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# The Legitimacy of Groups: Toward a We-Reasoning View

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**Abstract:** In liberal political philosophy, a prevalent view holds that groups are typically voluntary associations. Members of voluntary associations can accept, revise or reject group practices as a matter of *choice*. In this article, I challenge this view. Appealing to the concept of joint commitment developed in philosophy of social science, I argue that individuals who jointly commit their wills to a goal or a belief form a ‘We’-group. Members of ‘We’-groups are under an obligation to defer to ‘Our’ will embodied in ‘Our’ norms as a matter of *course*. I further show the ubiquity of We-groups. This joint commitment account of group authority raises a much-overlooked question of group legitimacy: Do members have good reasons to obey norms of their group? I show that state-centric views of legitimacy are inapt to answer it. A group-centric view, revived from the old communitarian literature, is defended.

**Keywords:** groups, joint commitment, social norms, legitimacy, group identity, We-reasoning

## 1 Introduction

In political philosophy, the traditional object of legitimacy is the state. The question of legitimacy has historically been understood as being about whether the state has the right to rule through law, and whether citizens have a corresponding obligation to obey. In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition that the state is not the sole source of authority. International organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, the European Union, and international courts, rule over member states through international treaties. Thus, the concept of legitimacy has been extended beyond the state.

However, the concept of legitimacy has rarely been extended below the state to include intermediate groups. I suspect that this is largely due to an assumption

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that groups are merely voluntary associations. Individuals are free to accept, revise, or reject group membership and its practices. Although groups issue associative obligations, they do not threaten individual autonomy in the same way as state obligations do. As long as freedoms of association, conscience, and information are guaranteed, groups are free to shape the lives of those individuals who let them do so.

In the first half of this paper, I aim to reject this assumption of voluntariness in its unqualified form. Drawing on philosophy of social science, I argue that while not all groups in the widest sense are authoritative, those constituted by *joint commitment* are. Broadly following Margaret Gilbert's account of joint commitment, I claim that once individuals jointly commit their wills to a goal, a principle of action or an expression of identity, they become members of a 'We', under the obligation to defer to the joint will embodied in 'Our' norms, as a matter of course. Social sanctions of various intensity often ensue in cases of dissent or disobedience of these group norms. Far from being a discrete phenomenon, limited to extremist groups, I draw on recent literature on norms to show that group authority is a pervasive phenomenon.

If I am correct and the phenomenon of group authority is both real and pervasive, then this poses some pressing questions about legitimacy. For example, what good reasons do individual members have for obeying group norms? When are they able to act in accordance with their own personal judgments? When should they reform a particular group norm? When should they leave the group or even actively bring about its demise?

As the social norm literature tends to be descriptive, I turn to political philosophy for help in answering these normative questions in the second half of this paper. As I will show, mainstream theories of legitimacy in political philosophy are state-centric. They fail to take seriously the justificatory weight of the We-perspective constitutive of joint commitment, and are therefore ill-equipped to assess the legitimacy of groups. After rejecting state-centric views, I explore a group-centric view of legitimacy found in the scant literature on the normativity of social norms. I call it the *We-constitution view*. It justifies social norms by their constitutive and expressive values of 'We'-identity. While it represents a major advancement on state-centric views through its honoring of the We-perspective, I argue that it fails to meet an important objection: namely, the bootstrapping objection. Since the *We-constitution view* amounts to claiming that any joint commitment to do something justifies the joint commitment to do it, it appears to be a circular form of justification which leads to undesirable consequences, such as group dogmatism. To overcome the bootstrapping objection, I suggest that we look to old communitarian accounts of legitimacy. Communitarians argue that 'We'-identity is genuinely valuable if it is authentic, and the authenticity of 'We'

in turn requires collective interpretation. I believe that such a reliable process of ‘We’-reasoning provides critical resources for groups to re-evaluate their joint commitment.

It is not the ambition of this paper to offer a full account of the legitimacy of groups and their norms. That project would require numerous books. My modest goal is to persuade political philosophers to catch up with the social-scientific understandings of norms and recognize the thorny questions of legitimacy raised by them, and to revive the communitarian program for future research.

## 2 Groups as Sources of Authority

As noted in the introduction, it is a widely held view within liberal political philosophy that groups (with the exception of extremist ones) are not sources of authority. Will Kymlicka elaborates this liberal view of the relation of self to groups in the following way:

We do not consider ourselves trapped by our present attachments, incapable of judging the worth of the goals we inherited or ourselves chose earlier. We do indeed find ourselves in various relationships, but we do not always like what we find. No matter how deeply implicated we find ourselves in a social practice, we feel capable of questioning whether the practice is a valuable one. (Kymlicka 2002, 226)

In the liberal view, most individuals experience group membership and its practices as matters of *choice*. We feel that it is up to us as individuals to step back and re-evaluate the value of our group practices, and abandon them if we so decide. In this section, I argue that this voluntary view of groups must be qualified. While not all groups in the widest sense are authoritative, those constituted by *joint commitment* are. I make this claim in three steps. First, I introduce the philosophical concept of joint commitment to distinguish three types of groups: *mere aggregates*, *associations*, and *We-groups*. I argue that only members of We-groups are obligated to defer to ‘Our’ norms as a matter of *course*. Next, I apply the concept to a wide range of We-groups in real life, illustrating its ubiquity. Finally, I consider two objections to my joint commitment account of group authority.

### 2.1 The Concept of Joint Commitment

Let me introduce the concept of joint commitment by using a modified version of Gilbert’s (2013, 23-36) famous walking together example. Imagine three scenarios.

*Scenario X:* Ann and Ben independently enjoy walking in the park P at night. Ann and Ben happen to walk side by side in the same park P every night from 9pm to 10pm.

*Scenario Y:* Ann and Ben independently enjoy walking in the park P at night. Due to new safety concerns, the management office of park P now requires visitors to pair up. Ann knows of Ben's habit from previous walks and asks Ben if he likes to pair up so they can continue their own habits. Ben says yes.

*Scenario Z:* Ann is not sure if she enjoys walking in the park P at night. She knows Ben takes his walk there every night from 9pm to 10pm. She asks Ben, 'I think that I will really enjoy walking here every night with you. Shall we walk together from now on?' Ben replies, 'Sure.'

Now suppose, after a while and upon re-evaluation, Ben judges that reading is a more worthwhile activity for him than walking at night. Without obtaining Ann's permission, he quits his night walks. Under which scenario(s) does Ann have a right to rebuke Ben for abandoning her?

