We often talk about groups lying. For instance, a recent headline involving a lawsuit brought against BP by the U.S. government claims, “BP lied about [the] size of U.S. Gulf oil spill, lawyers tell trial.”

In particular, the plaintiffs argue that immediately after the 2010 spill, internal company e-mails reveal that BP publicly reported that only 5,000 barrels of oil were leaking into the ocean per day with the deliberate intention to be deceptive, even though the company believed that this report was false and, in fact, knew that up to 100,000 barrels per day could have been leaking. This case is not unusual: a cursory review of recent news pulls up stories about the lies of Halliburton, Enron, the Bush Administration, and various drug companies.

Moreover, there are often enormously significant consequences that follow from group lies, for both the liars and those to whom they lied. If BP lied about how many barrels of oil were leaking into the ocean, this could be the difference between its being fined $17.6 billion instead of $4.5 billion. If the Bush Administration lied about whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, then the hundreds of thousands of lives lost in the Iraq war might have been spared. If a pharmaceutical company lies about the potentially harmful side effects of a highly lucrative drug to treat cancer, then this could result in its bearing responsibility for the health problems of countless patients.

Despite the prevalence of group lies and their often far-reaching effects, there has never before been a philosophical treatment of group lies. This paper begins the process of filling this

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1 A discussion of what distinguishes a group from a mere collection of individuals lies beyond the scope of this paper, but see Gilbert (1989 and 2004), Bird (2010), and List and Pettit (2011) for a treatment of this issue.

2 http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/30/us-bp-trial-idUSBRE98T13U20130930
surprising gap in the literature by focusing on the question of what a group lie is. I will first consider whether group lies can be understood in terms of the lies of the group’s members and, second, whether group lies can be characterized in terms of joint agreement by the group’s members to lie. After showing both views to be misguided, I offer my own account of group lying, according to which it crucially involves the group offering a statement. In particular, because what a group says can come apart from what its individual members say, I argue that a group might lie when no individual member lies, and a group might fail to lie even though every individual member does. Thus, my view provides a framework for not only understanding what a group lie is, but also for holding groups responsible for their broader linguistic behavior.

1. Individual Lies

To begin, I will take the following as a paradigmatic group lie:

TOBACCO COMPANY: Philip Morris, one of the largest tobacco companies in the world, is aware of the massive amounts of scientific evidence revealing the causal connection between smoking and lung cancer. While all of the members of the Board of Directors of the company believe this conclusion, they all decide that, because of what is at stake financially, the official position of the company will be that there is not such a connection. This position is then published in all of their advertising materials with the explicit intention to deceive the public.

Arguably, no group is more infamous for its lies than Philip Morris, a conclusion supported by various legal and moral verdicts. For instance, in a 2005 article in the Los Angeles Times, it was reported that “Jurors in Los Angeles County Superior Court found that Philip Morris had concealed information about the risks and addictiveness of smoking, with deliberate intent to defraud smokers such as Fredric Reller of Marina del Rey, who died in September 2003 at the age of 64…. In Fredric
Reller’s videotaped deposition, ‘he admitted that he was ashamed and embarrassed that he had believed Philip Morris’ lies and deceit that there was no valid scientific proof that their cigarettes caused lung cancer.’” I take it, then, that the scenario described in TOBACCO COMPANY, which is fairly close to non-fiction, is precisely the sort of case in which we feel comfortable attributing a lie to a group, and thus any account of group lies must have the resources to accommodate it.

With this in mind, a natural place to turn in trying to understand the nature of a group lie is with what an individual lie is. I have elsewhere argued for the following account:

\[
\text{LIE: } A \text{ lies to } B \text{ if and only if (1) } A \text{ states that } \phi \text{ to } B, \text{ (2) } A \text{ believes that } \phi \text{ is false, and (3) } A \text{ intends to be deceptive to } B \text{ with respect to whether } \phi \text{ in stating that } \phi.
\]

This account of lying is quite similar to the traditional view—which has roots dating back at least to the work of Augustine in *De mendacio*—except that condition (3) is importantly different. Whereas the traditional view requires that A intend to deceive B with respect to whether \( \phi \) in stating that \( \phi \), (3) requires only that A intend to be deceptive to B. While there are different ways of being deceptive, the most obvious involves deceiving, where the aim is to bring about false beliefs in the victim of the deceit. But another, less explicit, form of deception is where the aim is to conceal information. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, deceit is “the action or practice of deceiving someone by concealing or misrepresenting the truth.” Given this, I have proposed the following distinction, which suffices for my purposes even if it does not fully capture all of the ways of being deceptive:

\[
\text{Deceit: } A \text{ deceives } B \text{ with respect to whether } \phi \text{ if and only if } A \text{ aims to bring about a false belief in } B \text{ regarding whether } \phi.
\]

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3 See Lackey (2013).

