Group Evidence, Group Belief, and Group Responsibility Transmission

Mona Simion ( [0000-0001-7289-0872](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7289-0872)), Christoph Kelp ([0000-0001-7735-2109](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7735-2109)) , Glen Pettigrove ([0000-0003-3752-0299](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3752-0299))

Draft of 2 Dec 2024

**Abstract.** Evidence matters for responsibility. This paper investigates implications of this insight for group responsibility and the literature on group belief. In particular, we will be focusing on the transmission of group responsibility from group to individual. We will argue that there are cases in which responsibility transmits fully (to all members of the group), partially (to some but not all of its members), or not at all (to none of its members), and we will explore some implications of these observations for accounts of group belief in the literature on social epistemology. More specifically, we will provide reason to think that these observations provide support for an account of group belief that we favour over its main rivals in the literature.

**1. Introduction**

A key idea of evidentialism is that evidence is absolutely central to understanding epistemic normative statuses. It has been at the forefront of research in individual epistemology, where evidentialism’s famous claim that whether on has epistemic justification for believing a proposition, p, supervenes on and only on one’s evidence for p has been widely discussed in individual epistemology. At the same time, evidentialist ideas also have noteworthy applications in and implications for social epistemology. In this paper, we will investigate one such dimension: we will focus on the role evidence plays in group responsibility.

It is widely accepted in the literature that groups can host beliefs, have evidence, and bear responsibility for their actions. It is also well accepted that beliefs and their epistemic credentials, as well as the evidence that the subject has or should have had, matter for responsibility: very roughly, many accept something like an epistemic condition on blame, whereby, *ceteris absentibus* (e.g., absent other normative considerations that may override the demands of the norm in question) a norm violation by a subject S is in blameless just in case S epistemically permissibly lacks a belief (or a high enough credence) that they’re doing something wrong, because they neither have the evidence that this is so, nor should they have had it. Conversely, a widely accepted condition on blameworthiness is that S’s breaking a norm is blamsworthy just in case either S has a belief that they’re doing something wrong, or they should have had it, given the evidence they have or they should have had. In this, the epistemology of group evidence and group belief will be directly relevant to the ethics of group responsibility.

Against this background, this paper investigates, for the first time in the literature, the epistemology of downwards group responsibility transmission: how responsibility for norm violation at group level transmits downwards to individual level, given the doxastic and evidential facts on the ground.

This question has obvious and high stakes moral, political, and legal relevance: when we think that Philip Morris is responsible for increasing the incidence of lung cancer in a population, what does that tell us about whether we are able to hold particular individuals at Philip Morris responsible for raising the incidence of lung cancer in the population? When we say things like ‘The British are responsible for Brexit’, how does that translate to holding particular British nationals responsible for Brexit?

We proceed as follows: first, we look at a set of paradigmatic cases of group responsibility, and explain in a bit more detail the relevance of the epistemology of group evidence and group belief to the issue of group responsibility (Section 2). Second, we put forth our preferred account and show that it scores well on extensional adequacy (3). Finally, we investigate the most prominent accounts of group evidence and belief on the market, and argue that they encounter difficulties accounting for the downward responsibility transmission data (Section 3).

**2. Group Responsibility Transmission: The Epistemic Dimension**

Let’s start with some paradigmatic cases:

Full Downward Transmission

BANK: Anna, Mary, George, and Paul agree to rob a bank. Anna drives the getaway car, Mary holds the gun, and George and Paul remove the money from the vault. They are all accountable for having robbed the bank. Anna, for instance, is not just to blame for driving the car. She is to blame for the robbery (as are each of the rest of them).

Partial Transmission

CHEM: Anna, Mary, George, and Paul agree to form a company that uses chemical X to make product Y. Anna and Mary believe that X is harmless, as most people do. There is no evidence available to them to the contrary. They have done everything in their power, epistemically, to make sure X is safe. George and Paul, however, know that X is poisoning the local water supply. The company is accountable for poisoning the water supply. That blame distributes to George and Paul, but not to Anna and Mary.