Obviously, Ben does not wrong Ann in Scenario X. Ben had at most a personal commitment *to himself* to keep walking at night. Sure, he should not abandon it due to contrary *inclinations* (e.g. feeling lazy). But if the decision to quit is a product of careful deliberation, namely it is a personal *judgment* that reading is more worthwhile, it is not wrong for him to quit. Here, Ann might have an empirical expectation that Ben will keep appearing every night, because she has seen Ben repeatedly in the past. But this empirical expectation has no causal influence on her own decision to walk. She enjoys it anyway. Her commitment to her walk is formed independently of Ben's commitment. To use a technical term common in social ontology, in this case, there is only a *mere aggregate* of two individuals in the park P every night. There is no 'We'.

What about Scenario Y? Many would intuit that Ben wrongs Ann. Ann's entitled to say, 'But you promised!' Here, Ben assured Ann that he would walk with her, and Ann acted in reliance of his assurance. In this way, and in contrast Scenario X above, the two persons' action is causally connected. As a result of the assurance, Ann does not only have an empirical expectation that Ben *would* show up, but also a normative expectation that he *should*. So unless Ann has consented to release him from this normative expectation, he is under an obligation to *conform* to it. That much seems rather uncontroversial.

How about Scenario Z? Many would think that Ben wrongs Ann as well. But, somewhat controversially, I want to argue that the source and the nature of the wrongness here are distinct from those of Scenario Y. And I believe that the concept

of joint commitment accounts for the distinction. According to Margaret Gilbert, a joint commitment of wills is formed when

*we directly make it the case that each of us has sufficient reason to perform conforming actions. I say that we have done this directly because, in conditions of common knowledge, our mutual expressions of readiness jointly to commit us all, and these alone, sufficed for the purpose.* (Gilbert 2013, 401, emphasis in original)

As we can see from the quote above, there are two necessary and sufficient conditions for the creation of a joint commitment: mutual expressions of readiness to be bound by the joint will and common knowledge of it. These two conditions are present in Scenario Z only. When Ann invites Ben to walk together, she expresses her readiness to be bound by *their* plan to walk together. When Ben replies with ‘sure,’ he reciprocates his own readiness to be bound by *their* plan to walk together. Since the mutual manifestations of readiness in this case are in the form of a verbal agreement, the condition of common knowledge is easily met. Once Ben verbally accepts Ann’s verbal invitation, each of them knows the other party reciprocates readiness to be bound by the common plan to walk together. In this way, their wills are jointed as ‘one’ or a ‘body’ (Gilbert 2013, 56, 110, 331, 348). They are co-creators of the plan to walk together.

In contrast to Scenario Y, not only are the two persons’ intentions causally connected, they are *normatively* connected as well. Ann does not will independently of Ben. Rather, she wills decisively because Ben wills, and so does Ben. This intimate structure of joint intentions constitutes Ann and Ben as a plural subject bearing the pronoun ‘We’. Ann and Ben form a ‘We’-group composed of inseparable members with a common frame of mind. To the contrary, in Scenario Y, Ann and Ben form only an *association* of two separable individuals with their own minds. Their reason for walking remains their own. The self remains voluntary in the sense that each is free to enter or quit an association, according to personal judgments. If Ben had informed Ann of his reason for quitting, it would seem unreasonable for Ann to insist that he keeps her company. This would be particularly so if Ann could easily find a replacement. The same is not true of joint commitment, which demands deference. Let me explain.

The common mind of a We-group dictates each member to *follow* the commitment constitutive of it and the *normative expectations* derived from it. For example, while the commitment under Scenario Z is to walk together, the normative expectations engendered include that one should not draw ahead, fall behind, pursue a new route, put oneself in a situation wherein one cannot follow through. (For brevity’s sake, I will call these normative expectations derived from the joint commitment ‘group norms.’) To follow is not the same as to *conform*. Members must

comply with the normative expectations *for the right reason*, which is the content of the relevant normative expectations. That does not mean the normative expectations must be the *sole* reasons. Just that they have to be the ‘sufficient reasons,’ meaning they are considered rational and weighty enough to trump personal inclinations and judgments to do otherwise. In this case, Ben wrongs Ann precisely because he fails to take the group norms as sufficient reasons to act. By deciding to quit unilaterally, he follows his own will, and although acting in a rational way, in doing so he fails to respect the authority of the joint will. Note though he could not fully discharge his obligation by turning up if he said to Ann, ‘I came only because I enjoy walking anyway, not because you expected me to.’ While Ann would be entitled to feel resentment toward such failure to defer to the joint will as a member of ‘We’, she would not be so as a member of an association.

## 2.2 Joint Commitment in the Wild

In the walking together example above, the ‘We’ constituted is small-scale, transient, and trivial in purpose. Can the concept of joint commitment generalize across scales and objectives? Gilbert thinks so. She claims that the object of joint commitment can be a belief, a goal, a value, a principle of action or acceptance of a rule (Gilbert 2013, 354–55). Furthermore, she believes that joint commitment is a ubiquitous phenomenon, reflected in everyday We-groups of various sizes and forms of organization such as families, clubs, protest groups, trade unions, army units, and even nation-states (Gilbert 2006). We need not take on board such a sweeping claim. Whether or not these groups are genuine We-groups as opposed to associations or mere aggregates is highly context-sensitive. That said, I believe that the concept is useful to explain why we often feel ‘trapped’ in group practices, for good and bad, far more frequently than liberals assume.

Let us start with benign cases. To use an example from Brennan et al. who also develop a joint acceptance account of social norms (hereafter BEGS, 2013), there is a convention to pass the port to the left in Oxford. As a convention to coordinate traffic, one may think that Oxford dons are free to depart from it, if they judge their own safety to be a minor concern. But in fact, Oxford dons do not feel free to do so. Why not? Because the convention has long transformed into a group norm the moment, however imprecise it is, Oxford dons jointly accepted it as the expression of their identity of We-the-Oxford-dons. Even though there is no verbal agreement to this effect, mutual readiness can be implied. As Gilbert (2013, 219) explains,

expressions of readiness may be verbal or not, clear as the day or quite subtle. They may take place in one-shot face-to-face interaction or, rather, over a longish period time.

Here, the unchallenged, continued, intentional behavioral conformity to the practice of passing to the port on the left is a form of mutual expression. Given the expression is in public, mutual readiness to use the practice to express common identity is further out in the open for every Oxford don to know. The common knowledge of implied mutual readiness binds Oxford dons to their norm of identity.