4 I am grateful to Don Fallis for suggesting the addition of the clause “with respect to whether \( \phi \)” in condition (3) of my account.
Deception: A is deceptive to B with respect to whether \( p \) if A aims to conceal information from B regarding whether \( p \).

Concealing information regarding whether \( p \) can be understood broadly here so that it subsumes, among other phenomena, concealing evidence regarding whether \( p \). Moreover, notice that concealing information is importantly different from withholding information. To withhold information is to fail to provide it, rather than to hide or keep it secret. If I am trying to find a home for my challenging puppy, I withhold information about her lack of being housebroken if you don’t ask me anything about it and I do not mention it. But if I frantically discard all of the training pads lying throughout my house before you come over, then I am concealing the information that she is not trained.\(^5\)

Finally, notice that concealing information is sufficient, though not necessary, for being deceptive; thus, it is merely one instance of a more general phenomenon. Obviously, another way of being deceptive is to be deceitful, where one’s aim is to bring about a false belief in one’s hearer.

The weaker condition found in (3) involving deception avoids counterexamples to the traditional view,\(^6\) such as those involving bald-faced lies. A bald-faced lie is an “undisguised lie,”\(^7\) one where a speaker states that \( p \) where she believes that \( p \) is false and it is common knowledge that what is being stated does not reflect what the speaker actually believes. For instance, suppose that a student is caught flagrantly cheating on an exam for the fourth time this term, all of the conclusive evidence for which is passed on to the Dean of Academic Affairs. Both the student and the Dean know that he cheated on the exam, and they each know that the other knows this, but the student is also aware of the fact that the Dean punishes students for academic dishonesty only when there is a

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\(^5\) For further discussion of the distinction between withholding and concealing information, see Carson (2010: 56-7).

\(^6\) See, for instance, Sorensen (2007 and 2010), Fallis (2009), and Carson (2010).

\(^7\) Quoted from *The American Heritage Dictionary* in Sorensen (2010).
confession. Given this, when the student is called to the Dean’s office, he states, “I did not cheat on the exam,” though there is no intention on his part to deceive the Dean because there is no aim to bring it about that the Dean believes this. While this shows that speakers do not need to intend to deceive their hearers in order to lie, it does not challenge condition (3) of LIE. In particular, the student intends to be deceptive by virtue of concealing crucial evidence from the Dean that is needed for punishment from the university—namely, an admission of wrongdoing. Thus, the student intends to be deceptive, even though he does not intend to deceive.

2. Summativism and Sufficiency

Given the account of individual lying found in LIE, perhaps group lying can be understood in terms of what we might call *simple summativism*. Such a view can be expressed as follows:

\[ SS: \quad \text{A group, } G, \text{ lies to } B \text{ in stating that } p \text{ if and only if all of the members of } G \text{ lie to } B \text{ in stating that } p. \]

The account of individual lying found in LIE can then be used to understand what it is for the members of G to lie to B. In this way, a group lie is simply constructed out of the individual lies of its members.

There are, however, two immediate problems with SS that require minor modification. First, requiring that *all* of the members of G lie to B in order for the group to lie to B is too stringent. Surely, Philip Morris doesn’t fail to lie to the public simply because a few of its employees are on vacation or home ill and thus do not satisfy the conditions found in LIE. So perhaps SS should be revised so that only *some* of the members of G need to lie to B in order for the group to lie to B.

But this is still not enough to render SS plausible. In particular, what if the individual members of the group who lie about whether \( p \) to B are all utterly irrelevant to the domain in

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8 This is a slightly modified version of an example found in Carson (2010).
question? For instance, suppose that while all of the members of the Board of Directors of Philip Morris do not lie to B about the harmful effects of smoking, the custodians do. Is this enough for Philip Morris to lie to B about this matter? Clearly not. What this shows is that the individual lies in SS need to be made, not just by any members, but by the right ones. Most groups have members with vastly different roles, only some of whom have the authority or power to determine certain outcomes for the group as a whole. Those who have the relevant decision-making authority are often called *operative members.* Thus, while the custodians in this case might at least in part determine whether Philip Morris lies about the cleanliness of the company’s facilities, they are irrelevant to whether the group lies about the harmful effects of smoking; this is because they are operative members regarding the former, but not the latter, question. SS should, then, be modified in the following way:

\[
\text{SS*: } \text{A group, } G, \text{ lies to } B \text{ in stating that } p \text{ if and only if most of the operative members of } G \text{ lie to } B \text{ in stating that } p.
\]

SS* has clear virtues. It delivers the correct verdict that Philip Morris lies to the public in TOBACCO COMPANY with ease: given that all of the members of the Board of Directors individually lie in stating to the public that smoking does not cause lung cancer, the company lies about this as a group, too. Moreover, it explains group lying while utilizing only resources from the account of individual lying, which is not only simple but also avoids positing phenomena, such as group belief, that require further explication.