No Transmission

SCIENCE: Anna, Mary, George, and Paul form the group of scientists called ScienceLab. Anna is a chemist, Mary is a physicist, George is a mathematician and Paul is a biologist. They work together towards producing medicine Y, impeccably fulfilling their professional, epistemic etc. duties in the process. Y has horrible side effects. Nobody in the group figures it out due to structural problems: unbeknownst to all four scientists, and through no fault of their own, ScienceLab’s safety checks are flawed. ScienceLab is accountable for the bad effects. None of the scientists are. [[1]](#endnote-1)

These cases are paradigmatic cases for the three downward transmission options: full transmission, partial transmission, and no transmission.[[2]](#endnote-2) The details do not matter much: there are many cases with similar structures in the literature. The cases are also particularly interesting for our project because the epistemic details are clear difference makers: evidence/knowledge of wrongness matters for responsibility.[[3]](#endnote-3)

In what way does evidence/knowledge matter? There are old and serious debates on the exact shape of the epistemic condition on responsibility.[[4]](#endnote-4) Leaving the more controversial details aside, the following are popular principles in this literature:

*Blameless Norm Violation: Ceteris absentibus,* S violation of a norm is blameless iff S epistemically permissibly lacks a belief (or a high enough credence) that they’re doing something wrong because they neither have the evidence that this is so, nor should they have had it.

*Blameworthy Norm Violation*: Ceteris absentibus, S violation of a norm is blameworthy iff S either has a belief that they’re doing something wrong, or they should have had it, given the evidence they have or they should have had.

Since the intuition in BANK, CHEM, and SCIENCE is that group blameworthiness is present, the correct theories of evidence and belief should predict that either (1) the group believes that they’re doing something wrong, or (2) the group (epistemically) should have believed that they’re doing something wrong, because they have or should have had evidence to this effect.[[5]](#endnote-5) Furthermore, the correct theory should also predict the downward transmission data: that members who are intuitively blameless for the group’s norm-violating action meet the condition for blamelessness (i.e., epistemically permissibly lack a belief that they’re doing something wrong, given evidence they have and should have had), and that members who are intuitively blameworthy for the group’s norm-violating action meet the condition for blameworthiness (either believe or should have believed they’re doing something wrong, given their evidential situation).

**3. Knowledge-First Group Functionalism**

On the knowledge-first functionalist view of group belief defended by some of us in previous work,[[6]](#endnote-6) groups are *bona fide* epistemic agents, and they can host beliefs via the distributed contribution of the epistemic labour of their members.

On our account, there is a difference between a mere social agent and a proper epistemic agent. A group is an epistemic agent rather than a mere social agent insofar as it has an epistemic etiological function: a function to generate knowledge. It is a group that has generated knowledge in the past, which was beneficial and thereby contributes to the explanation of its continuous existence.

Group knowing and believing are analogues of individual knowing and believing: mere group belief that falls short of knowledge is botched knowledge[[7]](#endnote-7) in the sense that it is an instance of failure in epistemic function fulfilment.

This account’s take on the nature of group belief is strongly committed to multiple realizability: it claims that what makes something a group belief does not depend on either the internal constitution of the group or on a particular way to realise the mental state in its members. Groups are taken as social epistemic agents. They can have knowledge, justification, evidence, and beliefs independently of whether any individual member knows or believes the target proposition.

In turn, a subject is a member of an epistemic group that hosts a belief that p just in case: (1) she is a member of the corresponding social group, and (2) she contributes *cognitively* to the generation of the web of beliefs of the collective epistemic agent. In this, the account predicts that for a given social group ‘G,’ the epistemic agent ‘G’ will be a proper subset of the social agent ‘G.’ For instance, for the social group ‘the CIA,’ the epistemic agent ‘the CIA’ will be a proper subset of the social agent ‘the CIA.’

The model is a distributive belief model insofar as the cognitive contribution in question can be of two sorts: full and partial cognitive contribution:

**Full cognitive contribution**: Agents contribute cognitively fully to the group’s web of beliefs just in case, for some group belief that p, they host a full belief, an acceptance, or a credence of more than .5 that p is the case.

**Partial cognitive contribution**: Agents contribute partially to the group’s web of beliefs just in case, for some group belief that p, they host a full belief, an acceptance, or a credence that *q* is the case that stands in a basing relation to the group belief that p.

