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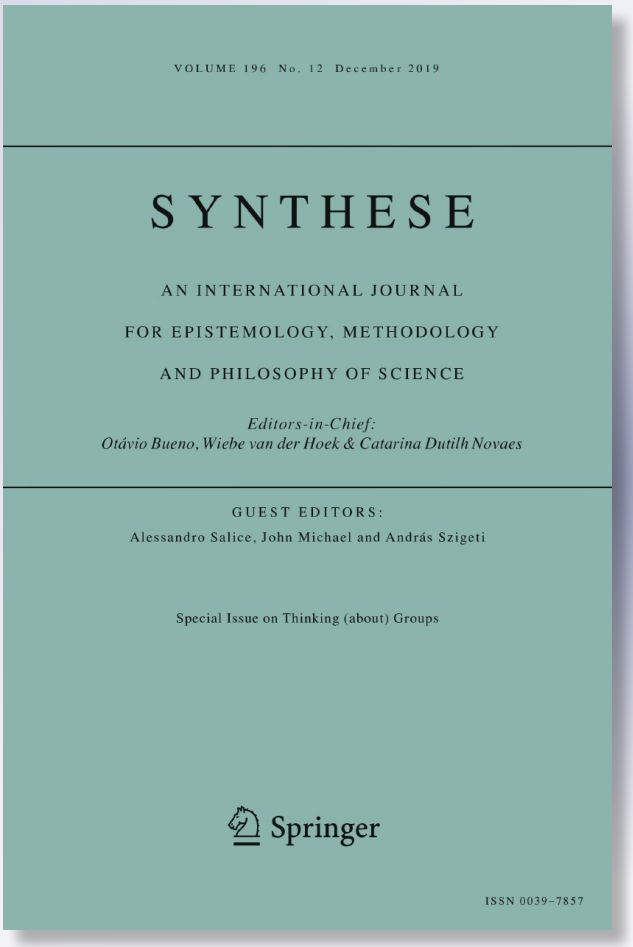

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S.I.: GROUPS

Reminiscing together: joint experiences, epistemic groups, and sense of self

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Abstract In this essay, I consider a kind of social group that I call 'epistemic'. It is constituted by its members' possession of perceptually grounded common knowledge, which endows them with a particular kind of epistemic authority. This authority, I argue, is invoked in the activity of 'joint reminiscing'—of remembering together a past jointly experienced event. Joint reminiscing, in turn, plays an important role in the constitution of social and personal identity. The notion of an epistemic group, then, is a concept that helps explain an important aspect of a subject's understanding of who she is.

Keywords Groups · Joint attention · Common knowledge · Episodic memory · Collective memory

There are many ways in which a collection of persons may qualify as a group, and just as many ways to answer the question of what a group is. In this essay, I consider a kind of social group that I call 'epistemic'. It is constituted by its members' enjoyment of a joint perceptual experience and their possession of perceptually grounded common knowledge, which endows them with a particular kind of epistemic authority. This authority, I argue, is invoked in the activity of 'joint reminiscing'—of remembering together a past jointly experienced event. Joint reminiscing, in turn, plays an important role in the construction of social and personal identity. The notion of an epistemic group, then, is a concept that helps explain an important aspect of a subject's understanding of who she is.

The essay is organised as follows. After some introductory remarks (Sect. 1), I introduce an example of an epistemic group from Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*

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that will be used throughout the text to illustrate my various points (Sect. 2). This is followed by an account of joint experiences and perceptual common knowledge (Sect. 3). I then ask how we should think about the kind of memory that underwrites the activity of joint reminiscing about a jointly experienced past, and substantiate the notion of an epistemic group (Sect. 4). In a last step (Sect. 5), I develop the idea that the activity of remembering together joint past events plays a crucial role in shaping their subjects' sense of self. The essay ends with some brief remarks on the notion of collective memory.

1 I

One can distinguish, very roughly, between two kinds of groups.[1] One can, firstly, group people together by drawing on some (often, though not necessarily, publicly observable) characteristic that they share, whether or not they know that they do. The OED recognizes this when it offers the following definition of a social group:

> A number of people who are classified together on the basis of certain shared characteristics; each of a number of categories or divisions of people within a larger set, population, etc. (OED Online, "group, n.", 2015)

Call this sort of collective an 'extrinsically specified' (or, for short, 'extrinsic') group. The characteristic that makes someone a member of an extrinsic group can be named without reference to the corresponding characteristic of other group members. It is just that two subjects have the same specific characteristic and are classified in terms of it.

