

## II—LIAM KOFI BRIGHT

### GROUP LIES AND REFLECTIONS ON THE PURPOSE OF SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Jennifer Lackey (2020) makes the case that non-summativist accounts of group belief cannot adequately account for an important difference between group lies (or, separately, group bullshit) and group belief. Since non-summativist accounts fail to do this, she argues that they ought to be rejected and that we should seek an account of group belief which can do better by this standard. I briefly summarize Lackey's argument, to give a sense of the role I see the central desideratum playing, and outline her arguments for that desideratum. I then critique one of the positive arguments she offers for the desideratum, briefly outlining the notion of explication and why I think it would not license the appeal to the Group Lie Desideratum that Lackey's argument depends upon. This leads me to reflections on the broader project of analysing notions of group belief, and the role I think such endeavours can or ought to play in social epistemology more broadly.

#### I

*Introduction.* In her fascinating piece on collective social epistemology, Jennifer Lackey (2020) makes the case that non-summativist accounts of group belief cannot adequately account for an important difference between group lies (or, separately, group bullshit) and group belief. Since non-summativist accounts fail to do this, she argues that they ought to be rejected and that we should seek an account of group belief which can do better by this standard. I am sorry to say that it is my (*de re*) intention to respond to this in the most irritating fashion possible, and focus on questioning the standard of evaluation rather than the first-order claims at issue. I hope in this essay to try and sketch, or at least make apparent via remarking on Lackey's essay, something like a different overall metaphilosophical orientation to the questions of social epistemology.

In particular, I shall proceed as follows. I will very briefly summarize Lackey's argument, to give a sense of the role I see the central desideratum playing. I will then outline her arguments for that

desideratum. With these on the table, I will critique one of the positive arguments she offers for the desideratum, then move on to briefly outline the notion of explication and why I think it would not license the appeal to the group lie desideratum that Lackey's argument depends upon. This will lead me to reflections on the broader project of analysing notions of group belief, and the role I think such endeavours can or ought to play in social epistemology more broadly.

## II

*Lackey's Argument.* Lackey argues that non-summative accounts of group belief formation cannot properly account for the phenomena of group lies or group bullshitting. She considers two versions of non-summativism about group belief. The first she refers to as 'JAA2', which she takes from Tuomela (1992). I reproduce the quotation, summarizing it here:

- (1') [JAA 2] *G* believes that *p* in the social and normative circumstances *C* if and only if in *C* there are operative members  $A_1, \dots, A_m$  of *G* in respective positions  $P_1, \dots, P_m$  such that:
- (2') the agents  $A_1, \dots, A_m$ , when they are performing their social tasks in their positions  $P_1, \dots, P_m$  and due to exercising the relevant authority system of *G*, (intensionally) jointly accept that *p*, and because of this exercise of authority system, they ought to continue to accept and positionally believe it;
- (3') there is a mutual belief among the operative members  $A_1, \dots, A_m$  to the effect that (1'); because of (1'), the (full-fledged and adequately informed) non-operative members of *G* tend tacitly to accept—or at least ought to accept—*p*, as members of *G*; and
- (4') there is a mutual belief in *G* to the effect that (3'). (Tuomela 1992, pp. 295–6)

The second is drawn from Pettit's (2003) work on judgement aggregation, and referred to as 'PBAA'. According to this view, a group collectively believes a claim that *p* just in case a majority of those empowered to make epistemic decisions on behalf of the group (decide which claims the group endorses, and so on) endorse each premiss in a set which collectively entails that *p*. Importantly, both of these accounts are consistent with the group being composed of individuals all of whom do not believe that *p* even though the group

does, and likewise with the group failing to believe that  $p$  even though all of their members do. This is because in either case the duly empowered persons exercising their authority to decide what the group believes may decide for the group in a way that does not reflect their personal beliefs, or the beliefs of any others in the group.

Lackey argues that neither JAA2 nor PBAA can satisfy what she calls the Group Lie and Group Bullshit Desiderata. For our purpose we may focus on just one, since essentially the same arguments would apply in both cases, and I will focus on the Group Lie Desideratum.

