

Groups that Fly Blind¹

Social ontologists frequently note that attributions of beliefs, desires, actions, and epistemic states such as knowledge to groups are common currency among the folk. As has been well-documented, the latter do consistently make claims such as: *Apple intends to bring back in-store classes in the U.S. and Europe*, *British Petroleum knows there is a fault in a blowout preventer—a piece of equipment that, if left unfixed, could have dastardly effects*, and *the CIA wants you to believe it traded assassinations and espionage for likes and shares*.² More generally, groups are often portrayed by the folk as agents in their own right, able to act on their attitudes to accomplish particular goals.³ Some have taken the ubiquity of such characterizations as an opening salvo in defense of the view that highly-structured groups are agents distinct from, or over and above, the members that comprise them. According to this view, such groups are agents with “minds of their own.”⁴

It is fair to say that the most popular view in the literature concerning group agency is that some groups are indeed agents with minds of their own who are able to act on beliefs, desires and/or knowledge that do not reduce to the mental states (or epistemic states) of those that compose them.⁵ Moreover, those who embrace this non-reductive thesis also tend to champion the view that some groups token mental states and/or epistemic states that none of the members of such groups token. If this latter claim is true—a position sometimes called *non-summativism*—then it seems clear that some group mental states and/or epistemic states are in fact not reducible to states of the members that comprise such groups.⁶ Let’s call the view that some groups have mental and/or

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²For the above assertions, see respectively: <https://www.patentlyapple.com/patently-apple/2021/08/apple-intends-to-bring-back-in-store-classes-in-the-us-and-some-european-retail-stores-by-the-end-of-august.html>; accessed September 3rd, 2021; <https://www.guardian.com/environment/2011/apr/20/deepwater-horizon-key-questions-answered>; accessed September 3rd, 2021; <https://thenextweb.com/insider/2019/04/26/the-cia-wants-you-to-believe-it-traded-assassinations-and-espionage-for-likes-and-shares/>; accessed February 15th, 2021.

³ For instance, in “The CIA wants you to believe it Traded Assassinations and Espionage for Likes and Shares,” journalist Bryan Clark portrays the CIA as a group that (a) wants the general public to see it as a more approachable, jocular agency than the invoking of its name typically elicits, (b) believes that by maintaining social media platforms it can accomplish this goal, and (c) launched and maintained such accounts to meet this objective.

⁴ This phrase is borrowed from Pettit (2003). Pettit has been one of the more vocal defenders of the groups-with-minds-of-their-own view. For others who embrace the view that some groups possess mental states and/or epistemic states that are irreducible to the mental states and/or epistemic states of the members that comprise such groups, see Gilbert, (1989), Schmitt (1994), Bird (2010), List and Pettit (2011), Mathiesen (2011), Hess (2014a & 2014b) and Tollefsen (2015).

⁵ List (2016) contends the same noting that “it is by now, relatively widely accepted that suitably organized collectives can be intentional agents in their own right, over and above their individual members” (295).

⁶ It strikes me that non-summativism of mental or epistemic states entails the irreducibility of such states. If it really is true that some groups can token such states without any of their members doing so, then it is hard to see how such states could be reducible to the states of their members. It is a more interesting question whether one can embrace the view that some group states are irreducible to the states of the members and yet deny non-summativism. One who embraced this latter view would be committed to the claim that in every instance of a group tokening an irreducible

epistemic states that are irreducible to their members mental and/or epistemic states in combination with the commitment that these mental states and/or epistemic states are not held by their members, *inflationism* (about group states).⁷

More recently, some inflationists have contended that groups with minds of their own can know the contents of their minds—or possess group self-knowledge—even if none of the relevant members possess this knowledge. Lukas Schwengerer (2022) has been the most explicit defender of the view that some groups can possess what I will call *inflationary group self-knowledge* (or "GS-K", group knowledge of the contents of their own minds that is irreducible to and not possessed by any members that comprise the group).⁸ In what follows I investigate whether some groups do possess GS-K.⁹ I argue, *pace* Schwengerer, that we have good reason to deny that groups do possess GS-K.

I defend this claim by in part criticizing Schwengerer's defense of GS-K, a defense that is an example of a *divergence argument*. The latter is an argument designed to show that the relevant (i) mental states or (ii) epistemic states of a group can diverge from the (i) or (ii) of the members that comprise such groups and are therefore unable to be reduced to the members' (i) and (ii). Additionally, I consider alternative divergence types of arguments and explain why I find them wanting as well.

I proceed to investigate more metaphysically-loaded ways the inflationist can defend the existence of GS-K, ways that involve adopting particular views in the literature concerning individualist self-knowledge that Schwengerer and others think can be marshalled to promisingly

state, there is some group member who tokens such a state. It is hard to see why one would embrace this position. Considerations involving the alleged multiple realizability of such states, for instance, do not seem to justify it. In any case, I want to stress that (a) the philosophers referenced in f.n. 3 who embrace the irreducibility of some group mental states also embrace non-summativism and (b) a number of these philosophers also defend the irreducibility of group mental states by defending the view that there are cases of non-summative group states. See Gilbert (1994) for a prime example of this. Given (a) and (b), I have decided to conjoin the irreducibility and non-summativism theses.

⁷ I borrow the term *inflationism* from Lackey (2020). For the purposes of this paper, I will call those who deny the conjunctive thesis I am calling *inflationism*, for whatever reason, *deflationists*. Most who deny this thesis think such states can be reduced to the states of the individuals in these groups, though not all deflationists do. See Quinton (1976), Corlett, (1996), Mokyr (2002), Goldman, (2014), and Lackey (2020) for defenses of various versions of deflationism.

⁸ It might be thought that, given his work on plural self-awareness and plural expressivism, Schmid (2014a and 2014b) is the most ardent defender of inflationary group self-knowledge. But on my reading of Schmid, the latter does not defend inflationary group self-knowledge as I am understanding it. This is in part because Schmid's position involves the members of groups having the relevant states as well. For instance, Schmid's (2014b) understanding of plural self-awareness involves collectives being self-aware in virtue of their "members having a sense of some of their attitudes as *theirs*, collectively" (17).

⁹ I should mention that in what follows, I assume that groups exist and that there are important differences between groups and mere sets of individuals. If groups do not exist, then inflationism about group mental states and epistemic states is false. This assumption, then, gives the benefit of the doubt to inflationists.

For discussion of what groups are and what distinguishes groups from mere collections of individuals, see Ritchie (2013).

explain how groups possess GS-K. I argue that these ways of defending the existence of GS-K are problematic as well.

In the final section of the paper, I argue that given what most inflationists think group knowledge simpliciter is, such inflationists should think groups lack GS-K. More specifically, I argue that both *joint acceptance* approaches to group knowledge defended by those who embrace joint acceptance accounts of group belief, as well as so-called *social knowledge* accounts of group knowledge are incompatible with their being GS-K. If this discussion is to the mark, then most inflationists themselves should deny the existence of the latter.