Despite these virtues, SS* faces two objections that, to my mind, show decisively that we need to look in an altogether different place to understand group lies. The first is that all of the operative members of G might state that \( p \) to B, believe that \( p \) is false, and intend to be deceptive to

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9 See, for instance, Tuomela (2004).
Consider the following:

**PERSONAL LIES**: Philip Morris has three operative members regarding the question whether smoking causes lung cancer, M₁-M₃. All three members lie to B in stating that there is not a causal connection between the two, but they do so entirely in the context of their personal relationships with B. B is M₁’s wife, and M₁ lies to her because he does not want her to worry about their son’s smoking habit when there is nothing that she can do to prevent it. M₂ is B’s best friend, and M₂ lies to her so as to not cause marital problems by contradicting M₁’s testimony. And M₃ is B’s son, and M₃ lies to her so as to avoid his mother’s nagging to quit smoking.

In **PERSONAL LIES**, though all three operative members of Philip Morris satisfy conditions (1)-(3) of LIE and thereby lie to B regarding the question whether smoking causes lung cancer, the tobacco company itself does not lie to B. This is because each member lies to B, not in his or her role as an employee of Philip Morris, but entirely because of the personal relationship shared with B. M₁ lies to B as her husband, M₂ lies to B *qua* her best friend, and M₃ lies to B in his role as her son. Otherwise put, M₁-M₃ would have behaved exactly the same way toward B, even if none of them worked at the tobacco company.¹⁰ This shows that the context in which an individual member lies can affect whether the group itself lies. Similar considerations apply with respect to testimony more broadly. If the CEO of Philip Morris testifies that smoking does not pose health risks, whether it is the

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¹⁰ Suppose that one were to argue that this is not enough to prevent the statements to B from being group lies because M₁-M₃ might be implicitly relying on a kind of authority from being known to be experts on tobacco. In this case, even though they are not speaking in their official capacity, what they say may be taken to represent the group’s view anyway. This complication can be avoided by simply adding to the case that B is entirely unaware that M₁-M₃ work at Philip Morris.
company’s statement depends on where and to whom it was offered. It is one thing to state it at a board meeting to co-workers and quite another to say this to one’s spouse while on vacation.

PERSONAL LIES thus reveals the following surprising result about group lies: a group can fail to lie to someone with respect to the question whether \( p \), despite the fact that every single one of its operative members lies to this person regarding this question. SS*, then, does not specify sufficient conditions for a group lie.

3. Summativism and Necessity

A second objection to the version of simple summativism found in SS* is that none of the operative members of G might state that \( p \) to B, believe that \( p \) is false, and intend to be deceptive to B with respect to whether \( p \) in stating that \( p \), but G might still lie to B regarding this question.\(^{11}\) Consider the following:

\(^{11}\) There is a very well-known case in the collective epistemology literature that might be taken to support this conclusion. In particular, Philip Pettit’s discursive dilemma seems to lend itself quite nicely to showing that a group’s lying can diverge from its individual members’ lying. (See Pettit (2003).) To see the dilemma unfold, Pettit asks us to consider a case involving the employees of a company deciding whether to forgo a pay-raise in order to spend the saved money on implementing a set of workplace safety measures. The employees are supposed to make their decision on the basis of considering three separable issues: “first, how serious the danger is; second, how effective the safety measures that a pay-sacrifice would buy is likely to be; and third, whether the pay-sacrifice is bearable for members individually. If an employee thinks that the danger is sufficiently serious, the safety measure sufficiently effective, and the pay-sacrifice sufficiently bearable, he or she will vote for the sacrifice; otherwise he or she will vote against” (Pettit 2003, p. 171). Imagine now that the company’s three employees vote in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serious danger?</th>
<th>Effective measure?</th>
<th>Bearable loss?</th>
<th>Pay sacrifice?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Pettit, one way of arriving at the belief of the group in this case is via a premise-based aggregation procedure, whereby the group’s belief is determined by the majority of votes found in the premise columns. Since there are more “Yes”’s than “No”’s in each of the premise columns, the group’s belief is to accept the pay sacrifice. Despite this, the individual members vote unanimously against the pay sacrifice. In such a case, Pettit claims that “the group will form a judgment on the question of the pay-sacrifice that is directly in conflict with the unanimous vote of its members. It will form a judgment that is in the starkest possible discontinuity with the corresponding judgments of its members” (Pettit 2003, p. 183). Because of examples such as this, Pettit concludes that groups are intentional subjects that are distinct from, and exist “over and beyond,” their individual members. In a very important sense, then, he concludes that groups have “minds of their own.”

On this reading of the discursive dilemma, the company above believes that the pay sacrifice should be made, though no individual member does. Given this, it is not difficult to envisage a scenario in which the group lies, though no individual member does. Suppose, for instance, that the company has an automated system that is designed to receive the inputs of the group, aggregate them in a premise-based way, but then report the negation of the output. The system is designed in this way by the group with the deliberate intention to deceive the public on the matter in question. So, the output from the premise-based aggregation procedure is that the pay sacrifice should be made, the system reports that it should not be made, and this is all set into motion with the deliberate intention to be deceptive to the public. Even if every individual member of the company states that the pay sacrifice should not be made, too, this need not involve lying on their part, since they actually believe this. Thus, if Pettit is correct about the discursive dilemma, there is a compelling reason to conclude that groups can lie to someone with respect to the question whether \( p \), despite the fact that not a single one of its operative members lies regarding this question.