Language conventions are another example. Although as a mere convention, language is not binding. We are free to change names, pronunciations or characters of language so long as others language-users understand us. Many of us feel free to speak a different language than our mother tongue. However, once a language is jointly affirmed as a norm of group identity, it becomes a matter of obligation to speak it, and to speak it right. This is why members of ethnic minorities feel the obligation to reject the dominant language, even if the latter serves communicative functions better. Speaking a *foreign* language feels as though they are abandoning *their* identity.

Many more customs are similarly willed into binding norms of group identity, but with harmful consequences. Consider the custom of dueling in 18th century Britain. Contrary to a mere custom such as using an umbrella in the rain which we feel free to ignore – no one would care to punish me for using a poncho, for instance – the custom of dueling was authoritative for British aristocrats. If a British aristocrat failed to turn up to a duel when challenged, he would be ridiculed. Why? When British aristocrats kept resorting to dueling as the way to express bravery and integrity, it was implied that dueling was the jointly accepted expression of British aristocratic honor (Appiah 2011). Those who defied the custom were seen as cowards. Similarly, when the custom of female genital cutting was jointly affirmed by Sudanese to be their expression of female chastity, Sudanese women could not freely pursue an alternative expression of female chastity (Bicchieri 2016). To consider another, when the custom for women to stay at home and attend to domestic duties is jointly affirmed by women themselves (or the wider cultural communities of which they are a part) as a norm of their femininity, career-oriented women would be criticized for being bad women. Fellow women might say, ‘We are women and we should prioritize family.’

Although joint commitments create toxic norms of identity, they can bind us in noble group projects as well. Consider We-the-partisans (Rosenblum 2010) and We-the-movements (Kolers 2016). Arguably, these political groups are not mere aggregates or associations. If the relevant members are merely driven by personal commitments, it would be difficult for them to persist. Political goals are typically distant. The goal to safeguard the constitution, or to end white supremacy, or to mitigate climate change are difficult to achieve. My individual effort makes little difference to their advancement. My vote in an election or my participation in a

mass protest is inconsequential. Sometimes, it can even be against my self-interest to engage in them. Standing for election requires making huge sacrifices to my family. Taking part in civil disobedience risks imprisonment. It is often individually rational to quit these projects. The reason why committed partisans are able to persist against all odds, while independents do not, is largely because they are bound by the authority of their joint goals. While there are moral motivations underlying these political projects, their weakness is overcome by the sufficiency of norms of obligation owed to *our* party or *our* movement.

### 2.3 Two Objections

I have used the concept of joint commitment to explain how We-groups are authoritative via their group norms. I have further shown the ubiquity of We-groups. I now consider two objections to my joint commitment account of group authority.

The first objection is that it is *over-inclusive*, including group types that are not in fact authoritative. According to this objection, mutual expressions of readiness to be bound by a common object and common knowledge are necessary but insufficient conditions to create authority. What is also necessary is *shared organization* (Leist 2014; Held 1970). Contrast organized groups such as political parties, universities, and workplaces with unorganized groups such as movements and ethnic groups. While it is true that norms abound in both group types, only those of the former type are *serious*. It appears that little consequence follows if a member violates the norm to turn up to a strike. In contrast, a Democrat would be called a traitor if she violates the norm to vote for one's own party. Similarly, almost all of us have violated some norms of our ethnic identity over the course our life, by failing to greet someone, eat something, or express grief appropriately. Our parents may have frowned at us, but that is usually the extent of the sanction. Yet, few of us dare to violate norms of our workplace or professional codes given the potentially dire consequences.

While the observation that norms in organized groups seem to be a robust obligation whereas norms in unorganized groups seem to be a weak request is correct, I do not think it undermines my argument. Shared organization is not an independent condition; rather, it facilitates *access* to common knowledge to mutual expressions of readiness. As we have seen, in large-scale groups, members can only draw inference from habitual conformity from others about the presence of mutual readiness. When face-to-face verbal agreement is impossible, it leaves room for interpretation of what one is ready to commit and how much. For example, when I see Canadians hugging each other when they meet, I have no sure way of telling whether it is the Canadian norm to hug *everyone* they meet or only friends,

and whether it is limited to informal occasions. Imprecision undermines common knowledge, which is a necessary condition of joint commitment. Yet in organized groups, the presence of a decision procedure overcomes the problem of imprecision of norms. It clearly defines roles and responsibility. Arbitration mechanisms can resolve disputes over the content or the validity of norms, or even the status of one's membership. This explains why a regular participant in a movement feels free to quit, not because the norm to persist in We-the-movement is not binding. Rather, in the absence of a formal membership status, she may think that she has not effectively signed on, or that others have not yet affirmed her as 'one of us.'

A different objection to my joint commitment account of group authority is that it is *under-inclusive*, excluding groups that are authoritative. According to this objection, both mere aggregates and associations are sufficient to ground obligations to obey mutual expectations to conform. To use a real example of mere aggregates, hotel guests, when told that most guests reused their towels and they too were encouraged to do so, the guests complied (Goldstein et al. 2008). These hotel guests were merely randomly thrown in the hotel; they had not committed to sharing the green goals of the hotel management or previous guests. They merely personally committed to paying for their rooms and services. This seems to suggest that neither mutual expressions of readiness nor common knowledge is a necessary condition for the creation of authority. The knowledge of the presence of normative expectation of the majority of a random population of which I am part suffices. Now consider a real example of associations. In the US, there is a strong norm of tax payment among the populace (Posner 2000). Do American citizens consider themselves a 'We'? This is surely an empirical question. But given the evidence of polarization between Democrats and Republicans, it is hard to imagine that Democrats and Republicans consider themselves a We. Division notwithstanding, they conform to each other's normative expectation to pay tax. This, again, suggests joint commitment is unnecessary for group authority.

This objection stems from a misinterpretation of my use of *authority*. As I defined it, *group norms* are experienced as *sufficient reasons* – they are experienced as *legitimate* reasons. It is the endorsement of content of the norms that drives obedience. In contrast, social norms need not be experienced as *legitimate* reasons. As Bicchieri (2006; 2016) argues, individual participants of social norms can conform out of a variety of motivational reasons, including fear of sanctions, desire of approval and internalization. A libertarian may conform to the tax norm out of fear of sanction whereas a socialist does so out of her personal judgment of justice. Differently put, there is no obligation to *defer* to the content of the social norms. One can discharge the obligation of a social norm by conforming in action, short of obeying. But group norms demand that we conform *for the right reason*. To go back to my Scenario Z above, if Ben says to Ann, 'I keep going simply because I like it,

not because I promised you,' Ann may rightly feel hurt. Seen this way, my account is not under-inclusive. The concept of joint commitment picks out a sub-set of norms, namely group norms, from the general class of social norms. While both are authoritative in a way, the former creates a further obligation to *obey*. As we will see shortly, this creates a challenge for justification, unique to group norms.