The conclusions reached in this paper matter. Not only would it be quite strange if all groups that are allegedly unique agents distinct from their members lacked this type of knowledge, and were, to use a phrase coined by Sydney Shoemaker (1994) *self-blind*; there are also reasons involving group responsibility concerning why it matters whether some groups possess GS-K. As noted above, inflationists hold that some groups act on the basis of their beliefs and desires. Such beliefs and desires, it is reasonable to believe, serve as an explanation for why groups do what they do. To return to an example referenced above, if the CIA launched its own social media accounts in part because it *wanted* to improve its favorability ratings with the public, and it *believed* it could do so by maintaining a social media presence, then in order to know why it was doing what it was doing, the CIA would, it seems, need to know that it had the relevant beliefs and desires. And if groups fail to know why they are behaving the way they are behaving, they would appear to be *less* morally responsible for their actions.¹⁰

In defense of the above claim, note that it seems reasonable to judge a person who consistently acts in a fawning way toward his boss *more* harshly if this person is well aware of why he behaves this way, than if he is not. The same, I think, can be said, of groups who allegedly have minds of their own. If such groups fail to know why they act the way they do, or never know the reasons why they act as they do, then such groups **appear** to be less responsible and therefore less deserving of praise or blame for their actions. Moreover, such groups would be unable to alter their behavior on the basis of such self-knowledge, and would thus be less critical, self-reflective agents than they would otherwise be if they possessed GS-K. It is, then, quite significant, whether groups possess GS-K.

Before proceeding to part one, I want to make explicit why it matters whether inflationists about group knowledge can reasonably embrace the view that groups possess *inflationary* GS-K as opposed to *deflationary* group self-knowledge. If groups were to possess only the latter, then there would be a problematic tension inherent in the inflationist's view. On the one hand, some

¹⁰ I stress the qualifier “less” here because my contention is *not* that if groups lack GS-K, they are unable to be held morally responsible. Collins (2022) has recently argued that being self-aware is a necessary condition for moral responsibility. Perhaps it might be the case that such self-awareness not only fails to amount to self-knowledge, but when coupled with other necessary conditions, jointly suffices for a group to be morally responsible. Even if this is the case, though, it seems reasonable to think that possession of GS-K could very well impact the praiseworthiness or blameworthiness of a given action. Schwengerer (2022; p. 1158-1159) defends this claim at length in an attempt to motivate the view that we should care about whether groups can know the contents of their minds.

groups would be autonomous, irreducible beings with mental states that do not reduce to the mental states of the members of the group; on the other hand, such groups could not know their own minds qua autonomous, distinct beings. Such knowledge would instead be solely the knowledge of the individuals in the group who are (allegedly) distinct from the group itself. The reason, then, that it matters whether psychologically autonomous groups possess GS-K is that such groups would not truly possess knowledge of their own minds if the knowledge in question was reducible to the members' knowledge.

I. GS-K & Divergence Arguments

In his (2022) work, Schwengerer motivates the view that there is GS-K by first invoking a case offered by Alexander Bird (2010). Bird's thought experiment involves two doctors who (i) collaborate on a research project, (ii) independently prove P and $P \rightarrow Q$ without informing the other that their respective results have been proved, (iii) agree to publish a paper demonstrating Q iff. P and $P \rightarrow Q$ have been proved, and (iv) have an assistant compile the results and publish the paper demonstrating Q . Bird claims that the group composed of doctors knows that Q even though none of the members of this group do, thereby (allegedly) demonstrating that some group knowledge does not reduce to the knowledge of members in the group. Schwengerer revises Bird's case in defense of the existence of GS-K as follows:

REFLECTIVE SCIENCE: Dr X, a physicist, and Dr Y, a mathematician, collaborate on a project to demonstrate the truth of the conjecture that q . Their project can be broken down into four parts. Part one is a problem in physics, the problem of showing that p , which will be the work of Dr X alone. Part two is a problem in pure mathematics, that of proving that if p then q , for which Dr Y takes sole responsibility. Part three is an application of modus ponens to the results of parts one and two. Part four is a plan for future research on r that the research group is intending to pursue if q is proven true. This plan has been developed by X and Y together and is prewritten before they have any knowledge of whether q is true, nor of the success of the first two parts. They arrange for an assistant to publish the paper if and only if the assistant receives from Dr X the demonstration that p is true and from Dr Y the proof of $p \rightarrow q$ (the brief part with the application of modus ponens and the part about future research intentions have been prewritten). The paper includes the self-ascription of intentions for future research on r . We can imagine that Drs X and Y have no other communication with each other or with the assistant and so do

not know at the time of publication that *q* has been proven, nor that they intend to do future research on whether *r* (1167).

Schwengerer points out that in REFLECTIVE SCIENCE, Drs X and Y do not individually believe that *Q*. He also adds the detail that the assistant lacks the concepts required to understand *Q* properly, and therefore does not believe *Q* either. Moreover, he makes explicit that no member of the group has the belief that the group intends to do future research on *r*. The doctors lack this belief because they have no clue that *q* is true, and the assistant lacks this belief because they lack understanding of both *q* and *r*.¹¹ Despite these absences on the part of the group members, Schwengerer maintains that not only does the group have the intention to do further research on *r*, but the group also has the self-belief that it intends to do the latter. Moreover, he thinks such a belief appears to amount to group or collective self-knowledge. Schwengerer motivates this latter claim by maintaining that:

The publication states that the research group intends to research *r*. This claim seems to be authoritative. It would be inappropriate to challenge the group on this point besides questioning the sincerity (1167).

Schwengerer's defense that the group has GS-K rests on his contention that the claim that *the group intends to research r*—call this claim 'C'—seems to be "authoritative."¹² Schwengerer adopts the term "authoritative" from Crispin Wright (1998). The latter maintains that avowals about *individual* agents' attitudes are weakly authoritative. Schwengerer interprets weak authoritativeness as entailing that such claims "provide empirically assumptionless justification for the corresponding third-person claims" (1156). Moreover, Schwengerer notes that while weakly authoritative avowals may be doubted on occasion without doubting [the] sincerity or understanding" of the avower, "such doubts are rare" (1156). Like Wright, he thinks such authoritativeness is a result of our sociolinguistic practices. More specifically, it is a feature of our sociolinguistic practices concerning reports about our own minds that the default position with respect to them is that they enjoy a presumption of truth on the part of our audience.

Schwengerer, then, moves from the contention that *C* seems to be authoritative to the claim that it is reasonable to think the group knows they intend to *r* although none of the members of this group possess such knowledge. If he is right, his case supports the existence of GS-K.

¹¹ See his (2022; p. 1167) for these assertions.

¹² Schwengerer also claims that if we think that the group in Bird's case knows that *Q*, we should think that the group in REFLECTIVE SCIENCE possesses self-knowledge of *r*. But the defense of the antecedent of this conditional is markedly different than the way Schwengerer defends the consequent claim. For one, an appeal to authority does not enter the picture with respect to Bird's case. Moreover, it strikes me that one can reasonably accept that the doctors in Bird's case know that *Q*, while also rejecting that the group in REFLECTIVE SCIENCE has self-knowledge that *r*. I develop this point below.