But now consider the following:
MANIPULATED AGGREGATION PROCEDURE: The operative board members of Philip Morris are discussing whether cigarette smoking is safe to the health of smokers. The board members are supposed to make their decision on the basis of considering three separable issues: first, whether the available evidence supports the conclusion that smoking is not connected to lung cancer; second, whether there is reason to think that smoking does not cause emphysema; and third, whether there is data supporting that there is not a link between smoking and heart disease. If a board member thinks that the evidence supports that smoking is not connected to cancer, does not cause emphysema, and is not linked to heart disease, he or she will vote that smoking is safe to the health of smokers; otherwise he or she will vote that it is not. The board members vote in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No lung cancer?</th>
<th>No emphysema?</th>
<th>No heart disease?</th>
<th>Safe to health?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following Pettit, one way of determining Philip Morris’s belief here is via a premise-based aggregation procedure. Since there are more “Yes”s than “No”s in each of the premise columns, the group ends up believing that cigarette smoking is safe to the health of the smokers, despite the unanimity of “No” votes from the operative members. Thus, Philip Morris is not lying if it reports to the public that smoking is safe, though the individual members might be.

To my mind, this conclusion is problematic for Pettit’s conception of group belief, as there seems to be no plausible sense in which Philip Morris believes that smoking is safe in the above case. To make this point even stronger, however, we can imagine that the individual votes of “Yes” in the premise columns were motivated at least in part by economic considerations, though not ones incompatible with belief. For instance, perhaps the board members were inclined to look for conclusive or definitive evidence linking smoking with lung cancer, emphysema, or heart disease before voting “No” in one of the premise columns. Were the economic advantages of selling cigarettes not present, we can imagine that their standards for
MANIPULATED SPOKESPERSON: Philip Morris hires spokesperson S—who is not a member of the group and is known to be naïve—to be the voice of the company’s views. S’s job is to attend the meetings of the Board of Directors at Philip Morris and, on the basis of the information therein presented, to draw the relevant conclusions and convey them to the public on the company’s behalf. At a recent meeting, the Board of Directors strategically

believing negatively would have been lower. Given this, the very fact that there are more “Yes”s than “No”s in each of the premise columns in MANIPULATED AGGREGATION PROCEDURE is in large part the result of the financial gain promised by minimizing the health risks of smoking. So, according to Pettit, while each board member individually believes that smoking is detrimental to the health of smokers, the collective view of Philip Morris is that it is safe and this group belief is explainable by the company’s desire for economic benefits.

If there are still doubts that this is problematic for Pettit’s view, notice this: groups can decide themselves which aggregation procedures to use for arriving at their beliefs—there are no fixed rules or constraints about this. For instance, an academic department may decide to use a dictatorial aggregation procedure by agreeing that the Chair’s view regarding online courses is the group’s belief on this issue. Or a college club might opt for a majority aggregation procedure when determining the group’s belief on membership requirements. Given this, let’s add one further feature to MANIPULATED AGGREGATION PROCEDURE: suppose that Philip Morris chooses a premise-based aggregation procedure to arrive at the group’s belief regarding the safety of smoking precisely because it wishes to deceive the public so as to reap financial and legal benefits. This has the following result on Pettit’s view: every member of Philip Morris believes that smoking is unsafe, but the group itself believes that it is safe entirely because an aggregation procedure was cherry-picked to produce this outcome. Surely, this is the wrong conclusion.

What all of this casts doubt on is the conception of group belief formed via a premise-based aggregation procedure at work in Pettit’s view. This, then, calls into question whether a legitimate counterexample to SS* can be formulated on this basis.
presented only the very small body of scientific evidence that indicates that there is not a connection between smoking and lung cancer. This was done both with the knowledge that there is overwhelming evidence showing that this is in fact false and with the deliberate intention that S would then draw the conclusion that there is not such a connection and state this to the public. Nevertheless, no operative member of Philip Morris actually ever states, to one another in the boardroom or to S, that there is not a connection between smoking and lung cancer. Moreover, as the company expected, S herself knows very little about the scientific evidence in question and so actually believes that there is not such a connection. At a recent press conference, S, in her role as the official spokesperson for Philip Morris, stated that there is not a connection between smoking and lung cancer.