*Group Lie Desideratum:* An adequate account of group belief should have the resources for distinguishing between, on the one hand, a group's asserting its belief that  $p$  and, on the other hand, paradigmatic instances of a group's lying regarding that  $p$ . (Lackey 2020, p. 196)

She takes from her own previous work (Lackey 2013) an account of lying as 'A lies to B if and only if (1) A states that  $p$  to B, (2) A believes that  $p$  is false, and (3) A intends to be deceptive to B with respect to whether  $p$  in stating that  $p$ '. The question is, then, why can neither JAA 2 or PBAA satisfy the Group Lie Desideratum with lies so understood?

Lackey's answer is formed by drawing upon such cases as the following:

TOBACCO COMPANY: Philip Morris, one of the largest tobacco companies in the world, is aware of the massive amounts of scientific evidence revealing not only the addictiveness of smoking, but also the links it has with lung cancer and heart disease. While the members of the board of directors of the company believe this conclusion, they all jointly agree that, because of what is at stake financially, the official position of Philip Morris is that smoking is neither highly addictive nor detrimental to one's health, which is then published in all of their advertising materials. (Lackey 2020, p. 195)

The worry is that in cases like TOBACCO COMPANY, those who are authorized to make the decision may do so in a fashion that passes muster according to JAA 2 and PBAA, but despite that, one is inclined to say obviously their decision constitutes lying. Phillip Morris is stating something that it clearly in some sense takes to be false and with intention to deceive. This should count as a lie, whereas the standard account seems to be attributing something like

sincere belief to Phillip Morris. Or at least these accounts (so Lackey argues) lack the resources to differentiate between the affirmations in cases like TOBACCO COMPANY and what should properly be called genuine or sincere beliefs.

As noted, my central concern in this response piece shall be with Lackey's Group Lie Desideratum. Why should we believe that it is an appropriate way to assess theories of group belief? I quote Lackey's defence of the desideratum:

I do not think that the Group Lie Desideratum needs much argument: if an account of group belief cannot discriminate between paradigmatic instances of group belief and clear instances where group belief is absent, the account is fundamentally misguided. But the problem here is not just that a view's inability to satisfy the Group Lie Desideratum reveals its deep failure to capture the nature of group belief. There are also important moral and legal reasons for wanting to hold groups, such as corporations, businesses and governments, responsible both for their lies and for the consequences that follow from them. In a case such as TOBACCO COMPANY, for instance, it is not just an intellectual curiosity whether an account of group belief gets the verdict right—it also matters so that we can properly hold Philip Morris morally and legally responsible for its lies about the health risks involved in smoking and the deaths that resulted from them. (Lackey 2020, p. 196)

We may divide this into two claims. There is a descriptive claim: it just so happens that group lies are typically instances where group beliefs are absent, and so any analysis that classifies all group lies along with group beliefs is simply incorrect. And there is a normative claim: it is morally or legally important to identify instances of group lies in order to better hold those involved accountable. I will challenge each of these rationales, starting with the normative claim.

### III

*The Normative Defence of the Group Lie Desideratum.* I believe it misidentifies what is morally important in cases such as TOBACCO COMPANY to think that what is needed is an account of precisely when a group counts as having produced a group lie rather than a group belief. Lackey's normative case for the Group Lie Desideratum relies on us agreeing that our ability to 'hold groups,

such as corporations, businesses and governments, responsible both for their lies and for the consequences that follow from them' requires satisfying the Group Lie Desideratum. I certainly grant that we do wish to hold groups such as corporations, businesses and governments accountable for their actions, and that the actions of such groups include epistemic actions like forming beliefs and making assertions. But I do not think the case has been made that achieving this requires clearly separating out group lies from sincere beliefs.

Instead, what seems to me to matter is rather that the procedure used for deciding upon which utterances shall be made is improper, and we normatively ought to intervene upon it. Whether a group utterance is a lie rather than a reflection of a sincere belief is orthogonal to whether the utterance is the sort of thing we should activate accountability mechanisms to deal with. To illustrate this, I shall try and sketch scenarios that seem to merit exactly the same moral (and perhaps also regulatory) response as Lackey's core case, even though they are by design instances of sincere group belief. If the lie/belief distinction does not make a difference to the appropriate moral response, I take it that this undermines the claim that we need an account that can distinguish group lies from group sincere belief to guide our normative appraisals. I shall argue that what our normative appraisal instead tracks is the concerning fact that those in a position to decide what group beliefs will be, most saliently in morally significant cases, can so easily abuse their power.

