

# Group Assertion

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**Abstract** In this paper, I provide the framework for an account of group assertion. On my view, there are two kinds of group assertion, coordinated and authority-based, with authority-based group assertion being the core notion. I argue against a deflationary view, according to which a group's asserting is understood in terms of individual assertions, by showing that a group can assert a proposition even when no individual does. Instead, I argue on behalf of an inflationary view, according to which it is the group itself that asserts, a conclusion supported by the fact that paradigmatic features of assertion apply only at the level of the group. A central virtue of my account is that it appreciates the important relationship that exists between most groups and their spokespersons, as well as the consequences that follow from this relationship. My view, thus, provides the framework for distinguishing when responsibility for an assertion lies at the collective level, and when it should be shouldered by an individual simply speaking for herself.

Groups make assertions all the time. It is nearly a daily occurrence to hear a university announcing a new initiative, a police department denying a charge of brutality, or a company reporting information about its financial value. Yet despite the frequency with which we take it at face value that groups do offer assertions, there is a shocking paucity of philosophical work on this topic. This paper aims to at least begin the process of filling this gap in the literature.

With respect to understanding collective phenomena in general, there are, broadly speaking, two different approaches. On the one hand, there is a deflationary approach, according to which explaining such phenomena does not require new theoretical resources; rather, we can simply rely on our grasp of the same

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phenomena at the individual level. This is because the states and acts of groups just are the states and acts of individual members, “summed up.” For instance, a deflationary view of group assertion holds that a group asserts a proposition just in case some of the members of the group assert the proposition. Which members are here relevant, and under what circumstances their assertions count as the group’s, need to be fleshed out, but the core idea is clear: group assertion is reducible to the assertions of individual members. Thus, to the extent that we understand individual assertion, we have the central resources for explaining group assertion.

According to an inflationary approach, on the other hand, collective phenomena cannot involve the mere summing up of the same phenomena at the individual level. This is because there can be states and acts of groups where there is no corresponding state or act of a group member. For instance, an inflationary view of group assertion holds that a group can assert a proposition even when not a single member of the group does. In a very important sense, then, collective phenomena are over and above any phenomena at the individual level.

In this paper, I will develop and defend an inflationary approach to what I will argue is the core kind of group assertion: authority-based. I will show that a group can offer an assertion even when no member of the group does, and thus that it is the group itself that is doing the asserting.<sup>1</sup> This conclusion is further supported, I will argue, by the fact that it is the group, rather than any individual, that is subject to the norm or norms governing assertion. Finally, I will explain why I regard assertion as being somewhat unique among collective phenomena in demanding that it be understood in straightforwardly inflationary terms.

## 1 Two Kinds of Group Assertion

Let’s begin by highlighting some key dimensions of group assertion. Very roughly, there are two ways in which a group might assert that  $p$ : first, a group may assert that  $p$  through all of its members reasonably intending to convey that  $p$  together in virtue of coordinated individual acts. Let us call this *coordinated group assertion*. An instance of this sort of group assertion is where the members of a tour group stranded on a desert island work together to form the words “We Need Help” in the sand. All of the members coordinate individual acts of communication that together convey the view of the group as a whole. Another example of coordinated group assertion is where all of the members of a research team collectively draft an article together, such as through Google Docs. If such members work collaboratively to literally compose, say, a single sentence—much like the members of the tour group put together the message in the sand—then this is the assertion of the research team. This should be distinguished from a case where each member of a group writes

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<sup>1</sup> To avoid confusion, I should note that I argued in my (2014) on behalf of a deflationary account of group testimony. But while my topic here is on what we might call the *metaphysics* of group assertion or group testimony (where I here use “assertion” and “testimony” interchangeably)—i.e., what is it for a group to assert or testify—the account in my (2014) takes up the *epistemology* of group assertion or group testimony—i.e., how do we acquire justified belief or knowledge via group assertion. Thus, my view is inflationary in a metaphysical sense, but deflationary epistemologically.

different parts that together make up a single article, which is how some co-authored or collaborative work is done. Whereas the former is an instance of coordinated group assertion, the latter is merely a collection of individual assertions.

While coordinated group assertion is surely important, the far more common kind of group assertion, and the one that I think has not been fully appreciated, is that offered through an authorized spokesperson(s). I am understanding the notion of a spokesperson(s) as subsuming any set of individuals that is smaller than a group as a whole and that speaks on a group's behalf with the proper authority. A spokesperson might be a member of a group, such as when the chair of a philosophy department has the authority to speak on behalf of the department when hiring decisions are at issue. Alternatively, a spokesperson might not be a member at all, such as when a lawyer is hired to speak on a philosophy department's behalf where pending litigation is concerned. The point that I wish to emphasize here, however, is that the standard way in which a group asserts is through an authorized spokesperson(s). Whenever a group asserts through an authorized set of individuals that is smaller than the group as a whole, let us call this *authority-based group assertion*. This kind of group assertion will be the central focus of this paper.

How should we understand a spokesperson's having the requisite authority to speak on a group's behalf? This question has been largely absent from work on collective phenomena, but a notable exception is found in Ludwig's (2014). Since his is the only extended discussion of this issue in the literature, it is worth considering in some detail.

## 2 Having the Authority to Be a Spokesperson

Ludwig's central aim is to provide an account of what he calls *proxy agency*, where "one person or subgroup's doing something *counts as* or *constitutes* or is *recognized as* (tantamount to) another person or group's doing something" (Ludwig 2014, p. 76). According to Ludwig, being a spokesperson for a group is a paradigmatic instance of being a proxy agent and is also what John Searle calls a *status function*.<sup>2</sup> "The two core ideas in the concept of a status function are that some object or thing or person has a certain social function, a function in certain social transactions, and that it has that function in virtue of its having acquired a certain status among a relevant group of people by way of their attitude toward it" (Ludwig 2014, p. 87). A standard example used to clarify the concept of a status function is money: twenty dollar bills are simply pieces of paper unless the relevant group members, such as buyers and consumers, agree to their having a particular social status. Similarly, Ludwig argues that individuals making assertions are spokespersons only when their status as such is granted by the relevant members of the community, which here includes all members of the group and audience in question. In particular, "a status function is a property an object has in virtue of people so regarding it...that enables it to play a certain role in a social transaction. This has to include all who participate in the social transaction. The announcing group's authorization of an individual

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<sup>2</sup> See Searle (1995).

plays its role only in the context of an action plan that specifies its function relative to a collective action by a larger group” (Ludwig 2014, p. 89).

Let us call Ludwig’s view here the *status function model* of being a spokesperson. One of the upshots of this approach is that the actions of proxy agents do not themselves constitute the actions of groups. This is because “in one way or another, group action through proxy agency calls upon every member of the group to contribute” (Ludwig 2014, p. 100). Thus, when a spokesperson asserts, this is the culmination of the activities of all of the group members, such as their granting authority to the spokesperson to speak on their behalf or their agreeing to the institutional arrangements that provide such authority.