### 3 Extending State-Centric Views of Legitimacy to Groups

If my argument about the authority of groups is correct, this raises questions about group legitimacy. Even though members *feel* that there is an obligation to defer to group norms, are there *good reasons* to do so? Why should the mere fact of joint commitment give rise to such a dramatic normative weight over members? What are the good reasons for rebutting this strong presumption of deference?

Social norm theorists have largely been silent or otherwise skeptical about this normative (as opposed to sociological) question of legitimacy. For example, Bicchieri believes that there is no deeper foundation for the felt obligation to norms than the “ingrained tendency to move from what is to what ought to be, and conclude that ‘what is’ must be right or good” (Bicchieri 2014, 210). Gilbert never answers this question either. As she explicitly states, her project is to elaborate on the *ontological* basis of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s idea of ‘common will’ and Charles Taylor’s ‘common meaning’ rather than their *justificatory* basis (Gilbert 2013, 181, 185n14, 341, 385).

A natural place to start for thinking through the legitimacy of groups is political philosophy. After all, political philosophers have been exercised by the question of legitimacy for thousands of years. Even so, as we will see, influential views of legitimacy in political philosophy are exclusively state-centric, which makes them ill-equipped for evaluating the legitimacy of groups. I will survey two mainstream state-centric views, namely, the voluntary consent view and the instrumental value view, and argue that both fail to take seriously the justificatory weight of the We-perspective constitutive of joint commitment.

#### 3.1 The Voluntary Consent View

In liberal political philosophy, the question of legitimacy is essentially one of how to reconcile the individual autonomy of citizens with the authority of the state (Nagel 1991, 33–36). Why should autonomous citizens defer to the state in the form

of its laws rather than acting on their own deliberative assessment? The mere fact of joint acceptance by citizens to subordinate themselves to the state is never sufficient for state legitimacy. A necessary condition of state legitimacy is that the joint acceptance must be *voluntary*. Much of the debate between liberals is about how best to construe the condition of voluntariness. To oversimplify, there are two broad views: substantive and procedural.

According to the substantive view, often attributable to John Rawls, citizens would voluntarily accept a norm if it is supported by substantive reasons that all *reasonable* persons can be expected to endorse. Reasonable persons are persons with the capacity to abide by fair and reciprocal terms of cooperation, and the capacity to form, revise, and pursue their own view of what is valuable in human life. As commonly understood, reasonable persons are autonomous persons with a sense of fairness. Rawls derives two principles of justice from this conception of reasonable persons. The first principle stipulates that each person has an inalienable claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties (e.g. the freedom of conscience, associational freedom). The second principle states that distributive inequality is acceptable only if it benefits the least well-off and under the condition of equality of opportunity. In this view, norms in compliance with the two principles of justice are capable of voluntary consent and are thus legitimate.

According to the procedural view, often associated with Jürgen Habermas, citizens would voluntarily accept a norm if it is a result of a discourse approximating the following conditions: a. inclusion of all affected; b. equal participation; c. sincerity; and d. rationality (motivated by the force of the better argument as opposed to coercion or inducement) (Habermas 2008, 82). Given its emphasis on inclusion and equality, the procedural view is also often referred to as the democratic discourse view. Only democratically legislated laws are legitimate.

For many, the voluntary consent view offers plausible evaluative standards for state legitimacy. Consider state laws which we intuitively find illegitimate, such as laws that disenfranchise certain citizens (e.g. slaves, women, blacks) and impose particular conceptions of the good (e.g. religion) on all citizens. They can be delegitimated by the substantive view because they are not supported by substantive reasons (here the first principle of justice) reasonable persons could endorse. They can also be delegitimated by the procedural view because, if slaves, women, blacks, and religious minorities were all allowed to debate freely on an equal footing, they would not consent to laws that deny their equal citizenship status. What happens if the standards are extended to group norms? They delegitimate too much. To be sure, they can delegitimate intuitively bad group norms, such as norms of female genital cutting and norms assigning social roles and responsibilities according to racist and sexist principles. Such norms either violate civil liberties (e.g. bodily autonomy) or are produced by undemocratic group decision procedures.

But the test of free and rational consent is so stringent that it cannot be met even by intuitively benign or good group norms. Consider the norm of wearing white to funerals in some Buddhist groups. Do reasonable persons have substantive reasons to accept them? Or can they be rationally justified in a free, egalitarian, and inclusive discourse? Probably not. Why should white rather than black be the appropriate color of mourning for Buddhists? The answer seems to be: 'That's just what Buddhists have accepted.' Consider the norm of bowing in Japan. Why should bowing rather than shaking hands be the greeting norm for Japanese people? The answer seems to be: 'That's just what the Japanese have accepted.' But for a reasonable person who is willing and able to step back from and revise her pre-existing commitments, the fact that a practice is what has been accepted is not a good reason. Appealing to 'the done thing' seems to be a parochial or, worse still, an invalid argument because it is self-justifying. Rational agents moved by the force of a better argument would not accept it. Yet, intuitively speaking, these norms of mourning and greeting are legitimate, and are qualitatively different from sexist and racist norms.

Why does the voluntary consent view fail to explain our intuitions about group norms? Because, in *We*-groups, we do not primarily or solely relate to our peers as autonomous persons with a sense of fairness. The nature of relations among citizens and between citizens and the state are perhaps more appropriately modeled upon association. In associations, when we are cooperating with strangers through impersonal institutions, we ensure that our individual contributions will not be taken advantage of. Autonomy protects us from unfair terms and keeps us at a safe distance from one another, even when our values and interests conflict. But in group life, 'We' are not merely trying to coordinate or cooperate across differences and conflicts. Members are trying to build meaningful connections in spite of differences and conflicts. The norms of greetings and mourning are not norms of cooperation. They are not set up to deter freeloading. Rather, they are norms of group identity and social meaning. Autonomy is both irrelevant and inappropriate as a guide for how 'We' ought to identify ourselves and what 'We' mean by our group practices. We routinely think it appropriate to make sacrifices to our fellow group members, sacrifices which would normally be considered unfair in the case of strangers. Most decision-making in teams is hierarchically structured, yet this does not undermine its legitimacy. In fact, we consider those who keep insisting on their own view to be bad teammates, even if the view in question is reasonable. This is not to say that autonomy does not matter at all in groups. My point is simply that autonomy cannot be the primary source of legitimacy for members' acceptance or non-acceptance of the norms of their group identities and the meanings of their group practices. The voluntary consent view must be rejected for failing to take seriously the *We*-perspective.

