Group Knowledge

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1. Introduction

There is *knowledge in groups* or communities, e.g. in the scientific community, that such and such is the case, and that in some cases *groups as groups know*; and in all these cases there must be or have been actual knowers. Accordingly, there is knowledge available in social groups, and this knowledge can be "picked up" and had by individual members as knowledge. My main concern in this paper is to give an account of group beliefs and knowledge in the sense that the group members *as a group* believe or know something. A central case here is *normatively binding* group belief and knowledge. In such a case the group is obligated to reason and act on the truth of the content of the belief in question. I will assume that a group cannot know unless its members or at least some of them know the item in question. The general ground for this assumption is that group properties *supervene* on their members' relevant properties (see Tuomela 1995 Chapter 6, for a discussion). A group's normatively binding belief concerning a topic will accordingly depend on its members, beliefs, indeed we-mode "acceptance" beliefs, about the topic and on their relevant "interconnections" concerning it. We-mode acceptance belief centrally involves the idea of functioning fully as a group member (see Tuomela 2002a, 2003a for the we-mode). A member's private or I-mode beliefs may differ from his relevant we-mode beliefs.

In a group that knows qua a group a justifying *group reason*, amounting to a jointly accepted joint reason (thus a we-mode reason), for the acceptance and truth of p in the case of group knowledge is needed. Why? Briefly, knowledge (entailing justified true belief) guides group action and, indeed, does it more reliably than mere shared belief and, at least from the group's point of view, even shared true belief. This also applies to the group case: The group can act as a group more successfully and reliably (from an objective point of view) as well as be more confident and take more risks (from its internal, "groupjec-tive" point of view) in the case of group knowledge based on a jointly accepted reason than in the case of shared true belief or even shared I-mode knowledge by the members (cf. Tuomela, 2003, for detailed arguments for we-mode group reasons). Another point is that the group can also better argue for its view and defend itself in public when it has a good collectively accepted joint reason for its view than when it does not. (The joint reason can in an extreme case be a collectively accepted disjunction of the members' private reasons.)

Speaking of normatively binding group beliefs, there are two kinds of them: 1) group beliefs (viz. beliefs attributed to a group) concerning the external world (e.g. grass is green) and being at least partly dependent "upon the way the external world is"; 2) group beliefs are social and artificial in the sense that they are performatively created and that it is entirely up to the group members to decide about their truth or, rather, correctness. I will call group beliefs of kind 1) *natural.* As to 2), I will concentrate on its central subclass formed by *constitutive institutional belief*s, based on collective acceptance. An example is given by the institutional case of money (e.g. the group accepts and thus believes that squirrel fur is money). I will concentrate on normatively binding group beliefs, where the normativity is based primarily on the fact that there are "operative" members for the group who have been authorized to make normatively binding decisions and agreements and/or to accept views for the group. The set of operative members may in the extreme case consist of all group members, in which case there need not be prior authorization.

In the case of natural knowledge the group might err concerning the truth of the content of an item of knowledge and even concerning the justification it has concerning the acceptance of the content. Group discussion and, indeed, any method of justification may fall short of yielding truth in the case of natural belief. In contrast, in the (constitutive) institutional case the truth of the item p of knowledge *and* the justification of the group´s acceptance of p are both totally up to the group. Thus the criteria of justification are necessarily social. In the constitutive institutional case we can speak of performative truth, as the conceptual model for these institutional beliefs is *collective performative speech acts*. Suppose we, the group members, decide and thereby declare that squirrel fur is to be our money by representing in our actual use that squirrel fur is money. Then squirrel fur is money in our group, and our group *knows* it is money and describes it as money. In other cases less than explicit declaration will suffice as long as functionally right action is involved.

In the case of natural belief there is in general mind-to-world direction of fit (cf. Searle 1983 for the notion). This means in colloquial terms that the mind must be changed to fit the world. In contrast, in the case of constitutive institutional belief (e.g. squirrel fur is money) the direction of fit is world-to-mind. That is, when viewed as constitutive the belief in question has the world-to-mind direction of fit (in contrast to the case when it is viewed merely as expressing what the world is like according to its subject). Thus, in the constitutive case the world is to be changed and kept changed by the participants so that it fits their mind. However, the group is here also taken to have asserted the content in question, and thus the belief also has the mind-to-world direction of fit.

The "operative" members who have formed the item of knowledge for the group *actually* have the knowledge (at least at the time of making the decision or agreement in question). The case with non-operative members, in contrast, may be like that of a stranger or an external obser-ver. They may learn about the item of knowledge e.g. by *testimony* from someone (or from books) and thus have the source in question as their justified source of knowl-edge. The content in question, say that squirrel fur is money in the group, is "quasi-objective" or, as we may say, "groupjective" knowledge (cf. Searle 1995). For external observers the knowledge that squirrel fur is money initially has the mind-to-world rather than the world-to-mind direction of fit of satisfaction (cf. above).