There are, however, at least two central problems with this status function conception of spokespersons. The first is that *a group’s asserting does not depend on audience recognition*. More precisely, groups can assert through a spokesperson not only when the audience members fail to regard the speaker as playing the role of spokesperson for the group, but also when they reject both her status and her corresponding assertion. Ludwig explicitly denies this possibility. He writes, “...if the group identifies a possible mechanism for group announcement, but doesn’t communicate it to the audience, or if the audience doesn’t find it acceptable, and so refuses to pay attention, then the group fails to achieve its aim. This would be analogous to someone declaring a certain object was to be the royal seal without getting others to go along with it” (p. 93). But suppose, for instance, that the police chief of a nearly universally sexist community has the sole power to designate a spokesperson to represent the department with regard to a highly publicized murder investigation, and for the first time in history he appoints a woman to this role. Let’s call her Jane. Suppose further that the community finds the appointment of a woman utterly unacceptable and so refuses to listen to, or accept, anything that Jane asserts. Has Jane asserted on behalf of the police department? To my mind, the answer is clearly yes. What is needed for a spokesperson to assert on behalf of a group is that she *has* the authority to do so, regardless of whether this is recognized by the audience members. If, for instance, it is written into the police department’s policies and procedures that the chief has the sole power to appoint the spokesperson, and he so appoints Jane, then she *has* the authority to speak for the department even if the sexist community rejects that she is playing this role and ignores everything that she says.

This verdict is paralleled in the individual case: those who are ignored do not fail to be asserters or fail to assert; instead, they are the victims of testimonial injustice<sup>3</sup> or their assertion fails to achieve its desired aim of uptake.<sup>4</sup> If, for instance, a

<sup>3</sup> See Fricker (2007).

<sup>4</sup> Some read Austin (1962) as requiring uptake in order for illocutionary speech acts to be successful. See, for instance, Langton (2009). For objections to the uptake requirement, see Antony (2011). Fricker (2012) applies this reading of Austin to testimony, writing “Without my uptake, whatever you may succeed in doing with your words, it won’t be quite testifying” (Fricker 2012, p. 254). Even if this is a correct reading of Austin, there are at least three worries with applying it to testimony or assertion (for our purposes here, we can treat testimony and assertion interchangeably). First, there is not a single view in the literature of what it is to testify that supports the uptake requirement [see, for instance, Coady (1992), Fricker (1995), Audi (1997), Graham (1997), Elgin (2002) and Lackey (2008)]. Second, this view has the consequence that one does not testify in a private diary that is never read, in a courtroom when one is not

woman asserts that she does not want to have sex with her partner, she *is* asserting this, even if her assertion is ignored or refused. Indeed, even if her partner is such that he does not accept her status as an asserter of refusals of sex *in general*, she is still an asserter. This is because she has the authority to refuse unwanted sexual advances even when her authority is ignored or rebuffed. In this way, I disagree with Ludwig's claim that a spokesperson asserting on behalf of a group without audience acceptance "would be analogous to someone declaring a certain object was to be the royal seal without getting others to go along with it." It would instead be analogous to an individual being the victim of testimonial injustice.<sup>5</sup>

Consider, also, some consequences of requiring audience recognition or acceptance in order for a spokesperson to assert on behalf of a group. Women would systematically be denied the ability to serve as a spokesperson in sexist communities, minorities would be unable to do so in racist societies, and so on. Moreover, suppose that Jane asserts on behalf of the police department at T1 when the community is sexist, but then years later at T2 the community has changed and is now accepting of her role as the group's spokesperson. Her statement would go from failing to be the group's assertion at T1 to being the group's at T2 and thus it would be incapable of functioning as evidence of the group's view at T1 but not at T2. These conclusions all seem problematic, as they conflate one's *asserting* with one's asserting *being properly appreciated*.

The second problem with Ludwig's status function view is that *whether a spokesperson asserts on behalf of a group does not require that the members of the group accept or recognize the authority of the spokesperson*; the spokesperson simply has to *have* the authority. Suppose that all of the fellow police officers of the sexist department above refuse to accept the policy that permits a woman to be the authorized spokesperson for the department. Thus, even though Jane is appointed as the spokesperson for the department, her statement would not be the group's assertion on Ludwig's view because all members of the group need to accept the institutional arrangements that provide such authority. But if the policies and procedures of the police department do not require agreement or consensus in order for authority to be given to Jane to serve as the spokesperson, then the members being disgruntled or unhappy doesn't make it the case that she is not asserting on behalf of the group.

By way of response to this sort of worry, Ludwig argues that simply by virtue of agreeing to be a member of a group, one thereby accepts the policies and procedures of the group. He writes: "meeting the membership condition requires endorsing the division of roles and responsibilities (that is partly what defines the role of

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Footnote 4 continued

believed, and so on. Third, if one takes someone to be lying and thus there is no uptake, then there is, on this view, no assertion. If asserting is a necessary condition on lying, then we get the result that the known liar cannot lie. For all of these reasons, uptake should not be taken to be necessary for testifying or asserting.

<sup>5</sup> Just to be clear, the parallel is as follows: just as individuals can assert in the absence of audience recognition, so, too, can groups assert via spokespersons without such recognition.

membership), anyone who joins such a group explicitly endorses its arrangements,<sup>6</sup> in accepting membership, and in that act then contributes constitutively to the authorization of its various roles” (Ludwig 2014, p. 97). But there is a dilemma facing this response: either group membership does not require the acceptance of the policies and procedures of the group or the notion of acceptance operative here is vacuous.

To see this, consider, first, a *sabotaging member* of a group: suppose that a police officer in the sexist police department becomes convinced of the moral wrongness of the sexism of his group and (i) rejects all of the sexist policies and procedures of the department, and (ii) actively works to undermine them. Surely this officer is still a member of the police department in question, yet it is not at all clear how he *accepts* the group’s policies and procedures. Acceptance is typically understood as being such that it would manifest itself in one’s actions. So, for example, one might be said to accept, even if one does not believe, that smoking is safe if one would assert that smoking is safe, act as if smoking is safe, defend the safety of smoking, and so on.<sup>7</sup> This is because acceptance often results from a consideration of one’s goals, such as the financial aim of making smoking appealing. But the sabotaging member’s actions support his rejecting rather than accepting the institutional arrangements of the police department.