This account predicts (correctly) that one can contribute both actively and passively to group web of beliefs. Passive contributors merely host the corresponding beliefs/acceptances/credences, but don’t do any further collaborative cognitive labour. In contrast, active contributors work collectively to produce the group beliefs by imputing information into the system, on which the output beliefs are based.

Our account of group belief combines naturally with knowledge-first functionalist accounts of group justification and group evidence.[[8]](#endnote-8) On our preferred versions of these views, group justified belief is belief formed via properly functioning group cognitive capacities that have the function of generating knowledge. In turn, group evidence that p consists of facts that increase the group’s evidential probability that p and that the group is in a position to know - in that it belongs to a type of group that has the cognitive capacity with the function of generating knowledge to take up these facts and update on them (Simion 2020, 2023, 2024).

Evidence the group should have had is unpacked as having to do with facts that the group is in a position to come to know, given their social role: social roles are norm constituted, and some of these norms are epistemic norms – norms that ask that the group agent investigates a particular issue to the effect of coming to know whether p is the case. These epistemic norms constituting the group’s social role generate evidence the group in question should have. When the group lacks this evidence, and if this evidence has the capacity to lower its evidential probability that p is the case, it constitutes itself in normative defeat for the group’s justification (Kelp and Simion Forthcoming, Simion 2024).

With a full account in place, let’s return to our toy cases of responsibility transmission and check on its extensional credentials. Since the account of group belief involves multiple realisability, it will have no trouble predicting that responsibility at group level obtains in all of our cases, since it will have no difficulty accommodating the existence of a group belief that what they’re doing is wrong in all cases. That being said, one may lack the intuition of group belief being present in SCIENCE. If so, the account also easily predicts responsibility based on presence of evidence the group should have had: the group in SCIENCE should have had the belief they’re doing something wrong, given the evidence that they should have had, given their social role.

Compatibly, responsibility does not uniformly transmit downwards to group members, but rather it follows cognitive contribution and epistemic situation.[[9]](#endnote-9) In BANK, responsibility transmits downwards via full cognitive contribution to all members, since, by stipulation, they all believe they’re doing something wrong and do it anyway. In CHEM, responsibility only transmits to the members that have full cognitive contribution to the group belief that they’re doing something wrong – i.e., to those who know the product is poisoning the water.

Finally, in SCIENCE, the account can accommodate two ways to think about the doxastic situation: if one has a pre-theoretic intuition that the group does host a belief that what they’re doing is wrong (which is not shared by the members), the account will correctly predict that the group is responsible but the members are not, since they do not contribute cognitively to the generation of this group belief. Alternatively, and, we think, more naturally, if one’s pre-theoretic prediction is that the group in SCIENCE lacks the belief at both member and group level, the account is, once more, in a happy position for extensional adequacy. First, because it predicts the group should have had the evidence that medicine X had bad side effects: in virtue of the social role that they play, they should have been structured such that they have good safety checks in place. At the same time, the responsibility does not transmit to the members, since they, by stipulation, conduct their inquiry impeccably.

**4. Responsibility Transmission: The Competition**

In this section we investigate whether the extant competing accounts of group belief are able to handle our toy responsibility data.

There are, very broadly speaking, four main varieties of accounts of group belief defended in the literature to date: first there are two types of summative accounts: there are accounts that take group belief that p to be constituted by either all their members believing that p (henceforth ‘full summativism’), or by some of their members believing that p (‘partial summativism’).[[10]](#endnote-10) On these accounts, a group believes that p if and only if (some of) their members believe that p. Second, there are two main types of competing non-summativism: joint acceptance accounts[[11]](#endnote-11) take group belief to occur in virtue of all group members coming together and ‘shaking hands’, as it were, on p – i.e., jointly accepting p. Belief in any of the members, on this view, is not necessary for the group to believe that p – joint acceptance is enough; juries are the paradigmatic case that motivates this view. Finally, competing distributive accounts[[12]](#endnote-12) think of the group as an epistemic agent in its own right, whereby the belief at group level is multiply realisable via working together towards the p result; scientific teams are the paradigmatic case these theorists have in mind, where it can be, in limit cases, that none of the scientists involved actually forms the belief in the complicated scientific result p, but they all contribute their expertise and epistemic labour to arriving at p.