Let $p$ be the proposition that there is not a connection between smoking and lung cancer. In MANIPULATED SPOKESPERSON, while all of the operative members of Philip Morris believe that $p$ is false, none of them actually states that $p$, either to S or to the public. So while they all satisfy condition (2) of LIE, none of them satisfies (1) and (3) of LIE. Moreover, while S states that $p$ to the public, she believes that $p$ is true and does not intend to be deceptive to the public with respect to whether $p$ in stating that $p$. Instead, S’s intention is to convey the view of Philip Morris in stating that $p$. S, then, satisfies (1) of LIE, but not (2) or (3). Thus, neither the operative members of the company nor the spokesperson satisfies the three conditions found in LIE. Nevertheless, Philip Morris lies to the public about the connection between smoking and lung cancer in MANIPULATED SPOKESPERSON.

To see this, notice that Philip Morris knowingly brings it about that S—who is the company’s official spokesperson—says something false to the public on its behalf, and does so with the explicit intention to be deceptive. In this context, the mere fact that the words do not literally come out of the mouths of the operative members of Philip Morris is irrelevant to whether the
group lies to the public. This is because the assertion, though offered by the spokesperson, is neverthe-
less *the group’s*. This, in turn, is due to the special relationship that exists between a spokesperson and the party she rep-resents: the assertion she offers *qua* spokesperson is that of the represented party, not her own. Thus, she can unknowingly lie on a group’s behalf while believing herself in the truth of that which she is reporting.

This point can be made clearer by considering the distinction between lying and misleading. Jennifer Saul provides the following case to illustrate the difference between these phenomena:

suppose that a politician, Tony, believes that there are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq but wants to convince his audience otherwise. Now compare the two utterances that he might offer in response to the question, “Are there weapons of mass destruction in Iraq?”:

(a) There are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

(b) Saddam Hussein is a very dangerous man.

If we suppose that in both cases Tony’s intention is to bring it about that his audience believes that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, then while he has lied in (a), he has merely misled in (b). A central difference between the two is that Tony’s statement is true in only (b), despite the fact that he deliberately conveyed something false in both. (Saul 2012: 4)

Given this, one might ask why it isn’t the case that S’s statement is merely an instance of misleading, not lying to, the public. By way of response to this question, notice that the operative members of Philip Morris *do* merely mislead S. By virtue of cherry-picking only the handful of studies that suggest that there is not such a connection, they offer true statements to S with the deliberate intention to convey something false. But their misleading S results in the company itself lying to the public. This is because all parties involved recognize that S’s statements are *on behalf of Philip Morris*—that her reports are the company’s assertion. In this way, so long as S is functioning

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12 For a detailed defense of this claim, see Lackey (forthcoming).
properly in her capacity as the spokesperson for Philip Morris, the company itself asserted that there is not a connection between smoking and lung cancer by virtue of S stating this. Thus, while the operative members’ manipulation of S avoids their lying to her, it does not get Philip Morris off the hook of lying to the public.

This can be further supported by considering how easy and convenient it would be for groups, such as corporations, to avoid lying if what Philip Morris did in MANIPULATED SPOKESPERSON failed to count as a lie. Groups could hire naïve spokespeople, mislead them with cherry-picked information, and have false statements thereby conveyed, all while avoiding any responsibility for lying. Surely this is an unwelcome result.

MANIPULATED SPOKESPERSON thus reveals another surprising result about group lies: a group can lie to someone with respect to the question whether \( p \), despite the fact that not a single one of its operative members lies regarding this question. SS*, therefore, does not specify necessary conditions for a group lie, either.

4. The Joint Acceptance Account of Group Lies

A common move that is made when summative accounts of group phenomena fail is to embrace joint acceptance theories.\(^ {13} \) According to these theories, collective phenomena, such as group belief and group intention, must be understood in terms of the joint acceptance of the operative members of the group. For instance, a joint acceptance account of group belief holds that a group, G, believes that \( p \) if and only if most of the operative members of G jointly accept that \( p \). On such a view, it is neither necessary nor sufficient for group belief that its individual members believe that \( p \). It is not necessary because joint acceptance by the group members does not require individual belief on their

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part, and it is not sufficient because individual belief by the group members does not involve their joint acceptance of the proposition in question.\textsuperscript{14}

Such an approach, then, might lend itself very nicely to accounting for the cases that are problematic for SS*. Specifically, perhaps group lies can be understood in terms of joint acceptance or agreement in the following way:

JA: A group, G, lies to B in stating that $p$ if and only if most of the operative members of G jointly agree to lie (in the sense found in LIE) to B in stating that $p$.\textsuperscript{15}

JA delivers the correct result in PERSONAL LIES with ease: even though $M_1$-$M_3$ each lies to B in stating that there is not a causal connection between smoking and lung cancer, they do not jointly agree to lie to B, and thus Philip Morris doesn’t lie to B either. This view also seems to provide the

\textsuperscript{14} For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that there is a difference between belief and acceptance—that accepting that $p$ is not the same as believing that $p$, and vice versa. For detailed discussions of this difference, see, for instance, van Fraassen (1980), Stalnaker (1984), Cohen (1989 and 1992), Wray (2001), and Hakli (2007 and 2011). While there is certainly not consensus among these authors about what precisely this distinction amounts to, below are four differences that have been cited between acceptances and beliefs:

