefs can be explained only by collective factors. All non-summativists reject correlativism, but they are then free to invoke individual factors other than individual beliefs to explain collective beliefs, such as the individual willingness to be part of a joint commitment to accept a proposition as a group. Their disagreement, then, turns on whether it is possible for a group to believe a proposition when *none* of its members believe it. Non-summativists believe that this is possible. Summativists deny this.

It should also be noted that most views put forward in the summativism/non-summativism debate are *monist*, that is, they purport to state truth conditions for all group belief ascriptions. Finally, the *method of cases* is the main methodology driving the debate, i.e., the tenability of a view is judged almost exclusively on the basis of its ability to explain the intuitions elicited in particular cases (see Gilbert 1989: Ch. 5, §3 for an explicit statement of this methodology, which many follow). As I will argue, intuitions, while helpful, cannot be the *sole* criterion for adjudicating between views. Accordingly, while the relevance of the method of cases should not be dismissed, it must be devalued.

3.1 Summativism

Finding the best formulation of summativism is no easy task.[12] The simplest summative view is often formulated as the view that a group G believes that p if and only if most or all members of G believe that p (Quinton 1975/6; Gilbert 1989: 241-2; 257-60). However, not all group belief ascriptions are true if most or all members of a group believe the proposition in question. Consider the case of Brexit. The British voted 52% to 48% to leave the EU. It's not hard to imagine headlines of the type 'Brits believe the UK should leave the European Union' being taken as true in light of these numbers. Indeed, in many cases (especially majority voting), it is not uncommon to equate a group's belief with the belief of the majority of its members, even if that majority is not a supermajority (e.g., most or all of the group members).

[12] For extensive discussion of summativism about group belief, see Gilbert (1989: Ch. 5), Lackey (2020: Ch. 2), and Faria (2021).

Moreover, in such cases, disagreements may arise, especially conceptual disagreements and metalinguistic negotiation (Plunkett & Sundell 2013; Stroud 2019) about what percentage of group members is considered 'enough' for the group to believe what the majority believes. For example, in the context of Brexit, some might argue that if 52% of the British electorate believes that the UK should leave the European Union, that percentage is not enough for the statement 'Brits believe the UK should leave the European Union' to be true, while others may consider it enough. Summativism should be able to accommodate such cases of disagreement and metalinguistic negotiation. One possibility is to opt for the following (intentionally vague) formulation:

> **Simple summativism**: A group G believes that p if and only if a significant percentage of the members of G believe that p.[13]

However, not all members of a group may be relevant in determining the content of the group's beliefs. This is best seen in the following example:

> **SUPREME COURT**. The justices of the Supreme Court contribute unequally to some of the acts of the court. Among the powers anchored for the Chief Justice is the power to designate authors for opinions of the Court. Suppose that the rules of the Court state that when a justice is given such authority by the Chief Justice with respect to p, and the justice issues an opinion on p, that justice's opinion becomes the official opinion (or belief) of the Court. Suppose further that Justice Scalia gets too big for his britches and sends an email to his colleagues putting Justice Thomas in charge of writing the opinion on a case. Suppose that Chief Justice Roberts sends an email putting Justice Kagan in charge of the same case. Then suppose that both Kagan and Thomas publish opinions. Kagan's publication is an opinion of the Court. Thomas's publication is not. (adapted from Epstein 2015: 222-3)

There are several ways to explain cases of this kind. For example, Quinton (1975/6: 17), in his explanation of summative statements about social objects of the form 'Group G is F', considers the possibility that they are true if "the most influential people who are [G] are F", which need not necessarily be most of the members of G. Gilbert (1989: 243) also considers (and argues against) a form of summativism in which the belief of the group is determined by the "authoritative individuals" of the group. In the same vein, Tuomela (1992) introduces the distinction between *operative* and *non-operative members*. Operative members are members who have the authority or are responsible for acting on behalf of the group and, in the case of group belief, for determining the content of the group's belief (at least for some issues). While in unstructured groups, such as populations, all group members are operative members, in some structured groups, such as the Supreme Court, this is not the case. Fricker (2010) makes a similar point by invoking the notion of *passengers*, group members who merely agree with what other members with greater authority think or do. However one chooses to make the distinction, or whatever terminology one uses, in the cases considered here, a set of group members is responsible for determining the content of the group's beliefs. A summative view that takes this possibility into account would be the following:

> **Operative member summativism**: A group G believes that p if and only if a significant percentage of the operative members of G believe that p.

[13] Lackey (2020) opts for the expression a 'significant percentage of the members' in the formulation of her summative account group belief.

However, the matter is even more complicated. In some cases, a set of operative members may be responsible for determining the content of the group's beliefs, but within that set, the opinions of different operative members may carry different weight. For example:

> **EXPERTS.** G is a group with ten operative members. By G's rules, G's opinion is p if and only if the doxastic score for p is greater than the doxastic score for not-p, where the doxastic score for a proposition p is calculated as follows: if an operative member is an expert on the question of whether p, their opinion counts for 5 points, otherwise it counts for 1 point. The situation is as follows:
>
> - 2 expert operative members believe that p (10 points).
> - 8 non-expert operative members believe that not-p (8 points).
>
> As a result, G's opinion is p, but most of the operative members believe not-p.

A better formulation of summativism, then, which omits the expression 'operative member' but includes the idea motivating its use, is the following:

> **Weighted summativism:** A group G believes that p if and only if enough members whose opinions have sufficient weight to determine G's position with respect to whether p, believe that p.

The formulation is intentionally vague to cover both group beliefs of unstructured groups in which all members are operative members and all their opinions have equal weight, and cases of structured groups in which not all members are operative members and their opinions may have different weight.

Call the three monist forms of summativism just distinguished *classical summativism.* Classical summativism builds on the quite plausible idea that a group can believe a proposition only if some of its members also believe it. However, some summativists find it necessary to supplement these views with additional clauses. For example, consider the following view discussed by Gilbert (1987; 1989):

> **Common knowledge summativism:** A group G believes that p if and only if (1) enough members whose opinions have sufficient weight to determine G's position with respect to whether, believe that p, and (2) it is common knowledge in G that (1).

One way to understand the common knowledge clause is as follows: it is common knowledge in G that p if only if (1) p, (2) every member of G believes that p, (3) every member of G believes that every member of G believes that p, and so on (cf. Lewis 1969; Gilbert 1987; List 2014). But as List (2014) notes, the notion of common knowledge could be understood differently (e.g., as a disposition rather than an infinite hierarchy of beliefs or as a primitive notion).

The inclusion of such a clause is motivated by the intuitions that arise in cases where there is a mutual belief in the group (i.e., all members have that belief) but the belief is not shared, as in the following case:

> **ZUNI TRIBE.** Suppose an anthropologist were to write "The Zuni tribe believes that the north is the region of force and destruction". Now suppose that the writer went on to give his grounds for this statement as follows: Each member of the Zuni tribe believes that the north is the region of force and destruction, but each one is afraid to tell anyone else that he believes this; he is afraid that the others will mock him, believing that *they* certainly will not believe it. Such an explanation might well, I think, be taken to throw doubt on the original statement. (Gilbert 1987: 187)

However, it is suboptimal to rely only on intuitions about cases of group belief to decide whether a common knowledge clause is required, because structurally similar cases can lead to contrary intuitions:

BOARD OF DIRECTORS. All members of the board believe that the CEO is obnoxious, but because the next promotion depends crucially on getting along with him, they all behave as if he were a nice person. Because of this behavior, everyone mistakenly believes that everyone on the board does not believe that the CEO is obnoxious. Had it not been for the promotion, everyone would have told the other members what they thought. Suspecting that the CEO is disliked by the board, one of the major shareholders of the company distributes a questionnaire to all the board members to get their opinion of the CEO, and they all write the following: "I find the CEO obnoxious, but the others find him nice". This shareholder tells the other major shareholders: "See, that's exactly what I was thinking: the board thinks the CEO is obnoxious, but for some reason they are not willing to say so in public."

In this case, the lack of common knowledge does not so clearly call into question the truth of the ascription 'The board thinks the CEO is obnoxious'. We could use this case to refute common knowledge summativism. But the bottom line is rather that intuitions about cases alone are not sufficient, and in cases of conflicting intuitions may not even be relevant, to decide between weighted summativism and common knowledge summativism, as long as different intuitions can arise depending on how you fill in the details of the cases. Even if the debate is driven by the method of cases to adjudicate between views, the foregoing considerations give us reason to be suspicious, or at least a little cautious, about relying on such a method as the sole criterion for theoretical adequacy.