Of course, Ludwig might say that the very joining of the police department by the sabotaging member brings with it an acceptance of its policies and procedures, even if this wouldn’t be manifested in any of his actions. But the sense of acceptance that must be operative here is so thin that it is vacuous. To make this even clearer, consider a *sabotaging joiner* of a group: suppose that a new police recruit joins the department precisely because he rejects all of the sexist policies and procedures of the department and wishes to actively work to undermine them. To my mind, sabotaging joiner is clearly a member of the police department—he has the same authority and benefits as all of the other members of the department, receives a paycheck from the department, and so on. There is, however, absolutely no sense in which he accepts the policies and procedures of the police department. Indeed, he joins the group with the sole aim of undermining the institutional structure because of its sexist nature. To say that all of this is still compatible with the sabotaging joiner accepting this institutional structure is to render the notion of acceptance here vacuous.

Thus, I reject the status function model of spokespersons—spokespersons are not like money or royal seals, which require agreement or recognition by the members of the social transactions in order to be what they are. Instead, my view might be called *pluralist*: there is a multitude of mechanisms for securing the relevant kind of authority needed for being a spokesperson. One of the more common ways is where there *is* agreement, and authority is acquired through members of a group explicitly

<sup>6</sup> Explicit endorsement of a group’s policies and procedures is a very strong requirement for group membership. Ludwig argues that this requirement is true only of “genuine organizations,” where “members choose to join and, hence, agree to the conditions of membership, which includes an endorsement of the institutional arrangements” (Ludwig 2014, p. 97). As I will argue later, however, I think that members can join groups without such an endorsement.

<sup>7</sup> For detailed discussions about this difference between acceptance and belief, see, for instance, van Fraassen (1980), Stalnaker (1984), Cohen (1989, 1992), Wray (2001) and Hakli (2007, 2011).

or implicitly *granting* it to a spokesperson. For instance, a philosophy department might vote to elect the Chair as its spokesperson on matters related to job searches, or the members might grant this authority when they accept employment at an institution where this is part of the Chair's duties. Or members of a group might sign a legal contract that grants authority to a lawyer to speak on their behalf on matters related to the litigation in question. But the granting of authority by the members of a group is not the only way in which it might be acquired.

Another way is through *tradition or inheritance*, such as when a member of a monarchy has the authority to speak on behalf of his or her nation on, say, matters of national security. Even if members of the nation explicitly reject the monarch's authority and actively seek to distance themselves from the expressed views, the authority might exist nonetheless. Moreover, unlike heads of state who are voted into office, citizens of a monarchy might have no say in who is speaking on their behalf, and if they acquired their citizenship through birthright, there might be no sense in which they ever accepted the relevant institutional structure.<sup>8</sup>

Still another way in which such authority might be acquired is through *non-objection*. Suppose that a collection of protesters informally gathers outside the Dean's office at a university to object to the recent firing of a tenured faculty member. When the media shows up on the first day, suppose that one of the protesters—call her Mary—states, “We object to the faculty member's employment being terminated without due process.” On this first day, Mary's statement is an instance of an individual offering her own view of what a collective entity believes. In other words, the assertion is Mary's, not the group's. But suppose that the protesters continue to meet and no one objects to Mary reporting their views to the media. At some point, Mary acquires the authority to speak on behalf of the group through the absence of objections from the members, thus rendering her statements those of the protesters.<sup>9</sup>

It may also be worth leaving open the possibility that having the authority to be a spokesperson can be moral or fundamental. Just as I have the authority to refuse sexual advances, regardless of whether this authority has ever been recognized or appreciated, perhaps parents have the authority to assert on behalf of their very young children, even if they live in a society where this has always been denied.

These are simply some examples of how authority can be acquired, but there are certainly others, such as through seizure or coercion. The central point to note here, though, is that the having of authority to be a spokesperson need not be granted or accepted by either the members of the group or the audience in question, and it is

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<sup>8</sup> Ludwig argues that citizenship is a hybrid status, where “operative members” are those “who have accepted membership” and thus when we say that a hybrid institutional group has done something *qua* institution, this “entails that (and only that) its operative members have all contributed, whether or not it has non-operative members as well” (Ludwig 2014, p. 99). But why would those who obtained citizenship through birthright not be operative? Doesn't this subgroup make up the bulk of most nations? Moreover, since it is highly questionable whether *accepting* membership is necessary for group membership, it would be best to not build this into one's account of group agency.

<sup>9</sup> Ludwig (2014) might deny that this is a case of a spokesperson asserting on behalf of a group, since he claims that only genuine organizations can authorize proxy agents. But this isn't plausible. Unstructured, informal groups can evolve to have spokespersons without any clear act of “joining” or of agreeing to the conditions of membership.

the having of authority to speak on a group's behalf that in large part determines whether the assertion in question is an individual's or a group's.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to being pluralist, the conception of authority operative here is *de facto* or *descriptive* rather than *normative*, and thus the authority in question need not be morally or politically legitimate. Consider a case where the authority in question is acquired in some sense illegitimately: suppose, for instance, that in the case of the protesters discussed above, the members do not object to one of them speaking on their behalf because they are oppressed or bullied by him. Or suppose that some revolutionaries seize authority from a political figure to speak on behalf of a subset of the citizenry. Is the relevant group asserting in these sorts of cases?

The short answer to this question is yes. The mere fact that authority is acquired in, say, a morally illegitimate way does not mean that the person in question doesn't have it. As I said above, the authority at issue here is *de facto* or descriptive authority, not normative. A group of rebels might seize authority from the President of a country so as to oppress the members of an ethnic minority. Even if this seizure of authority is morally illegitimate, the rebels might still come to have the authority to speak on behalf of the country. The same is true in the individual case: a highly aggressive business executive might become the President of a corporation through immoral dealings, but this doesn't prevent him from having the authority to serve as the corporation's spokesperson. Or suppose that a woman feels so dominated by her husband that she never objects when he speaks on her behalf. Through this systematic non-objection, the husband might come to have the authority to be his wife's spokesperson on a range of issues, even if the process whereby this is achieved is morally illegitimate. Of course, there are limits to this, which make clear the difference between authority and power. Some psychological trauma may be so severe that the absence of objection is due to the *inability* to object, and so it might not be possible to acquire authority through non-objection in such cases, despite having power. But the central point that I want to emphasize here is that illegitimately acquired authority can be authority nonetheless.

There are, however, a couple of objections about this notion of authority that should be considered. First, suppose that a king has been taken to have the authority to speak on behalf of the citizenry without anyone realizing that in fact the laws of the monarchy grant this authority to the queen. Who has been the spokesperson for the nation, the king or the queen?

On my view, this would simply be described as a conflict of authority. The king has authority to speak on behalf of the citizens through non-objection, and the queen has authority to speak on their behalf through the law. And such a conflict would have to be resolved through, e.g., negotiation, in order to determine who has the final authority. But this is unique neither to my view nor to group assertion. Suppose that unbeknownst to us, my husband and I each hire a different lawyer to represent me in a suit. The first lawyer says on my behalf that I want to settle while the second one says on my behalf that I don't. Which one is my actual spokesperson? Again, there is a conflict of authority that needs to be resolved here before it can be determined what my assertion is.