### 3.2 The Instrumental Value View

In liberal political philosophy, a major rival to the voluntary consent view is the instrumental value view developed by Joseph Raz. According to Raz, voluntary consent is neither necessary nor sufficient for legitimacy. For him, the central source of legitimacy is the instrumental value of the rules. More specifically, rules are legitimate to the extent that they help citizens better comply with reasons that apply to them independently (Raz 1986). Raz identifies four scenarios in which a state is able to achieve legitimacy under the instrumental value view. First, the state has expertise in a certain domain (e.g. regulation of pharmaceuticals) which ordinary citizens lack. For example, by deferring to the rules on drugs, citizens do better than by attempting to work out for themselves which drugs are safe and effective. Second, the state can compensate for limits of rationality. Humans are often weak-willed and fallible, and this means that our deliberations can fail us. For example, if it is left to me to decide whether to wear a seatbelt, I might be tempted to choose comfort over safety. By deferring to the seatbelt rule, it is easier for me to do the right thing. Third, the state is more efficient in solving coordination problems. For example, the state can set the rule to drive on the right side of the road so that drivers do not need to work it out for themselves. Finally, the state is more efficient in solving cooperation problems. For instance, if it is left to citizens to decide whether to pay tax, some may defect. But all have reason to choose a cooperative outcome in which everyone pays tax, so the rule to pay tax is justified.

The instrumental value view seems highly relevant. It has recently been adapted to explain the justificatory bases of social norms. Brennan et al. (2013, 89; see also Dougherty 2016) argue that social norms function well in the second scenario Raz identifies: namely, when human rationality is bounded. As ‘socially beneficial decisional short cuts,’ social norms identify for us the required or permissible actions from ‘complex and nuanced principles’ we endorse independently. So, binding oneself to social norms helps us to avoid mistakes and taxing deliberative efforts. To use their examples, social norms against lying, bribery, or having sexual relations with one’s housemates are justified because they helpfully instantiate more abstract moral principles about integrity and mutual respect for us. We can also imagine that some groups derive their legitimacy from their expertise. For example, members of cultural and religious groups would do better following group norms (e.g. norms about food, dress code, worship) than interpreting cultures and religious texts themselves, because these group norms offer more accurate interpretations.

Another seeming advantage of this view is that it offers plausible evaluative criteria for group legitimacy. We are required to follow group norms only if they are right or useful from the perspective of an instrumentally rational agent. Intuitively

benign norms, such as greetings and mourning, are legitimate to the extent that they save us from deliberating with each other over thousands of possible alternative practices. In contrast, if a group norm requires us to do silly or immoral things which we have no reason to do independently, we can ignore it. Norms such as dueling, foot binding and female genital cutting are arguably neither right nor useful. Even if they help instantiate abstract values which members have independent reasons to accept, such as bravery, honor, and chastity, other practices can instantiate these values in less harmful or more meaningful ways. From today's perspective, we know that honor might be expressed by speaking up for the vulnerable, and chastity might be demonstrated by women exercising their self-confidence rather than destroying their genitals.

Despite its apparent relevance and its ability to distinguish bad norms from good norms, the instrumental value view removes all the justificatory weight of joint commitment, and for this reason it must be rejected. In this view, the fact that members have accepted certain norms plays absolutely no justificatory role. Legitimacy is reducible to the rightness or the usefulness of the norms. To put it in David Enoch's (2014) terms, for Raz, norms merely 'trigger a dormant reason that was there all along,' independent of their status as norms. Norms do not 'give' reasons in the 'robust' sense that they command obedience *because they are the norms*. Admittedly, some social norms (e.g. norms against lying and bribery) play a reason-triggering role only. However, norms of joint commitment *in fact* play a reason-giving role. For example, it is the norm for members of the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement to shop or eat almost exclusively at "yellow businesses" (a collection of firms openly promoting protest messages and identifying themselves with the color of the movement). Members support these yellow businesses not solely for their price or quality; rather, they do so mainly to honor their commitment to the movement, because this is what their commitment requires. By definition, following a group norm presupposes recognition of its legitimacy because it is the group norm. In other words, instrumental reasons seem to be the wrong sort of justificatory reasons for group norms.

Of course, a Razian could reply that even though people *experience* group norms as such, they really should not, rationally speaking. Following norms for the sake of following norms amounts to herd mentality. This response is highly counterintuitive, however. Consider why a Japanese person should follow the bowing norm rather than the French cheek-kissing norm. Both norms have the same instrumental value: namely, to save people from the deliberative efforts of choosing a way of greeting. But intuitively, many think that the Japanese should follow the Japanese norm, not the French norm, because it is *their* norm. There seems to be a source of legitimacy that is derived not from usefulness of the norm but from the norm itself. The same point can be made about rightness. Do members

of cultural and religious groups follow their group norms simply because of their accuracy in interpreting cultures and religions? Obviously not. If they were not members to begin with, they would have no independent reason to make sure their interpretation of cultures or religions was accurate. And their membership is constitutive of the relevant cultural and religious norms. In other words, members have no independent reasons to comply with these group norms; their reasons to comply are norm-dependent. If the voluntary consent view flattens out the relational quality among members by the idea of fairness, the instrumental value view empties it out. Taking the perspective of an instrumentally rational agent who is unencumbered, the instrumental view is a worse candidate for making sense of the justificatory weight of the We-perspective.

## 4 Toward a Group-Centric View of Legitimacy

As we have seen, the mainstream state-centric views of legitimacy cannot be easily extended to groups. From the respective positions of autonomous individuals or instrumental rational individuals, the justificatory weight of joint commitment is either unduly diminished or dismissed completely. In the remainder of the paper, I take on the task of developing a group-centric view of legitimacy, with an eye toward justifying group norms. I identify a group-centric view in the social norm literature, which I dub the *We-constitution view*. It locates the legitimacy of group norms in their constitutive and expressive values of *We-identity*. While I am sympathetic to this view, I will argue that it fails to meet the bootstrapping objection. To meet the bootstrapping objection, I propose to supplement it with an account of *We-reasoning*.