Let me give another example of this instability of intuitions in cases of group belief. Lackey (2020) offers a summative view that includes a clause aimed at excluding cases in which the attitude of a group is 'base fragile' as cases of group belief, where "a group's state is base fragile if the bases of a significant subset of its members' beliefs conflict with the bases of another significant subset of its members' beliefs." (Lackey 2020: 45). Lackey thus holds that group belief is, ceteris paribus, inconsistent with this kind of base fragility, as the following case supposedly shows:

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT. The English Department deliberates on the next hire. All members jointly accept that Sarah Peters is the best candidate for admission.

- Half of them believe this because they believe she is a highly qualified applicant and therefore the best candidate for admission.
- Half of them believe this because they believe she is a highly *un*qualified applicant. They want to sabotage the department and consider 'the best candidate for admission' to be the applicant most likely to drag down the department's ranking. (adapted from Lackey 2020: 45)[14]

Lackey believes that cases of this sort are not cases of group belief, and that they therefore warrant the inclusion of an anti-base fragility clause in a monist, summative account of group belief. Here is Lackey's formulation of her view, which we may call 'coherence summativism':

> **Coherence summativism**: A group G believes that p if and only if (1) there is a significant percentage of G's operative members who believe that p, and (2) are such that adding together the bases of their beliefs that p yields a belief set that is not substantively incoherent.

As with the common knowledge clause, however, reported intuitions about cases do not provide conclusive evidence for deciding whether a clause against base fragility is needed. For other cases may give rise to conflicting intuitions. Consider the following example:

[14] One could argue that ENGLISH DEPARTMENT is not really a case of base fragility because the members of the group do not jointly believe or accept the same proposition. After all, the case seems to involve an equivocation on what counts as the 'best' candidate. Thanks to Aidan McGlynn for suggesting this interpretation.

GEOMETRY CLASS. In geometry class, students are taught that equilateral triangles are triangles whose three sides are equal in length, and they all understand that. They also know that to determine if a particular triangle is equilateral, they need to determine if its three sides are the same length by measuring them with a ruler, for example. But the teacher wants to see if the students can find another way to determine if a triangle is equilateral (for example, by measuring whether each of the three angles is 60º). So she divides the class into groups of three, draws an equilateral triangle, T, on the board, and gives students protractors instead of rulers to measure the angles (and no other instructions).

Three students discuss how to proceed and conclude (no matter how) that if the angles of a triangle are equal, the three sides must be equal in length.

- Student 1 takes the protractor, goes to the board, measures each of the angles of T, and concludes that each is 60º. Based on this, she tells her classmates that all the angles of T are equal.
- Student 2 does the same thing, but because he suffers from dyslexia, he measures 61º for each angle. Based on this, he tells his classmates that all the angles of T are equal.
- Student 3 does the same, but because his protractor is defective, he measures 62º for each angle. On this basis, he tells his classmates that all the angles of T are equal.

In this way, they all believe that the three angles of T are equal and therefore that the three sides have the same length and therefore that T is equilateral.[15]

According to Lackey's account, the group of students does not believe that T is equilateral—because if we add up the bases of the students' beliefs, we get a belief set that is substantively incoherent. But this is counterintuitive. To further illustrate how counterintuitive this judgment can become, suppose that after the previous task, the teacher gives the students a ruler to double-check whether their group belief is correct. Suppose that this time the three students correctly measure that the three sides of T are equal in length. In Lackey's view, the group has gained a new belief, namely that T is equilateral. However, a more plausible diagnosis is that the group's earlier belief has been strengthened by the emergence of new evidence.

Should we conclude that coherence summativism is false? One might be tempted to reach this conclusion in light of the case, but counterexamples, while not irrelevant, are not decisive either. That, at least, is the lesson we can draw from a comparison between the case that supposedly motivates Lackey's view (ENGLISH DEPARTMENT) and the case that refutes it (GEOMETRY CLASS), namely that it is at best inconclusive to adjudicate between views based only on intuitive evidence from cases—and the same is true of common knowledge summativism. For here, too, we can adjust the details of the cases as we wish to support or refute any view we like or dislike. This does not mean that we should dispense with intuitions altogether, only that they cannot be the *sole* criterion for adjudicating between competing views. A reflective equilibrium approach, as I will argue, is better.

3.2 Non-summativism

[15] The respective beliefs of students 2 and 3 may even be justified: suppose a reliable mathematician had respectively told them that equilateral triangles have 61º/62º angles. However, whether the group members' beliefs are justified is irrelevant: we are assessing views of group belief, not of group justification. It also does not matter whether they are true or false.

Non-summativists also often use the method of cases to motivate their views (List 2005 is an exception). In particular, they rely on intuitions about cases to argue that summative conditions are neither sufficient nor necessary for group belief. Consider a case that supposedly proves the former:

> **TWO COMMITTEES**. The Food Committee believes that faculty members are consuming too much coffee. The Library Committee, however, has no opinion on the matter, since it speaks only on issues that affect the library. Nevertheless, the two committees are composed of exactly the same members, each of whom believe that faculty members are consuming too much coffee (adapted from Gilbert 1987: 189).[16]

Gilbert holds that the lack of belief of the Library Committee shows that summative conditions (such as those of simple, operative member, common knowledge and coherence summativism) are insufficient for group belief: the conditions are in place, but the group does not have the corresponding belief.[17] Other cases, we are told, intuitively justify the rejection of correlativism: they show that the possibility that a group believes a proposition even though none of its members believe it is a real possibility. For example, Gilbert (1987) offers a somewhat complicated case which she thinks "one can use it as a basis for formulating an account of [group] belief" (Gilbert 1989: 292). Lackey's following case is simpler:

> **PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT**. The Philosophy Department deliberates on the next hire. None of the members agree that Jane is the most qualified candidate, but all of them accept this statement as the opinion of the Department, i.e., all members jointly accept that Jane is the most qualified candidate without believing it themselves. The reason for this is that they believe Jane is the candidate most likely to be approved by the administration. (adapted from Lackey 2020: 21)

Gilbert believes that cases like PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT are clear cases of group belief (the department, as a group, believes that Jane is the most qualified candidate). Lahroodi (2007: 287) suggests a similar case in which an administrative committee in a church "known for its vehement hostility to gay rights" holds views such as that gay marriage is morally impermissible or that openly gay persons have no voting rights in church affairs. Most members of this committee, however, are open-minded about gay rights and, as individuals, hold views that speak for gay rights. However, because of normative pressures, they tow the church line on these issues and, as a group, accept views that are against gay rights. Cases like Lahroodi's illustrate how the operating norms in groups can lead to a divergence between the attitudes of groups and the attitudes of their members. The crucial question, of course, is whether such group attitudes deserve the label 'group beliefs' (rather than, say, 'group acceptances') in the cases discussed here. Non-summativists are happy to refer to such collective attitudes as 'group beliefs', while summativists disagree.

Note also that the divergence in the motivating cases for non-summativism is not only in the lack of correspondence between the attitudes of the group and the attitudes of its members, but also in the

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[16] As Epstein (2015: 227) explains, committees, courts, and boards are typically set up to perform certain roles in certain spheres of action and are powerless outside of those spheres. Gilbert assumes in TWO COMMITTEES and similar cases that group beliefs operate in a similar way: groups are set up to have opinions on certain issues but not on others. Summativists (e.g., Lackey 2020) disagree with this assumption: what a group can believe is not determined by constitutional or practical constraints, but by what individual group members can believe (e.g., given psychological and epistemic constraints, such as their cognitive abilities or their epistemic position). Indeed, the case may elicit opposite intuitions for this reason.

[17] In support of weighted summativism, one could argue that the group members' beliefs about coffee consumption carry no weight in determining the Library Committee's position, so the committee has no opinion on the matter. However, this makes the same assumption mentioned in the previous footnote, namely that groups are set up to have opinions on certain issues but not on others, which summativists find problematic.

reasons for adopting such attitudes.[18] For example, in PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT, the department as a group 'believes' that Jane is the most qualified candidate for non-epistemic reasons (because she is the candidate most likely to be approved by the administration), while the department members believe the opposite for epistemic reasons (e.g., after reading Jane's CV, they have strong evidence that she is not the most qualified candidate).