We have seen that the responsibility data in the three Downward Transmission cases imply that the groups in question either host a full belief that they’re doing something wrong, or, alternatively, they don’t, but their lack of belief is epistemically impermissible – they (epistemically) should have believed it, given evidence they have or should have had. In what follows, we will go back to the Downward Transmission cases and investigate whether the main accounts of group belief on the market are able to accommodate this prediction.

*4.1 Group belief*

We’ll begin by looking into whether existing accounts of group belief can explain cases of downward transmission in terms of group belief.

Let’s start with BANK: recall that the four characters in this case were all predicted blameworthy for the group blameworthy action of robbing the bank. All accounts of group belief will do well in accommodating this datum: both varieties of summativism will predict group belief that robbing the bank is present in this case, since plausibly the four know full well that robbing banks is the wrong thing to do and go ahead and do it anyway. Even if we stipulate that they (or some of them) don’t, it remains plausible that they should have known. What explains the full responsibility transmission data is lack of blameless ignorance at both group level and individual level.

The Joint Acceptance account, similarly, does a fair job in explaining the case: it is plausible that the robbers jointly accept that it’s wrong to rob the bank (or if not, they should have, given their evidence) and go ahead and do it anyway – which explains both group and member accountability.

Finally, all distributive views have an easy time as well, in virtue of multiple realisability: they can claim that, in this case, group belief is constituted by the beliefs of all members, which explains both the accountability present at group level, and its downwards transmission to individual level.

In the case of CHEM, things get a bit more complicated: recall that in CHEM, only two of the characters were aware of the dangerous effects of chemical compound X, while their colleagues had no clue about this, in spite of their best epistemic efforts. Here things look less rosy for full summativism and joint acceptance accounts: both views predict that no group belief that releasing X in the water supply is wrong is present, since it is not the case that all members of the group believe it, nor is it the case that they jointly accept it.

Partial summativism and distributive accounts will have no trouble handling this case: after all, neither asks for participation of all the members of the group in group belief formation, so these views are perfectly compatible with predicting that group belief that releasing x in the water supply – and thereby group responsibility – is present in the case at group level, as well as at the level of the members that host the relevant beliefs that constitute the group belief.

Finally, let’s see how the four accounts deal with the No Transmission case. Recall that the case is one where the group – ScienceLab – is accountable for the bad effects of medicine Y, but none of its members are – it’s a rare failure in ScienceLab’s safety checks protocols. Since none of the scientist believe, nor do they jointly accept, that Y is dangerous and thereby that it’s wrong to release it in the population, both varieties of summativism, as well as the joint acceptance account, will predict no group belief is present in this case. Distributivist views, at least in principle, can do better, in virtue of accepting multiple realisability of group belief.

*4.2 Group Evidence and Responsibility*

We have seen that, while distributivist views may be able to explain downward transmission in terms of group belief, summativist and joint acceptance views struggle to do so. If they are to succeed on this front, they will have to explain group blameworthiness in the cases where they predict lack of belief in terms of epistemically impermissible ignorance at group level. That is, they will have to hold that group responsibility in these cases is generated by the fact that group belief should have been present, given evidence the groups have or should have had.

Unfortunately, the prospects of this explanation doing the work are not great either. Here is why: since these accounts are deflationary, the relevant epistemic should deflates. For full summativism, the claim that group belief should be present in the CHEM and SCIENCE cases, since group belief reduces to the belief of all members, amounts to the claim that all the members should (epistemically) have had the relevant beliefs. For instance, in CHEM, all members of the group should have believed that it’s wrong to release X in the water. This, however, is false by stipulation: Anna and Mary believe that X is harmless, as most people do. There is no evidence available to them to the contrary. They have done everything in their power, epistemically, to make sure X is safe – there is no evidence they lack but should have had. Similarly, by stipulation, all the scientists in SCIENCE have done everything right, epistemically: it is not the case that they should have believed that Y has dangerous side effects, by any plausible epistemic should, since there is no evidence they have or should have had to this effect. Furthermore, partial summativism will similarly, and for largely the same reasons, fail to explain blameworthiness in SCIENCE: by stipulation, it is not the case that any of the ScienceLab members failed in any way, epistemically speaking, in terms of evidence responsiveness or evidence gathering.[[13]](#endnote-13)

How about Joint Acceptance accounts? Can their champions claim that these groups – in CHEM and SCIENCE – should have believed that what they were doing was wrong? It is hard for us to see how that argument could go. Again, note that, in virtue of what these accounts take group belief to amount to – i.e., joint acceptance – the claim would have to be that their members (epistemically) should have jointly accepted that releasing the relevant components – X and Y – was wrong. It’s mysterious what variety of epistemic should might vindicate this prediction: after all, for some of these characters, it would amount to accepting a claim without any evidence whatsoever of its truth, and without any obligation to investigate further (again, by stipulation).