In response to Schwengerer's defense, it should first be pointed out that there are several crucial differences between first-person avowals and claims like C that make it reasonable to believe that even if the former are weakly authoritative, the latter are not. One crucial difference is the fact that very few people doubt that individual agents have mental states, or doubt (after reflecting on it) that individual agents have access to *some* of the contents of their minds. But in the case of a claim like C, it very well might be doubted that the group agent in question has the relevant mental states and/or access to those mental states. This is due to the strange setup of REFLECTIVE SCIENCE, a setup in which none of the group members believe q, let alone believe that the group they are members of intends to r. These details of this story render it at least somewhat contentious whether the group in fact does know they have relevant intention. In defense of this claim, contrast REFLECTIVE SCIENCE with mundane cases in which an individual reports that they intend to get groceries, or that they intend to engage in a research project. The latter claims at least have the air of authoritativeness, in Wright's sense. They at least do so more than C does. Because of this, while one might think it is a matter of our sociolinguistic practice that our default is to typically accept what *individual* agents tell us in these cases, one might very well be skeptical that such a practice extends to groups with minds of their own. There are, after all, a number of people who doubt that groups token inflationary mental states. Even more, I imagine, would doubt that they possess inflationary knowledge of such states.¹³

In further support of the view that C is not weakly authoritative, it is important to distinguish what a reader of the journal in question who lacked knowledge of the backstory concerning C might think when reading this article. Such a person might think C is true, and perhaps that the group knows that C. But it's reasonable to believe this is because the reader is assuming that the group members have communicated with each other their findings, etc. In other words, a person unfamiliar with the backstory might assume C is true because they are assuming the scenario is a non-aberrant one. Once they are made aware of this background story, they are likely to be much less inclined to unquestionably accept that C is true, or that the group knows that C.

Assume next, though, that I am mistaken, and C really is weakly authoritative. Schwengerer, as the above quote indicates, moves from the contention that C appears to be weakly authoritative to the claim that it is inappropriate to challenge the group besides questioning the group's sincerity. But even de facto weak authoritativeness—(as opposed to the appearance of the latter—doesn't license such a move. Indeed, as Schwengerer himself notes, Wright grants that weakly authoritative claims can be contested, and not just on the grounds of understanding or sincerity. Given this, we might wonder whether it is appropriate to question whether C is believed, (let alone known), by the group. Due in large part to the aberrant backstory of Schwengerer's case, I think the answer is 'yes.' One reason it seems reasonable to question whether the group believes

¹³ Earlier in his (2022) work, Schwengerer defends the view that some non-inflationary group self-avowals appear to have the mark of authoritativeness. But such a defense is not a defense of the claim that *inflationary* group self-avowals are authoritative. I am questioning the latter here.

they have the relevant intention is because the alleged belief does not play a role in the critical reasoning or future planning of any of the group members involved. But it seems that if the group truly does have self-knowledge of the intention, such self-knowledge would play a role in the group's decision-making. And it is hard to see how it could when none of the group's members believe they have this intention.

Furthermore, it also seems reasonable to question whether the group has the relevant intention. One might think the group lacks this intention given that none of the group members at the time of publication are going to act on it. And if none of the members are going to act on it, it is unclear how the group is going to act on it (or perform actions that in any direct way help to satisfy that intention).¹⁴ I think these points indicate that there is nothing inappropriate about questioning whether the group has the relevant second-order belief. For even if C is true, it is at the very least contentious that it is.

In addition to the above points, note next that if we were to go on and question the group about whether they in fact believe C, it's not clear how they would defend that they do, nor that they would want to do so. After all, even the most ardent contemporary inflationists about groups think groups are at least in part constituted by their members.¹⁵ And the members are *not* going to defend C. They aren't even aware Q has been proven. There is a crucial difference here, it seems, between the position the members are in and the position that we, qua individual agents, are in when we in fact know we have a given intention. If questioned about whether we have the latter when we in fact know we do, most of us, in the typical case, will be emphatic about the fact that we do. This is so regardless of whether we are able to articulate *how* we know we have this intention. Such is not the case with respect to Drs X, Y and the assistant, who when questioned about C are, (if they are being rational), going to throw up their hands, shrug their shoulders, and tell us they have no clue. If the members that at least partly compose the group are not willing or (reasonably) able to defend C, it is unclear how the group can respond to the challenge that they do in fact have this belief.

The upshot of this discussion is that even if C is authoritative, it is not only appropriate to question the group about C, but once questioned, it's not clear the group would respond to an inquirer in a way that would make us think the group knows they have the alleged intention. C being weakly authoritative, then, does not give us good reason to think the group knows that C.

Now even if Schwengerer fails to provide an adequate defense of the claim that the group knows that C, that would not entail that the group fails to know C. That being granted, insofar as the group's alleged intention and self-knowledge of this state are not going to play a role in the reasoning or agency of the group members who partly constitute the group at the time of publication, it seems more reasonable to think the REFLECTIVE SCIENCE group is merely *in a position* to form the relevant intention. And if they form the latter, then they would be *in a position*

¹⁴ I develop worries about how groups can act on desires, intentions, and other motivational states when none of the members have the relevant states in my BLIND.

¹⁵ For instance, Hess (2014a), one of the more radical inflationists, holds the view that groups are in part constituted by their members.

to know they have it.¹⁶ To motivate this suggestion, consider a case involving an individual agent who believes they will research the causes of a disease *if* they first confirm that there really is the disease in question. We can stipulate that there is such a disease, and the agent is in a position to readily access facts confirming that such a disease exists. They have, however, yet to access them. Such a person is in a similar position as the agents in REFLECTIVE SCIENCE. The facts are there to be accessed but given the position this person is in with respect to them, she doesn't yet know the relevant facts or have the relevant intention to engage in such research. If this is the case with respect to the individual, it seems reasonable to hold that the REFLECTIVE SCIENCE group—a group at least partly composed of members who are analogous to the individual—is also merely in a position to form the relevant intention and to know that it has this intention if it does so. I submit, then, that Schwengerer's defense of GS-K, while novel, is flawed.

There are, of course, other divergence arguments that could be advanced in defense of GS-K. Given space constraints, I am going to limit my discussion of such arguments here to the following summaries concerning why I think such cases fail as defenses of this type of knowledge. The summary in question runs as follows:

- (i) Divergence arguments that involve groups allegedly having different evidence than their group members possess fail to vindicate GS-K because such cases, when modified to defend GS-K, lack the appropriate divergence between what the group knows about the contents of its mind and what the members know about the group's mind;
- (ii) Divergence arguments that involve the invocation of different evidential standards between groups and group members due to practical considerations fail as defenses of GS-K because there are principled reasons for thinking evidential standards cannot be manipulated by practical considerations in the way proponents of such arguments believe they can.¹⁷

¹⁶ It might be thought that a similar criticism can be advanced with respect to Bird's thought experiment in defense of knowledge simpliciter. Such a group, it might be held, is merely in a position to know that Q. (Cf. Lackey (2020); p. 127). And this would seem to run up against a claim that I made earlier—viz. that even if Bird's defense of knowledge simpliciter is to the mark, Schwengerer's defense might not be. However, there are important differences between the two cases. The main one concerns the fact that the question concerning Bird's case is whether the group knows that Q. In Schwengerer's case, there is not only the question of whether the group knows that it has the relevant intention *r*, but whether it has *r* at all. I have provided reasons for thinking that the group doesn't have *r*, and therefore cannot know that it does. There is a sense, then, in which Schwengerer's group is even further removed from possessing the knowledge he thinks they have than Bird's group is.