<sup>10</sup> I will say what else is needed to distinguish individual from group assertion in what follows.



Second, suppose that a king has the legal authority to speak on behalf of his citizens, but there is widespread discontent in his nation about the existence of the monarchy. No one acknowledges his authority and no one takes him to be speaking for the nation. Is he still asserting on their behalf?<sup>11</sup>

If the king is still regarded as the king, and with this role comes, say, the legal authority to speak on behalf of the citizens, then, yes, the king continues to assert on behalf of his nation despite their discontent. It is, however, possible that the widespread discontent among the citizens brings about social changes that *do* undermine the king's having this authority. Perhaps there is so much opposition that it becomes an open question whether the nation still has a king, or whether one of the king's roles is to be the spokesperson for the people. In these cases, it would be indeterminate whether the king is asserting for the nation. If there is radical social change and the monarchy is dismantled or the king is stripped of much of his authority, then he would no longer be asserting on behalf of the nation. It might also be the case that the citizens forge new groups—such as a revolutionary or opposition party. While the king might still reign over the nation and thereby speak on its behalf, there might be different spokespersons for these opposition groups.

We have seen, then, that having the authority to be a spokesperson can be grounded in a multitude of features, where agreement or recognition by the members of the social transactions is merely one such option. I now want to turn to another aspect of being a spokesperson that is worth highlighting.

### 3 The Autonomy of Spokespersons

In addition to it being the case that the standard way in which a group asserts is through an authorized spokesperson(s), another central point that I wish to emphasize is that most spokespersons have a certain degree of autonomy or independence. A spokesperson, at the very least, is not merely a parrot or a mouthpiece with a script, repeating verbatim what she has been told by the members of the group. But even more strongly, a spokesperson often asserts on behalf of a group without consulting the group or its members regarding the specific content of the proffered statement. This is at least in part because spokespersons are frequently required to speak for their clients “on the spot,” to respond to new questions and concerns by extrapolating from the information that they already have. Moreover, spokespersons sometimes have expertise that goes beyond what the represented group and its members have. A lawyer, for instance, need not consult with her clients each time she speaks on their behalf since at least some of what she states concerns legal matters over which her clients might be wholly ignorant.

Combining the central features of authority-based assertion thus far highlighted—namely, that the standard way in which a group asserts is through an authorized spokesperson(s), and that most spokespersons have a certain degree of autonomy—results in the possibility that a group can assert a proposition about which it and its individual members are wholly unaware. Here is an example:

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<sup>11</sup> I am grateful to Michael Bratman for this question.

AUTONOMOUS SPOKESPERSON: Philip Morris hires spokesperson S—who is not a member of the group—to represent the company’s views to the public.<sup>12</sup> Philip Morris explicitly tells S that the company’s official view is that smoking is safe, no matter what. At a recent press conference, S, in her role as the official spokesperson for Philip Morris, is asked whether smoking causes disease X. No member of Philip Morris has ever heard of disease X, nor do they have any beliefs about its safety, but S responds on Philip Morris’s behalf that smoking does not cause disease X.

In AUTONOMOUS SPOKESPERSON, Philip Morris asserts that smoking does not cause disease X while no member of the company has ever even heard of disease X. This is because S has the authority to autonomously speak on behalf of Philip Morris where the safety of smoking is concerned, even when this goes beyond matters that S has explicitly discussed with Philip Morris’s members. Any adequate account of group assertion, then, needs to accommodate this distinctive feature of the way that groups assert.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4 Coordinated and Authority-Based Group Assertion

With these considerations in mind, I propose the following accounts of coordinated group assertion (CGA) and authority-based group assertion (ABGA), respectively:

CGA: A group G asserts that  $p$  in the coordinated way if and only if the members of G coordinate individual acts  $a_1, \dots, a_n$ , so that they all reasonably intend to convey that  $p$  together in virtue of these acts.

ABGA: A group G asserts that  $p$  in the authority-based way if and only if that  $p$  belongs to a domain  $d$ , and a spokesperson(s) S (i) reasonably intends to convey the information that  $p$  in virtue of the communicable content of an individual act (or individual acts) of communication,<sup>14</sup> (ii) has the authority to

<sup>12</sup> One might ask the following: if Philip Morris hires an outside spokesperson, S, to represent the company’s view, does this thereby make S a member of the group in question? The answer here is clearly no. If the Supreme Court hires an outside clerk to assist with legal research, this does not thereby make the clerk a member of the Supreme Court. If Northwestern University hires Bulley and Andrews Construction Firm to renovate one of the academic buildings, this does not make the construction workers members of Northwestern. Bringing a suit against the firm, for instance, is not to thereby bring suit against Northwestern.

<sup>13</sup> While individuals might also grant authority to another to speaker on their behalf, such as when a lawyer represents an individual client, group assertion is distinctive in that this is the standard way in which groups assert.

<sup>14</sup> I should note that in my (2006) and (2008), condition (i) is presented as being both necessary and sufficient for an individual to testify (or assert). However, to distinguish what a spokesperson does in testifying or asserting on behalf of someone else, rather than on behalf of herself, my account of individual testimony (assertion) should explicitly specify this. Thus, it should read:

S testifies (asserts) that  $p$  by making an act of communication  $a$  if and only if S reasonably intends to convey on behalf of herself the information that  $p$  (in part) in virtue of  $a$ ’s communicable content.

I am grateful to Marija Jankovic for a question that led to the inclusion of this note.

convey the information in  $d$ , and (iii) acts in this way in virtue of  $S$ 's authority as a representative of  $G$ .<sup>15</sup>

According to the CGA, coordinated group assertion simply involves individual acts—such as placing rocks in the sand or words in a document—that are coordinated, and so there is not much to add to what has been said about individual acts. I will, therefore, spend the remainder of the paper focusing on authority-based assertion. And here there are a number of features to note.

First, condition (i) of the ABGA is modeled on the account of individual testimony that I have developed elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> In particular, the focus is on *acts of communication* so as to allow for assertions that do not involve statements, such as nods, pointing, and other gestures. Moreover, to avoid countenancing as assertions acts of communication where the intention is to convey the information that  $p$  in virtue of features *about* the assertion—such as my intending to convey the information that I have a soprano voice by asserting this in a soprano voice<sup>17</sup>—it is required that the speakers reasonably intend to convey the information that  $p$  at least in part in virtue of the act's communicable content. Still further, the intention in question needs to be a reasonable one. A group does not assert that its name is Philip Morris—even if it intends to convey this information—through winking at the public. This is because, in the absence of prior agreement that a certain sequence of winks will be understood as conveying Philip Morris's name, this intention is not a reasonable one.