These kinds of theoretical considerations can be used as an argument against non-summativism (see §4), but non-summativists are happy to bite the bullet on the assumption that group beliefs are not subject to the same epistemic standards as individual beliefs. One implication of Gilbert's view, for example, is that group beliefs are more subject to the epistemic standards of individual attitudes such as acceptances than beliefs. This is because she explains group beliefs in terms of the notion of joint commitment to goals (where, in the case of group beliefs, the goal in question is to accept a proposition as the group's view).[19] She explains the notion of joint commitment as follows:

> The complex idea of a joint commitment to espouse a goal as a body is to be roughly interpreted as follows. The relevant joint commitment is an instruction to the parties to see to it that they act in such a way as to emulate as best they can a single body with the goal in question. (Gilbert 2013: 33)

Gilbert's non-summative view (which she calls the 'plural subject account') can be succinctly formulated as follows (cf. Lackey 2020):

> **Joint acceptance account**: A group believes that p if and only if the members of G are jointly committed to accepting p as the group's view.[20]

The members of a group may jointly commit to accepting p as the group's view because they themselves believe in p, but individual belief in the jointly accepted proposition is not required for the group members to jointly commit to accepting it as the group's view. It may well be that they become part of the corresponding joint commitment because they accept p (for whatever reason), even though they do not believe it. Cases like PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT are meant to illustrate this possibility. But again, intuitions about cases do not provide conclusive evidence to adjudicate between summative views and the joint acceptance account (and other non-summative views).

First, it is unclear how the joint acceptance account can explain cases of group belief in which the groups in question exhibit a low degree of structure or functional organization, such as passengers on a train who might be said to believe that the train is going to London (**PASSENGERS**)—also note assertions (5), (7), (8), and (10) in §1. Such cases seem to show that non-summative conditions are not necessary for group belief after all.

Second, here is a structurally similar case to PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT, which appears to elicit summative intuitions showing that non-summative conditions are not sufficient for group belief:

> **NAKED KING**. The naked king shows up at the Dress Code committee. All members are present. A fearsome royal guard shouts out: "Do you think the king's clothes are appropriate for tonight's

[18] For discussion on the question of what is for a group to believe something for a reason, see Brown (2022).

[19] See Gilbert (2002: §7) for discussion of this point.

[20] See McMahon (2003) and de Ridder (2022) for detailed discussion of Gilbert's view. Tuomela (1992) offers a similar but more complicated non-summative view of group belief in terms of the notion of joint acceptance. See Lackey (2020) for discussion of Tuomela's view.

dinner?" One of the members, after looking around a bit, shouts back: "Of course, we think they are appropriate." The guard also looks around menacingly and asks, "Is that right?" Everyone nods.[21]

The members of the committee, out of sheer fear, jointly accept that the king's clothes are appropriate for the dinner, but they certainly do not believe it because they know that the king is naked. As Lackey (2020) points out, joint acceptance of a proposition can come about for a number of reasons when group members do not believe it, such as compromise, imposed rules, or, as in the previous case, prudential considerations. Should we call these joint acceptances 'group beliefs'? As I hoped to have shown, intuitions about cases do not provide conclusive evidence for a clear answer. Yet the debate between summativism and non-summativism relies heavily on intuitions about cases to adjudicate between views.

What is the best way to explain the notion of group belief if we give less weight to our intuitions about cases? Sometimes, but not often, intuition reports are supplemented with general diagnoses of why summative or non-summative views fail to meet certain theoretical desiderata or criteria that any adequate account of group belief should satisfy. To illustrate, since lying requires believing that the asserted proposition is false, and groups can lie, Lackey (2020) argues that the following is a desideratum for any adequate account of group belief:

> **Group lie desideratum**: An adequate account of group belief should have the resources for distinguishing between, on the one hand, a group's asserting its belief that p and, on the other hand, paradigmatic instances of a group's lying regarding that p.

The idea is that if NAKED KING refutes non-summative accounts like Gilbert's, it is not just because one has the intuition that it is not a genuine case of group belief, but because it is a clear example of a group lie, even a bald-faced one (collectively agreeing with 'The King's clothes are appropriate', when everybody sees that the king is naked), so it should be the case that the group believes that the asserted proposition is false.[22] Views like Gilbert's, however, do not have the means to make this judgment. In contrast, summative views can. This gives us a *theoretical* reason to prefer the latter.

At one end of the spectrum, then, one might choose to adjudicate between views based solely on intuitions about cases; at the other end, one might consider only theoretical considerations. As I will suggest, the debate between summativism and non-summativism would benefit from a better methodological approach, that of reflective equilibrium: an approach that decides between views by taking into account both intuitions *and* theoretical considerations. But let us first consider the next dispute in the literature, which more often invokes the latter.

4. Believism and rejectionism

The last major point of contention in the literature on group belief revolves around the question of whether group beliefs are really beliefs (Tollefsen 2019: 265). So-called *believers* claim that there is such a thing as group beliefs (Gilbert 2002; Tollefsen 2002; 2003;), while *rejectionists* (Wray 2001; 2003; Meijers 2002; 2003: Backes 2021) deny this. More specifically, believers and rejectionists respectively hold the following theses:

> **Believism**: Both groups and individuals can believe propositions.

[21] The case is inspired by Gilbert's railway carriage case (Gilbert 1989: 310).

[22] Lackey (2020) extends this criticism to non-summative views that do not rely on intuitions about cases, such as List's premise-based aggregation view (List 2005).

Rejectionism: Although groups can have some propositional attitudes, such as acceptances, they cannot believe propositions. Only individual agents can really believe.

One consequence of rejectionism is the commitment to an *error theory* about group belief ascriptions: when people attribute beliefs to groups, they are in error because groups do not in fact believe (Wray 2003). A more substantive error theory, held by most rejectionists, holds that collective belief statements are figurative language and that their literal meaning is tied to the notion of collective or joint acceptance (Preyer 2003). In Wray's words, "when we attribute beliefs to groups, what the group does is accept the view in question, not believe it." (Wray 2003: 364).

The typical rejectionist argument goes as follows:

1. Having the property P explains why an attitude A is a genuine belief.
2. Individual beliefs have P, which explains why they are genuine beliefs.
3. According to theory T of group belief, group beliefs do not have P.

C Therefore, the kind of collective attitudes postulated by T are not genuine beliefs.

Thus, if it can be shown that for a representative number of doxastic properties and theories of group belief, the collective attitudes postulated by these theories are not genuine beliefs, then we have good reason to believe that there is no such thing as group beliefs at all: only individual agents can really believe.

To illustrate, here are some properties of beliefs that are mentioned in the literature on group belief:

i. Beliefs are involuntary, and are not normally subject to direct voluntary control. (Bratman 1993; Engel 1998)

ii. Beliefs aim at truth or are regulated by truth. (Williams 1973; Engel 1998)

iii. Beliefs are shaped by evidence for what is believed, and the degree to which a belief is reasonable is in general proportional to the degree of evidence that one has for its truth. (Bratman 1993; Engel 1998)

iv. Beliefs are subject to an ideal of integration or agglomeration, which means that, other things being equal, we should try to make our beliefs coherent or consistent, and to fit them together within some larger view. (Bratman 1993; Engel 1998)

v. Beliefs have a mind-to-world direction of fit. (Anscombe 1957; Lackey 2020)

The same kind of argument can also be given for the properties of believers (not just their beliefs). Some properties of believers mentioned in the literature include the following:

vi. It is conceptually and psychologically impossible for there to be a believer with only one belief. (Laitinen 2014).

vii. While it is psychologically possible for believers to have contradictory beliefs, they cannot believe known contradictions, i.e., propositions known to be false. (Foley 1986)

viii. Believers who, by asserting p, lie, believe that p is false. (Lackey 2020)

Rejectionists arguments typically target non-summative conceptions of group belief, namely those of believers, who, like Gilbert, assume that group beliefs are a real phenomenon (and therefore do not subscribe to an error theory about group belief ascriptions), and who explain group beliefs in terms of

joint acceptances (or joint commitments to accepting propositions as a group, in Gilbert's case). Here is an instance of such kind of argument (cf. Wray 2001; Meijers 2002):

1a. Being involuntary explains why an attitude A is a genuine belief.