¹⁷ See Schmitt (1994) for a case like (i) and Mathiesen (2011) for a case like (ii). Schmitt and Mathiesen offer these types of cases in defense of inflationary group justification. One could, however, modify these cases to make them defenses of GS-K.

I take the types of arguments referenced in (i) and (ii) to be the most promising divergence-based ways of defending GS-K.¹⁸ Insofar as they are problematic, I think it is prudent for the proponent of GS-K to look elsewhere for an adequate defense of GS-K.

II. Non-Divergence Ways of Defending GS-K

In the previous section I argued that particular divergence arguments fail to vindicate the existence of GS-K. There are, however, alternative ways to defend the latter. One way to do so is to embrace metaphysically loaded views in philosophy of mind and epistemology, and in particular, individualist accounts of self-knowledge, and modify the latter with respect to groups. In this section, I explore two of these alternative ways of defending GS-K—ways that might strike inflationists as promising—beginning with a discussion of an approach to self-knowledge advanced by Shoemaker (1994).

In a series of influential lectures, Shoemaker contends that if an agent *S* possesses the appropriate amount of rationality (as well as the relevant conceptual capacities), then insofar as *S* tokens the relevant mental states, *S* will also token a belief that they are tokening such states. As Shoemaker writes, “On this conception [of self-knowledge], all you have to add to the available first-order belief, in order to get the second-order belief is the appropriate degree of intelligence” (288). Shoemaker’s position is known as *constitutivism*. And on what I take to be the most plausible way of understanding the latter, one’s beliefs about one’s mental states are *safe* in the sense that they cannot easily be false, and therefore, when true, amount to knowledge.

Shoemaker, then, accepts the radical view that in the typical case, merely tokening a mental state *M* will involve knowing that one is in *M*. If such a view of self-knowledge can also be applied to groups with minds of their own, then it seems that all these groups would need to do in order to possess self-knowledge would be to token mental states.¹⁹ The inflationist, of course, would need to adequately defend the view that some groups do possess inflationary mental states, but there are a number of defenses of inflationary attitudes in the literature and I have not here tried to refute them. Insofar as such defenses are successful, and it is also reasonable to embrace constitutivism about self-knowledge *with respect to groups with minds of their own*, then it appears that some groups really do possess GS-K.

¹⁸ Readers familiar with the group ontology literature know that there are also a number of divergence arguments designed to demonstrate that some group mental states cannot be reduced to the mental states of members in these groups. Gilbert (1989) advances a number of these types of arguments. I did not include a discussion of these types of arguments above because I think that even if such arguments effectively enable one to arrive at the conclusion that some group mental states do not reduce to the mental states of the individuals in the group, proponents of such arguments would then need to advance claims about why the mental states in question, insofar as they are beliefs, amount to knowledge. And to do so, they would have to advance controversial claims about group knowledge and in particular group self-knowledge. But such claims would then be doing much of the argumentative work, whereas divergence arguments are supposed to enable inflationists to vindicate their thesis without having to advance such contentions.

¹⁹ The account of inflationary group knowledge would, of course, also have to be compatible with groups possessing GS-K as well. More on this below.

In considering this constitutivist-defense of GS-K, though, one thing we need to investigate is whether the reasons Shoemaker embraces constitutivism for individuals are compelling reasons when it comes to groups with minds of their own. In considering this question, note that one of the main reasons Shoemaker offers in defense of constitutivism is that rational agents cannot be self-blind or lack self-knowledge of their minds, and that his approach to self-knowledge, unlike alternative positions successfully explains why they cannot be.

The details of Shoemaker's argument from self-blindness are nuanced and complex, as is whether the latter actually succeeds as a defense of constitutivism.²⁰ For our purposes, though, we can set aside some of these details and focus on what Shoemaker means by *rational agent* and why he thinks the relevant type of rationality precludes the agent in question from being self-blind. In exploring this question, first note that there is a weak sense in which individuals (or groups for that matter) can be rational agents, and yet still be self-blind. Such individuals could be rational in the sense that their mental states cause them to act in goal-oriented ways to accomplish their purposes, and such purposes are at times accomplished. Such agency, it seems, does not seem to require self-knowledge of one's mental states.

Shoemaker implicitly acknowledges the above point. But he has a stronger sense of agential rationality in mind. The type of rationality he thinks is incompatible with self-blindness involves being able to evaluate one's reasons (including one's mental states), revise such reasons if they conflict, and update the content of one's beliefs in light of new experiences. As he puts it, "It is essential to being a rational being that one be sensitive to the contents of one's belief-desire system in such a way as to enable its contents to be revised and updated in the light of new experience and enable inconsistencies and incoherencies in its content to be eliminated" (285). That type of rational agency, it might more reasonably be thought, does require self-knowledge of one's mental states.

If one were interested in defending GS-K by invoking a Shoemaker-inspired line-of-defense, one would need to defend the view that groups with minds of their own can be rational in this more robust sense. And it might be thought that the foundation for such a defense has already been offered in the literature. Philip Pettit (2007), for instance, has argued that groups can reason about their attitudes in part by forming meta-propositional attitudes, or "attitudes towards propositions in which propositions may themselves figure as objects, of which properties and relations are predicated" (498). Pettit maintains that given groups have a feedback sensitive system—or a system in which the group has access to the content of their existing commitments—such groups have the ability to make inferences about their beliefs, evaluate their beliefs, and revise their beliefs accordingly through their members. If Pettit is correct about this, this would lend support to the view that some groups have the type of rationality Shoemaker ascribes to individuals.²¹

²⁰ See Kind (2003) and Gertler (2011) for developed criticisms of Shoemaker's argument from self-blindness against views such as inner sense accounts of self-knowledge.

²¹ There are other ways of defending the view that groups are rational in the relevant sense. One might, for instance, embrace the view that if groups behave as if they are robustly rational, then they are the latter. This claim, in turn,

But it is important to emphasize here that such abilities would need to be inflationary in nature. Such abilities would need to be possessed by the group without being possessed by any of the individuals in the group in order for the group abilities to lend support to the view that groups possess GS-K. This is so because if what is providing the explanation of why we should think groups possess GS-K can be understood at the individual-level, then group self-knowledge would appear to be explainable at the level of the members. And Pettit and others, it seems, ground the relevant group abilities in the members' abilities. For example, Pettit notes that it is the members who will adjust their positions so as to "rectify perceived inconsistencies in the group's attitudes"; it is the members who act together to implement "an intentional exercise of group control" (514).

It might be maintained, though, that there is a way to defend the view that some groups possess abilities to reason about their beliefs, evaluate such beliefs, and revise their beliefs that are in fact abilities that cannot be explained at the individual level. Perhaps such a view can be motivated by appealing to the multiple realizability of such abilities.²² If this is the case, we would still need to ask whether the possession of these abilities makes it reasonable to think that groups possess *inflationary* GS-K. And I think the answer to this question is 'no.' Here is why: on the most plausible view of inflationary group abilities, groups possess abilities that supervene on and/or are realized by the abilities of the agents that comprise the group. It is the members' reasoning, etc. that grounds the group's abilities. And given this, it seems reasonable to think that the members are going to know what the group knows about the contents of its states when the group (allegedly) reasons about them.