Second, according to the ABGA, a group can assert that  $p$  even when not a single member of the group either intends to convey the information that  $p$  or asserts that  $p$ , thereby permitting groups to have autonomous spokespersons who assert on their behalf “on the spot.” At the same time, the ABGA does not allow such spokespersons to assert on a group's behalf on any topic whatsoever. Both of these results follow from condition (ii), which requires that a spokesperson(s) have the authority to convey some or all of the propositions in a domain of which that  $p$  is a member. So, for instance, a spokesperson might have the authority to speak on Philip Morris's behalf with respect to matters that concern the safety of smoking, but not about questions concerning the company's finances. This enables my view to deliver the correct verdict that Philip Morris is asserting that smoking does not cause disease  $X$  in AUTONOMOUS SPOKESPERSON.

<sup>15</sup> One might wonder whether there is a third kind of group assertion, what we might call *distributed group assertion*. Suppose, for instance, that there are three members of a committee, each of whom uploads information to an automated system. M1 submits that  $p$ , M2 submits that  $q$ , and M3 submits that  $r$ . The system then aggregates the information and issues a public report that the committee's view is that  $s$ , even though no member of the group is aware of this aggregated result. Is this group assertion? Strictly speaking, the answer is no, as there is simply no one who intends to convey the information that  $s$ . When we learn that  $s$  from the automated output, we're learning from the system, not from the group. This is supported by the fact that if it were the group's assertion, then the committee could learn from its own assertion. For instance, when the output that  $s$  is issued and the committee learns this by reading the report, the committee itself could come to learn that  $s$  from its own assertion. Given this, distributed group assertion is assertion in only an extended sense.

<sup>16</sup> See Lackey (2006, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> This is a slightly modified example from Audi (1997).

Moreover, notice that condition (iii) of the ABGA requires that S assert on G's behalf in virtue of S's authority as a representative of G. For instance, suppose that Philip Morris's spokesperson tells his wife while on vacation that the company disregarded valid scientific evidence about the dangers of smoking. In such a case, he might be personally asserting to his wife about this fact, but he is not doing so on behalf of Philip Morris. This is because even if he has the authority to convey this information on behalf of Philip Morris, he is not doing so in virtue of this authority; instead, he is doing so in virtue of his role as a husband to his spouse. Condition (iii) thus rules out such individual assertions from counting as a group assertion, even if one of the members in fact has the authority to speak on behalf of the group.

In order to better understand both conditions (ii) and (iii) of the ABGA, I would like to draw an important distinction between what we might call a *rogue spokesperson* and a *bad spokesperson*.

On the one hand, a rogue spokesperson is one who asserts that  $p$  on behalf of G either without having the authority to do so or without doing so in virtue of this authority. There are at least two different ways in which a spokesperson can be rogue. First, S might assert that  $p$  on behalf of G, where that  $p$  is not part of the domain in which S has authority to represent G. For instance, Philip Morris's spokesperson might assert that the company's favorite movie is *Citizen Kane* or that the company does not support gay marriage, despite having the authority only to speak on behalf of the company when the safety of smoking is at issue. Here, the *content* of the statement in question lies outside of the scope of S's authority in speaking on behalf of G and thus condition (ii) of the ABGA fails to be satisfied. Second, S might assert that  $p$  on behalf of G, where S's asserting that  $p$  does not aim to reflect the view G intends for S to assert on its behalf. For instance, Philip Morris might have a bumbling spokesperson who aims to be a whistleblower and expose the company's deceptive practices, but because of her bumbling ways, ends up inadvertently asserting precisely what G wishes.<sup>18</sup> In such a case, even though the spokesperson might in fact assert that smoking is safe, and even though this might accurately represent what Philip Morris wishes S to report on its behalf, S is speaking for herself as a whistleblower when she makes this assertion, not for the company. Given this, while S might have the authority to speak on behalf of Philip Morris when the safety of smoking is concerned, S does not assert that smoking is safe in virtue of her authority *as a representative of G*, thereby failing to satisfy condition (iii) of the ABGA. Thus, when a rogue spokesperson, S, asserts that  $p$  on behalf of G, *the assertion in question is S's, not G's*, either because S does not have the authority to assert that  $p$  on behalf of G or because she fails to do so in virtue of her authority as a representative of G.

On the other hand, a bad spokesperson is one who asserts that  $p$  on behalf of G and has the authority to do so, but nonetheless fails through incompetence or negligence to say what G intends for S to assert on its behalf. One way this might happen is if the spokesperson is simply very bad at drawing the relevant inferences that follow from G's other beliefs. For instance, when S is asked whether smoking causes disease X, S might answer affirmatively because S fails to realize that Philip

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<sup>18</sup> I am grateful to Anne Baril for this example.

Morris intends for S to respond negatively to this question on its behalf, even though this is the obvious inference from all of the company's other views on the matter. Another way a spokesperson might be bad is through failing to pay close enough attention to the details of G's views. For instance, when S is asked whether Philip Morris agrees with scientists that smoking causes emphysema, S might answer affirmatively because S failed to listen carefully to the discussions at the company's board meetings. In the former case, S is an *incompetent spokesperson* and in the latter case, S is a *negligent spokesperson*, but in both cases S is a bad spokesperson who is asserting on behalf of Philip Morris. This is because S not only has the authority to assert that *p* on behalf of G, but S also does so in virtue of her authority as a representative of G—she just does so badly. Thus, when a bad spokesperson, S, asserts that *p* on behalf of G, *the assertion in question is G's, not S's*.

The difference between a rogue and a bad spokesperson might be made more vivid by considering the likely consequences of their respective statements. While a rogue's assertion might be *disavowed* or otherwise denied by the group in question and the spokesperson might be fired, a bad spokesperson might be forced to *retract* the assertion on behalf of the group and be reprimanded or trained. A rough analogy on the individual side might be the difference between an unfortunate statement offered while under the control of hypnosis versus one made while drunk: in the former case, one didn't assert anything at all, and thus can completely disavow it, while in the latter case, one did offer an assertion and thus needs to retract it, and perhaps apologize, the next morning.

One might worry here that my view has the unattractive consequence that a group asserts that *p* even when every member of the group protests that the spokesperson in question made a serious mistake in asserting that *p* on their behalf. While this is indeed true of my view when the spokesperson is merely bad, rather than rogue, I regard this as the correct result. Consider a spokesperson for an individual: if I hire a sloppy or mediocre attorney to defend me in a lawsuit, I might end up asserting through the attorney that, for instance, I'll accept a settlement offer, despite this not being what I ultimately wanted. The same is true of action more broadly—if I grant authority to a financial advisor or a stock broker to make financial transactions on my behalf, I might end up selling one of my stocks despite my vehement opposition to this after the fact. This is why we should choose our spokespersons, and our representatives more broadly, very wisely.