2. Group knowledge

Group knowledge involves group belief, in analogy with the individual case. I have elsewhere (in Tuomela 1992, 1995) given an account of group belief (in this case amounting basically to the group's acceptance of p as true). Here I propose to elucidate *epistemically justified* normatively group-binding group belief:

(*BG*) Group g is *justified in believing* that p in the normative group-binding sense in the social and normative circumstances C if and only if in C there are (authorized) operative members $A_1,...,A_m$ of g in respective positions $P_1,...,P_m$ such that

(1) the agents $A_1,...,A_m$, when they were performing their social tasks in their positions $P_1,...,P_m$ and due to their exercising the relevant authority system („joint intention formation" system) of g,

> (a) (intentionally) collectively accepted p as true or correctly assertable in g and because of this exercise of the authority system they ought to continue to accept and believe it positionally, thus in the we-mode (being collectively committed to p, which they have collectively accepted for g); and

> (b) p relates appropriately to the realm of concern of the group and is epistemically justified for g in C;

(2) there is mutual knowledge among the operative members $A_1,...,A_m$ to the effect that (1);

(3) because of (1a), the (full-fledged and adequately informed) non-operative members of g tend to tacitly accept -- or at least ought to accept -- p in the we-mode;

(4) there is mutual knowledge in g to the effect that (3).

My concise group-level analysis of epistemic group justification for the case dealt with by (*BG*) can be summarized in general terms as follows (cf. Tuomela 2002b):

(*EJ*) Proposition p is *epistemically justified* for group g (in a situation C) if and only if (in C) g accepts p in virtue of p fitting and being supported by (a) the data available to g and (b) the „semantical" (viz. world-language, language-language, and language-world) rules accepted by g.

Clause (b) is to be understood in terms of the scientific method and hence conduciveness to informative truth, understanding the semantical rules here more or less in a Sellarsian way (cf. Sellars 1968, Tuomela 1985). (*EJ*) can clearly accommodate not only natural group beliefs (best covered by the phrasing) but also constitutive institutional group beliefs. In the latter case the central element in (b) is a constitutive rule such as "squirrel fur counts as money".

My present analysis of "positional" group knowledge is compatible with the possibility that a group member may be justified in the I-mode without the group being justified.: A joint reason might be missing. For instance, the constitutive goals and standards (etc.) of the group might simply prohibit the kind of I-mode or private justification that the group member has for his belief that p. (Even all group members might be justified without the group rationally having a joint reason – cf. cases requiring compromises.) Conversely, the group might be justified in its acceptance that p even if some members (e.g. non-operative members) are not, and might privately have good reasons against the truth of the content in question, but just go along with what the operative members have accepted. (Cf. Schmitt 1994, for resembling points.)

To arrive at an elucidation of group knowledge that p, I propose, in contrast to Longino 2002, that the truth of p (or, more generally, correct assertability) also needs to be required, for the group might be wrong no matter how good reasons it takes itself to have. In addition, there must

be a condition blocking Gettier-type paradoxes. Without further discussion, I adopt Pollock's 1987, p. 181, formulation for this condition. So we get:

(KG) g *knows* that p in the normative group-binding sense in the social and normative circumstances C if and only if in C (i) g believes that p in the normatively group-binding sense and p is not only groupjectively but also epistemically justified (in g), (ii) p is true or correctly assertable (for g), and (iii) there is no true proposition, q, such that were g to believe that q it would not any more be epistemically justified in believing that p.

It follows from (KG)) -- given the entailed clause (1)(b) of (BG) -- that the operative members must know that p and indeed generally mutually we-know that p in the we-mode (but they need not know it *also* in the I-mode). However, the non-operative members might not know that p, despite being obligated to knowing.

Not all group beliefs are normatively group-binding in the above sense. Let us still consider weaker kinds of group knowledge that fall into four categories I – IV (cf. Tuomela 2003b.) I will do it concisely in terms of some examples as follows:

(1) The Catholic Church believes that miracles happen. (Category I: Normatively group-binding, viz. based on group obligation, with supporting I-mode beliefs had by the group members)

(2) The Communist Party of Ruritania believes that capitalist countries will soon perish, but none of its members really believes so. (Category I: Normatively group-binding but not backed by personal, I-mode beliefs)

(3) This group believes that Smith is a traitor. (Category II: Weakly normatively group-binding as the leaders have led the others to believe that they ought to treat Smith as a traitor, which resulted in collective commitment)

(4) The team believes that it will win today's game. (Category III: Non-normative, the case is assumed still to be group-binding, because of based on a joint plan which is personally accepted in a non-normative, thin sense by the participants and which involves collective commitment but no group-obligation)

(5) Finns believe that sauna originated in Finland. (Category IV: Non-normative and non-binding; this kind of shared we-belief is what Gallup investigations study).

The most typical group beliefs seem to be the normatively group-binding group beliefs in the sense of category I and the non-normative beliefs in the sense of category III. We have:

(KGG) g *knows* that p *as a group* in C if and only if in C (a) g believes that p in one of the senses I-III ; (b) p is epistemically justified (for g), and (c) p is true or correctly assertable (for g).

Here the phrase 'as a group' primarily means that the group members are collectively committed to p for the group.*

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