So suppose that in the TOBACCO COMPANY case the members of the board all took a pill that ensured that they honestly affirmed that smoking was beneficial and not detrimental to one's health. The effects of the pills last long enough for the board members to form their collective decision as to what to affirm and assert. But, importantly, all board members are such that, counterfactually, had they not taken the pill, and just followed their normal procedures for deciding what to adopt as the group belief, they would have voted to affirm the claim that smoking is not detrimental to health. In this scenario, their evidence-gathering procedure was entirely as before, and they were just as poised to simply ignore the weight of the evidence before issuing their judgement as they would have been in the original TOBACCO COMPANY scenario. But their use of the pill ensures that at the point of actually affirming (say, voting on the propositions which constitute the premisses of the aggregation, or taking part in whatever procedure brings it about that they are

exerting their pertinent authority), they honestly believe the unjustified claim.

Given that I have already signalled that I am going to focus attention on the importance of proper procedures, one might worry that in this revision of the scenario it seems as though taking the truth pill has just become part of the bad group belief formation procedure. So revise the case such that, instead, just as they are about to engage in the process that constitutes group belief formation, and quite outside of their control or even knowledge, Anansi casts a charm over the board members and they all come to sincerely affirm the claim they were about to affirm on spurious grounds. As such, without it in any way reflecting on their own epistemic efforts, the board members now sincerely believe the claim they induce the company to affirm. The group belief is now entirely reflective of the real belief of those so authorized to make epistemic decisions for the company.

I take it that such cases modify the scenario such that the individual board members, at least, are no longer lying when they affirm that smoking has health benefits. I think they also modify the case such that there is no longer a group lie. Group beliefs must be allowed to be poorly epistemically grounded in available evidence just as ordinary beliefs may be. Lackey herself notes that ‘wishful thinking can certainly produce belief, both at the individual and at the group level, but clearly a positive epistemic requirement would not be satisfied here’ (2020, p. 200). It seems that in the case where Anansi has deceived the board members they are in something like that scenario: they have a real group belief (rather than a group lie) which just happens to be very poorly epistemically grounded in the available evidence.

Despite thinking that this modification shifts the case from one of what may plausibly be called group lies to what may plausibly be called group beliefs, I do not think the introduction of a magic belief-changing pill or charm is normatively significant at all. In all cases, the company has in place a procedure for making public utterances about a matter of great public import wherein it may deploy its vast resources to mislead the public for profit. The moral problem is that the procedure the board members follow in deciding what utterances are to be put forward is such that it allows them to simply ignore the evidence where it is not convenient to the company as a profit-making enterprise. The fact that in some such cases the board members may form a sincere group belief is not reassuring in the

slightest. I take this to indicate that what normatively matters is not whether the bad epistemic action taken by Phillip Morris was forming a bad group belief or uttering a group lie.

My own sense of what has gone wrong here is instead that the harm is downstream of a feature of group belief Lackey mentions in her essay. As she notes, ‘group belief is far more directly voluntary than it is in the individual case, since acceptance is something that can be taken up at will’ (Lackey 2020, p. 199). This greater degree of voluntary choice in group belief formation opens it up to a certain kind of characteristically social epistemic abuse—a kind of wilfully bad epistemic behaviour. Whether or not this bad behaviour issues in sincere belief, it is detrimental to the public when acted upon, since it can result in poorly epistemically grounded claims receiving the public backing of powerful entities. Hence the point which seems to me morally important, and wherein I would hope regulatory intervention should occur, is that it should be impermissible for those making decisions about what a company will affirm and publicize do so in a way that ignores the evidence available to them. It is this wilful epistemic neglect, or poor procedure for making epistemic decisions about utterances or the like, that I wish to control or rein in among the powerful groups of public life. And I wish to regulate it all the same regardless of whether or not groups (or those authorized to make epistemic decisions on behalf of groups) are able to sincerely persuade themselves of the results of their neglect. Lies and lackadaisicalness are equally bad in normative social epistemology.