In defense of this claim, consider a group that has an ability to evaluate a particular belief of theirs, say the belief that the group ought to hold a shareholder's meeting. Even if such an ability were inflationary in nature, it would, it seems, still be the group members that would be deliberating about whether this belief is a rational belief. After all, as noted above, the relevant group abilities, even if inflationary in nature, would still supervene on and/or be realized by the members' abilities. And given this, if such group members are deliberating about whether this belief is a rational belief, the group members are going to be aware of what the group believes just like the group with a mind of its own would be. There would not be the appropriate discrepancy between what the group allegedly knows and what the members know about the contents of the group mind for GS-K to be vindicated. And the same result would seem to be the case in other conceivable scenarios. Insofar as this discussion is to the mark, even if groups have irreducible abilities that would make them rational in Shoemaker's sense of rationality, the possession of such abilities would not make it reasonable to infer that the group has inflationary self-knowledge. The

might be defended by embracing the even more controversial thesis known as *interpretivism*, which in this context, would entail that if we can understand and interpret a system as a rational agent (in the relevant sense), then that system just is a rational agent. Tollefsen (2015) endorses a version of interpretivism. This way of defending irreducible group rationality would face the same worry, however, that I advance below.

²² I should add that even if group abilities are multiply realizable, it would need to be the case that such abilities are not possessed as well by the group members. Thanks to a reviewer of this paper for discussion about this issue.

opposite, in fact, appears to be the case. Invoking a Shoemaker-style line-of-defense of GS-K, then, even granting particular controversial claims that help the inflationist out, is unpromising.²³

An alternative, non-constitutivist way of defending GS-K, involves invoking *rationalist* theories of self-knowledge. Rationalists, to borrow a term from Brie Gertler (2011), are those who embrace the view that our rational agency explains how we possess self-knowledge, knowledge that is acquired not through introspectively observing our attitudes, but rather via awareness of our reasons for such attitudes. Richard Moran (2001), to take one example, defends such a view. Following the seminal work of Gareth Evans (1982), Moran holds that we can know our attitudes via adopting what he calls the *deliberative stance*. According to Moran, we know whether we believe that P by considering whether we *ought* to believe that P; this question in turn requires us to consider what reasons we have for believing this proposition. Moran explains this transparent means of acquiring self-knowledge as follows:

A statement of one's belief about X is said to obey the Transparency Condition when the statement is made by consideration of the facts about X itself, and not by either an 'inward glance' or by observation of one's own behavior (101).

Considerations of facts about X itself in turn involve a focus on the reasons for holding X. Knowing what we believe according to Moran, is a matter of having one's reasons for that attitude determine that belief. The method is thought to be transparent or *extrospective* insofar as one directs one's attention not towards the belief itself, but towards one's reasons for believing.²⁴

An inflationist might think that some groups can come to possess self-knowledge of the contents of their minds extrospectively by adopting the deliberative stance.²⁵ Such an approach, at the very least, seems more promising than embracing the view that inflationary groups know the contents of their minds via introspection or looking inward.²⁶

²³ Thanks to a reviewer's helpful comments concerning how to motivate a Shoemaker-inspired defense of GS-K.

²⁴ Moran further suggests that when we engage in the deliberative stance and come to recognize that our reasons favor P, we in turn avow that P. This avowal—or a declarative statement made in light of one's reasons—enables us to know that P.

²⁵ Schwengerer (2020; p. 1169-1700) is sympathetic with the view that extrospective positions like Moran's can help explain how groups possess inflationary self-knowledge.

²⁶ If further defense of this claim is needed, consider that a number of philosophers who think individuals do acquire self-knowledge via an introspective process think that they do so by way of brain processes, and in particular processes that involve so-called *attention mechanisms*. See, for example, Armstrong (1968), Lycan (1996), and Goldman (2006). But even if groups possess minds of their own, there is no unified group brain for there to be such processes. Additionally, those who think the introspective process does not involve such attention mechanisms, but rather involves a non-causal process like acquaintance, typically think that knowledge by acquaintance demands focused attention on the target states in question. And such attention seems to require a type of unified mind or brain that is not comparable to the types of group minds posited by inflationists. Moreover, the states most acquaintance theorists such as Fumerton (1995), Gertler (2001), and Chalmers (2003) think individuals are introspectively acquainted with

Insofar as an inflationist is going to appeal to rationalism to explain why we should think groups possess self-knowledge, they would need to explain why we should think engaging in the deliberative process enables agents to acquire knowledge of the attitude in question. How, in other words, does making up your mind about whether to believe that P, make it the case that you know that P?²⁷ An inflationist might invoke Moran's answer to this question, an answer that is arguably the most developed one in the literature. This answer involves the advancement of a transcendental argument to the conclusion that we have the right to assume that the deliberative stance yields self-knowledge. Moran's argument, as I understand it, involves the claim that individuals are rational agents who engage in critical reasoning about practical and epistemic matters. Such reasoning, according to Moran requires that we conceive of ourselves as agents whose attitudes are determined by our reasons. But since we cannot verify that our attitudes are determined by our reasons because this would involve considering our attitudes in isolation of them, we have the right to assume that we acquire knowledge of our attitudes by attending to our reasons for holding those attitudes.²⁸

Now in order for this line-of-reasoning to support the view that GS-K exists, the "we" in Moran's argument needs to be understood as "groups with minds of their own." If it is not understood in this manner, then the argument would only be successful, if successful at all, in demonstrating that beings such as individual agents or groups with mental features that can be reduced to the features of their members, know their attitudes by adopting the deliberative stance. And such a defense would not support the existence of GS-K. Given this, we must ask how successful the above line-of-reasoning is when we understand "we" in this way.

In addressing this question, note that, as suggested above, one might hold that groups fail to be critical reasoners in the relevant inflationary sense. If they are not, then this defense of GS-K is a non-starter. But even if they are, this way of defending GS-K would still face several serious objections. Indeed, one particularly problematic contention is the claim that engaging in critical reasoning requires the agent's conception of themselves as an agent whose attitudes are determined by their reasons. Christopher Peacocke (1999) and others have argued that *individuals* can engage in critical reasoning that occurs at the sub-personal level and therefore does not involve conceiving of oneself as an agent whose attitudes are determined by their reasons.²⁹ But the case for rejecting the claim that critical reasoning involves conceiving of oneself as an agent seems even stronger with respect to groups with minds of their own. As discussed above, the reasoning that groups engage in, on the most plausible views of group reasoning, is grounded in the reasoning of the members. And it seems clear that such members can engage in such activities without conceiving of the group they are a member of as an agent. The most obvious example of such a case would be one in which the group members don't think there are any group agents.

are phenomenal states that are at the fore-of-consciousness. But most inflationists, including Tollefsen (2015) and List (2016), are skeptical that groups possess phenomenal states.

²⁷ O'Brien (2003) and Shoemaker (2003) both wonder how Moran can successfully answer this question.

²⁸ This interpretation of Moran's transcendental argument closely follows Gertler's (2011; p. 189) interpretation.

²⁹ See Peacocke (1999; p. 276) for a case that supports this claim.