*4.3 Distributivism and Responsibility*

We have, so far, argued that distributive accounts of group belief stand the best chance of accommodating the responsibility data in all of the cases we have been concerned with, at least on the face of it. Since, on these accounts, group belief is multiply realisable, they have the in-principle flexibility to adapt their belief predictions to the responsibility data. In what follows, we will look more closely at the details of some of the most prominent distributive accounts of belief (Brown 2024; Bird 2010; Palermos 2016) to check this result.

Jessica Brown (2024) defends functionalism about group belief. Furthermore, in contrast to many functionalists, Brown develops a unified account for group doxastic, epistemic, and responsibility phenomena. Importantly for our purposes here, Brown develops her view in conjunction with a view of group evidence and group responsibility. In this, we think, Brown is the best equipped competing distributive account on the market when it comes to accounting for the ways in which responsibility, evidence, and belief interact at group level.

According to Brown, a group’s G evidence consists of facts that G has an epistemically respectable doxastic relation to. (Brown doesn’t take a stance on how to analyse this respectable doxastic relation. She allows that it might it at least be knowledge or justified belief. That said, previous work suggests she will be more inclined towards the latter). In turn, on her account, a group’s ignorance is blameless when it is not the case that we could reasonably have expected the group not to be ignorant, given its duties to avoid wrongdoing. A group’s duties to avoid wrongdoing depend on the stakes, the group’s cognitive capacity and situation, the group’s official role, legislation, and industry standards.

Here is our central worry for Brown’s view, when it comes to our purposes in this paper: SCIENCE is a paradigmatic case in which a group lacks the relevant cognitive capacity even though it should have had it. The group has bad mechanisms for handling evidence in place, such that now its cognitive capacity to acquire and process evidence that the medicine has side effects it is impaired. If responsibility facts vary with cognitive capacity facts, this will be a case where the group does not have the relevant cognitive capacity, and thereby does not count as blameworthily ignorant, even though it should have had this evidence.

Let’s move on to alternative distributive views. On Alexander Bird’s distributive view of group belief (2010), in virtue of the social relations at work, different parts of the system contribute to the generation of the system’s collective mental state. Bird thinks the best way to see the analogy between an individual and a group believer implicit in the distributed model is in terms of the analogy between social institutions and organisms developed as ‘structural functionalism’ by, most notably, Émile Durkheim (1893). This view sees the whole of society as an organism, with the various institutions (the law, parliament, business, the security services, etc.) performing different functions in order to contribute to social cohesion. This parallels the different functions of the systems and organs of a biological organism that contribute to its organic unity and stability and to the pursuit of its overall goals.

The main worry we have for Bird’s model is that, in virtue of imposing only social constraints on group membership – i.e., constraints pertaining to participating in the pursuit of the common goal – membership in the believing group becomes implausibly easy to attain (Simion et al 2022). This, in turn, opens the door to being too permissive about responsibility attributions as well.

To see this, consider the role, *vis-à-vis* a group belief, of the mailperson delivering the correspondence to the group of scientists in the SCIENCE case. Is the mailperson a proper member of the group that believes ‘*p*’, where *p* is a complicated scientific proposition? Bird’s account will have to answer yes, since the mailperson, in virtue of their social role, contributes to the generation of the relevant piece of scientific knowledge. This clashes with our intuition. Furthermore, it becomes even more problematic when we consider appropriate responsibility attributions. Is the mailperson a proper part of the group that is responsible for the bad side effects generated by drug Y in the population? Intuitively (and legally!) no. However, Bird’s view will predict they are: after all, the mailperson cannot be a member of the group that hosts the responsibility-relevant belief, but not part of the group that shoulders the responsibility for the effects of the drug, since the belief is what explains the responsibility to begin with.