One can, secondly, group people together on the basis of mental characteristics that are shared in a more substantive sense than merely being displayed by all members of the collective. You might think that Gilbert's (1990) 'plural subjects' or agents who entertain a collective intention of the kind described by Bratman (1992) qualify as groups. The OED recognizes such groups in a second definition:

> A number of people who associate together for social or professional reasons, or who are linked by a common interest or purpose. (OED Online, "group, n.", 2015)

This kind of group is what I call 'intrinsically specified' (or, for short, 'intrinsic'). The key feature that characterises intrinsic groups is captured by the term 'together' in the above definition. The subjects who are 'linked by a common purpose' each are in a mental state that is individuated relative to the corresponding mental states of the other group members. For instance, each of the members of a Gilbertian plural subject has 'offered his will to be part of a pool of wills that is dedicated, as one' (1990, p. 185) to the pursuit of a shared goal. You could not spell out the goal of any of these members without reference to the goal of the other members. Similarly for

[1] I sometimes talk about 'groups' and sometimes about 'social groups' in this text. In both cases, I mean groups whose constituents are people, or at any rate (in the case of what I call 'intrinsic groups') beings able to enjoy collective mental phenomena (see Leavens 2011 for an argument that non-human primates are capable of joint attention). A dyad of two people can constitute a group for my purposes.

Bratman's account of shared cooperative activities: for us to be involved in such an activity, each of us has to 'intend that we perform the (cooperatively neutral) joint action' (1992, p. 331). Again, you could not name the content of my intention ['we perform…'] without referencing yours, and vice versa.

Although a burgeoning literature treats intentions as the defining feature of the members of intrinsic groups, not all such groups begin with a 'common interest or purpose'. In this essay I pursue the idea that one very basic kind of intrinsic group is constituted by a particular kind of experience and the common knowledge it grounds.[2] It is a delicate kind, but it is not therefore some fringe phenomenon. It is, I think, ubiquitous, and it plays a significant role in our constitution as social beings. Members of such groups stand in a triadic epistemic constellation that comes into existence when they are looking at some object, or participating in some event, together.[3] This, so the idea, bestows upon them a particular kind of authority. They are, as joint subjects in the constellation, in a privileged position with regard to the justification of claims about the observed event, including their own role in it. This epistemic authority, I argue, is crucial for the activity of joint reminiscing, the attempt to reconstruct a past event together with others who also were part of it. On this view, what is often called 'joint attention' in the philosophical and psychological literature is not only relevant in the context of a range of questions in epistemology and developmental and comparative psychology. It is relevant also as an important factor in the constitution of joint perceivers' and agents' sense of self.

These remarks are no doubt nebulous; I hope to fill them in as we go along. But before doing so, it will be useful to have a concrete example at hand.

2 II

In Mann's (1902/1955) family epos *Buddenbrooks*, a conversation takes place between Antonie Permaneder, *née* Buddenbrook, and the Consul Hermann Hagenström, on the occasion of his purchase of the Buddenbrooks' splendid, if slightly tatty, family residence. The conversation picks up on a long-ago incident that occurred when both protagonists were children and Hermann tried to trade a sandwich for a kiss with Toni. She rejected him, partly because of plain antipathy but also, and intertwined with that sentiment, because the Hagenströms were then upstarts in the Hanse Town of Lübeck, newcomers seen as vulgar by the patrician merchant family Buddenbrook. The tables have since turned: the sale of the house is necessitated by the economic and biological decline of the Buddenbrooks, while the Hagenströms have prospered and are overtaking their old rivals financially, socially, and also in sheer health and family size. Toni herself has not fared well; she has suffered two failed marriages and has been living with her recently deceased mother in the house that is now for sale.

[2] I shall say that joint experiences 'ground' or 'make available' common knowledge. I merely mean here that the subjects of these experiences enjoy the relevant common knowledge in virtue of their joint experiences. I adopt no particular view on how to substantiate this 'in virtue' relation.

[3] The idea that the epistemic constellation in episodes of joint visual attention is irreducibly triadic is developed in Campbell (2005, 2011).

> …he [Hermann Hagenström, A.S.] came back to the growing up of the family, and to their narrow quarters. "Yes, this is something else entirely," he said. "I've seen that already, on the way upstairs. This house is a pearl, certainly a pearl – if you can compare anything so large with anything so small, ha, ha! Why, even the hangings here – I own up to having had my eye on the hangings all the time I've been talking. A most charming room – in fact. When I think that you've passed all your life in these surroundings – in fact –"
> "With some interruptions," said Frau Permaneder, in that extraordinarily throaty voice of which she sometimes availed herself.
> "Oh, yes, interruptions," repeated the Consul, with a civil smile. Then he glanced at Senator Buddenbrook and the broker; and, as those gentlemen were in conversation together, he drew up his chair to Frau Permaneder's sofa and leaned toward her, so that she felt his heavy breathing close under her nose. Being too polite to turn away, she sat as stiff and erect as possible and looked down at him under her drooping lids. But he was quite unconscious of her discomfort.
> "Let me see, my dear Madame Permaneder," he said. "Seems to me we've done business together before now. In fact – what was it we were dickering over then? Sweetmeats, wasn't it, or tit-bits of some sort – and now a whole house!"
> "I don't remember," said Frau Permaneder. She held her neck as stiff as she could, for his face was really disgustingly, indecently near.
> "You don't remember?"
> "No, really, I don't remember anything at all about sweetmeats. I have a sort of hazy recollection of lemon-buns, with sausage on top – some disgusting sort of school luncheon – I don't know whether it was yours or mine. We were all children then. – But this matter of the house is entirely Herr Gosch's [the broker, A.S.] affair. I have nothing to do with it."
> She gave her brother a quick, grateful look, for he had seen her need and came to the rescue by asking if the gentlemen were ready to make the round of the house. (Mann 1955, pp. 485–486)