### 4.1 The We-Constitution View

In a move to defend the legitimacy of Gilbertian-type joint commitments, Elizabeth Anderson writes:

The normativity or 'oughtness' of social norms, then, is an 'ought' constitutive of commitments of collective agency. It is grounded in the perspective of collective agency, in 'our' shared view of how 'we' ought to behave. (Anderson 2000, 193)

What Anderson presents here is a simple but profound idea: a *We-constitutive* joint commitment is in itself a source of legitimacy. According to Anderson, *We-constitutive* joint commitment is fundamentally valuable to the exercise of our prac-

tical agency. To determine what to do, we must appeal to our self-understanding. Yet, the question of ‘who am I’ cannot be settled decisively or solely by an autonomous conception of self. The notion of a reflective self with a sense of fairness is too empty to provide guidance. As Anderson argues, our self-understanding is ‘largely’ constitutive of group identities (2000, 192). I am a citizen, an employee of a firm, a member of a church, a relative of a family, and so on. My reasons for action in the circumstances are determined by the joint wills of the members of the respective groups. And their wills are embodied in the social norms that the respective groups have accepted.

More recently, Brennan et al. (2013, 80) and Samuel Scheffler (2018) have made arguments along similar lines, claiming that the fact that group norms make possible a ‘We’ and goods ‘We’ value is a good reason to obey them. They put it this way:

Clearly social practices may be *instrumentally* valuable in all sorts of ways. They may help us to engage in mutually beneficial forms of coordination where our interests are aligned, and to maintain harmony and social stability where our interests are pitted against one another. But, arguably, this is not all. We have seen that social practices in which we are participants help to shape our sense of self and our relations with others by defining a zone of familiarity within which there exists a stock of shared history and meaning. (Brennan et al. 2013, 79, emphasis in original)

While acknowledging that instrumental value may play a part in justifying group norms, Brennan et al. argue that it remains a small part. The constitutive and expressive values of group norms play a more central role. They share Anderson’s view that group norms *make* us as they shape our self and collective understanding. Furthermore, group norms enable a ‘zone of familiarity’ within which members can share a sense of meaning and history. To be able to recognize and express oneself as a fellow to other fellows is a weighty reason for members to obey their group norms, and it is not reducible to its rightness or usefulness. As Brennan et al. explain, Oxford dons do not obey the norm of passing port to the left just to avoid running into each other. Nor do Australians obey the norm against beach nudity just to keep the public peace. In these cases, the central reason for obedience is that these group norms embody a standard that the Oxford dons and Australians have accepted. It is *their* practice, *their* standard, and—*rightly or wrongly*—it reflects *their* identity.

Likewise, Scheffler argues that members have reasons to obey their group norms because they validate and express valued membership. According to Scheffler, group norms play the role of desires and needs in interpersonal relationships such as friendship and love. For example, as your friend, I have good reason to meet your desires, needs, and interests just because they are your desires, needs,

and interests. I do not calculate what is in it for me to meet them. This is part of what valuing our friendship involves. He then extends this idea of expressive value in deferring to a friend's needs, desires, and interests to groups. As he explains, in groups, it is difficult to know each member individually and meet all their individual needs, desires, and interests. The larger the group, the harder this is. How do I as a member express that I value my group membership? By obeying the group norms, as they embody the joint will of the members. As he writes, if a member, as a routine matter, simply acts on her own judgments about the group's needs and desires, and disregards their judgments, then she is not "genuinely responsive to them: to their status and value as the independent agents with whom we have formed a common bond." (Scheffler 2018, 7)

The We-constitution view represents a significant advancement on the state-centric views we have examined. Most importantly, it recognizes the justificatory weight of the We-perspective that is constitutive of joint commitment. *Contra* the voluntary consent view, it does not take the perspective of the autonomous agents who value only fairness or democratically produced decisions. Rather, it starts from the perspective of committed members who are routinely deferential and partial. And it is precisely because we are routinely deferential and partial that there is a 'We' to begin with. It would not delegitimize parochial norms simply because they fail the test of generalizability. The We-constitution view also justifies group norms for the right reason. Instead of reducing group norms to their objective rightness or usefulness, the We-constitution view recognizes that group norms are valuable relative to their members. We follow cultural and religious norms, for example, not because they get things right, but because following them constitutes and expresses our valued cultural and religious membership. Membership, and the group norms that make it possible, is the central source of value and legitimacy for group norms.

## 4.2 The Bootstrapping Objection

Despite its advantages over state-centric views, the We-constitution view faces an important objection: the bootstrapping objection. The view amounts to arguing that our joint commitment to doing something provides us with a normative reason to jointly commit to do it: just because the Oxford dons have accepted that they will pass the port to the left, they have good reason to pass the port to the left. This appears to be an unacceptable form of justification because it is circular and arbitrary. On most accounts of practical reasoning, a rational belief (or desire) cannot be justified by circular reasoning or arbitrary reasons. A rational belief (or desire) must be justified by some basic belief (or desire) (e.g. that pain is bad, that

murder is wrong) that does not in itself require further justification. The problem with the We-constitution view is that the chain of justification stops at the joint commitment, but there is, however, nothing basic about it. As we have seen, most joint commitments arise out of arbitrary conventions and customs.

The bootstrapping worry can be heightened if we apply this form of justification to a wide range of joint commitments. The joint commitments to bind girls' feet to express beauty, remove female genitals to instantiate chastity, duel for honor, or enslave people as a means of production can all be justified by the We-constitution view. Why? Because all of these immoral norms of joint commitments are valuable to the extent that they constitute a 'We', albeit an immoral 'We'. And all of these immoral norms are valuable to the extent that they enable trust, solidarity, and mutual understanding among members of a group, albeit an immoral group.

Not only does the We-constitution view seem to justify immoral norms, it also gives rise to an unacceptable form of dogmatism in group agency. It takes 'We' as given and regards what 'We' value just as what is We-valuable. Just because we have accepted a particular principle of action, we should continue to live by it, rightly or wrongly. Of course, if the majority decides otherwise, change is possible. But the puzzle is how the majority can come to decide otherwise when any dissenting voice is almost automatically considered illegitimate. As explained, to honor one's membership is to defer to the joint will embodied in the group norms as a matter of course. It is not clear when this strong presumption of deference can be rebutted. As a result, committed members are prevented from questioning the value of their pre-existing joint commitment, or else they risk being deemed uncommitted.