Given the first-order issue at hand, it’s perhaps worth noting that having such regulations in place may then actually lend extra weight to a basically non-summative picture of group epistemic life. Even if those empowered to make group epistemic decisions actually happen not to believe claims that their evidence supports, or which would be best supported were proper epistemic procedure followed, I still normatively expect them to do something akin to making a selfless assertion (in the sense of Lackey 2007). They should use their group belief affirmation ritual to ‘selflessly commit’ the group to a belief in some claim that has some more healthy relationship to available evidence. In this way, the relationship between the actual beliefs of those who carry out the authorized procedure for group belief formation and what the group actually comes to believe would, in some cases, be rather attenuated indeed.

I readily admit that legal enforcement of such procedural norms would be very difficult. But my point is that what seems to me normatively important is that the procedure by which large enterprises can come to their beliefs on matters of public import be a procedure which reflects the evidence available to the enterprise. Otherwise, the enterprise's group belief formation procedure may, in some cases, simply amount to a means by which conspiracies against the public are realized. After all, the sort of beliefs which give the question of group belief versus group lie its normative significance in the first place are beliefs on matters of public import.

Hence the policy questions that I think we need assistance with in this domain are: what are the norms for procedures which lead to group belief formation, and how do we hold people to those norms? I have argued that the group belief versus group lie distinction will turn out not to track whether the procedures are worth endorsing and who has been following them well. I thus think we have not yet been given reason to believe that it will contribute to this normative project to be able to distinguish the two. In fact, given that the same policy response is warranted for either group lies or poorly epistemically grounded group belief, by framing things this way we are insuring ourselves against multiple types of malfeasance. Hence the normative defence of the Group Lie Desideratum fails.

That the policy response ought not to track whether it is group lies or poorly produced group sincere belief is important, as it helps forestall an objection one might have to the above. One might think that even if the group lie and the group sincere belief were as bad as one another, it still matters that they are wrong for different reasons. We may wish to keep track of that reason for the wrongness. But recall that what was supposed to motivate the Group Lie Desideratum was that we need accounts that satisfy it for helping us in practical and normatively significant matters. A rationale for tracking a difference between cases that is not action-guiding is not a dialectically appropriate defence in this context.

Before turning to the descriptive argument for the Group Lie Desideratum, I wish to deal with one additional counter-argument to what I have just said. Perhaps I am simply failing to imagine the situations under which it is normatively significant that we can distinguish group belief from group lie. I assumed the pertinent scenario was one in which we aim to work out what policies we should want to endorse for regulating groups that make morally significant group



epistemic decisions. And so I suggested that Philip Morris's behaviour in the TOBACCO COMPANY case is morally akin to other poor epistemic behaviour, such as having in place faulty norms of (or procedures for implementing) evidence evaluation before making an epistemic decision about what to affirm. But perhaps it is not that sort of regulatory or policy context I should be concerned with when deciding whether it is normatively important to satisfy the Group Lie Desideratum.

While I cannot survey all options, there is a rival class of possible contexts of use that strike me as plausible. One might think that guiding public discourse or enabling discriminations between cases one encounters in everyday life, as opposed to in more reflective contexts where we are forming policy, requires discovering the precise means of separating group beliefs from group lies. Knowing who is a group liar rather than (say) a misguided group believer might be useful for engaging in civic discourse during political debates, arguing online or in another public forum, or guiding where or against whom we should protest. In this sort of context, there is not yet a question about where to target legal regulatory interventions. Instead, the discourse would have purposes like rallying support for policies or programmes whose detailed implementation would come later. The fact that when we get to working out the legal or regulatory details we may not want to focus on the lie/sincere belief distinction as our point of intervention does not mean that we have no interest in having a vocabulary fit for civic discourse that makes it clear where our moral concerns lie.