The description of this conversation is the account of a failed attempt at joint reminiscing, and through it the establishment of a particular kind of connection: the Consul, keen to revisit the past episode, even moves his chair closer to Toni in his desire for intimacy. But she rejects him, as she has in the past: she initially denies remembering the event altogether and, when pressed, purports to be unable to recall what sort of food was being proffered. What really is at stake here, though, is not the question of the kind of luncheon that Hagenström tried to trade for a kiss. What is at stake is that Toni refused the social upstart who is now buying her out of her childhood home and attempts to utilize this purchase to cure the embarrassment he once suffered at her hands. But the attempt derails, as his advances have in the past. Toni denies him recognition now as much as ever, and the two families' reversal of fortune does nothing to change that.

This episode is instructive because it illustrates what I mean by the notion of an epistemic group. The Consul's attempt to reminisce with Toni about their shared past derails, but the social unit they form in virtue of it uncomfortably persists: only thus can her rebuke matter so much to him. Thinking about why this is so will shed light,

I hope, on the nature of an epistemic group. Before I can attempt that task, though, some remarks are in order about what I call 'joint experiences'.

3 III

Joint reminiscing is about past joint experiences. We can, of course, think of episodes of shared remembrance, for instance on Armistice Day, that do not build on an original action or event that the remembering subjects carried out or witnessed together. But these are not, for present purposes, the relevant kinds of events. What I am interested in are episodes in which the joint retelling of a shared past has consequences for the way in which the participants see themselves in the present. The constitution of their social identities begins not only when they recall, revisit, and reconstruct the joint event. It begins with that event itself, and it is only because joint events have the epistemic structure they do that their subjects can reminisce about them in an identity-shaping way. I briefly highlight three key features of joint experiences.

3.1 Joint experiences and common knowledge

It is notoriously difficult to say what conditions a set of experiences has to meet to qualify as shared.[4] In the classic case (Schiffer 1972) a candle is placed on the table between us (I will call this scenario 'Candle' in what follows). As long as we are normally sighted, each of us will enjoy a perceptual experience that presents both the candle we are attending to and also, perhaps less prominently, the other person. You might think that this is an obvious example of two subjects' perceptual experiences being joint. But what feature of 'Candle' is responsible for their jointness? It cannot merely be the fact that the two subjects are looking at the same candle. It is essential for the shared character of two subjects' perceptions that each subject feature in the other's experience. Yet that requirement is still not sufficient. You can, with some difficulty, imagine a case in which I see you looking at the candle, and you see me looking at the same candle, without our experiences being shared. For instance, we might be sitting next to each other, both seeing the candle but with a transparent screen between us that each of us mistakenly believes to be blocking the other person's visual access. Here each of us enjoys an experience that presents the other person looking at the candle, but our experiences are not, intuitively, joint. What is missing is the dependency relation: we are not, after all, looking at the candle *together*.

The usual way to spell out this dependency relation is by appeal to the common knowledge that pairs of joint experiences make available. In 'Candle' we can commonly know, in virtue of our respective experiences, that there is a candle on the table, and that each of us knows that there is a candle on the table. Our respective experiences thus put us in a position to know not only propositions about the external world, but

[4] See the chapters in Eilan et al. (2005), Seemann (2011), and Metcalfe and Terrace (2013) for recent discussions.

also propositions about what each of us knows about our knowledge of the world.[5] So one kind of knowledge that joint experiences ground is social: they make available, to each perceiver, knowledge about the epistemic state of the other subject.

This way of getting a grip on the question of what makes a pair of experiences joint raises a number of important questions. Among these are whether the proposal commits you to the idea that *only* pairs of experiences that ground common knowledge can qualify as joint, and whether it commits you to the idea that joint experiences must have conceptual content. Addressing these questions is well beyond the reach of the present paper, however, and fortunately not necessary for thinking about epistemic groups.

3.2 The epistemic authority of joint subjects

Despite the apparent complexity of perceptually grounded common knowledge, joint experiences are utterly pedestrian. We enjoy them whenever we look at some object together and are thus able to point out its features to each other. Pointing plays an important role in our cognitive lives, and for good reason. When we point at or otherwise demonstratively appeal to the perceptual characteristics of a jointly perceived object, we enjoy a position of epistemic authority. After all, we are both seeing the object, and both know that we do. So we are in a privileged position to evaluate claims about the perceptual properties of the thing. Compare 'Candle' with a scenario in which we are playing a game of Scrabble. Our rule is that any word in the dictionary may be used to score points. We have a copy of the dictionary, so we can always look up whether a candidate word is mentioned in it. In 'Scrabble', there can be no doubt about the justification for our choice of words. If you don't believe me that a given word exists, I can simply show it to you in the dictionary, and that settles the matter. 'Candle', on the present account, is just like that: because the candle is visible to us both, and we know that it is, we can always justify our perceptual claims by appeal to its perceived properties.