2a. Individual beliefs are involuntary, which explains why they are genuine beliefs.

3a. According to Gilbert's theory of group belief, group beliefs are voluntary because they arise by a voluntary joint commitment to accept propositions as a group.

C Therefore, the kind of collective attitudes postulated by Gilbert's theory are not genuine beliefs.

There are at least three general ways in which non-summativists may respond to these kinds of arguments. The first is to reject premise 3. Gilbert (2002), for example, responds to 3a that group beliefs are not voluntary in the problematic sense of direct doxastic voluntarism. In particular, while Gilbert acknowledges that the wills of individual group members are involved in the production of the collective belief that p, namely by expressing their willingness to be jointly committed with the others to believe p as a body, the individual group members are not the bearers of the collective belief in p. Instead, the resulting joint commitment constitutes a collective agent (a 'plural subject' in Gilbert's terminology) who is the bearer of the collective belief in question. Gilbert's idea, then, is that from the fact that the wills of individual group members are involved in the production of the collective belief, it does not necessarily follow that the collective belief is (directly) willed by the constituted collective agent.

Another way is to cast doubt on premise 2 for at least some doxastic property P, i.e., to show that while "it is unclear whether collective [beliefs] have [P], it is *equally unclear* whether individual beliefs do, and for similar reasons" (Gilbert 2002: 50). Meijers (2002) argues, for example, that group beliefs are not genuine beliefs because (a) they can be adopted or abandoned for non-epistemic reasons, despite the existence of available evidence, without thereby being criticizable, but (b) this is not the case with individual beliefs. Suppose (a) is true. Against Meijers, one could side with pragmatists about reasons for (individual) beliefs and argue that the practical (prudential or moral) value of a belief can provide us with a normative reason for that belief, so that individual beliefs may be formed or abandoned on such grounds (cf., e.g., Leary 2017; Rinard 2019a; 2019b; Schmidt 2021), calling (b) into question. Thus, if (b) is false, and since individual beliefs are genuine beliefs, (a) would not provide sufficient reason to believe that group beliefs are not genuine beliefs.

The third way non-summativists can respond to the rejectionist arguments is to deny premise 1, namely, that for at least some doxastic property P, having P is what explains why an attitude is a genuine belief. Gilbert (2002: 48-9) gives a general argument in this direction:

1. An important criterion of adequacy for a philosophical account is a degree of responsiveness to the use of the relevant terms, in this case, 'belief' and its cognates 'believes', 'believer', and so on.

2. An adequate account of belief must accommodate all phenomena that are referred to without question as cases of 'belief', unless some good reason can be given for excluding some of these phenomena.

C Unless some good reason can be given for excluding collective belief statements, it would be better to consider their referents in formulating an account of belief, and not to pronounce as to the nature of belief as a result of considering only individual belief statements and their referents.

Gilbert's corollary is that instead of accepting rejectionist arguments aimed at showing that (non-summativistically modeled) group beliefs are not genuine beliefs because they lack some property P that individual beliefs have, one can instead argue that since group beliefs do not have P, even though individual beliefs do, P cannot be what explains why an attitude is a genuine belief.

Rejectionists find reasons to resist Gilbert's argument. First, although (i)-(viii) (and similar criteria) are far from uncontroversial and should not be taken as given truth, they have long been regarded by many philosophers as what distinguishes belief from other mental states or propositional attitudes *in general*, or what is distinctive about being a believer. Moreover, one problem that rejectionists (e.g., Wray 2001; 2003; Meijers 2002; 2003) see for views such as Gilbert's that are based on the idea of joint acceptance (or of joint commitment to accept propositions as a group) is that the properties that the resulting non-summativistically modeled collective attitudes arguably have are those that many (e.g., Van Fraassen 1980; Lehrer 1990; Cohen 1992; Bratman 1993; Engel 1998) believe distinguish *acceptance* from other propositional attitudes, especially beliefs: properties such as being voluntary, being aimed at utility or success (rather than at truth), or being responsive to practical considerations (rather than to evidence or epistemic reasons). For example, pace dialetheism, it is not possible to believe a proposition that we know is a contradiction. But we may well accept known contradictions without believing them, e.g. for the sake of argument. Similarly, members of a group may jointly commit to accepting a known contradiction as the group's position. Should we call the resulting collective attitude 'belief' or 'acceptance'? Rejectionists (and probably many others) would say it is an acceptance, since it satisfies one key criterion that distinguishes beliefs from acceptances in general. Non-summativists would call such collective attitude a belief, arguing that group beliefs are a whole different beast. Whoever is right, as Gilbert and Pilchman (2014: 193) note, "[t]he debate over rejectionism has reached something of a stalemate."

There is, however, a way out of this impasse that will please neither rejectionists nor non-summativists. For an important position in the logical space of believism is not considered in the debate. As we have seen, believers need not be non-summativists, that is, they need not treat group beliefs as a whole different beast and explain them in terms of joint commitments or acceptances, nor need they deny their existence and subscribe to the rejectionist error theory according to which the literal meaning of group belief ascriptions is tied to the notion of collective acceptance. Believers can regard group beliefs as a real phenomenon, so we are not mistaken in attributing beliefs to groups, and explain their existence in terms of a familiar phenomenon: individual beliefs, as summativists do. That is, summativism is a variant of believism that holds that both groups and individuals can believe propositions, but groups can believe propositions because their individual members can.

Summativism is in principle in a good position to resist rejectionist arguments to the conclusion that group beliefs are not genuine beliefs. While both summativists and non-summativists include individual and non-individual factors in their accounts of group belief, only summativists deny the possibility that a group has a belief when none of its members do. Thus, if at least some group members must believe p in order for the group to believe p, it is in principle easier to explain why group beliefs or believers have the same properties as individual beliefs or believer: it can be argued that the properties of the latter transfer to or are instantiated by the former, or perhaps that the properties of the former reduce to the properties of the latter.

5. Reflective equilibrium about group belief

The foregoing considerations are not intended as knock-down objections against non-summativism, but as motivation for a summative approach to group beliefs. They also urge us to reconsider the

methodology of the debate between summativism and non-summativism. On the one hand, while we should not dispense entirely with intuitions about cases, the method of cases cannot be the only method for assessing the theoretical adequacy of a view, for the reasons given in §3. On the other, views of group belief should also take into account certain theoretical criteria about what characterizes belief and believers. In particular, pace Gilbert's above argument against premise 1, the fulfillment of criteria such as (i)-(viii) (the list is far from exhaustive) can be seen as another means (in addition to the method of cases) of testing the theoretical adequacy of the views put forward by believers, both summativists and non-summativists. For, although they are not uncontroversial, they are widely accepted criteria for explaining what makes an attitude a genuine belief or what is distinctive about being a believer. At a minimum, a test for theoretical adequacy that any view of group belief should pass is that it should not be undermined by arguments such as those outlined in §4. However, responding to such arguments or accommodating the relevant theoretical criteria cannot come at the expense of a massive disregard for intuitions about particular cases. What we want instead is a theory of group beliefs that achieves a wide *reflective equilibrium* such that it largely accommodates our pretheoretical intuitions about which cases count as cases of group belief, is consistent with widely accepted theoretical criteria for beliefs and believers, and is supported by independent considerations.

The method of reflective equilibrium has been widely used to decide between views in areas such as the philosophy of logic (e.g., Goodman 1955), theories of justice and ethics (e.g., Rawls 1971), epistemology (e.g., Goldman 1988), theories of rationality (e.g., Stein 1996), or theories of vagueness (e.g., Keefe 2000). As described by Daniels (1996) and Kauppinen & Hirvelä (forthcoming), a (wide) reflective equilibrium is a coherent triple of sets of beliefs that consists of (A) a set of considered judgments or intuitions about particular cases or at any level of generality; (B) a set of principles or theories (principles together with some rationale for them); and (C) a set of arguments or considerations based on background theories such that they must show that the principles or theories in (B) are more acceptable than alternatives for reasons that are to some extent independent of the fittingness of (B) with the relevant considered judgments and intuitions in (A).

In the present case, (A) includes reported intuitions about:

A1. Non-summative conditions being unnecessary for group belief (e.g., PASSENGERS).