Another way of putting this point is that if a group has a second-order irreducible ability to reason that is the result of having particular first-order realizers, realizers that are the result of individual agents in the group, then the reasoning that affords the group the irreducible ability in question are being carried out by the individual members of the group. And if those individuals don't need to conceive of themselves as a group agent whose attitudes are determined by their reasons, then neither does the group. This is the case because the group is guaranteed to have such an ability via the reasoning of the individual agents in the group, agents who don't have to think there is some group agent at all (let alone a group agent with a mind of its own). One could, of course, entirely divorce group abilities from the members abilities. But then it is unclear how groups could have the abilities in question at all.

I think the objection just adumbrated suffices to reject a Moran-inspired defense of GS-K. But even if this objection has a tenable response to it, note that a proponent of this way of defending GS-K must also embrace the view that groups with minds of their own can conceive of themselves as critical reasoners. There have been some attempts in the literature to vindicate the view that groups can be self-aware. However, such attempts, including Stephanie Collins (2022) recent work concerning group self-awareness, ground collective self-awareness in the awareness of individuals in the group.³⁰ And this would not be inflationary self-awareness in the appropriate sense given that the members of such groups would have the relevant self-awareness of what the group is self-aware of. Insofar as this is the case, even if there is an adequate reply to my initial objection to the Moran-inspired defense of GS-K, there are further concerns we should have with this line-of-reasoning.

The question of how we know our attitudes by adopting the deliberative stance is not an easy one to answer. In fact, some see an inability to answer this question as the chief stumbling block to Moran's view. Moran provides us with an explanation in the case of individuals of why we should think adopting the deliberative stance yields self-knowledge. But, as we have seen, such an explanation is problematic with respect to defending the view that groups with minds of their own possess GS-K. And it is not clear what alternative way a proponent of GS-K sympathetic with rationalism can advance.

We have taken a close look at two non-divergent, metaphysically-loaded ways of defending GS-K. There are other non-divergent means an inflationist might appeal to in defending their position, but the above strike me as two of the more promising. Both ways, I have argued, are problematic.

It might have been noticed that in the above discussion, I refrained from mentioning what inflationists think the nature of group knowledge simpliciter is. I have done so because I think the points made in this section can be cogently defended while bracketing discussion of the proposed nature of the latter. In the next section, however, I argue that inflationists who adopt the most

³⁰ Schmid (2014b) provides another discussion of plural or group self-awareness. On my understanding of Schmid's view, particular members in the group would have the same type of awareness as the group does.

popular accounts of group knowledge simpliciter, have, because of those accounts, good reason to deny that groups possess GS-K.

Part III: GS-K & Inflationary Accounts of Group Knowledge

Despite the discussion up to this point, I imagine the committed inflationist will think there is some plausible way of vindicating GS-K. In this section, though, I argue that given positions the majority of inflationists are already committed to, inflationists themselves should abandon the view that groups possess GS-K. The commitments in question involve claims about what group knowledge simpliciter is.

To begin to see what the issue is, it will be helpful to first discuss the standard inflationary way of understanding group belief. The latter involves an appeal to joint acceptance or joint commitment.³¹ Margaret Gilbert (1989), for instance, embraces the popular view that what it is for a group to believe a particular proposition is for the relevant members of the group to jointly accept the proposition in question. More precisely, Gilbert analyzes group belief along joint-commitment lines as follows:

JAA: A group G believes that P iff. the members of G jointly accept that P.

On Gilbert's view joint acceptance involves it being common knowledge in G that the members of G individually have intentionally and openly expressed a willingness to jointly accept that p with the other members of G.³² It follows that if *inflationary* group belief is required in order for a group to possess inflationary group knowledge, and most inflationists think it is,³³ such joint acceptance is necessary for groups to possess GS-K. The emphasis on *inflationary* is important. If group belief is required for group knowledge and group self-knowledge in particular, then the latter would only be inflationary in nature if the group belief is itself inflationary. And inflationary group belief for one who embraces JAA or something like it is going to be a matter of the members jointly accepting the proposition in question and hence, (according to Gilbert), believing that

³¹ Note that in what follows, I use the terms "joint acceptance" and "joint commitment" interchangeably. There might be subtle differences in the literature between the way the two terms are used, but for my purposes, I believe I can ignore such subtleties in making my broader point.

³² See Gilbert (1989; p. 306). Gilbert further notes that, "Joint acceptance of a proposition p by a group whose members are X, Y, and Z does not entail that there is some subset of the set comprising X, Y and Z such that all the members of that subset individually believe that P" (306).

Tuomela (1992) also accepts a joint acceptance account of group belief but analyzes group belief in terms of operative-member-joint-acceptance, where *operative members*, crudely put, are members who have decision making authority within a group.

³³ Klausen (2015) notes that most extant contributions to collective epistemology share the assumption that group knowledge simpliciter requires group belief and group belief should be analyzed in terms of joint commitment; the latter, according to him, entails joint awareness.

proposition, while the members of the relevant group do not believe the proposition in question.³⁴

It is this latter point that poses a challenge to the view that one can embrace JAA, and more broadly, inflationary accounts of group knowledge simpliciter grounded in joint acceptance, and reasonably accept the existence of GS-K. For it is very difficult to see, given the conscious and deliberate process that groups go through in forming a belief, how the members of such a group would not possess the relevant second-order belief about the (alleged) mental state of the group in question. For example, if a group comes to jointly accept that P, and no members of the group believe that P, then it is at least somewhat plausible to think that the group has a belief that the members don't. However, it is implausible to think that the members of such a group would fail to have the belief that they just jointly accepted the proposition in question. After all, they just went through the conscious and deliberate process of accepting that very proposition. Such members are, therefore, not only going to be aware of having gone through such a process, but they are also going to believe that the group has just jointly accepted the proposition in question. Ergo, there is not going to be a divergence between what the group believes about the target proposition concerning the group mind and what the individuals believe.

To make the above point more vivid, consider an inflationist who thinks that groups know the contents of their minds by following particular inferential rules of the kind that Alex Byrne (2018) thinks individuals follow to know facts about their minds. Byrne holds, for example, that in the typical case we acquire knowledge of what we believe by conforming to the following rule:

BEL: If P, believe that you believe that P

where 'P' is some proposition about the world. Given that P is a proposition about the world, on Byrne's view we investigate the world to know what we believe, as opposed to looking inward to do so.

Byrne contends that *following* BEL involves believing that one believes that P *because* one recognizes (and hence knows) that the antecedent obtains. But if one recognizes and hence knows that P, then one believes that P. Therefore, following BEL ensures that one's belief that one believes that P will be true. BEL is thus, according to Byrne, a rule that when followed produces safe beliefs (i.e., beliefs that are not likely to be false). In Byrne's terminology, BEL is *self-verifying*.³⁵

³⁴ If this were not the case, then (i) the deflationist would be able to accommodate the relevant group beliefs in a deflationary-friendly manner, by reducing the belief to the beliefs of members in the group, and (ii) Gilbert would not need to offer cases in which there is an alleged divergence between what the group accepts and what its members believe to motivate the view that inflationary group belief exists.

³⁵ Byrne also notes that one can attempt to follow BEL and not succeed in following the rule. Doing so involves merely believing that P where the belief in question fails to amount to knowledge because P is false. But as Byrne notes, one interesting feature of BEL is that even if one does not succeed in following this rule, as long as one tries to follow the latter, one's second-order belief about what one believes will be true. This is because trying to follow BEL entails believing that the antecedent of BEL obtains. And that will (in almost all cases) ensure that one's second-order belief is true. Thus, BEL, in Byrne's terminology, is also *strongly self-verifying*.