The obvious objection is that experience can misrepresent the perceptual properties of its objects. Perhaps your eyesight is weak and the candle therefore doesn't look as it is to you; perhaps we are both seeing it through a pane of glass that distorts its shape. In that case, pointing out the apparent perceptual characteristics of the jointly perceived object won't help: demonstration does not remedy misperception. But this consideration does not undermine the epistemic privilege of joint perceivers. On the contrary, it is precisely this privilege that allows us to discuss and evaluate the relevant perceptual claims. It is because we are jointly perceiving the object, and commonly know that we do, that the other person's disagreement is a role of concern; if you didn't look at the object with me, you would simply have no evidence with which to justify your perceptual claims. The subjects of joint experiences are in a position of authority with regard to the evaluation of a range of claims about the triadic constellation that

[5] There is a recent discussion about the relation between joint attention and common knowledge (Campbell 2005; Peacocke 2005; Wilby 2010) that focuses on the problem posed by the infinite iterations it generates. This problem is not at the heart of the present argument.

they help constitute because they possess common knowledge that provides them with the evidence needed to justify these claims.

3.3 The triadic structure of epistemic groups

There is a structural similarity between the subjects of a pair of joint experiences and the agents who jointly pursue a cooperative activity. This similarity allows us to think of them both as members of intrinsic groups. In each case, the subjects stand in a particular relation to each other: they have in common a characteristic that can only be spelled out by reference to the corresponding feature (or features) of the other group member (or members). Just as I cannot constitute a plural subject or pursue a collective activity on my own, so I cannot have a joint experience by myself. As soon as you capture the jointness of a pair of experiences in terms of the common knowledge they make available, this conclusion is unavoidable. After all, common knowledge requires, by definition, two subjects.

But there are also important differences. The subjects of a collective intention share (in the sense discussed) a mental state, but what is shared between the subjects of a pair of joint experiences is not adequately described as a mental state. Joint experiences, on the present view, necessarily involve the environment.[6] You could not spell out the relation between the two subjects in terms of the common knowledge grounded by their experiences if there were not an actual object that is jointly perceived by both. There could not, for instance, be a joint hallucination, since in that case you could not have common knowledge of the presented scene. Joint experiences thus necessarily have three constituents: the two (or, on occasion, more) joint perceivers and the perceived object or scene.

The triadic character of joint experiences is important for the purposes of this paper. It gets obscured easily in the philosophical discussion of perception-based common knowledge. In that discussion, the subjects play the role of passive perceivers and knowers who look at the jointly perceived object and thus come to know propositions about that object and about what they know about their knowledge. But real-life joint experiences very rarely (if ever) are static perceptual events.[7] Some recent writers suggest, plausibly to my mind, that they are better conceived as temporally extended processes (Hobson and Hobson 2011; Reddy 2011).[8] When we are jointly looking at an object, we are usually able to (and often do) point out the object of our attention to each other. We can direct each other's focus to particular aspects of the scene we are considering. That we are able to thus interact with each other is important not just for the metaphysics of joint experiences. It is important also for the question of the scope of the epistemic authority that is enjoyed by their subjects. Subjects of perceptually acquired common knowledge are not only perceivers but also agents who shape the experiences of those others with whom they attend to objects in their environment. As

[6] For alternative, intentionalist accounts see Peacocke (2005) and Schmitz (2014).

[7] You may, of course, think, that perception is never a static event (e.g., Noe 2004).

[8] Although I will keep calling (for stylistic reasons) joint processes 'events' in what follows, I don't mean to thereby suggest that they are occurrences without temporal extension.

such, their role in the constitution of the joint event can itself become the topic of a discussion in which these subjects are epistemically privileged.

3.4 'Jointness' and intersubjectivity

Joint experiences play out between persons (human or not) who stand in a particular relation to each other. By focusing on the notion of common knowledge, I have been stressing this relation's epistemic dimension. You may worry (as a reviewer for this journal did) that this way of approaching the notion of 'jointness' fails to pay tribute to what is sometimes called the 'intersubjective' aspect of the relation; the attunement of feelings and emotions that play a crucial role in human interaction. The worry is particularly pertinent because I am interested in the role of joint experiences, and their subjects' memories thereof, in the construction of a social kind of identity. In the dialogue between Toni and the Consul, the debate about what is jointly perceived really serves as an opener and stand-in for the negotiation of the protagonists' social positions, in the light of what has happened to and between them. It is undeniable that this negotiation is very much concerned with quite raw, and powerful, feelings and emotions, and that these subjective attitudes are an important part of the relation between Toni, the Consul, and what they saw and did together. It is also widely accepted that the capacity to jointly attend to objects with others is acquired by a motivation to share an interest in objects with others (Carpenter and Liebal 2011) and that what Hobson and Hobson (2005, p. 188) describes as 'a special interpersonal engagement involving feelings' is indispensible for a complete characterization of secondary intersubjectivity. Am I not missing out on this rich social tapestry by stressing so strongly the perceptual aspect of joint experience?