A2. Non-summative conditions being insufficient for group belief (e.g., NAKED KING)

A3. Summative conditions being unnecessary for group belief (e.g., PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT).

A4. Summative conditions being insufficient for group belief (e.g., TWO COMMITTEES).

A5. Coherence clauses being necessary for group belief (e.g., ENGLISH DEPARTMENT).

A6. Coherence clauses being unnecessary for group belief (e.g., GEOMETRY CLASS).

A7. Common knowledge clauses being necessary for group belief (e.g., ZUNI TRIBE).

A8. Common knowledge clauses being unnecessary for group belief (e.g., BOARD OF DIRECTORS).

It also includes:

A9...A_n. Widely accepted theoretical criteria for beliefs and believers (e.g., criteria (i)-(viii)).

(B) includes the monist views already seen—for simplicity, I leave aside current pluralist views based on group kind/group belief kind correspondence, and leave the discussion of pluralism to the next section:

B1. Classical summativism: simple, operative member, and weighted summativism.

B2. Common knowledge summativism.

B3. Coherence summativism.

B4. Non-summative views (where the joint acceptance account is the most representative)[23].

(C) will be addressed in §7—because different independent considerations may support different theories.

Each of the theories in (B) reaches a different reflective equilibrium, and each sacrifices different intuitions and criteria. We can judge their theoretical adequacy according to (i) which theory achieves the most comprehensive equilibrium (i.e., which theory explains more intuitions and criteria) and (ii) which independent considerations (C) speak in its favor. Here is a visual representation of the kind of (narrow) reflective equilibrium these views *prima facie* achieve:

(A)	(B1) *Classical summativism*	(B2) *Common knowledge summativism*	(B3) *Coherence summativism*	(B4) *Non-summative views*
(A1)- PASSENGERS	✓	X	X	X
(A2)- NAKED KING	✓	✓	✓	X
(A3)- PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT	X	X	X	✓
(A4)- TWO COMMITTEES	X	X	X	✓[24]
(A5)- ENGLISH DEPARTMENT	X	X	✓	X
(A6)- GEOMETRY CLASS	✓	✓[25]	X	✓[26]
(A7)- ZUNI TRIBE	X	✓	X	✓
(A8)- BOARD OF DIRECTORS	✓	X	✓	X[27]
(A9)...(A_n) - Theoretical criteria	✓	✓	✓	X

As we see, and as argued in §4, summativism (in general) is in a better position than non-summativism to explain the theoretical criteria for beliefs and believers. Of course, this should be taken with caution (and should not be taken as a conclusive reason for the theoretical adequacy of summativism, but only as a pro tanto motivation for exploring a summative approach to group beliefs), because as we have seen, non-summativists have argued that their views satisfy some of these criteria. But it is better if a view of group belief does not carry such a burden of proof on its shoulders. On the other hand, there seems to be no reason to include common knowledge or coherence clauses in a classical summative view. The reason, as we have seen, is that different cases lead to conflicting intuitions—ZUNI TRIBE vs. BOARD OF DIRECTORS, in the case of common knowledge summativism, and ENGLISH DEPARTMENT vs. GEOMETRY CLASS, in the case of coherence summativism—, leaving no motivation for the qualified views. All in all, classical summativism remains the best *monist* approach to group beliefs.

[23] The other representative non-summative view is List's premise-based aggregation view. I omit it here not only for reasons of space, but also because the counterexamples it falls prey to are very similar to those of the joint acceptance view. See Lackey (2020) for a detailed discussion of this view.

[24] The members of the Food Committee, *qua* members of this committee, are jointly committed to accept as a group that faculty members consume too much coffee. The same is not true of the Library Committee, since it speaks only on issues that affect the library.

[25] We may assume that it is common knowledge that everyone believes that triangle T is equilateral.

[26] It is natural to suppose that the students jointly accept that triangle T is equilateral.

[27] It is unclear how board members can jointly commit to accepting as a group that the CEO is obnoxious unless they talk to each other about this issue.

In what follows, I will show that a conceptually richer and more fruitful view can be achieved if we combine classical summativism with pluralism.

6. Pluralistic summativism

6.1 The beliefs of unstructured groups

A cogent reason why classical summativism is preferable is that it is unclear how the revised summative views, and also non-summativism, can account for an important subset of group belief ascriptions: those that refer to *unstructured groups*, groups such as populations, markets, or mobs.[28] In unstructured groups, the conditions for common knowledge are often not present (*contra* common knowledge summativism). Nor are the corresponding joint commitments of non-summativists. Moreover, in such groups, which often consist of many members, adding the bases of their beliefs is likely to yield a set of beliefs that is substantively incoherent (*contra* coherence summativism). Nevertheless, we ascribe beliefs to such groups—consider, for example, assertions (5), (7), (8), and (10) in §1.

Accounting for the beliefs of unstructured groups comes at the expense of non-summative intuitions about the possibilities that groups believe propositions when none of their members do, and that groups do not believe propositions when all of their members do.

It seems that one of the two desiderata must go.

6.2 Why not all-encompassing pluralism

The pluralist views we saw in §2 can account for the beliefs of such unstructured groups: they are just one kind of group belief. They can also accommodate non-summative intuitions: the beliefs of functionally organized, structured groups can be modeled in non-summative terms. So why not use the best of both worlds (summativism and non-summativism) in an *all-encompassing pluralist view*?

There are two reasons not to go down this road. First, as pointed out in §2, by assuming group kind/group belief kind correspondence, such a pluralist view is *committed* to a particular taxonomy of groups that some scholars working on the metaphysics of groups consider wrong (e.g., Epstein 2019). Thus, it is better if a view of group belief is not tied to controversial metaphysical theses. Second, if one type of group belief is to be modeled summatively (that of unstructured groups) and another type of group belief is to be modeled non-summatively (that of structured groups), we might ask what unifies the notion of group belief in the first place. This is best seen in terms of the theoretical criteria for beliefs and believers. These are criteria that describe *in general terms* what characterizes a believer and how beliefs can be distinguished from other propositional attitudes. In an all-encompassing pluralist framework, the beliefs of unstructured groups can meet these criteria with flying colors, but it may be more difficult to argue that the same is true for the non-summatively modeled beliefs of structured groups.

All-encompassing pluralism thus runs the risk of offering a disjunctive story about how these criteria do and do not apply to group beliefs, which can lead to a taxonomy of belief types that have little to do with each other. On what grounds should we call it a taxonomy of 'beliefs' rather than of two distinct kinds

[28] We can raise the objection that non-classical summativism and non-summativism are unable to account for the beliefs of unstructured groups without committing ourselves to the thesis that group kinds are to be distinguished according to whether they are structured or not. Kinds of groups can be distinguished in other ways, and they can still be structured to different degrees or in different ways. In other words, a group can have the property of being unstructured without this property determining what kind of group it is.

of collective attitudes, say, group beliefs and acceptances? Note that this is the same kind of argument that rejectionists use to argue that there is no such thing as group beliefs if they are to be understood non-summatively, but only group acceptances, this time rephrased against all-encompassing pluralism (see the arguments in §4).

Although these are not knock-down objections to all-encompassing pluralism, they motivate us to explore a different pluralist view. I think that in a reflective equilibrium approach to group belief, we would be better off dispensing with non-summative intuitions, for reasons also explained in §7. The possibility that a group believes a proposition even though none of its members believe it, which is considered a real possibility by non-summativists, should not be overstated. The clearest cases of group belief are those in which there is *perfect agreement* between what the group and its members believe. These paradigmatic cases are typically cases in which all members are operative members, all believe p, and their opinions have equal weight. It may even be the case that the members of the group jointly accept p as the group's view because they individually believe p. But the former need not be the case, and even non-summativists must correctly account for these cases. Classical summativism, on the other hand, does much better, i.e., simple, operative member, and weighted summativism can explain these prototypical cases in a straightforward way. In other cases, however, the views differ. This does not mean that the views are wrong. Rather, they capture different kinds of group beliefs, as I will argue next.[29]

6.3 Dominant and authorized group beliefs

Structured groups often have a large subset of non-operative members and a small subset of operative members. Suppose that all non-operative members believe p, a belief shared by a few operative members. Suppose further that most operative members (or those whose opinions carry enough weight to determine the content of the group's belief) believe not-p. Consider the following example:

COMPANY. A company's small shareholders have no say in the company's official opinions, and only the major shareholders can determine the content of those opinions. The situation is as just described:

- Most small shareholders believe p.
- Some large shareholders also believe p.
- The large shareholders whose opinions carry enough weight to determine the content of the company's position, believe not-p.