However, I doubt that it is important for normal public discourse that we have an analytically sharp or precise definition that stands behind our judgements. Whatever rough sense of family resemblance guides our extension of a concept from uses concerning individuals to those concerning groups works well enough for the most part without need of more precision. The 'for the most part' consideration is important, since I am not saying there are no contexts where greater precision would be useful. But I am saying that everyday political discourse is not one of them. We can just as well spray paint 'lying murderers!' on the windows of tobacco companies' headquarters now as we would if we had a more fine-grained analysis of the group lie. And indeed, we can do this and have our act of protest well enough understood even if we never actually generate a fine-grained analysis of 'group lie'. So if there is a case to be made for the

normative significance of having an analytically sharp analysis of ‘group lie’ or ‘group belief’, it does not come from the demands of everyday uses of ‘liar’ or ‘belief’ as applied to groups.

Here, then, is the situation I think we face regarding the normative defence of the Group Lie Desideratum. In everyday use, we do not need a precise analysis to achieve the normatively important social purposes a loose concept of ‘group lie’ versus ‘group sincere belief’ might help achieve. When I reflect on the legal or policy context where I would want to have more precise things to say to facilitate regulating corporations or government agencies or other such groups who are powerful enough for me to think their group epistemic actions matter, it does not seem to me that my regulatory purposes would be achieved by means of distinguishing group lies from sincere group beliefs. Hence I do not grant that there is a normative case for satisfying the Group Lie Desideratum.

In the next section I shall draw out the metaphilosophical stance that lies behind my reasoning here. Ultimately I see myself, as a social epistemologist, engaged in a task of explication of important concepts. I will argue that this project, which involves the creation of new concepts to replace old ones, would not necessarily require that we satisfy the Group Lie Desideratum. I thus do not grant that either of Lackey’s stated reasons that we must endorse the Group Lie Desideratum, and so reject the JAA2 or PBAA analyses, holds water.

#### IV

*Explication and the Descriptive Defence of the Group Lie Desideratum.* One task philosophers carry out is explication. It is often taken together with Carnap’s metaphilosophical views from (Carnap 1950). On a relatively conservative understanding of explication, then, to explicate an old concept is to construct a new concept that better serves the function of the old one (Leitgeb 2013, p. 271). The new concept may achieve this by being more precise, or by resolving ambiguities that frustrated previous attempts to reason about the topic matter in question. On a somewhat less conservative understanding of explication (see Novaes 2020), it may assist in clarifying concepts for purposes beyond just future research. For instance, it could guide policy makers or activists in deciding where to

focus their efforts. Further, we may wish to downplay the role of precisification and ambiguity resolution and embrace instead the creative element of explication—see it as a way of generating new concepts that help us perform the tasks we are concerned with.

Hence, for instance, the technical concept of ‘probability’ we nowadays work with no doubt has some relationship to precursor notions of chance, which were part of what inspired and spurred its development, but it is in many respects quite distinct (for a book-length study of the general topic see [Hacking 2006 \[1975\]](#)). What justifies the place of ‘probability’ in our conceptual lives is not that it captures the real underlying facts about probability, or even chance or any other hazily understood prior notion. Rather, this precise concept earns it its keep in our conceptual order because it has been so overwhelmingly useful to various scientific and practical endeavours that are themselves worth pursuing.

To illustrate explication in a bit more detail I will use an example from my own previous work ([Bright, Malinsky and Thompson 2016](#)). My co-authors and I found that social scientists who wished to look for intersectional effects in large data sets were reporting that they were unable to test the sort of claims we were interested in. So we first drew from previous intersectional theorists’ statements regarding what sort of things they hoped to be able to study and also achieve through intersectionality theory. We found that, for instance, people were interested in cases of causal relationships that only existed in relatively small subpopulations and thus were hard to detect. With the background idea that it is as if such causal effects only switch on for small subgroups, we called this phenomenon ‘switch intersectionality’. We then argued that one could capture important features of switch intersectionality in a standard statistical framework for reasoning about causal claims. Using this framework allows one to achieve the descriptive and political goals which had led theorists to be interested in switch intersectionality in the first place. And it is for just this reason that we argued our explication of switch intersectionality ought to be preferred.