Brennan et al. and Scheffler are aware of this objection, but their responses are not at all convincing or complete. First, in response to the immorality concern, they qualify their view by asserting that seriously unjust or manifestly irrational group norms are illegitimate (Brennan et al. 2013, 81; Scheffler 2018, 6). Elsewhere, I have detailed my skepticism over this justificatory strategy (Tam 2020a). The problem is not that this introduces incoherence between the We-perspective and some objective standards of morality and rationality. I believe that there are indeed multiple sources of legitimacy for *individuals* and they can stand in conflict. Rather, the problem with this strategy is it implies that moral legitimacy is an inherent or necessary feature of group legitimacy. More precisely, it presupposes that one source of legitimacy, i.e. universal principles of morality and rationality, necessarily *takes precedence* over the other, i.e. the values of joint commitments. In reality, there is simply no such necessity. When these two sources of legitimacy conflict, *members* tend to privilege the legitimacy of the We-perspective. For example, many Britons had long recognized that their slave trade was cruel and inhumane and lacking in moral legitimacy. Yet they continued to engage in the practice because they recognized that the slave trade was legitimate for Britons because it instantiated their

national identity as an empire of free trade and prosperity. Put differently, unless the relevant group also jointly accept these universal principles of morality and rationality as their common principle of action, they do not have group legitimacy. Group legitimacy is not derivative of moral legitimacy.

In response to the arbitrariness objection, Brennan et al. argue that all agent-relative values are arbitrary, though not irrational. To use their example, even if a person values collecting late Edwardian stamps over early Victorian coins, the arbitrariness in this personal attachment is not normally considered to be irrational. We do not demand that agent-relative values track any fundamental features of the world. The arbitrariness objection is an objection only if we are objectivists about values. This response misses the mark. As I have suggested, the bootstrapping objection is not so much about the arbitrary *source* of the values as it is about whether the valuing is subject to some *rational control*. Even at the individual level, we do not equate what an agent values with what is valuable to the agent. What is valuable must be the result of some critical reflection. That is because we can make mistakes about the value of our current projects. We may regret wasting time on trivial goals or goals that do not authentically express who we are. For example, we might regret having spent years pursuing a law degree when that time could have been better spent on thinking fundamental questions about justice, which we now realize is our true passion. I believe that what is valuable to a group must also be the result of some critical reflection, and not simply that which the group happens to value.

Scheffler recognizes that what is valued is not necessarily what is valuable, and that rational control is necessary for making a correct judgment of value. But he seems to suggest that the mechanism of rational control in groups is the same as the mechanism of rational control in individuals: namely, the exercise of individual autonomy. He asserts:

There will be times when individuals will appropriately act on their own understandings, especially if they are convinced that the group's norms are seriously unjust, manifestly irrational, or profoundly misguided. And, of course, it is always appropriate for individuals to try to bring about changes in the group's norms. (Scheffler 2018, 8)

For reasons that may already be obvious, I do not think this autonomy strategy is available to groups. First, as I have already written, norm-independent standards of justice and rationality are not standards of group legitimacy. They are not reasons to reject a certain norm from the We-perspective. Second, as I have repeated, in the We-constitution view, deference to group norms is constitutive and expressive of one's membership. Therefore, any dissent seems to express rejection of one's membership. Of course, Scheffler could be suggesting that when

norms are very bad, one should dissociate. If so, this is not a strategy available to committed members, who seek change but not dissociation. Put differently, this is not a strategy for groups to wield rational control over their norms; rather, it is a strategy for individuals to *regain* rational control over their groups. It does not solve the problem of group dogmatism but merely avoids it. In the next section, I will offer a different strategy for groups to wield rational control, and I will show how committed members can collectively change their norms without recourse to autonomy.

### 4.3 Meeting the Bootstrapping Objection

I have shown how the We-constitution view grounds the obligation to obey norms of joint commitment in their constitutive and expressive values of We-identity. Otherwise, these fundamentally important values for our lives as social agents would be void of meaning. But a major problem with this view is that joint commitments bootstrap their own legitimacy, resulting in some undesirable consequences, such as dogmatism. Can the bootstrapping problem be overcome? In this final section, I argue that it can. I propose that we look to old communitarian literature on state legitimacy for inspiration. As I will show, this provides a useful account of collective reasoning, which I call *We-reasoning*, that wields rational control for groups over their joint commitment.

The return to communitarianism may strike readers as an odd move. Is it not obsolete? It is true that the communitarian program has waned and political liberalism and multiculturalism have replaced it as more plausible theories of state legitimacy. It is now widely accepted that most, if not all, modern states are not single jointed communities of shared values, as communitarians assume; on the contrary, they are societies of diverse, conflicting values. Even so, I suggest that we can reinterpret the communitarian accounts of state legitimacy as accounts of group legitimacy, and that they are highly plausible.

Communitarians such as Michael Walzer (1987), Charles Taylor (1989), Benjamin Barber (1984) have long argued that there is an inherent normativity in communal values (or norms of joint commitment, in my terms), which obligates members of their relevant community to conform. They share the We-constitution view that communal values are fundamentally important to the extent that they constitute and express the authentic ethical character of a community, or its *Sittlichkeit*. However, they depart from the We-constitution view by refusing to accept that all joint commitments constitute the We-identity correctly, or express it equally well. According to most communitarians, who ‘We’ really are is constituted by a *system* of mutually supporting joint commitments, rather than a single joint com-

mitment. Not all existing joint commitments carry the same weight, or any weight at all, because some are more fundamental than others to us, and some may even be out of step with the deepest commitment of the community. In other words, communitarians do not think that we can evaluate the legitimacy of a particular joint commitment in isolation from other joint commitments.