In this context, we are torn as to whether we should refer to the group's belief as the belief that p (i.e., that of most small shareholders and a few large shareholders), or as the belief that not-p (i.e., that of enough large shareholders). The prediction of *simple summativism*—a group G believes that p if and only if a significant percentage of the members of G believe that p—is the former. The prediction of *weighted summativism*—a group G believes that p if and only if enough members whose opinions have sufficient weight to determine G's position with respect to whether p, believe that p—is the latter. But those are wrong monist predictions. Instead, I think we need to distinguish two *kinds* of group beliefs here: *authorized group beliefs* and *dominant group beliefs*. That is, in cases like this, the group has at least these two types of group beliefs, and group belief ascriptions can refer to both (we will see an example in a moment):

[29] The following distinctions can easily be extended to other doxastic attitudes of groups, such as disbelief and suspension of judgment.

Dominant group belief: G's belief that p is a dominant group belief if and only if a significant percentage of the members of G believe that p.

This is the *kind* of group belief that *simple summativism* captures.

Authorized group belief: G's belief that p is an authorized group belief if and only if enough members of G whose opinions have sufficient weight to determine G's position with respect to whether p, believe that p.

This is the *kind* of group belief that *weighted summativism* captures.

The distinction serves to explain disagreements about group belief ascriptions.[30] For example, consider the following assertions:

11. Facebook believes that remote work is less efficient.

12. Facebook believes that remote work is *not* less efficient.

CASE 1. One might disagree with (11) if 'Facebook believes' is read as an attribution of an authorized group belief and instead agree with (12) if read as an attribution of a dominant group belief. To illustrate, a natural response we might hear to (11) might be the following:

> Come on! It's just the bigwigs who think so. Most employees and most shareholders believe remote work is efficient. So Facebook definitely believes that remote work is *not* less efficient.

This response indicates that, with (12), the group is attributed a dominant, but not authorized, group belief.

CASE 2. Now consider opposite readings of (11) and (12). One might disagree with (11) if read as an attribution of a dominant group belief and agree with (12) if read as an attribution of an authorized group belief. To illustrate, another natural response we might hear to (11) might be the following:

> Come on! After doing it for a while, most employees and shareholders now know that working remotely is less efficient, like many thought before the pandemic. But for some reason, the bigwigs believe that remote work is actually more efficient. So Facebook definitely believes that remote work is *not* less efficient.

This response indicates that, with (12), the group is attributed an authorized, but not a dominant, group belief.

6.4 Operative group beliefs

Non-operative members may sometimes be irrelevant in assessing an assertion like (11), and we may want to challenge it anyway, not because most members of the company do not believe the proposition in question, but because a significant percentage of operative members (e.g., most directors and major shareholders) believe it when the weight of their opinions is insufficient to determine the content of the company's official opinion.

CASE 3. For example, one could disagree with (11) and agree with (12) by responding to (11) as follows:

[30] See Pettigrew (ms.) for a recent analysis of group belief ascriptions and how they can be interpreted differently by different people.

> Come on! While most directors on the board and most major shareholders believe remote work is less efficient, Mark Zuckerberg thinks it is efficient. So Facebook definitely believes that remote work is *not* less efficient.

In this case, one agrees with (12) because one reads it as referring to an authorized group belief, and one disagrees with (11) because one reads it as referring, not to a dominant or authorized group belief, but to an operative group belief, defined as follows:

> **Operative group belief:** G's belief that p is an operative group belief if and only if a significant percentage of the operative members of G believe p.

This is the *kind* of group belief that *operative member summativism*—a group G believes that p if and only if a significant percentage of the operative members of G believe that p—captures. An operative group belief in p may also be an authorized group belief if the significant percentage of operative members believing p carries enough weight to determine the group's position with respect to p. But this is not necessarily the case, as the previous example shows.

CASE 4. Now consider opposite readings of (11) and (12), such that one disagrees with (11) by reading it as attributing an authorized group belief and agree with (12) by reading it as attributing an operative group belief. Consider the following response to (11):

> Come on! Only Mark Zuckerberg believes that remote work is less efficient. Most directors on the board and most major shareholders believe that it is efficient. So Facebook definitely believes that remote work is *not* less efficient.

As we can see, the same assertion can be used to ascribe different kinds of group beliefs to the same group. Here is a visual representation of the examples:

Group belief ascriptions	CASE 1	CASE 2	CASE 3	CASE 4
11. Facebook believes that remote work is less efficient.	Authorized group belief	Dominant group belief	Operative group belief	Authorized group belief
12. Facebook believes that remote work is *not* less efficient	Dominant group belief	Authorized group belief	Authorized group belief	Operative group belief

Disagreement about group belief ascriptions is to be expected when it comes to complex groups where there is a power imbalance among group members in determining the position of the group. In groups where all members have equal power, as is often the case with unstructured groups (e.g., the population of Sweden, passengers on a train), their dominant group beliefs are their authorized and operative group beliefs precisely because the opinions of all group members have equal weight in determining the group's position. In more complex groups, as we have seen, the three types of group beliefs differ.

These distinctions not only help explain disagreements we may have when attributing beliefs to complex groups: in more morally loaded cases, distinguishing between different kinds of group beliefs may also be important, for example, in determining individual responsibility (or lack thereof) for a group's position (more on this in §7). Consider the following assertion:

> 13. The police believe that people of color do not "belong" in certain neighborhoods and may be engaged in criminal activity.[31]

[31] From Ramirez et al. (2000: 5).

Suppose activists think that (13) is true. Is (13) true because it is a belief shared by most police officers (dominant group belief), by most highest-ranking officers (operative group belief), or by the chief of police (authorized group belief)? These are important questions to address in the moral domain.

6.5 Unauthorized group beliefs and minority beliefs

As we have seen, authorized group beliefs may coincide with operative and dominant group beliefs when a significant percentage of operative members determine the group's position in the case of the former, or of group members (not just operative members) in the case of the latter. They differ when these conditions are not met.

A particular case of divergence between the dominant and authorized beliefs of a group that is worth examining is the following: the operative and the non-operative members of a group disagree about whether p and the latter clearly outnumber the former, so that their beliefs are significantly dominant relative to the size of the group. We can call such beliefs *unauthorized group beliefs*, which are a type of dominant group beliefs.

Morally loaded cases illustrate again why it is important to distinguish these types of group beliefs: they shed light on cases in which an internal disagreement between many group members who have no power to determine the group's position and a few members who do have that power becomes so disproportionate in numbers that the belief of the unauthorized majority can be said to be a belief of the entire group. Consider one such case.

The Roman Catholic Church is composed of many members and some of them believe that women should play a more significant role in the Church, such as holding office as bishops. Suppose that in the future, among the many members in the lower ranks, the prevailing view is that women should hold office as bishops, while the members in the highest ranks, whose beliefs determine the Roman Catholic doctrine, hold the opposite view. Suppose further that the majority opinion is eventually regarded as heresy by the powerful minority. How is a statement such as 'The Church believes that women should not hold office as bishops' to be evaluated? Disagreement over this assertion is to be expected, and we can now understand why: one could read 'The Church believes' as an attribution of an authorized group belief, so one would agree with it; or one could read it as an attribution of an unauthorized group belief and argue that this is not what the Church believes because most members of the Church believe the opposite, even if they do not have the power to make it the official position (so it should not be considered heresy).

Here is a more precise definition of this type of group beliefs:

> **Unauthorized group belief**: G's belief that p is an unauthorized group belief iff:
>
> (1) some non-operative members of G believe p,
>
> (2) all operative members of G do not believe p (e.g., either disbelieve or suspend on p),
>
> (3) the members of G who satisfy (1) outnumber the members of G who satisfy (2), and
>
> (4) the proportion of members of G who satisfy (1) is enough for the belief that p to be a dominant belief of the group.