This, I claim, is typical of the more creative version of the explicative process and mindset. Conceptual clarification does not require capturing cases or tracking distinctions that were already marked in a somewhat hazier form. One instead tries to argue directly that a given context allows for the completion of worthy goals by means of the conceptual tools one creates.

I believe that the task of explication is a proper task for social epistemologists. I will consider how the Group Lie Desideratum appears to an explicator. I take it that one who carries out explications accepts a desideratum as a constraint just in case either the only or the most efficient way of achieving their purpose is to ensure the result of their explication is in line with the desideratum's demands. The question is: would someone who wished to explicate the concept of 'group belief' take on board the Group Lie Desideratum as constraining the results of their attempts to produce an explication? I shall argue that they would not.

I have already argued that the explicator would not have reason to accept the Group Lie Desideratum on normative grounds. I think that once one thinks about what explication is, it will also be clear that an explicator would not accept the descriptive argument for the Group Lie Desideratum. That is to say, the mere fact that they may fail to capture prior distinctions between group lies and sincere group beliefs would not cause an explicator to give up their analysis.

It is a given in the literature on explication that an explicated concept may end up considerably different in its extension from any folk analogue. As [Novaes \(2020\)](#) discusses, the classic case of explication in Carnap's work was the construction of a bio-taxonomic concept 'pisces' to replace a folk taxonomic concept 'fish'. Here Carnap readily admits that in the end the two concepts 'do not even approximately coincide' ([Novaes 2020](#), p. 1016). This is because wherever it was advantageous in terms of facilitating the formation of general hypotheses about biological systems to depart from the ordinary concept, such a departure was thereby justified. Further, this is not just an idiosyncrasy of this particular case. One engages in explication only because one has some reason to be dissatisfied with the resources one's previous conceptual tools made available. One should thus be ready to accept the possibility that in order to generate adequate tools, one must make some changes in one's conceptual organization.

So there is not a general presumption that fidelity to particular case judgements regarding what we should normally call a group lie versus group belief will be respected by our explicated concepts of group lie versus group belief. And this may extend to particular paradigm cases too. We may simply accept that as part of using these concepts in a way we find conducive to our general aims we may sometimes make odd-sounding judgements about cases. But that need not bother us! Unless our only goal was specifically not to say

odd things about particular cases, saying odd things about some paradigm cases is compatible with obtaining a wide variety of valuable goals.

For instance, in an analysis of group lies that is especially targeted at potential legal uses of the concept, one may wish to tie the definition of ‘group lies’ to the violation of certain legal duties which are not intuitively related to the concept of lying. In that case, one may find that one often fails to classify instances of what-seems-intuitively-to-be group lying that stay within the bounds of the law as group lies. This would be problematic per the Group Lie Desideratum, but fine to the explicator who is concerned with making the concept more precise for specific legal purposes.

Against the objection that this seems to amount to a justification for systematically misrepresenting the facts in service of whatever goal our explication is meant to serve, the explicator as I envision them may respond that this misses the force of their metaphilosophical conception of their task. For such an objection presupposes that there is some prior fact about what are really group lies versus what are really group beliefs, and treats the explicator as riding roughshod over the distinction. But from the more creative explicator’s point of view, they are creating the distinction by creating the concepts. The difference between a group belief and a group lie is something that their explication will bring about, not something that it must track. They are deciding on the conditions under which it will be true to say that something is a group belief rather than a group lie, or vice versa. Hence the explicator could not be misrepresenting where the distinction is drawn; there is no prior fact for them to be mistaken about.

At this point it might be objected that there is a sort of fallacy of composition being committed. Just because the explicator may (by their own lights, at least) permissibly say counter-intuitive things about given paradigmatic instances of group lies, that does not mean they may permissibly disregard the Group Lie Desideratum. For that desideratum just says they must be able to draw the distinction somehow. Even if for any given case they may diverge, eventually and for some cases they still have to find some way of drawing the distinction if they are to be playing the game of giving an analysis of group lies (or group beliefs as opposed to group lies) at all. In fact, [Shiffrin \(2019\)](#) has recently argued that paying attention to the way that lawyers (or people working in the legal domain) think about wrongful deception would benefit philosophers. This is because legal

practitioners have found it necessary to focus on cases of negligent deception which do not look like paradigm cases of deception, and develop concepts and norms appropriate for dealing with them. Shiffrin thus nicely illustrates how in this very sphere conceptual innovation can be important, and may involve moving away from mapping the conceptual terrain in a way that seems intuitive to us.