Notice that on this view, a rogue spokesperson and a bad spokesperson might offer assertions with the very same content in identical circumstances, yet one might be S's assertion while the other is G's. S1 might assert that smoking causes emphysema because she aims to be a whistleblower while S2 might assert that smoking causes emphysema because she fails to draw obvious inferences from Philip Morris's other views on the matter. When S1 and S2 both offer their assertions on behalf of the company in response to the same question at a single press conference, S1's assertion is her own while S2's is Philip Morris's.

Finally, it should be noted that it is precisely conditions such as (ii) and (iii) that distinguish an *individual asserting about the beliefs of a group* from a *group asserting*. Suppose, for instance, that a member of Philip Morris, who has no authority to speak on its behalf, asserts that the group's view is that smoking is safe.

Even if this member has access to what the group's view is and purports to be speaking on its behalf, this is not group assertion; instead, it is an individual asserting about the group's view. According to the ABGA, this is because the member is not a spokesperson that has the authority to convey information about the safety of smoking on behalf of Philip Morris. Of course, as mentioned earlier, in some cases, a member might try to offer a group assertion and, to the extent that she succeeds, she might in part create her own authority as the group's spokesperson. But until this happens, she is speaking for herself, not the group.

## 5 Two Other Accounts

There are two other views of group assertion in the literature.<sup>19</sup> The first is Miranda Fricker's variant of a joint acceptance account, according to which we should "...construe a group testifier as constituted, at least in part, by way of a *joint commitment to trustworthiness as to whether p* (or whatever range of *p*-like questions might delineate the body's expertise, formal remit, or informal range of responsibility)" (Fricker 2012, pp. 271–272, original emphasis). Fricker here takes the joint commitment to trustworthiness to be constitutive of a group being a testifier, and thus it seems to follow that no group could offer assertions in the absence of such a commitment. But this is a puzzling requirement, for it seems to confuse being a *testifier simpliciter* with being an *epistemically good testifier*. Surely an individual can testify about all sorts of matters without any commitment at all to trustworthiness; liars and those engaged in other forms of deception do precisely this. What we would say about them is that they are not epistemically good testifiers, but that they are testifiers nonetheless. The same is true of groups. Groups whose members do not jointly commit to trustworthiness—such as certain deceptive corporations and governments—are testifiers, even though they are not epistemically reliable ones. Indeed, if we adopt Fricker's account of group testimony, not only would we be hard-pressed to account for the lies of groups that generally eschew trustworthiness, we would also thereby have difficulty holding them responsible for such deception.

Fricker appeals to Edward Craig's distinction in his (1990) between being a *testifier* or *informant* and being a *source of information* and argues that she is offering an account of only the former. Footprints in the sand, for instance, might be a source of information, as are photographs, but neither is a testifier. Persons can function this way, too—I might infer that you are nervous from the hesitancy with which you deliver your testimony, even without your asserting that you are nervous. But even granting such a distinction, surely not every epistemically bad testifier turns out to be a mere source of information. When Philip Morris says that smoking is safe, the corporation is a group testifier if anything is, despite the fact that it is clearly an epistemically bad one here. So my central criticism is unaffected by

<sup>19</sup> Both of these views are presented as accounts of group testimony, but they can be understood as accounts of group assertion for our purposes. I will thus use "testimony" and "assertion" interchangeably here.

Craig's distinction. Later in her paper, Fricker goes on to say, "At any rate, my main claim can be the weaker one: that any group partly constituted by way of a joint commitment to trustworthiness (regarding some relevant range of questions) is pre-eminently suited to enter into the second-personal relations of trust that characterize testimony" (Fricker 2012, p. 272). Even this weaker notion, however, is problematic, since, again, second-personal relations of trust clearly do not characterize testimony *simpliciter*—at best, they characterize epistemically good testimony.

The second account of group testimony, or assertion, in the literature is offered by Deborah Tollefsen, where she argues as follows:

A group  $G$  testifies that  $p$  by making an act of communication  $a$  if and only if:

1. (In part) in virtue of  $a$ 's communicable content  $G$  reasonably intends to convey the information that  $p$ .
2. The information that  $p$  is conveyed by either (i) a spokesperson  $S$  or (ii) a written document.
3. If (i),  $G$  does not object to  $S$ 's uttering  $p$  on its behalf and if  $G$  intends for any specific individual(s) to utter  $p$ , it intends for  $S$  to utter  $p$  and  $S$  believes that he or she knows this.
4. If (i),  $S$  utters  $p$  for the reasons in 3.
5. If (ii),  $G$  does not object to the way in which  $p$  is conveyed in writing.
6.  $G$  conveys the information that  $p$  in the right social and normative context.
7. In conveying the information that  $p$  in the right social and normative context,  $G$  is taken to have given its assurance that  $p$  is true (Tollefsen 2009, pp. 12–13).

There are issues to be raised with every condition of this account. Let's begin with (1), which Tollefsen adapts from the account of individual testimony found in my (2006, 2008). The problem with applying it here is that it is not clear that it can accommodate the autonomy of spokespersons and, therewith, the kind of group testimony found in *AUTONOMOUS SPOKESPERSON*. In particular, while Philip Morris testifies that smoking does not cause disease  $X$ , not a single member of the group reasonably intends to convey this information in virtue of  $S$ 's making the act of communication  $a$ . So unless a group can intend to do something that no individual member intends to do, (1) is a problem for group testimony.<sup>20</sup>

Regarding condition (2), there are three problems. First, a group's conveying the information that  $p$  through either a spokesperson or a written document is an unnecessary disjunction, as a spokesperson can clearly communicate on behalf of a group in both verbal and written form. So (i) subsumes (ii). Second, there can be more than one spokesperson who conveys the information that  $p$ . A subgroup of individuals, for instance, might be called upon to communicate a company's view, and thus all of these members would function as relevant spokespersons. (i) should, therefore, be modified accordingly. Finally, (2) lacks the resources for accommodating instances of coordinated group testimony.

<sup>20</sup> I should note that I am not saying that a group cannot intend to do something that no individual member of the group intends to do. But if one's account of group testimony is going to rely on a thesis this substantive, then it should be defended.

Turning to condition (3), worries arise regarding both parts. First, it necessitates that G does not object to S's uttering  $p$  on its behalf. As I emphasized in the text, however, spokespersons often have some autonomy with respect to speaking on their clients' behalf, and so they do not present their statements to the group for prior approval before they are offered. (3), then, cannot require for every instance of group testimony given via a spokesperson that the group does not object to S's uttering that  $p$  on its behalf *prior to the utterance*. But nor can it be necessary that the group does not object to the spokesperson's uttering that  $p$  on its behalf *during or after the utterance*. If it did, it would make whether a group in fact testified depend on something that could possibly come years after the statement was offered since a group could object to a spokesperson's testimony long after it was offered. Even more importantly, this would permit groups to deny having testified when clearly they did. Suppose, for instance, that in *AUTONOMOUS SPOKESPERSON*, Philip Morris attempts to avoid legal and moral responsibility for smoking-related health problems by denying having testified to its safety simply because (3) wasn't satisfied. Not only does it seem that the company testified despite the failure of this condition, but groups also shouldn't be able to get off the normative hook so easily. Since a spokesperson can clearly convey information on behalf of a group in writing, similar problems apply to condition (5).