Orestis Palermos (2016) defends a distributed model of group belief that imposes stronger conditions on membership of the believing group than Bird does. According to Palermos, to produce knowledge, epistemic collaborations rely heavily on the *mutual* interactions of their group members. What is required for membership in the believing group are reciprocal relations of collaboration that function to generate the belief in question: for someone to be a proper member of the believing group, they need to be such that they both input information into the system, and receive information from the system, in an epistemically beneficial feedback loop (Palermos 2016). When individuals merely interact loosely and in a largely unidirectional way, they do not give rise to a distributed cognitive system. It is easy to see that Palermos’s model will not have the mailperson problem: the mailperson is not a member of the believing group, because they merely input information, without any feedback loop being described. In contrast, the scientists both input information into the system, and receive information from the system, which they then use in generating further inputs, etc. That’s why the scientists, but not the mailperson are proper members of the group that hosts the relevant beliefs, and shoulders the relevant responsibility for the bad side effects.

The problem with Palermos’s model is that it makes group membership too hard to attain. There are many cases of group belief in which there are no reciprocal relations of collaboration between members in the generation of the group belief. For instance, consider a variation of SCIENCE in which one of the scientists – say George – does actually host the belief that releasing drug Y is wrong, because it will likely have terrible side effects. However, he never tells this to anyone, nor does he do much to participate in this project. On Palermos’s account, and against intuition, this scientist is not a member of the believing group – no information feedback loop is described – and thereby neither is he a member of the group that’s responsible for the side effects the drug has in the population. Alternatively, consider the case of a Management Group at a University which has a diverse range of members, from Deans to student representatives. It is easy enough to see that contributions to the formation of many of the group’s beliefs will be rather uneven and in the limit case, certain members have no input at all, perhaps because they weren’t present at the meeting at which the belief was formed or perhaps because they prevented from contributing to the formation of the belief on structural grounds (because of the role they play in the group). Again, Palermos’s account makes the counterintuitive prediction that the relevant people are not part of the group.

Before closing, we’d like to add one further worry for Bird’s and Palermos’s accounts of group belief. In order to get all the cases right, these views will need to explain how it can be that group responsibility transmits sometimes to all group members (full transmission), sometimes to none (no transmission), and sometimes to some but not all (partial transmission). A problem that all three distributive accounts face is that they don’t appear to have the resources to explain partial transmission. The key reason for this is that these views remain largely silent on the internal structural features of the group. However, it is hard to see how any view could hope to explain partial transmission without appealing to internal structural features of the group. Accordingly, in order to stand any chance of providing an adequate explanation of all cases of downward transmission, champions of these accounts will need to work out some internal structural features of groups and put these to work to explain partial transmission. Our hypothesis is that what they will end up is something very close to the account we developed in Section 3.

5. Conclusion

This paper has investigated the role evidentialist ideas play in understanding a topic that has been of keen interest in social epistemology, to wit, group belief and group responsibility and, in particular, the transmission of responsibility from group to individual. We saw that group responsibility can transmit downwards to all members of the group, to only some members, and to none, and we argued that a view of group belief some of us have defended elsewhere can accommodate these observations. In contrast, the main rival views of group belief struggle here. While there are differences in how well they perform with respect to the three different options, there is no such view that gets all of them right. In this way, applications of evidentialist ideas allow us to make progress on key issues in social epistemology issues, thus opening up new directions of research beyond the familiar territory of individual epistemology.

**References**

Bird, A. 2007. Justified judging. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 74*(1): 81–110.

Bird, A. 2010. Social knowing: The social sense of ‘scientific knowledge’. *Philosophical Perspectives 24*(1): 23–56.

Brady, M. S. and M. Fricker. 2016. *The epistemic life of groups: Essays in the epistemology of collectives*. Oxford University Press.

Broncano-Berrocal, F. and Carter, J.A. 2020. *The Philosophy of Group Polarization*. London: Routledge.

Brown, Jessica (2024). *Groups as Epistemic and Moral Agents*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Buller, D. 1999. *Functions*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Carter, J. A. 2015. Group knowledge and epistemic defeat. *Ergo*, 2(28): 711-735.