But next consider the prospects of coupling a joint acceptance approach to group belief with Byrne's extrospectionist approach in order to make sense of how groups come to possess GS-K. More specifically consider what would be involved in a group following (or attempting to follow) BEL. Such a group would have to first consider whether to jointly accept the relevant proposition P. In the event that they did accept it, they would then have to proceed to jointly accept that they jointly accept P on the basis of having jointly accepted P. But such a group would only engage in this process if the members were already aware that the proposition in question has been jointly accepted. This is because the group would only jointly accept that they jointly accept some proposition on the basis of following BEL if they were aware that the antecedent of Byrne's conditional obtained. No group would think that they should jointly accept that they jointly accept some proposition without being aware of what was previously jointly accepted. But if all the members already believe (and ostensibly know) that they have jointly accepted the relevant proposition, the second-order group belief would not be inflationary in nature. And as noted above, this would need to be the case in order for such (alleged) group knowledge to be inflationary in nature.

To further underscore the worry here note that in the case of individuals attempting to conform to Byrne's rule, it is at least in principle possible that an individual could conform to BEL without being cognizant of the fact that they are doing so. Perhaps when an agent judges that P this in turn causes them to believe that they believe that P, where this causal process occurs at the sub-personal level.³⁶ But the same cannot be said with respect to groups if group belief is a matter of joint acceptance. The group is not going to somehow be caused to believe that they believe that P without the members being aware of the fact that the reason they are jointly accepting that they jointly accept that P is because they have just jointly accepted the relevant proposition. Such acceptance, as construed by Gilbert and other inflationists, involves too deliberate of a process for Byrne's rule to be followed without awareness of the fact that it is being followed. This is why the members of a group following BEL are going to be aware of what they, qua group, have jointly accepted. The result is that the knowledge would not be inflationary in nature. And this same point can be made with respect to every instance of a group following or attempting to follow BEL or any of the other inferential rules Byrne thinks individuals follow to know the contents of their mind.

The moral of the above discussion is not simply that inflationists who embrace joint acceptance approaches to group knowledge are unable to reasonably embrace Byrne's epistemology of self-knowledge to explain how groups come to know the contents of their minds. The broader upshot is that those who embrace such approaches have an exceedingly difficult time making sense of how GS-K could be inflationary in nature. Given the nature of the joint acceptance process, group members are going to believe what the group has jointly accepted, and there simply is not going to be the type of discrepancy necessary in order for the group knowledge in question

³⁶ This is one reason why I think it is possible for Byrne to explain how we can know we token a belief that P without also having to know that we judge that P.

to be inflationary. And while I will not pursue the issue here, I think the problem for the inflationist is compounded if one accepts not only a joint acceptance approach to group belief, but couples it with a joint acceptance account of group justification to make sense of what group knowledge simpliciter is.³⁷

At this point it might be noted that there is an alternative, non-joint acceptance approach to group knowledge that has been embraced by some inflationists, an approach that appears to avoid the above problem. This approach not only rejects the view that group knowledge requires joint acceptance, but also abandons the view that group knowledge supervenes on the states of the agents that comprise such groups.³⁸ Such alleged collective knowledge has been called *social knowledge*, and its existence has been most thoroughly defended by Bird (2010).³⁹

We have already seen that Bird defends the existence of inflationary knowledge simpliciter via cases like SCIENCE. He, though, motivates the view that there is social knowledge by invoking additional thought experiments, examples that involve communities C such as the scientific community, in which no individual in C knows or is even aware of a given proposition P. However, because the information plays the functional role it does in C, the latter, according to Bird, knows that P. One such example is the following:

Accessible Information: Dr. N is working in mainstream science, but in a field that currently attracts only a little interest. He makes a discovery, writes it up and sends his paper to the Journal of X-ology, which publishes the paper after the normal peer-review process. A few years later, at time t, Dr. N has died. All the referees of the paper for the journal and its editor have also died or forgotten all about the paper. The same is true of the small handful of people who read the paper when it appeared. A few years later yet, Professor O, is engaged in research that needs to draw on results in Dr. N's field. She carries out a search in the indexes and comes across Dr. N's discovery in the Journal of X-ology. She cites Dr. N's work in her own widely-read research and because of its importance to the new field, Dr. N's paper is now read and cited by many more scientists (32).

³⁷ Schmitt (1994) and Hakli (2011) embrace joint acceptance approaches to group justification. These two approaches are at present the most well-developed accounts of group justification.

³⁸ Note that while Gilbert and others who embrace a joint acceptance approach to group belief and group knowledge reject the view that members of the group in question token the relevant belief (something that makes them inflationists), they do not reject the view that group knowledge supervenes on the mental states of the agents in the group.

³⁹ See Bird (2010). Klausen, in his (2015), also defends this type of knowledge.

Bird claims that throughout the duration of the period in which (i) Dr. N publishes his work, (ii) Dr. N and all of the readers of his paper die, and (iii) Professor O discovers Dr. N's work, the scientific community knows the proposition in question. If he is right about this, then it is possible for a collective like the scientific community to know a particular proposition despite the fact that none of its members know that P or are even aware of the fact that P. Bird takes the above case to demonstrate that inflationary group knowledge does not supervene on the mental states of the members of groups.

While Bird uses cases like Accessible Information to reject deflationism about group knowledge, he also uses them to motivate the view that there is a type of collective knowledge that is functional in nature. More precisely, Bird contends that it is only collectives with the following features that can be knowers:

- (i) They have characteristic outputs that are propositional in nature;
- (ii) They have characteristic mechanisms whose function is to ensure or promote the chances that the outputs in (i) are true;
- (iii) The outputs in (i) are the inputs for (a) social actions or for (b) social cognitive structures (including the very same structure) (42-43).

Note that it seems to be the case that collectives like particular scientific communities do meet the above conditions. Outputs of scientific communities are things like journal articles which will be propositional in nature. Processes like the peer review process function to help ensure that the outputs are true. And articles in the scientific community serve as inputs for social actions (e.g., the mandating of specific health code standards based on such research).

This outline of Bird's position, I believe, is enough to allow us to determine whether it is compatible with the view that groups possess GS-K. And I think the answer is that it is not. Consider that if we embrace Bird's view of group knowledge, a group could know a fact about its own mind without any individual in the group even being aware of the fact in question. But this strikes me as an unacceptable consequence. In defense of this contention, note that it is commonly thought that having self-knowledge of the fact that one has a particular attitude enables an agent to reason critically about the proposition the attitude in question is adopted towards. In other words, such self-knowledge enables an agent to evaluate and revise the relevant attitude, and in particular base her attitude on her reasons, something she could not do if she were unaware of the proposition in question. If an individual agent truly knows that she believes that P, then she should be in a position to revise her position with respect to P.⁴⁰ But such would not necessarily be the case for collectives if what Bird calls *social knowledge* could be a type of self-knowledge. If the latter could be a type of self-knowledge, then collectives could know some proposition P about their own mind

⁴⁰ Alternatively, if I truly know that I have a particular belief, then that suffices, I contend, for that belief being access conscious in Block's (2008) sense of the term.

without being in a position to critically evaluate that proposition. After all, none of the members of the collective nor the collective itself, on his view, need be aware of that proposition.