To a certain extent this must be granted, but it only pushes the argument in a different direction. For, as just mentioned, it begs the question to assume some prior notion of group belief or group lie that simply must be respected in these analyses. The explicator is in the business of creating distinctions, not reproducing them. As such, what an explicator faced with the task of analysing these notions would do is to make some distinction which would achieve whatever conceptual work we currently hope to achieve by talk of group belief versus group lies. The fact that a given analysis, like JAA2 or PBAA, cannot make the cut in the same place and for the same reason as our folk taxonomy is not yet a reason to conclude that it cannot get the important tasks done by some other means. To make that latter stronger case, one would need an analysis of what tasks we are attempting to accomplish by means of these concepts. Since Lackey was not trying to give an explication in this essay, she was under no obligation to provide an analysis of this. I am only pointing out that the explicator has not yet been given reason to accept the Group Lie Desideratum.

## V

*Conclusion.* Let me sum up then. Lackey's case against JAA2 and PBAA relies on one granting a Group Lie Desideratum and a Group Bullshit Desideratum that operate in a basically similar fashion. I have been focusing on the former. Lackey offers two reasons for accepting the Group Lie Desideratum. The first is that it is normatively desirable, given the moral and legal importance of holding liars to account. I have argued that what is morally significant in the cases she outlines is ensuring an epistemically responsible procedure is followed, but that this will not track whether or not the group has asserted a group lie or a badly formed group belief. Further, I argued that we do not need a precise account of the difference between group belief and group lie for other normatively important tasks.

Lackey's second argument was that group beliefs must be distinguished from paradigmatic cases of group lies, since otherwise one will simply mischaracterize, be inaccurate concerning, group lies. Against this I have outlined a rival perspective on what one seeks to achieve through engaging in (committing?) social epistemology. I argued that if one adopts this perspective, Lackey's descriptive argument for the Group Lie Desideratum would not go through either.

The overall methodological or metaphilosophical perspective on social epistemology I have tried to outline could be summarized as follows. In everyday life we make use of vague or ambiguous concepts that for the most part achieve their social purpose without need of precise analyses to validate or support them. Occasionally, however, special social or technical purposes require that we have more fine-grained analyses at hand to make more precise discriminations among phenomena or facilitate rigorous inferences concerning what to do or think. In those cases, we philosophers may well need to engage in the creative conceptual work of explication. However, there is no a priori reason to think that the results of our explicative work will result in concepts that track the same distinctions that we were previously making, or that allow us to better enforce norms that we might have phrased in terms of our previous concepts. Instead, we must carry out analysis by specifying a particular context of use and task we wish to achieve in that context, fully aware that concepts so developed may seem odd if applied outside that context, and may not achieve their task in the same way as other conceptual tools we had available prior to explication would have. As such, the method of analysing core concepts like 'group belief' by means of considering cases where it would seem (in)apt to apply it is ill-suited to carrying out philosophy in this way. The fact that the Group Lie Desideratum was not found attractive was just an upshot of this broader methodological or metaphilosophical difference.

Let me end by being explicit about how I take this work to relate to Jennifer Lackey's paper. In offering these methodological or metaphilosophical reflections, I have simply outlined a different perspective, and tried to make it clear how from this perspective the Group Lie Desideratum would not seem attractive. I have tried to be careful in referring to this metaphilosophy as 'a' rather than 'the' way of doing philosophy, and avoided any suggestion that just because this alternative perspective is available it invalidates the sort of work Lackey is engaging in. As such, I do not of course take this to have refuted her

argument, nor even to have provided a good reason for Lackey to change her mind about either the first-order issue or the metaphilosophical issue. I hope instead to foster understanding and hence a long-run convergence in metaphilosophical perspectives. Perhaps the results of explication may prove useful to more traditional analysis, just as I know that the results of Lackey's careful analytic work have proven so invaluable to my own thinking so many times before.

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