Carter, J. A., Gordon, E. C., and Jarvis, B. W. (Eds.). 2017. *Knowledge first: Approaches in epistemology and mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Conee, Earl Brink & Feldman, Richard (2004). *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. Edited by Richard Feldman.

Durkheim, E. 1893. De la division du travail social. Paris: Alcan. Translated as The Division of Labor in Society, by W. D. Halls, New York, NY: The Free Press, 1984

Feldman, Richard (1988). Epistemic obligations. *Philosophical Perspectives* 2:235-256.

Feldman, Richard (2000). The ethics of belief. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 60 (3):667-695.

Feldman, Richard & Conee, Earl (1985). Evidentialism. *Philosophical Studies* 48 (1):15 - 34.

Gilbert, M. (1987). Modelling Collective Belief, Synthese, 73(1): 185–204.

Godfrey-Smith, P. 1993. Functions: Consensus Without Unity. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 74: 196-208.

Graham, P. J. (2012). Epistemic entitlement. *Nous*, 46(3): 449-482.

Ichikawa, J. J. 2014. Justification is potential knowledge. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy 44*(2): 184–206.

Kallestrup, J. 2016. Group virtue epistemology. *Synthese*: 1–19.

Kelp, C. 2018. *Good Thinking: A Knowledge First Virtue Epistemology*. New York: Routledge.

Kelp, Christoph (2021). *Inquiry, Knowledge, and Understanding*. Oxford University Press.

Kelp, Christoph and Simion, Mona (2017). Criticism and Blame in Action and Assertion. *The Journal of Philosophy* 114 (2), 76-93

Kelp, Christoph, and Simion, Mona (Forthcoming). Norms of Inquiry and Normative Defeat. In Matheson, J. and Creller, A (eds.), *Inquiry: Philosophical Perspectives*, Routledge.

Lackey, J. 2014a. *Essays in collective epistemology*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Lackey, J. 2014b. Socially extended knowledge. *Philosophical Issues 24*(1): 282– 298.

Lackey, J. 2016. What is Justified Group Belief? The Philosophical Review (2016) 125 (3): 341–396.

Lackey, J. 2021. *The Epistemology of Groups*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

List, C. and Pettit, P. (2011) *Group Agency: The Possibility, Design, and Status of Corporate Agents*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McCain, Kevin (ed.) (2018). *Believing in Accordance with the Evidence: New Essays on Evidentialism*. Cham: Springer Verlag.

McCain, Kevin (2013). Explanationist evidentialism. *Episteme* 10 (3):299-315.

McCain, Kevin (2014). *Evidentialism and Epistemic Justification*. New York: Routledge.

Millikan, R. (1984). *Language, thought, and other biological categories*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Miracchi, L. 2015. Competence to know. *Philosophical Studies 172*(1): 29–56.

Neander, K. (1991). The teleological notion of function. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 69: 454–468.

Palermos, O. 2016. 2016. The Dynamics of Group Cognition. Minds and Machines. 26(4), 409-440.

Rudy-Hiller, Fernando (2022). The Epistemic Condition for Moral Responsibility, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy(Winter 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/moral-responsibility-epistemic/>.

Schmitt, F.F. (1994). The Justification of Group Beliefs, in Schmitt, F.F., Socializing Epistemology: The Social Dimensions of Knowledge, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.: 257–288.

Simion, M. 2019. Testimonial Contractarianism: A Knowledge-First Social Epistemology. *Nous.* Online First.

Simion, M. 2020. *Knowledge First Social Epistemology*. MS.

Simion, M. and Miragoli, M. (2021). Gender, Race, and Group Disagreement. In Carter, J.A., and Broncano-Berrocal (eds.), F., *Group Disagreement*, Routledge.

Simion, M., Carter, J.A., and Kelp, C. (2022). On Behalf of Knowledge-First Collective Epistemology. In *Doxastic and Propositional Warrant*, P. Silva and L. Oliveira (eds.), Routledge.

Simion, M. (2023). Resistance to Evidence and the Duty to Believe. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Online First.

Simion M. (2024). *Resistance to Evidence*. Cambridge University Press.