1. One can accept propositions that one does not believe, whereas one cannot believe what one does not accept.
2. Acceptance often results from a consideration of one’s goals, and this results from adopting a policy to pursue a particular goal.
3. Belief results in a feeling, in particular, a feeling that something is true.
4. Acceptance can be voluntary, whereas belief cannot. (Wray 2001, p. 325)

\textsuperscript{15} Given that Fricker (2012) argues for a broadly joint acceptance account of group testimony—where a group’s testifying requires a joint commitment to trustworthiness—it is not implausible to think she might espouse a joint acceptance account of group lying—where a group’s lying requires a joint commitment to untrustworthiness.
right verdict in MANIPULATED SPOKESPERSON, at least on a certain reading of the case. If, for instance, the Board of Directors jointly agreed to strategically present only the very small body of scientific evidence that indicates that there is not a connection between smoking and lung cancer, and this was done with the intention of being deceptive toward the spokesperson, then it might be argued that this amounts to the operative members agreeing to lie to the public regarding this question. Thus, Philip Morris would end up lying to the public, too.

But it is not difficult to see that JA fails as a general account of group lies. On the one hand, the operative members of a group jointly agreeing to lie isn’t sufficient for a group’s lying. Suppose, for instance, that all of the operative members of Philip Morris conceal from one another their personal beliefs regarding the safety of smoking and yet, because of peer pressure, they all nonetheless agree to lie to the public that smoking is safe. If it turns out that all of the operative members in fact believe that smoking is safe, and there is a collective commitment to the proposition that smoking is safe, then the group hasn’t lied to the public in saying that it is. This is evidenced by the fact that if the public learned all of the details of the case, they might regard Philip Morris as ignorant and misinformed for believing that smoking is safe, and they might even regard it as deceitful—given the members’ agreement to lie—but they wouldn’t say that the company lied. This is because in every sense, Philip Morris believes that smoking is safe when it states that it is, despite the joint agreement to lie about this. In this way, just as agreeing to be happy does not in fact make it the case that one is happy, agreeing to lie does not in fact make it the case that one lies.

On the other hand, the operative members of a group jointly agreeing to lie isn’t necessary for a group’s lying. For instance, suppose that everything in MANIPULATED SPOKESPERSON is exactly the same, except that the Board of Directors strategically presented only the very small body of scientific evidence that indicates that there is not a connection between smoking and lung cancer without jointly agreeing to do so. Philip Morris seems to be engaged in a lie no less than in the original
scenario. Yet, according to JA, these are instances of two radically different phenomena, one
involving a group lie while the other doesn't.

Moreover, we can imagine a slight variation to the paradigmatic group lie— TOBACCO
COMPANY—with which this paper began: suppose that the members of the Board of Directors of
Philip Morris decide to never jointly agree to lie to the public precisely to avoid being responsible for
lying. Thus, the company is aware of the massive amounts of scientific evidence revealing the causal
connection between smoking and lung cancer and yet they deny such a connection to the public
with the intention to be deceptive. According to JA, Philip Morris doesn’t lie in such a case because
of the lack of joint acceptance to do so. But, surely, this is the wrong result.

It is worth noting that these objections are not ones that can be avoided through simple
modification. Joint acceptance or agreement necessarily requires intentional activity on the part of
the members of the group at issue. Indeed, it is this very feature that enables such accounts of group
phenomena to avoid the problems facing summative views. Regardless of what the individual
members believe, for example, the group’s doxastic states depend crucially on what the group chooses to
do. Similarly, even if each member of a group strategically reports what she herself does not believe
with the explicit intention to be deceptive, the group itself does not lie unless there is joint
agreement to do so. However, while the intentional component of joint activity is what allows for
the response to summativism, it is also what leaves the view open to decisive counterexample. For
simply jointly agreeing to lies does not make it the case that a group lies and merely refusing to
jointly agree to lie does not necessarily prevent a group from lying. Hence, it is the very heart of a
joint acceptance account of lying that is the problem.

5. Group Lies
We have seen that group lies cannot be understood in summative terms since a group’s lying can diverge significantly from the lies of its individual members. In particular, a group can fail to lie even though every operative member does, and a group can lie even though no operative member does. We have also seen that the standard non-summative move of embracing a joint acceptance account doesn’t help here, since a group can fail to lie even though every operative member jointly agrees to, and a group can lie even when there is no joint acceptance to do so. So where does that leave us?