In the earlier stages of the intragroup disagreement described above, we might expect that the unauthorized belief that women should hold office as bishops would not be widespread enough among non-operative members of the Church to be considered a belief of the entire group. Once we distinguish unauthorized *group* beliefs, it is natural to also offer a definition for those unauthorized beliefs *within* a

group that cannot yet be considered group beliefs. These are *minority beliefs*. These are cases in which conditions (1) and (2) of the previous definition hold but (4) does not (and (3) may or may not hold), i.e., cases in which there is a group of non-operative members who have an opinion which is in disagreement with the opinion of those who can determine the group's position. Such a subgroup has a minority belief within its group (i.e., not a belief of the whole group), and we can define it as follows:

Unpowered minority belief. The belief that p is an unpowered minority belief in G iff:

(1) some non-operative members of G believe p,

(2) the belief that p is neither an authorized nor an operative belief of G, and

(3) the proportion of members of G who satisfy (1) is *not* enough for the belief that p to be a dominant belief of the group.

The unpowered minority beliefs of a group are typically in disagreement with the beliefs of the group[32], although not necessarily.[33] But minority beliefs may be held not only by non-operative members. Sometimes they are also held by some of those who have the power or authority to determine the group's position. We can further define minority beliefs within the subgroup of operative members as follows:

Empowered minority belief. The belief that p is an empowered minority belief in G iff:

(1) some operative members of G believe p, and

(2) the proportion of members of G who satisfy (1) is *not* enough for the belief that p to be an authorized or operative belief of the group.

Beliefs held by an empowered minority may be shared by non-operative members and may even be unauthorized (i.e., dominant) group beliefs. Moreover, in such cases, they may also be in disagreement with the group's authorized beliefs[34]. Finally, a belief in a group can be minoritarian in both senses simultaneously, and in this sense, we can simply call this belief a minority belief (simpliciter).

7. Independent considerations in favor of pluralistic summativism

Pluralistic summativism, then, is the view that there are at least three kinds of group beliefs: dominant group beliefs (including unauthorized group beliefs), operative group beliefs, and authorized group beliefs. On this view, when the beliefs of all members of a group have equal weight in determining the group's position (as is often the case in unstructured groups), the collective beliefs of such a group are instances of these three types of group beliefs (i.e., the three kinds of group beliefs coincide) . When the former is not the case (as is often the case in functionally organized, structured groups), the group may

[32] The minority of black employees in a company might believe p (namely, that the company should hire more black workers and give them more high-level jobs), while the rest of the employees, including the directors and the CEO, withhold judgment on p. This is a case where a dominant, operative, authorized doxastic attitude of a group is at odds with an unpowered minority belief.

[33] For example, if a minority within a group believes p, but the other group members have never considered the question of whether p, with the result that they have no doxastic attitude toward p (they do not even suspend judgment on p).

[34] Following the example in footnote 32, suppose that this time only the directors and the CEO suspend on p, with the exception of the only two black directors on the large board who believe p. Let us also assume that the rest of the employees also believe in p. This is a case where the operative, authorized doxastic attitude of a group is at odds with an empowered minority belief that is supported by the dominant, unauthorized belief of the group.

have different kinds of group beliefs, as we have seen in examples.[35] This fact explains much of the epistemic life of groups, including certain cases of intragroup disagreement, as well as certain disputes about how we should interpret attributions of group belief to such groups.

In a reflective equilibrium approach, pluralistic summativism not only achieves the same (narrow) reflective equilibrium as classical summativism (i.e., it explains the same points), but it also finds support on independent grounds. For a view reaches a wide reflective equilibrium only if there is a set of arguments or considerations that show that the view is more acceptable than alternatives for reasons that are to some extent independent of the view's conformity to original intuitions and theoretical criteria. The purpose of this section is to explain some such considerations.

1. *No potentially controversial metaphysical commitments.* In contrast to current pluralist views, pluralistic summativism does not assume a potentially controversial taxonomy of group kinds. Instead, it distinguishes group beliefs in terms of balances and imbalances among group members in their capacity to determine the group's position. When a group is such that each member has equal power to determine the group's position (as is often the case in unstructured groups, e.g., the Swedish population), the three distinguished types of group beliefs coincide: dominant, operative, and authorized group beliefs. However, when groups become more complex, with roles and differences in authority and power among group members, certain imbalances arise in that capacity. In such groups, the various types of group beliefs may come apart and coexist.

The upshot is that there is no principled restriction on the kinds of group beliefs that different kinds of groups can have: any kind of group can have any of the three distinguished kinds of group belief. Since the question of how to taxonomize types of groups is controversial in the metaphysics of groups (at least it has not been settled), this is an advantage over competing pluralist views.

2. *Disagreement about group belief ascriptions*. Disagreement about group belief ascriptions (especially those concerning complex groups) is to be expected (§§6.3-6.4). Pluralistic summativism helps explain such linguistic disagreement by distinguishing between three kinds of group beliefs to which a group belief ascription can refer: dominant group beliefs (including unauthorized group beliefs), operative group beliefs, and authorized group beliefs.

3. *Intragroup disagreement*. Distinguishing between these different kinds of group beliefs helps explain much of the epistemic life of groups and the behavior associated with it, including certain kinds of intragroup disagreement. For example, the linguistic disagreements described in §§6.3-6.4 (CASES 1-4) may actually occur as genuine disagreements within groups. For instance, in CASE 1, Facebook's directors and major shareholders (those whose opinions carry enough weight to determine the content of the company's official position) believe that remote work is less efficient, while most employees and small shareholders do not. This intragroup disagreement can be explained by the fact that there are two types of opposing group beliefs in the company: an authorized and a dominant group belief. Thus, a group's authorized beliefs may disagree with its dominant group beliefs (including the special case of unauthorized group beliefs, as the case of the Church in §6.5 shows), but they may also conflict with its operative group beliefs (CASE 3 can be interpreted in this way). Moreover, it is also possible for a group to disagree internally because its dominant group belief (e.g., that of most employees and small

[35] Objection: Doesn't pluralistic summativism imply that a group can believe a known contradiction, p and not-p? Reply: pluralistic summativism does not imply that a group can have *one kind* of group belief in a known contradiction, but that it can have two different kinds of group belief in (knowingly) contradictory propositions. The latter implication is not problematic.

shareholders) disagrees with its operative group belief (e.g., that of most directors and large shareholders).

One might argue that these layers of complexity are not necessary to explain intragroup disagreements. For they may be explained by *inter*group disagreements between subgroups. For example, one might argue that the directors and the employees of a company are two distinct (albeit related) groups that hold opposing beliefs about whether p, which explains why the company internally disagrees about p.[36]

Nevertheless, there are several problems with this proposal. First, it does not account for all cases of intragroup disagreement, such as those in which there is no clear way to divide the group into subgroups. In the example of Facebook, the opinions of employees and small shareholders have no weight in determining the content of the company's views, but the opinions of directors and large shareholders do. On what criterion are members supposed to be divided into subgroups in the event of an internal disagreement: according to whether the group members are (1) employees, directors, or shareholders, which includes *both* small and large shareholders, or according to whether (2) the group members' opinions carry weight in determining the company's position? There is no clear answer to this question.

Second, even if there is a natural way to divide the group into subgroups, the alternative proposal is not able to account for some cases of intragroup disagreement.

EXPERTS 2. Consider a group of 20 members and a situation similar to that described in EXPERTS. The official opinion of the group is p if and only if the doxastic score for p is greater than the doxastic score for not-p. This time, the doxastic score for p is calculated as follows: if an operative member is an expert on the question of whether p, their opinion counts for 2-10 points, depending on their level of expertise (e.g., if a member has the highest level of expertise in the expert group, their opinion counts for 10 points, and 2 points if they have the lowest, and so on); otherwise, if an operative member is not an expert, their opinion counts for 1 point.

There are 10 experts E_1–E_{10} whose opinions on whether p count for the following points: E_1–E_3's opinions each count for 10 points, E_4's opinion counts for 9 points, and E_5–E_{10}'s opinions each count for 2 points. The other 10 operative members are not experts. Suppose that the situation is as follows:

- The expert operative members E_1, E_2, and E_4 believe that p (29 points).
- 2 non-expert operative members believe that p (2 points).
- The expert operative members E_3 and E_5–E_{10} believe that not-p (22 points).
- 8 non-expert operative members believe that not-p (8 points).