Consider the argument I am developing. The argument is that joint experiences bestow a particular kind of epistemic authority on their subjects; that the subjects form an epistemic group in virtue of this authority; and that joint reminiscing draws, in a way I have not yet spelled out, on it to maintain epistemic collectives over time and to shape the social and personal identity of its subjects. In cases in which it is a social event and not just an object that is jointly experienced, the group members' authority extends beyond claims about perceptual objects, to include claims about the subjects' role in the events they help constitute. Toni and the Consul have special expertise not only with regard to the nature of the object they traded, but also with regard to what happened and what each of them did. In the *Buddenbrook* case, what they did, and what they are negotiating now, is charged with feelings and emotions. But these subjective attitudes, which are what really matters in their discussion, aren't being spelled out; they form the subtext of a conversation that, on the face of it, is about a school luncheon. There is a good reason for that: social recognition and the emotions associated with its denial are not the sorts of things over which the subjects of a joint episode have epistemic authority. There is nothing they could point out to each other, in the manner of the reference to dictionary entries in 'Scrabble', to settle contested claims in that domain. The special authority of the subjects of a jointly experienced social event extends to claims about what they demonstrably did, but not to claims

about how they felt. What is jointly perceived is, after all, the visual dimension of the event.

This, then, is the reason for focusing on the perceptual authority of joint perceivers: they are in a privileged position with regard to the justification of a range of claims about the jointly perceived scene because they saw it together, in a way that enables them to settle contested claims about it by pointing out its relevant features to each other. But this is not to say that the much less tangible, subjective and intersubjective dimension of joint encounters doesn't matter. On the contrary, it is this dimension that makes many joint encounters meaningful. And it is this dimension, ever-present though rarely articulated, that explains why joint experiences and joint reminiscences can be so important for the constitution, and negotiation, of their subjects' social sense of self.[9]

4 IV

4.1 Joint reminiscing

The social relevance of joint events will typically be fully apparent only after they have occurred. This is particularly obvious for events with political or autobiographical import. The marchers through the Brandenburg Gate during the Fall of the Berlin Wall in October 1989 could not then have been in a position to assess the full importance of the event of which they were part; it was, after all, possible that the border crossings between East and West Germany would be closed again very swiftly. And Toni Buddenbrook could not have known, when refusing Hermann Hagenström's advances, that her suitor would buy her out of house and home decades later. So there is an important question about the place of joint events in their participants' memories.

I call 'joint reminiscing' the activity of remembering a past joint event together with the people who helped constitute it. Reese and Farrant (2003), from whom I borrow the notion of 'reminiscing', stress the autobiographical relevance of talking about the past with others. As a first approximation, we can say that joint reminiscing contributes to its subjects' present-day self-understanding by drawing on their shared memories of a past event of which they were part. This raises the question of how to think of such memories. The participants' memories of a joint past event are importantly authoritative: that the subjects jointly enjoyed a (perceptual and agentive) experience of past events puts them in a privileged epistemic position with regard to the evaluation

[9] Schmitz (2014) distinguishes between 'merely mutual' and 'genuine joint' attention. The former is the perceptual phenomenon that can lead to common knowledge about the jointly perceived environment. The latter involves 'a prosocial motivation to share an object'. He claims that 'any attempt to treat joint attention as a merely perceptual, purely cognitive phenomenon must fail'. I agree. But much depends on which aspect of this rich and complex phenomenon is at stake; whether, for instance, we are interested in the question of how the capacity for joint attention develops in human infants, or whether we want to know what the epistemic role of joint perceptual attention is in the acquisition of common knowledge. These are very different concerns, and you can, I think, legitimately (as e.g., Schiffer 1972, Campbell 2005, 2011, or Peacocke 2005 do) focus on their epistemic function without considering their intersubjective dimension. You are not thereby committed to the view that prosocial motivations are irrelevant for a complete account of joint attention.

of present-day accounts of what happened and their role in it. What gives Toni the right to contest Hagenström's rendering of their childhood transaction is precisely that she was there with him.

The kind of memory that can put the subjects of a pair of joint experiences in a position of epistemic authority is episodic. Episodic memories are retained memories of particular events that the subject originally experienced and is able to explicitly recall, so as to be able to 'travel back into the past' (Tulving 1983, p. 1) in her own mind. Michael Martin suggests that it provides its subjects with a 'retained acquaintance with a past happening' (2001, p. 267). This view avoids, he argues, a dilemma arising for theories that take their cue from the Russellian notion of memory as 'acquaintance with the past'. On the one hand, one's memory of a past episode could not be presenting the past episode as occurring now, in the moment of remembrance: if it did, there would be no sense of the memory as being about the past. If, on the other hand, the present memory has a distinct phenomenology *as* being about the past, then the connection with the earlier experience is severed: one then loses all grip on the distinction between imagining and remembering a past event. Martin's proposal is to think of the content of episodic memory as a representation that originated in the original episode. Then, he argues, we can accommodate the distinction between imagining a past event and recalling it: only memory links the subject to what is being remembered. You could then not be in your current state without the earlier event that you are recalling, even though the memory does not share the original episode's phenomenal characteristics (Martin 2001, p. 277).