The second part of (3) requires that, if G intends for any specific individual(s) to utter  $p$ , it intends for S to utter  $p$  and S believes that he or she knows this. But consider this: suppose that Philip Morris has two official spokespersons, Maria for Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and Terrence for Tuesdays and Thursdays. Suppose, further, that the group, knowing that it is Monday, intends for Maria to state on its behalf that smoking is safe, but it turns out that she called in sick and was replaced at the last minute by Terrence. When he reports to the public on behalf of Philip Morris that smoking is safe, this is no less the company's testimony than if Maria had done so, despite the fact that the group doesn't intend for Terrence to do so.

There is also a problem with (4), which requires that if the information that  $p$  is conveyed via S, S utters that  $p$  for the reasons in (3). Recall that the reasons in (3) are that the group doesn't object to S's uttering that  $p$  on its behalf and intends for S to utter that  $p$ . Once again, however, this condition is too strong and ignores the different roles that are often given to spokespersons. For instance, a spokesperson might be hired specifically to piece together the information gathered at a group's meeting into a legally sound view and then report it to the public. In such a case, the spokesperson utters that  $p$ , not because the group intends for S to do so, but because the group intends for S to use its autonomy and legal expertise to present the best version of the group's view from a legal point of view. It is, however, still the group's testimony.

Condition (6), which requires that G convey the information that  $p$  in the right social and normative context, is included to rule out as group testimony statements such as those found in *PERSONAL LIES*. But not only is a clear, substantive characterization of which social and normative contexts are "right" difficult to come by, we have seen that the same result can be achieved by requiring that the



spokesperson in question have the authority to speak on behalf of the group being represented.

Finally, there are problems with condition (7), which requires that G be taken to have given its assurance that  $p$  is true. I have elsewhere argued extensively against what is known as the assurance view of individual testimony, and my objections apply straightforwardly to the group case (see my 2008). So I will briefly mention only the following: such a condition makes the act of testifying depend on the recipient's reception of it, but this has counterintuitive results. Suppose, for instance, that a corporation is called to testify against a partner company and the jurors are skeptical of the spokesperson's trustworthiness because of the conflict of interest. In such a case, the jurors might not take the company to have given its assurance that  $p$  is true, but surely it has testified.<sup>21</sup>

There are, therefore, significant problems facing both of the existing accounts of group assertion, none of which apply to the view defended in this paper.

## 6 Group Assertion is Not Reducible to Individual Assertion

If what I have argued is correct, a spokesperson asserting on behalf of a group in the right sort of way can be constitutive of group assertion, and thus this phenomenon must be understood in inflationary terms since a group may assert that  $p$  even when no member of the group asserts that  $p$ . In *AUTONOMOUS SPOKESPERSON*, for example, Philip Morris asserts that smoking does not cause disease X despite the fact that no member of Philip Morris asserts this or is even aware that there is such a disease as X. Given this, the only one who could be doing the asserting here is the group itself.

But one might wonder how substantive this conclusion is. For even though group assertion is not reducible to the assertion(s) of individual *members* of the group, isn't it still reducible to individual assertion(s)? In particular, isn't the group's assertion in *AUTONOMOUS SPOKESPERSON* reducible to the spokesperson's assertion? If so, the mere fact that the spokesperson is not a member of the group doesn't seem to reveal anything deeply important about the nature of group assertion. Indeed, the extent to which group assertion demands an inflationary treatment seems to be a minor quibble regarding whether the reductive base needs to be composed of group members or not. The heart of the view, however, seems clearly deflationary.

This understanding of the view of group assertion that I've defended in this paper is, I think, deeply mistaken. In a nutshell, my response to this worry is this: when

<sup>21</sup> I should note that Tollefsen's account of group testimony is adapted from Justin Hughes's account of group speech acts, according to which:

For a group, G, speaker, S, and utterance,  $x$ , G utters  $x$  if and only if:

1. There exists a group, G, this group has an illocutionary intention, and  $x$  conveys that illocutionary intention.

2. S believes that he or she knows the illocutionary intention of G and that X conveys this illocutionary intention.

3. G does not object to S uttering  $x$  on its behalf and if G intends for any specific individual(s) to utter  $x$ , it intends for S to utter  $x$ . S believes that he or she knows this.

4. 2 and 3 are the reasons S utters  $x$  (Hughes 1984, p. 388).

My arguments here apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to Hughes's account.

spokespersons are speaking on behalf of groups that they represent, they are not themselves asserting anything at all, a conclusion that is clearly supported by noticing that what they say does not have any of the paradigmatic features of assertion. Let us begin with what is arguably the most decisive consideration here: assertion is governed by an epistemic norm, but what spokespersons say is not. For instance, it has been widely argued that knowledge is the norm of assertion—that one should assert that  $p$  if and only if one knows that  $p$ .<sup>22</sup> While such a view is not immune to objections, most of the critics simply replace it with a weaker epistemic norm, such as justified belief, or reasonable to believe, and so on.<sup>23</sup> But now notice: there is no sense whatsoever in which spokespersons are governed by such norms. Consider a chair serving as the spokesperson for her department in a conversation with the administration about future hiring plans. Under no circumstances should she assert that  $p$  to the administration only if she knows, or justifiably believes, or has reason to believe that  $p$ . All focus on belief, either directly or indirectly, and whether the chair believes something is entirely irrelevant to the norms she should follow as a spokesperson. More precisely, the dominant norm governing spokespersons is *to assert what best reflects the view of the group she is representing*. Because a spokesperson can be doing everything that she ought to even if reporting on behalf of a group a proposition that she personally has absolutely no basis for, and indeed evidence against, believing, there is simply no epistemic norm of assertion governing spokespersons. Since someone is clearly asserting something in cases such as AUTONOMOUS SPOKESPERSON, and this asserter is subject to the norm(s) governing assertion, the natural conclusion to draw is that it is the group itself. Thus we have a group asserting that  $p$  when no individual at all is asserting that  $p$ .<sup>24</sup> Such a view is nowhere in the ballpark of a deflationary view.