I propose that we understand group lies in the following way:

\[
    \text{G-LIE: A group, } G, \text{ lies to } B \text{ if and only if (1) } G \text{ states that } p \text{ to } B, \text{ (2) } G \text{ believes that } p \text{ is false, and (3) } G \text{ intends to be deceptive to } B \text{ with respect to whether } p \text{ in stating that } p. 
\]

The key lesson that we learned earlier is that group lies need to be, in an important sense, made by the group rather than by the individual members. G-LIE captures this by having the group be the agent at the center of the view. But there is the further question of how to understand the particular conditions, (1)-(3). In what follows, I will provide an account of group statements that thereby fleshes out (1) of G-LIE. There are two reasons for proceeding this way. First, much work has been done on group beliefs and group intentions, so these conditions can be understood in terms of one’s preferred view of these notions.\footnote{This is not entirely true, as some views of group belief and group intention will be unable to accommodate most of the instances of lying discussed in this paper. For instance, I have argued elsewhere (unpublished) that joint acceptance accounts of group belief, such as those found in Gilbert (1989), Tuomela (1992), Schmitt (1994), and Tollefsen (2007 and 2009), are fundamentally incapable of adequately accounting for groups lies and group bullshit. There are also accounts of intention that require common knowledge, such as Bratman’s highly influential view of shared intention in his (1993), that would be at odds with the view of}
assertions,\textsuperscript{17} and so it would be nearly impossible to make sense out of group lies without getting clear on what is involved in a group saying something. Second, as will become apparent, the divergence that we find between group lies and the lies of individual members—which is what lies at the heart of G-LIE—is to be traced to a similar divergence between a group’s statement and the statements of individual members. Thus, my account of group assertion will provide a general framework for understanding group lies in a way that accommodates all of the cases discussed earlier.

6. Group Assertion

I will 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 \textit{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

\textsuperscript{17} For the purposes of this paper, I will understand “group statement” and “group assertion” as interchangeable.

\textsuperscript{17} But condition (2) of G-LIE can be understood in terms of the view of group belief that I develop and defend in my (unpublished).
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 first point that I wish to emphasize here, however, is this:

(1) 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 an authority-based group assertion.

The conception of authority that I favor is de facto or descriptive rather than normative, and thus the authority in question need not be morally or politically legitimate. Moreover, my view of authority is pluralist: there are different 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 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

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18 For an alternative view, see Ludwig (2014).
group might sign a legal contract that grants authority to a lawyer to testify 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.\(^{19}\)

Still another way in which such authority might be acquired is through *non-object*. 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

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\(^{19}\) 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.
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.\textsuperscript{20}

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 can come about through various avenues, and it is 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.\textsuperscript{21}

In addition to it being the case that the standard way in which a group asserts is through an authorized spokesperson(s), the second point that I wish to emphasize about group assertion is this:

(2) Most spokespersons have a certain degree of autonomy or independence.

A spokesperson, at the very least, is not merely a parrot, 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

\textsuperscript{20} 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.

\textsuperscript{21} I will say what else is needed to distinguish individual from group assertion in what follows.
with her client each time she speaks on its behalf since at least some of what she states concerns legal matters over which her client might be wholly ignorant.\(^22\)

Combining (1) and (2) of authority-based assertion, however, results in:

(3) A group can assert a proposition the content of which the individual members are wholly unaware.

(3), of course, is significantly stronger than the conclusion from MANIPULATED SPOKESPERSON, where the members of the group are aware of the content of the proffered assertion but don’t actually assert it themselves. According to (3), because groups often testify through autonomous spokespersons, it follows that they can literally offer assertions about matters wholly unfamiliar to them or their members. Here is an example:

AUTONOMOUS SPOKESPERSON: Philip Morris hires spokesperson S—who is not a member of the group—to represent the company’s views to the public. 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

\(^{22}\) Of course, there are limits to this authority, as will be captured in my distinction between rogue and bad spokespersons.
adequate account of group assertion, then, needs to accommodate this distinctive feature of group statements. 23

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

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

ABGA: A group G asserts that \( p \) 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, 24 (ii) has the authority to convey some or all of the information in \( d \), and (iii) acts in this way in virtue of the authority as a representative of G. 25

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23 While individuals might also grant authority to another to speak 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.

24 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:

\[
S \text{ testifies (asserts) that } p \text{ by making an act of communication } a \text{ if any only if } S \text{ reasonably intends to convey on behalf of herself the information that } p \text{ (in part) in virtue of } a\text{'s communicable content.}
\]

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

25 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
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. In particular, the focus is on \textit{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—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

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\begin{itemize}
\item[26] See Lackey (2006) and (2008).
\item[27] This is a slightly modified example from Audi (1997).
\end{itemize}
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.

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 go 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. 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.

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28 I am grateful to Anne Baril for this example.
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 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 very crude 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.

7. Results

Group lies, then, should be understood in terms of groups offering either coordinated or authority-based statements. Notice that just as groups can lie that \( p \) without any individual member lying that \( p \), groups can assert that \( p \) without any individual member asserting that \( p \). This divergence between what groups do and what their members do can be explained precisely through spokespersons possessing authority to assert on behalf of the group. This is why group assertion is the core feature of group lying: while others might have the authority to speak or assert on our behalf, it is far more puzzling how others might have the authority to believe or intend on our behalf.\(^{29}\) Thus, getting clear on condition (i) of the ABGA is what enables an understanding of the distinctiveness of group lies.