This may strike you as a plausible account of episodic memory. It is well suited to explain the authority of subjects with regard to claims about their past: because the representation of the memory preserves its subject's contact with what happened then, she maintains the expertise that she acquired as an original witness of the past event that is now under scrutiny. The problem is that it is hard to see how the account could be made to work for the memory of jointly experienced events. Recall the parallel I drew between the epistemic position of subjects in joint perceptual scenarios and that of the subjects in 'Scrabble'. In both cases, the epistemic constellation allows the subjects to settle contested claims simply by pointing out relevant facts to each other. If you don't believe me that a given word exists, I can show you the entry in the dictionary. If Toni doesn't believe that Hermann really has brought the promised lemon bun, he can show her the contents of his lunch box. Subjects in joint constellations can point out the relevant facts to each other because these facts are publicly accessible.

It is just this feature that is lost when the event is remembered. I cannot produce evidence, of the kind available in 'Scrabble', if we are debating a past jointly experienced event. Whether you were there with me or not is irrelevant as far as our perceptual evidence is concerned: all I can offer is my memory of what has happened, which may or may not be consistent with yours. My memory of the event does not confer on me the kind of epistemic privilege each of us has in an occurrent experience that I enjoy jointly with you: it does not enable me to make accessible facts about the event to you.

Compare this situation with the justification of a belief about a past event that I witnessed by myself. If I justify a claim about this event by appeal to my past experience of it, I am not invoking evidence that is publicly accessible either; after all, you didn't see what happened. But by saying that I know that p because I saw that

p, I am nevertheless doing more than simply appealing to authority. Recognising this makes intelligible the importance courts ascribe to eyewitness accounts of contested events. Taking your cue from Martin's view, you could say that what explains the justificatory power of eyewitness accounts is the recognition that subjects of past perceptual experiences retain a direct connection with the past event that is preserved through their representation of it.

It is just this kind of explanation that is not available in the justification of claims about jointly witnessed events. I can, of course, appeal to my presence at the jointly perceived event in the same way in which this is possible in individual cases. Toni can appeal to her retained experience of the past event to justify her belief that it was a lemon bun Hermann attempted to trade with her. What she cannot do, though, is directly justify her claim *to him*, in the way she could in the original event. There is a fundamental epistemic asymmetry between joint perceptual events and their subjects' memories of them that does not exist in the individual case. The justificatory power of a single subject's appeal to her occurrent perceptual experience is of the same kind as the power of her appeal to her memory of the event, because the representation of the past event originates in the original experience and thus retains the link between the subject and the past. By contrast, the justificatory power of a subject's appeal to an occurrent joint experience is fundamentally distinct from the subject's memory of it. In the occurrent case, I can highlight facts about the environment to justify my beliefs about it by pointing them out to you; in the case of a memory of it, I can only appeal to my own past experience. As far as after-the-fact justification goes, the presence of the other person at the past event does not play a special role. If you take it, plausibly to my mind, that it is the 'retained acquaintance with the past' that confers justificatory relevance on appeals to past experience, this acquaintance cannot be of a joint kind. There could not be any travelling, in one's own mind, to a shared past, precisely because one could not access the joint character of that past.

The claim here is not that I am in principle unable to remember what we saw, or did, in the past; such a claim would obviously be absurd. The claim is that I could not *episodically* recall a joint event, in the sense of retaining, in memory, the joint experience of it. I can, of course, have a semantic memory of it: I may be able to remember, for instance, that we sat at a table in a restaurant and that there was a candle between us. And I can have an episodic memory that retains my acquaintance with the past event and that makes my claims about what happened amount to more than appeals to authority. What is not available is a memory that preserves the particular epistemic power of the original joint episode: the constellation that allows each of the subjects to point out facts about what is jointly experienced to each other.

So we are now faced with a different kind of dilemma: either we accept that subjects' memories of a joint past event do not amount to a present-day joint acquaintance with what happened, and thus do not bestow upon them the particular epistemic power that they enjoyed in the original experience; then there is nothing *particular* to subjects' justifications of claims about past jointly witnessed events, even if these justifications are addressed at other witnesses of (or participants in) the original episode. Or we insist that people who jointly reminisce about a shared past are better placed, epistemically, than subjects who appeal to their individual past experience of some event in order to justify claims about it; then it is mysterious why this should be so.

I think that this dilemma is at the heart of the situation in which the subject of a memory about the joint past finds herself. Since memory presents its contents as factual (like perception, memory could not present to you an event as not having taken place), the subject of a remembrance of a past joint episode cannot but take it, counterfactually, that her memory of the event represents it in such a way that, were the event originally experienced, she *could* simply point out the relevant facts to her joint perceiver. Toni remembers a lemon bun being traded, and this means that she remembers the original episode so that she *could* point out to Hermann that that's what he has in his lunch box, were she to travel back, in her mind, to her childhood. That her memory is of a joint episode suggests to her, invariably, that she is in a privileged epistemic position *vis-à-vis* Hermann with regard to claims about the jointly experienced event. But she isn't: memory, as an individual's representation of the past, does not retain the epistemic power of joint experience.