What this entails is the need for collective interpretation, or what Walzer calls a process of “cultural elaboration and affirmation” (1987, 40), and which I have elsewhere (Tam 2020a, 2020b) called ‘We’-reasoning. And it is this process of We-reasoning that yields rational control to groups over their joint commitments, or so I argue. To see how, we need to get a clearer understanding of the process of We-reasoning. The goal of We-reasoning is to determine how these joint commitments fit together to give a community the most authentic expression. As Walzer makes clear, this is not just a ‘positivist reading’ of actually existing joint commitments, as if their meanings were immediately available to our understanding (1986, 27). In practice, joint commitments need to be “read, rendered, construed, glossed, elucidated, and not merely described.” (Walzer 1986, 27). Every member of the relevant We is making an interpretation. But what is the best interpretation to bind us? As Walzer explains, it is not a summary of all readings. He compares the practice to reading a poem. He writes,

The best reading illuminates the poem in a more powerful and persuasive way. Perhaps the best reading is a new reading, seizing upon some previously misunderstood symbol or trope and reexplaining the entire poem. (Walzer 1986, 27)

This powerful analogy allows us to see how groups need not be dogmatic about their norms, insofar as they can engage in good We-reasoning, which is capable of confirming as well as challenging received opinion. To illustrate, let’s return to the example of female genital cutting (FGC). The Sudanese managed to reject their norm of FGC not because members of society exercised their autonomy and engaged in individual critical reflection. To the contrary, they engaged in We-reasoning (Bicchieri/McNally 2016, 25). Some members (e.g. religious elders) took the lead in reinterpreting the norm of FGC in the context of a system of norms that make the Sudanese who they are. They might have come to the conclusion that the norm of FGC, instantiating the joint commitment to chastity, was of lesser importance than other, more fundamental joint commitments, such as to the love for one’s children and to non-violence. Alternatively, they might have concluded that an alternative expression, such as a healthy mind and body to embody the pristine, untouched, God-given condition, was a better expression of chastity than cut women.

We have seen how the presumption of deference can be rebutted if a particular joint commitment is rendered incompatible with the deepest joint commitment

of one's group through We-reasoning. But how can We-reasoning be initiated in the first place? As explained, any member who dissents from the prevailing majoritarian interpretation appears to reject her identity. Can a committed member dissent? She can. Walzer helpfully contrasts the job of a connected critic with that of a detached critic. The former can criticize or even revolutionize. She is carrying out an 'inside job,' as it were. The latter, by contrast, seeks to 'drown out' the communal values of her own life in her own time and place, and as such engages in an enterprise of 'conversion and conquest.' This means that a committed member can, and at times should, dissent as a connected critic.

A connected critic appeals to internal standards, namely, to other norms of joint commitment from the We-perspective. This does not mean that a connected critic cannot introduce external standards to the group. It simply means that whenever she does so, she should translate them into what 'We' could jointly accept. Moreover, a connected critic is motivated by the good of the group. She is not emotionally detached. She wishes the group well and seeks the success of their common enterprise. British abolitionists such as Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp, and William Wilberforce are examples of connected critics (Tam 2020b). When they sought to reject the norm of the slave trade, they did not just appeal to external standards such as humanitarian principles against cruelty and evil. They did an inside job by translating these principles into something that Britons could jointly accept: namely, an honorable Britain whose deepest commitment is to freedom. They rejected the pre-existing interpretation that the practice of slave trading was consistent with British national identity as a freedom-loving nation, because the best understanding of freedom was not freedom of commerce but of persons, and Africans are persons. Unlike their predecessors, the Quakers, who criticized the trade self-righteously and were seen as rebels, these abolitionists saw themselves and were seen as patriots. They manifested their readiness to protect Britons' deepest joint commitment to national honour. This is how, in the We-reasoning view, committed members can dissent. They are the members who inspire a collective search for better expressions of group identity.

As we have seen, the We-constitution view can avoid the bootstrapping objection by taking an interpretative view of We. Since who we are and what we owe to each other requires an ongoing collective process of We-reasoning among members, a joint commitment does not bootstrap its own legitimacy. The legitimacy of a joint commitment flows from the reliability of the We-reasoning that gives it interpretative validity. A joint commitment is not valuable just because it constitutes and expresses the We-identity; rather, it is valuable if it fits well with the system of joint commitments in which a group is embedded.

One may object that We-reasoning, by appealing to internal standards, is not sufficient to transform a group which is *deeply* committed to evils. Unless I build

moral content (e.g. mutual respect for autonomy) into We-reasoning, no act of re-reading or deeper reading can delegitimize a We-group whose deepest joint commitment is oppressive. This is an important concern, which deserves lengthy treatment on its own. Here, I can only make two quick replies. First, I resist building moral content into my account of We-reasoning because I want to acknowledge that (a) thoroughly corrupt groups exist (e.g. fascist groups), and (b) no amount of ingroup reasoning is sufficient to reform it. I have elsewhere (Tam 2020a; 2020b) argued that we cannot count on We-reasoning alone to do all the work in moral progress. In most cases, we need both impartial moral reasoning and partial We-reasoning. Second, I believe that there are sufficient internal resources within a We-group to resist ingroup oppression. It would be psychologically impossible for a member to stay committed to a common project if that project consistently harms her interest or dominates her will. Unity is not centrally about autonomy, but respect for autonomy seems to be a precondition for it. Marriages, friendships, teams, and movements break when the autonomy or the interest of a party or a subgroup is consistently undermined. This is compatible with a non-moral account of group legitimacy. A united fascist group which respects the autonomy of its ingroup members can still commit to actions that dominate outgroup members. Solidarity among racists is still solidarity, conceptually speaking.

## 5 Conclusion

In this paper, I have rejected the widespread assumption in liberal political philosophy that groups are mere voluntary associations and that they do not raise issues of legitimacy. By explaining the authoritative nature of norms of joint commitment, I have shown that almost all groups driven by 'We'-ness command deference from their members. I have further demonstrated that mainstream state-centric views of legitimacy cannot explain why groups should or should not have such significant normative weight over their members. I have explored a group-centric view, called the We-constitution view, which locates the legitimacy of group norms in their constitutive and expressive values of We-identity. I have argued that, while this is a better view than the state-centric views, it faces the bootstrapping objection, which can be met if supplemented with We-reasoning.

If my argument about group legitimacy has been successful, I hope that it is now obvious why the question merits more attention from social and political philosophers. As the discussion of FGC and the slave trade has shown, recognition of the (il)legitimacy of group norms is often a driving force for moral progress. Moral progress cannot rely solely on the interpretations of universal principles of

justice and rationality. Moreover, since groups wield dramatic normative power over their members, we can no longer rely solely on freedoms of association, conscience, and information to protect members from the improper influence of their groups. We should explore how institutions and cultures can promote good We-reasoning such that members can empower themselves to find meaningful group identities. For example, how can connected critics avoid peers misunderstanding of motivation? Also, how does a group know that they have the right interpretation? When is a member justified in bringing about the demise of the group. What are the appropriate modes and institutions of We-reasoning? As I have said, my goal here is to set these questions in motion, not to answer them all in this paper. And as I have suggested, the communitarian program can offer rich resources for us to think through these questions.

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