This conclusion is further supported by considering other features of assertion. In addition to being governed by an epistemic norm, Sanford Goldberg highlights the following in his recent book<sup>25</sup> on assertion:

1. Conveyed Self-Representation: “Many writers describe assertions as involving the speaker’s *representing herself* as knowing, or at least having evidence for, what she has asserted.” (Goldberg 2015, p. 7)
2. Sincerity: “Another feature of assertion which, though not unrelated to assertion’s epistemic significance, nevertheless deserves to be called out separately, has to do with assertion’s relation to belief. Simply put, when they are performed sincerely, assertions express or manifest one’s beliefs.” (Goldberg 2015, p. 8)
3. Entitlements and responsibilities: “Suppose that you believe something on the basis of Jones’ say-so, and then are queried regarding the grounds of your belief....we might say that Jones’ assertion authorized or entitled you to do so;

<sup>22</sup> See Unger (1975), Williamson (1996, 2000), Adler (2002), DeRose (2002), Reynolds (2002), Hawthorne (2004), and Fricker (2006). Cohen (2004) says that he is “not unsympathetic” to the view.

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Douven (2006), Lackey (2007) and MacKinnon (2013).

<sup>24</sup> Just as an attorney might bring a lawsuit on behalf of her client, without being a party to the suit herself, so, too, a spokesperson might assert on behalf of another without thereby asserting herself.

<sup>25</sup> Goldberg (2015).

and when you do “pass the buck” to her in this way, Jones then has the responsibility to address the challenge herself. It would thus appear that in asserting that  $p$ , the speaker authorizes the hearer to defer any legitimate challenge to the truth of the claim to her, and generates the responsibility for taking up that challenge.” (Goldberg 2015, p. 8).

We see, again, that while these features are true of the group’s assertion, they are not true of the spokesperson’s report. Beginning with 1, when a spokesperson reports that  $p$  on behalf of a group, there is no sense in which she represents *herself* as knowing, or having evidence for believing, that  $p$ . Instead, it is the party she is speaking for that is being represented as having the appropriate epistemic relationship to that  $p$ . This is related to 2, since even if one wishes to reject that there is an epistemic norm governing assertion, it surely is true that when assertions are performed sincerely, they generally express or manifest the asserter’s beliefs. Again, however, this is not at all the case with respect to the spokesperson’s reports, where sincerity would be wildly out of place. Indeed, a spokesperson who aimed to be sincere, and report what she herself believed, would be subject to significant criticism and censure by the party she is representing. Finally, if it is appropriate to “pass the buck” to anyone in cases of authority-based assertion, surely it should be passed to the group rather than to the spokesperson. The group is the one who espouses the view in question, and the group is the one that bears the responsibility for the assertion—not the group’s messenger. Indeed, it may even be the case that the spokesperson knows very little about why the group holds the view that it does, and would rightly need to check with the party she is representing before responding to any objections. It should thus be clear that spokespersons are not asserting anything in cases of authority-based group assertion; they are simply the means by which groups offer assertions.

One issue that I would like to address is this: I have elsewhere argued on behalf of more deflationary<sup>26</sup> views of various collective phenomena, such as group belief and justified group belief.<sup>27</sup> Yet in this paper I am defending an account of group assertion that is substantively inflationary. Is there an explanation of this asymmetry that is not *ad hoc*?

Yes, and here it is: when, and only when, it is possible to grant authority to another agent or agent-like entity to do something on one’s behalf does it follow that inflationism is true. So, for instance, I can give authority to my lawyer to speak on my behalf, to lie on my behalf, to bullshit on my behalf, and to act on my behalf. In all of these cases, then, it will be possible for my actions to be constituted by the actions of another, even when I myself am entirely ignorant of the matter. Thus, accounts of all of these phenomena will be inflationary in nature. In contrast, I cannot grant authority to another to believe on my behalf, or to desire on my behalf, or to justifiably believe on my behalf, or to know on my behalf. To be sure, I can defer to others in such cases.

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<sup>26</sup> I should note that I have never defended a view that is entirely deflationary. Rather I have argued for views that have as a condition that some of the individual members of the group instantiate the phenomenon in question.

<sup>27</sup> See my (2016) and (unpublished).

When asked, “Where do you want to have dinner,” I can respond by saying, “Wherever my daughter wants to go.” What this means is that I’m giving authority to my daughter to decide where we’re going to eat our next meal. I’m deferring to her desires, but nothing she does is constitutive of my mental states.

It may now be asked, however, whether there is tension in my overall view. For, on the one hand, I am saying that states such as group belief or group knowledge require member belief or member knowledge, and yet, on the other hand, I am also saying that group assertion does not even require by a single member of the group in question awareness of the proposition asserted. Thus, a group can assert that  $p$  in the complete absence of belief or knowledge that  $p$ . But then isn’t there a conflict between my appealing to, say, an epistemic norm of assertion—which has some connection to belief—to motivate the extent to which I’m an inflationary theorist, while also denying that group belief is necessary for group assertion?

By way of response, let me first emphasize that I am here providing an account of group assertion, not epistemically permissible assertion. Given this, many of my examples, such as AUTONOMOUS SPOKESPERSON, are cases of a group offering an assertion, though not necessarily in an epistemically appropriate fashion. For instance, while it is true that Philip Morris asserts that smoking does not cause disease X, it is clearly not epistemically proper to do so, as there is no basis at all for believing such a claim.

Nevertheless, given my account of authority-based group assertion, surely it is plausible to think that there will be some group assertions on my view that are epistemically permissible despite the fact that the group itself fails to possess the knowledge in question. But I don’t regard this as problematic, as I have elsewhere argued extensively that assertion at the individual level can be epistemically proper in the absence of knowledge, and even in the absence of belief. This leads to my embracing what I call a Reasonable to Believe Norm of assertion.<sup>28</sup> So it would simply follow that group assertion is like individual assertion in requiring neither knowledge nor belief; indeed, the considerations in this paper can be viewed as providing even further arguments against views such as the Knowledge Norm of assertion. Of course, given the combination of theses I hold, it would have to be shown either (i) that groups properly assert that  $p$  when, and only when, it is reasonable for groups to believe that  $p$ , or (ii) that the norms governing assertion differ at the individual and at the group levels. I favor option (i), but arguing in favor of it lies beyond the scope of this paper. The point that I wish to emphasize here is that my inflationary view of group assertion is compatible with my appealing to general features of assertion to support such a view.

## 7 Conclusion

In this paper, I’ve provided the framework for an account of group assertion. On my view, there are two kinds of group assertion, coordinated and authority-based, with authority-based group assertion being the core notion. I’ve argued against a

<sup>28</sup> See my (2007, 2008).

deflationary view, according to which a group's asserting is understood in terms of individual assertions, by showing that a group can assert a proposition even when no individual does. I've also argued on behalf of an inflationary view, according to which it is the group itself that asserts, a conclusion supported by the fact that paradigmatic features of assertion apply only at the level of the group. A central virtue of my account is that it appreciates the important relationship that exists between most groups and their spokespersons, as well as the consequences that follow from this relationship. My view, thus, provides the framework for distinguishing when responsibility for an assertion lies at the collective level, and when it should be shouldered by an individual simply speaking for herself.<sup>29</sup>

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