Moreover, the account of authority-based group assertion developed in this paper provides the framework for understanding not only group lies, but also other phenomena in the neighborhood. For instance, while the statement in MANIPULATED SPOKESPERSON is clearly a group lie, the statement in AUTONOMOUS SPOKESPERSON might be better characterized as group bullshit. This is because while Philip Morris clearly believes that it is false that smoking does not cause lung cancer in MANIPULATED SPOKESPERSON, thereby satisfying (2) of G-LIE, the company does not

\(^{29}\) Notice that I am not saying that it is not possible for others to believe or intend on our behalf. I am simply saying that it is far more puzzling how this can be the case than it is that others assert on our behalf. This is because we have straightforward cases of the latter in the individual case, such as a lawyer asserting on behalf of her client, but not so clearly of the former.
have any relevant beliefs about disease X in\textsc{Autonomous Spokesperson}. In this sense, it might fit better with Harry Frankfurt’s description of bullshit, which he describes as follows:

It is impossible for someone to lie unless he thinks he knows the truth. Producing bullshit requires no such conviction. A person who lies is thereby responding to the truth, and he is to that extent respectful of it. When an honest man speaks, he says only what he believes to be true; and for the liar, it is correspondingly indispensable that he considers his statements to be false. For the bullshitter, however, all these bets are off: he is neither on the side of the true nor on the side of the false. His eye is not on the facts at all, as the eyes of the honest man and the liar are, except insofar as they may be pertinent to his interest in getting away with what he says. He does not care whether the things he says describe reality correctly. He just picks them out, or makes them up, to suit his purpose. (Frankfurt 2005: 55-6)

Because Philip Morris doesn’t have any relevant beliefs about disease X in \textsc{Autonomous Spokesperson} but states that it is safe merely to suit its economic purposes, the assertion seems to be a case of group bullshit. My authority-based account of group assertion provides the resources for capturing this: because the spokesperson has the authority to assert on behalf of Philip Morris when the safety of smoking is concerned, the assertion about disease X is Philip Morris’s, and thus the company is the one bullshitting, not the spokesperson.

Still further, this view of the nature of group assertion has significant consequences for the epistemology of group testimony. In particular, if, as I have argued, the statement in \textsc{Autonomous Spokesperson} is an instance of a group asserting, then a widely accepted view in the epistemology of individual testimony—the transmission view\textsuperscript{30}— cannot be true of group testimony. According to

the transmission view, knowledge is transmitted via testimony and thus if H knows that \( p \) on the basis of S’s testimony that \( p \), then S must know that \( p \). But now consider a modified version of AUTONOMOUS SPOKESPERSON: suppose that it is true that smoking does not causes disease X and the public comes to learn this on the basis of Philip Morris’s spokesperson stating that this is so. In such a case, the public knows that smoking does not cause disease on the basis of Philip Morris’s testimony, but there is no sense whatsoever in which Philip Morris knows that smoking does not cause disease X, as Philip Morris doesn’t even have the concept of disease X. So even if the transmission view is true of individual testimony, it cannot apply at the level of groups.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that the model of group assertion presented here might be viewed as providing the framework for an account of group action more broadly. That is, group action in general might be understood as either coordinated or authority-based, with the latter involving, not always a spokesperson, but another agent who has the authority to act on behalf of the group. In this way, the view developed here can shape our grasp of group agency and, therewith, group responsibility in ways that go far beyond lying and bullshitting.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have provided an account of group lies. On my view, a group’s lying cannot be understood merely in terms of features that take place at the level of its members, such as their offering individual lies or jointly agreeing to lie. Instead, it is the group itself that lies, in virtue of the group’s stating that \( p \), the group’s believing that \( p \) is false, and the group’s intending to be deceptive with respect to whether \( p \) in stating that \( p \). A central virtue of my account is that it appreciates the unique relationship that exists between most groups and their spokespersons, as well as the subtle

and complex interactions made possible by that relationship, such as the possibility that what a
group says may come apart from what its individual members say. In these ways, my view provides
the basis not only for understanding how groups are responsible for their linguistic behavior, but
also for determining when it is appropriate to trace this responsibility to the individual members of
the group and the spokespersons who represent them.\footnote{I am grateful to Anne Baril, Michael Bratman, Josh Dever, Allan Hazlett, Kirk Ludwig, Eliot Michaelson, Jim Pryor, John Searle, Andreas Stokke, audience members at the 3rd Colombian Conference in Logic, Epistemology, and Philosophy of Science in Bogotá, Colombia, the University of Toronto, Mississauga, the University of St. Andrews, the Southwest Epistemology Workshop at the University of New Mexico, the International Workshop on Lying and Deception at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany, the Collective Intentionality IX Conference at Indiana University, New York University, the University of Connecticut, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, the University of Georgia, Radboud University, and, especially, Baron Reed for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.}

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