Now some philosophers have defended the much bolder claim, or something very much like it, that self-knowledge is necessary in order for an agent to critically reason about facts about their mind. Indeed, as suggested above, Moran thinks that self-knowledge is required in order for an agent to critically reason about propositions concerning what she believes, intends, etc.⁴¹ While this necessity claim has been criticized by some, I am making the weaker, and by my lights, much more plausible sufficiency claim. On my view, if any entity possesses self-knowledge, that suffices for them to be able to critically evaluate the relevant proposition about the contents of their mind. And it is this sufficiency claim that coupling social knowledge with GS-K would not allow inflationists to meet. This point about critical reasoning, I believe, bolsters the case that the group in Schwengerer's REFLECTIVE SCIENCE case lacks self-knowledge. Such an agent seems entirely incapable of reasoning about that which it is supposed to possess self-knowledge about. But if such an agent truly did have self-knowledge, it would be able to engage in such reasoning.

Another way of putting the above point is that, at the very least, one cannot know some proposition about their mind, and lack awareness of that very proposition, on any plausible account of awareness. We could not, for instance possess self-knowledge of the proposition that we believe that Helena is the capital of Montana without also being aware of that very proposition. If further defense of this claim is needed, note that if the higher-order perception approach to consciousness and self-knowledge of the stripe defended by William Lycan (1996) is to the mark, then our attention mechanisms make us aware of the fact that we believe that P by generating a higher order-perceptual state directed at the target mental state. This higher-order state, on the standard reading of Lycan's view, causes us to believe that, for instance, we believe the particular proposition in question.⁴² On this approach, it follows that having self-knowledge of one's propositional attitudes via one's internal attention mechanisms entails that one will be aware of the proposition that one adopts an attitude towards.

It bears noting, however, that non-higher order accounts of awareness such as the view of awareness embraced by Laurence Bonjour (2003) has the same result. Bonjour, for example, holds that occurrent mental states M are states that because of their nature, are states that when we token them we are aware of them. On Bonjour's view such awareness does not consist in tokening a belief about M. Such awareness, he thinks, enables us to attend to M, and in particular, with respect to our attitudes, attend to the propositional content of M. This attention can, on his view, afford us with non-inferential, highly epistemically secure knowledge of such states, but only because we are conscious or aware of the propositional content of the state.

The above discussion indicates that it is reasonable to hold that in order to possess self-knowledge of the fact that one tokens a mental state M, one must at least be aware of the

⁴¹ See Burge (1996) for a similar position.

⁴² Rosenthal, in his (1986) work, offers an alternative higher-order account of awareness-consciousness—known in the literature as *the higher-order thought view* (or HOT). A similar moral, I think, can be drawn from this account.

proposition that is the relevant fact. That there can be GS-K that is social knowledge entails the rejection of this very plausible claim, and is therefore, problematic because of it. I take this point to put to rest the view that there can be group self-knowledge that is of the social nature Bird focuses on.

Proponents of Bird's view might argue that group self-knowledge might be markedly different than individual self-knowledge, and given this, we should refrain from thinking the two types of knowledge share the same features.⁴³ In response, while we should acknowledge that there might be differences between group and individual self-knowledge that are noteworthy, if the kinds in question are as radically different as I have argued they are, then it is plausible to hold that the relevant kind does not merit the label *self-knowledge* at all.

In this section we have looked at the two most popular inflationary analyses of group knowledge. I have argued that both of these accounts are incompatible with groups possessing inflationary group self-knowledge. If I am correct about this, then the vast majority of inflationists should think that groups fail to possess inflationary self-knowledge.

Conclusion:

I have argued that the only explicit defense of GS-K in the literature—a divergence argument offered by Schwengerer—is untenable and explained why I take other types of divergence arguments to be ineffective defenses of GS-K as well. I also defended the view that two of the more promising non-divergence ways of defending GS-K—ways that involve embracing individualist theories of self-knowledge—are also problematic. Lastly, I have worked to demonstrate that the standard ways of understanding group knowledge simpliciter do not comport well with inflationary group self-knowledge. The upshot of this discussion is that it is not only reasonable to hold that inflationists won't be able to successfully defend the existence of GS-K; most of them should not try to do so.

Earlier I motivated the view that if groups with minds of their own lack GS-K, they are going to be less responsible for their actions than they would be if they possessed such knowledge. If groups lack knowledge of their beliefs, desires, intentions, etc., then they are going to lack knowledge of *why* they act the way they do. And such ignorance, I believe, is going to bear on just how morally responsible such groups can be. More specifically, such self-ignorance is going to limit the amount of responsibility it is reasonable to attribute to a group. This is in part because lack of such self-knowledge limits the amount of control groups have over their actions. Groups with self-knowledge are in a position to know why they are doing what they do, and to change their actions and/or the states that led to such actions on the basis of such knowledge. To lack the latter, then, is to not have as much control over's one actions as an agent would otherwise have if they possessed such knowledge.⁴⁴ And almost all inflationists think that having control over one's actions matters with respect to moral responsibility.

⁴³ See Gilbert and Pilchman (2014) for a similar response to the charge that what they think inflationary group belief is, is too dissimilar to individualist belief.

⁴⁴ For issues related to this point about self-knowledge and control, see BLIND (2021).

In making the above point, it should be clear that I am not defending the view that possession of GS-K is *necessary* for groups with minds of their own to be morally responsible. In fact, I don't think it is. But moral responsibility is a matter of degree. A corporation, for instance, might be more morally responsible for an action than they would otherwise be if they possessed self-knowledge of why they acted the way they did, even if they could still be responsible for that action (to some extent) if they lacked such knowledge. This is just to emphasize that the possession of GS-K can (and on my view does) impact the degree to which groups with minds of their own are morally responsible for what they do. How much such ignorance impacts moral responsibility is a difficult question to answer, and one that arguably cannot be quantified or given a one-size-fits-all answer. Adequately addressing such a question might also require knowing more about the conditions that are necessary for baseline moral responsibility. As such, this question requires more space than I can give it here.⁴⁵ Fortunately, the general point about self-ignorance impacting the degree of moral responsibility attributable to groups can stand without having to offer a robust account of moral responsibility. Results reached in this paper about GS-K, then, are indeed quite significant.

As mentioned above, the standard view in the social ontology literature is that groups are agents independent of the members of such groups. If my discussion about GS-K is to the mark and groups do not possess GS-K, then while such groups would possess inflationary attitudes, they would (i) not know they possessed them, (ii) know what attitudes they were acting on and would be (iii) less morally responsible because of it. In other words, groups with minds of their own would indeed fly blind.

⁴⁵ It is a challenging question what conditions need to be met for groups to be morally responsible for their actions. Most inflationists, as implied above, think that group moral responsibility for actions requires some control over such actions. Hess (2014b) motivates the view that particular groups have free will in arguing that they can be morally responsible. Additional conditions that might need to be met for baseline moral responsibility include the ability to care about morality, as Tollefsen (2008) thinks, or phenomenal consciousness, as Baddorf (2017) maintains.

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