The activity of joint reminiscing can be seen as the collective attempt to overcome the dilemma, by construing a present-day account that connects its subjects to what happened, in such a way that the epistemic power bestowed on its subjects by the original joint experience is retained; that its subjects can, by appealing to the memory of the event, directly justify to each other a range of claims about what happened. Joint reminiscing, on this view, has as its goal something that is, strictly speaking, impossible: it aims at a retained acquaintance with a shared past. It is not merely concerned with the expression, and discussion, of knowledge claims about a past event. Its purpose goes far beyond that: when we jointly reminisce we try to conjure up, however imperfectly, a shared past that no single individual can episodically recall on her own.

4.2 Epistemic groups

At the beginning of this essay I introduced the notion of an epistemic group. Such collectives, I said, are particular kinds of intrinsic groups—assemblies of persons who are linked by mental states that are individuated relative to the mental states of other group members. I suggested that such groups can be constituted not only by persons who entertain, and act on, joint intentions, but also by those who jointly experience a particular event and thus come to commonly know facts about it. I also highlighted the peculiar, and complex, relation between joint experiences and the activity of jointly reminiscing about such experiences. My claim was that the participant in an episode of joint reminiscing about a shared past found herself in a dilemma: on the one hand, she could not but take it that the memory of the event bestowed on her an epistemic privilege; on the other hand, this privilege could not be akin to that of the participant in a joint episode, since her individual memory of the event did not put her in a position to justify claims about it by pointing out the relevant facts to her former joint perceiver.

The question now is where that leaves us with regard to the question of an epistemic group. By the lights of this essay, Toni and the Consul formed an epistemic group when, decades ago, he attempted to trade his lemon bun for her kiss. But what about the present-day reminiscence, forcefully pursued by Hagenström but barely allowed

by Toni? Does she still form a group with the Consul; or, if not, would she if their exchange were of a more amiable kind?

I don't think that hard-and-fast answers are possible or even desirable here. The conversation between Toni and Hermann is so rich precisely because it trades on an unarticulated subtext that provides it with a meaning far beyond the question of what kind of food was at stake. In a way, the group theorist here is faced with just the same dilemma as the participant in an episode of joint reminiscing: the shared past does bestow a particular authority on its subjects, who thus come to constitute a group, with regard to claims about it; but they cannot now justify these claims in the immediate way they could back then. The connection between Toni and the Consul that makes them a group is of an uneasy, ambiguous nature, and it has nothing to do with shared goals of any kind (quite the contrary); but it is no less powerful for that.

5 V

5.1 Self-awareness

The activity of joint reminiscing is autobiographically important: because our present-day sense of self is informed by our memories of the past, and because this past is constituted, in parts, by the other people with whom we shared it, their account of what happened matters for our understanding of who we are.[10] In the scene from the *Buddenbrooks*, the question of the present-day connection between Toni and the Consul depends on how they see themselves, and each other, as individual agents in the past event that the discussion is, overtly, about. Hermann presents an account of the two protagonists as keen traders, participants in a negotiation that seamlessly carries over into the present-day sale of Toni's house. He paints the two of them as social equals whose shared interests connect their past and present selves. Toni, by contrast, plays down the past interaction that she'd prefer to altogether forget, and denies absolutely any link between that event and the present-day occasion. In her version, who she was then and who she is now has nothing to do with Hagenström and his advances; in his version, his present-day appearance in her house is legitimised not so much by his wealth but by the amicable terms on which he has always been with her.

The striking feature of the scenario is the role the past joint event plays in the constitution of its participants' sense of who they are, or want to be. It serves as a foil of which each of them makes liberal use so as to suit their respective purposes. On the account developed in this paper, there is a good reason why the shared past invites the subjects to use it in this way: since there can be no retained joint acquaintance with a shared past, claims about it cannot be justified in the immediate way that was available in the original episode. But since both subjects nevertheless individually remember what happened, each of them attempts to present her version of it, and

[10] The essays collected in Fivush and Haden (2003) expand on the role of social memory in the constitution of an autobiographical sense of self from cultural and developmental viewpoints.

particularly those of its aspects that bear on their respective present-day senses of self, as authoritative to the other.

The role of the past in episodes of joint reminiscing, and the construal of social and personal identity it serves, is made vivid in Kiper's (2015) essay 'Hope is the Enemy', in which she describes her experience as a live-in carer for Mr. Schecter, an elderly dementia sufferer. As he increasingly loses his grip on the present, he shares with her, over and over again, his rapidly fading memories of the distant past—of Warsaw where he had lived before the war, his parents, his brother into whom he ran miraculously in the Siberian forest while they were interned in separate camps and who died from pneumonia six months later. One insight Kiper draws from her experience is how powerful the social function of memory can be. She highlights Mr. Schecter's reliance on her for reassurance of his own existence in the face about his memory loss, and how his memories in turn 'seeped into' her, 'becoming part of my own mnemonic repertoire, until I felt that his world and mine formed a collective reality' (Kiper 2015, pp. 44–45).