Stapleford, Scott (2012). Epistemic duties and failure to understand one’s evidence. *Principia: An International Journal of Epistemology* 16 (1):147-177.

Stapleford, Scott (2014). Completing Epistemic Oughts. *Philosophical Forum* 45 (2):133-148.

Stapleford, Scott & McCain, Kevin (2020). Bound by the Evidence. In Scott Stapleford & Kevin McCain (eds.), *Epistemic Duties: New Arguments, New Angles*. New York: Routledge. pp. 113–124.

Stapleford, Scott & McCain, Kevin (eds.) (2020). *Epistemic Duties: New Arguments, New Angles*. New York: Routledge.

Williamson, T. 2000. *Knowledge and its Limits*. Oxford University Press.

Wright, L. 1973. Functions. *The Philosophical Review* 44: 409–422.

**Notes**

1. Note that the responsibility at issue in SCIENCE is genuinely moral, rather than legal alone. After all, even if legal accountability is present, one can always ask whether it should have been present. If the answer is yes (which, plausibly, it is), then the legal normative prediction supervenes on a moral one. Many thanks to Jesus Navarro and Dani Pino for pressing us on this. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. A related but different question is about the closure of group responsibility under membership. Now, CHEM and SCIENCE provide reason to think that group responsibility isn’t closed group membership in the sense that if the group is responsible then so is each member. If there is a closure principle on group responsibility, it needs to be restricted. How so? One attractive answer is in terms of downward transmission. Members of a group are responsible for something the group did if responsibility transmits downward to them. That’s why, in CHEM, George and Paul are responsible, while Anne and Mary aren’t, and why, in SCIENCE, none of the members are responsible even though the group is. This is why we focus on downward transmission here, rather than on closure. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. For classic as well as more recent work on evidence, see e.g., Conee and Feldman 2004, Feldman and Conee 1985, McCain 2013, 2014, Stapleford and McCain 2020 as well as the essays in McCain 2018. For paradigmatically externalist views, see Williamson 2000, and Simion 2023, 2024. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. See Rudy-Hiller 2022 for an excellent overview. See also Kelp and Simion 2017 for our preferred account. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. For more on duties to believe see e.g., (Feldman 1988, 2000, Simion 2023, 2024, Stapleford 2014) and the contributions to (Stapleford and McCain 2020). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Simion 2020, Simion & Miragoli 2021, Simion, Kelp, and Carter 2022. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. For the locus classicus for knowledge-first epistemology and philosophy of mind, see Williamson 2000. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Kelp 2018, 2021, Simion 2019, 2023, 2024. For work on functions, see Graham 2012, Millikan 1984, Neander 1991, Wright 1973. For more knowledge-first views of evidence and justification, see Bird 2007, Jenkins-Ichikawa 2014, Williamson 2000. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. We do not mean to say that group responsibility is only a matter of cognitive contribution and epistemic situation. For instance, we want to allow that the kingpin of a heist may bear more responsibility for the crime than most other members. There are many ways in which this can happen. Responsibilities within the group endeavour may be unevenly distributed among members. If so, it will not be surprising that some individuals will share larger parts of the group’s responsibility than others. Since we are focusing on the epistemic condition on group responsibility, a lot of this can be set aside here. However, questions may arise even on this front. For instance, we may want to allow that some individuals have more of a responsibility to know/have evidence for relevant propositions than others. While making sense of uneven distributions of responsibilities to know/have evidence is a fascinating issue, space is limited and we will have to leave a fuller discussion for another occasion. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. See e.g., Lackey 2021, List and Petit 2011, Schmitt 1994 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. See e.g., Gilbert 1987 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. See e.g., Bird 2010, Brown 2024, Palermos 2016 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. There is a question as to whether summativists can make sense of downward transmission at all. After all, the group is nothing over and above its members. If so, it is hard to see how, according to summativists, there could be (downward) transmission from groups to its members, just as it is hard to see how there could be transmission of responsibility from Samuel Clemens to Mark Twain. It would seem that, at best, summativists can make sense of closure of group responsibility under membership (see n.1). If we are right and cases such as CHEM and SCIENCE provide reason to think (i) that an unrestricted closure principle is false and (ii) suitable restrictions on closure are to be explained (at least in part) in terms of downward transmission, summativism will be in further trouble. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)