Thus, the authorized belief of the group is p (31 points for p vs. 30 points for not-p), while the dominant belief of the group is not-p, since a significant percentage of the group members (75%) believe not-p (including 70% of the experts). In this way we can explain the group's disagreement about p. Now, as the alternative view goes, suppose that we divide the group into two subgroups: the experts and the non-experts. It is difficult to see how the disagreement can be explained. While the non-experts, it could be argued, believe not-p, e.g., on a simple or operative member summative view (all members are operative and 75% believe not-p), the subgroup of experts also believes not-p according to the same view (70% believe not-p).

One could reply that, according to weighted summativism, the expert group believes in p (29 points for p vs. 22 points for non-p), while the non-expert group believes in not-p (2 points for p vs. 8 points for

[36] Thanks to Aidan McGlynn for pressing this point.

not-p). But we can adjust the numbers as we wish (both the scoring rule and the distribution of opinions), so this view also leads to incorrect results. For example (EXPERTS 3), the expert group may suspend on p if there is 1 expert whose belief in p counts for 30 points and 9 experts whose aggregated beliefs in not-p also count for 30 points. Now, if in the subgroup of non-experts 6 members believe that p and 4 believe that not-p, the position of that subgroup becomes p, as does the position of the entire group (and hence its authorized belief). Nevertheless, the group internally disagrees, with 7 members believing p and 13 members believing not-p (so the dominant group belief is not-p). However, it is unclear how this disagreement is supposed to be explained by the alternative proposal, which this time resorts to weighted summativism. For, according to this view, the experts suspend on p while the non-experts believe p. How can a disagreement between two beliefs (in p and in not-p) be explained in terms of suspension vs. belief?

The foregoing considerations illustrate the main problem with the alternative proposal: to explain disagreement within a group by intergroup disagreement between subgroups, one must resort to particular views of group belief, and these views yield the wrong predictions, as shown in the case of summativism. Non-summativism does not fare any better: there are many cases of intragroup disagreement in which one of the subgroups in question is not be able to form the kind of *joint* acceptances or commitments necessary for that subgroup to form beliefs in the non-summative sense—think of any disagreement between a company's board of directors and its employees in which the employees are coerced not to unionize or, in a more extreme case, not even to talk to each other (think of silenced assembly line workers, for example).

Pluralistic summativism is a better view after all. It is surely a complex view, but so are cases of group belief (especially those where there is disagreement within the group).

4. *General theoretical criteria for beliefs and believers*. Since the various kinds of group beliefs are explained summatively, that is, in terms of the individual beliefs of group members (along with the weight they have in determining the position of the group), it will be easier for pluralistic summativism than for non-summativism and all-encompassing pluralism to explain why group beliefs and group believers satisfy the general theoretical criteria for beliefs (e.g., that they are involuntary, aim at truth, are shaped by evidence, etc.) and believers (e.g., the impossibility of being a believer with only one belief, that one believes that p is false when one lies by asserting p, etc.).

5. *Moral evaluation*. Last but not least, with assertions like 'The police believe that people of color do not "belong" in certain neighborhoods and may be engaged in criminal activity' or 'The Church believes that women should not hold office as bishops', we are often interested not only in knowing whether they are true, but also, from a moral point of view, *why* they are true. For example, it makes a moral difference whether these assertions are true because the belief attributed to the group is a dominant, an operative, or an authorized group belief (or perhaps all these together). The reason is that identifying the relevant kind of belief(s) held by a group helps better locate *individual responsibility* (and thus blame) for what the group believes: should operative or non-operative members be held responsible? If the former, should we blame a significant percentage of operative members, or only those whose opinions carry sufficient weight? The pluralist component of the view helps answer these kinds of questions.

The summative component is also helpful in moral evaluation. Regardless of whether one believes there is such a thing as genuinely collective responsibility, we often want to assign individual responsibility for morally wrong collective attitudes, such as racist, sexist, or homophobic group beliefs. It is certainly easier to assign individual responsibility when the collective belief exists because some individual members also hold it. For summativism, individual responsibility for attitudes held by a group when its

individual members do not hold them should be assigned differently than in cases of complete or partial agreement between the attitudes of the group and the attitudes of its members, for in the former cases, on this view, the attitudes are simply not group beliefs but perhaps group acceptances or group decisions. In this way, any moral difference in cases of group belief is essentially to be explained in terms of the beliefs of individual members, while different group attitudes require different standards. If, on the other hand, as non-summativists think, a group can believe a proposition even though none of its members believe it (and even reject it), the assignment of individual responsibility becomes less straightforward. In particular, non-summativists must identify individual factors other than individual beliefs to explain how individual responsibility for a morally wrong belief should be allocated (e.g., the reasons that individual members have for participating in the joint commitments that lead to morally wrong beliefs).[37]

While non-summativists may or may not provide plausible explanations for how individual responsibility for morally wrong group beliefs should be allocated, their views have a further shortcoming when it comes to the moral evaluation of an important subset of group beliefs: those of unstructured groups. Groups with low levels of social integration do not usually make joint commitments to accept propositions as a group, nor do they form collective attitudes through judgment aggregation procedures. Yet we ascribe beliefs to such groups (e.g., ethnic groups, neighborhoods, and other communities), and some of these beliefs have moral valence. For example:

> 14. White people often believe that multicultural / anti-racist education is only necessary for those who interact with "minorities" or in "diverse" environments.[38]

Obviously, an ethnic group such as white people is not socially integrated enough to make joint commitments or use judgment aggregation procedures. Nevertheless, we evaluate their group beliefs in moral terms. Non-summative views are silent on how this should be done, let alone how individual responsibility should be distributed in such groups. In contrast, pluralistic summativism in particular, and summativism in general, provides a clear roadmap for how this should go: to evaluate these group beliefs from a moral perspective, we must evaluate the individual beliefs of their members.

8. Implications for other debates

Group belief is a real phenomenon worthy of philosophical investigation, a phenomenon best explained in pluralist, summative terms following a reflective equilibrium approach. What are the implications of this result for the following two other important questions in social epistemology?

> **Group knowledge question**: In what sense do groups know?
>
> **Group justification question**: In what sense are group beliefs justified?

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[37] The problem of distributing individual responsibility for morally wrong group beliefs is particularly pressing for non-summative views such as List's (2005), which hold that group beliefs are the result of aggregation processes (e.g., majority voting). For illustration, consider cases in which the group relies on a premise-based aggregation process to determine the group's stance (see List 2005 for an example and Lackey 2020 for discussion), but no member believes or accepts the outcome. In these cases, the explanation for a morally wrong outcome (e.g., a racist group attitude) may focus more on what is wrong with the aggregation process rather than what is wrong with the individual beliefs of the group members. In contrast, in cases where the same aggregation process results in a group attitude that reflects the opinions of individual members, more attention may be paid to what is wrong with the latter. However, such a non-summative view, which considers both types of cases as instances of 'group beliefs,' will have a harder time explaining why the group beliefs in question should be evaluated differently from a moral perspective.

[38] From DiAngelo (2011: 66).

Just as we should not assume without argument that there is a single notion of group belief and that the same truth conditions apply uniformly to all group belief ascriptions, so authors responding to these questions should not offer views of group knowledge and justified group belief on the unmotivated assumption that their conditions apply uniformly to all group beliefs. To illustrate, Lackey (2020) holds that justified group belief features a coherentist requirement similar to that of group belief (cf. coherence summativism). However, as I have argued, the beliefs of unstructured groups often do not satisfy this requirement because these groups may include many members with very different epistemic profiles, such that adding the bases of their beliefs is likely to yield a set of beliefs that is substantively incoherent. Nevertheless, we usually attribute beliefs to such groups, indicating that they have beliefs. So either their beliefs are systematically unjustified (that would be the prediction of Lackey's view), or we had better relax the conditions for justified group belief for such groups, opening the door to a pluralistic approach to group justification (e.g., so that some kinds of group beliefs must satisfy the coherentist requirements while others do not). In either case, an adequate account of justified group belief should build on an adequate account of group belief. And the same is plausibly true of group knowledge.[39] [40]

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[39] Unless group knowledge does not entail group belief. See Koscholke (*forthcoming*) for an example.

[40] Many thanks to Aidan McGlynn as well as to audiences in Seville and Barcelona for helpful comments.

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