The peculiar characteristic of Kiper's situation is that even though she does not share a past with Mr. Schecter, he anchors his own past experiences in her through the stories he tells her about what happened, in ever-shorter loops. He creates, somewhat paradoxically, a present that is defined by his rapidly fading remembrance of the past. And because she occupies a prominent (though itself often forgotten) place in this present, she thereby becomes part of Mr. Schecter's past—not because he falsely remembers her as featuring in it, but because his present becomes what he recalls about the past. His sense not only of who he is now, but also of who he was then, is thus maintained in relation to her. Conversely, her own sense of self is influenced by his memories, which come to define the period she spends in Mr. Schecter's home.

In a way, this scenario is the reversal of joint reminiscing. We jointly reminisce when we reconstruct a shared past so as to achieve a rendering that does justice to both of our retained apprehensions of what happened. Mr. Schecter, by contrast, builds a shared present by reminiscing about his past to a person who was not part of the original events. But, just as in *Buddenbrooks*, he uses his memory of the past to construct (and maintain) a present-day sense of self, by relating it to his listener. It doesn't matter, really, whether his account is accurate, and even if Kiper had been there with him its accuracy would not have been decisive. The role of the past in establishing a social sense of self is that of a foil for a story that plays out in the present: this is true both for the case of a shared past, as in Toni's and Hermann's barter, and for the case of a past that is related to an audience who did not witness what originally happened. What does matter is that there be a second person to whom the account of the past is narrated: without that person, there could be no joint reminiscing. But without that person, there could also not be the kind of remembrance that allows Mr. Schecter to externalize his memories and thus retain a sense of who he is, however fragile it may be, in the face of his memory loss. In both cases, the presence of the other person plays a constitutive role in the subject's understanding of a past event, its present retelling, and her own role in it.[11]

[11] I have been focusing here on cases in which the activity of joint reminiscing plays an important role in the formation of their subjects' socially constituted sense of self. But, as a reviewer pointed out, there can

5.2 Epistemic groups and collective memory

I have argued that joint reminiscing plays an important, if delicate, role in the maintenance of epistemic groups. To end this chapter, I want to point out how realizing this role can help with a problem that is discussed in the literature about 'collective memory'. Wertsch and Roediger (2008, p. 318) understand it as 'a form of memory that transcends individuals and is shared by a group'. If so, there arises the question of where to situate it: it can't, going by this definition, exist 'in individuals' heads', but it isn't illuminating either to simply ascribe it to the 'group', at least as long as you don't spell out what exactly you mean by that term. The notion of a 'group mind' or a 'collective consciousness' is ontologically problematic unless you can explain how it relates to the minds, and memories, of the individuals who constitute it.[12]

The account developed in this paper may be useful here: it suggests that joint reminiscing is the activity, by the members of an epistemic group, of jointly telling a story about a joint past event. This does not amount to anything very mysterious: there is no 'group mind' at work when Hermann tries to trade his breakfast sandwich for a kiss from Toni, or when he tries to reminisce about the event with her. It is just that his apprehension of the event depends on her role in and experience of it, and vice versa. That she is tempted by the lemon bun but abhors him, both physically and socially, is crucial for an adequate rendering of his experience of the episode. Conversely, you could not describe her experience of the attempted trade without describing his keenness, the unappetizing mix of erotic and material desires, that prompts her to reject him so absolutely. The collective aspect of the episode, and the social memory of it, resides in this constitutive, and epistemically significant, relation between the two protagonists' experiences of the event. It is this relation that, on the view developed here, we attempt to recover in our joint reminiscing about the past. We form an epistemic group by becoming anchored in one another's minds, and can remain so long after the events that achieved this are over. But although we would not be who we are if it weren't for this relation that ties us to each other, we yet remain individuals, with distinct, and on occasion irreconcilable, memories of the events we helped constitute.

Footnote 11 continued
be episodes of collectively recalling an event that was witnessed simultaneously, though not jointly (e.g., the collective recall of a car accident that each subject saw individually). In such cases, there is no social aspect to the original event, and it is for this reason that its collective retelling cannot shape the participants' social identities in the way in which the two cases I discussed do. Since there is no constitutive connection between the mental lives of the perceivers of the original episode, this connection cannot be invoked to justify claims about it, and one's own role in it, at a later time.

[12] Sutton (2012, p. 16) suggests that '…this embarrassment about social memory may be unnecessary if memory studies in the social sciences can be more firmly grounded in social ontology and social-cognitive psychology'. In particular, he recommends taking seriously Wegner's (1986) notion of a 'transactive memory system' that enables groups to 'interactively integrate information over time'. The present account is in the spirit, if not the letter, of this proposal.

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