

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Valuable and pernicious collective intellectual self-trust<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Recent years have seen a shift in epistemological studies of intellectual self-trust or epistemic self-trust: intellectual self-trust is not merely epistemologists' tool for silencing epistemic skepticism or doubt, it is recognized as a disposition of individuals and collectives interesting in its own rights. In this exploratory article I focus on a particular type of intellectual self-trust—collective intellectual self-trust—and I examine which features make for valuable or pernicious collective intellectual self-trust. From accounts of the value of individual intellectual self-trust I take three frameworks for evaluating collective intellectual self-trust: an epistemically consequentialist, a virtue-theoretic and a prudential/pragmatic framework (§2). Then I introduce collective intellectual self-trust (§3). Against this background I explain what is distinctive of valuable collective intellectual self-trust (§4) and pernicious collective intellectual self-trust (§5) within the three frameworks. I close by discussing the relation between the three frameworks and argue that evaluating intellectual self-trust requires a multi-perspectival approach constituted by the three frameworks.

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a shift in epistemological studies of intellectual self-trust or epistemic self-trust: intellectual self-trust is not merely epistemologists' tool for silencing epistemic skepticism or doubt, it has been recognized as a disposition of individuals that is interesting in its own rights. In addition, it has been recognized as a socially, politically relevant category (El Kassar, 2020; Jones, 2012). Authors have since turned to defining individual intellectual self-trust (Dormandy, 2020; El Kassar, 2020, 2021; Jones, 2012; Tanesini, 2021) and discussing the features of valuable and pernicious intellectual self-trust (El Kassar, *forthcoming*; Leefmann, 2022; Tanesini, 2021). At the same time, political and social developments as well as the COVID-19 pandemic have given collectives renewed attention within epistemology: group ignorance and group conspiracy belief are just two examples. Interpersonal trust may be regarded as a necessary condition for forming and maintaining a group and for group action in particular (cf. Lahno, 2017, p. 137). But, as I have argued previously, groups may also manifest trust in themselves, intra-group trust or: collective self-trust (El Kassar, 2021, *forthcoming*). One form of such collective self-trust is collective *intellectual* self-trust. A collective or group can trust themselves intellectually: they trust the intellectual deliverances and cognitive capacities of the group and its constitutive members. Trusting one's group intellectually arguably features in collective action because it secures the group's intellectual basis for a collective action. It also grounds group belief and group knowledge because it blocks doubt about the group's beliefs. For example, a research group that possesses collective intellectual self-trust trusts their research results, their shared considerations, and they are not easily swayed by external criticism. And just like in the case of individual intellectual self-trust, a group's collective intellectual self-trust can be valuable or pernicious.

In this exploratory article I examine which features make for valuable and pernicious collective intellectual self-trust. Given the debate about the nature of group knowledge, group justification etc. in relation to individual knowledge, justification, etc., we may reasonably expect that collective intellectual self-trust does not work like individual intellectual self-trust, nor for their values to be determined in the same way. Nevertheless, I start from accounts of valuable and pernicious individual intellectual self-trust because the categories they employ for evaluating intellectual self-trust are so general that they should apply to collective cases, too. And even though self-trust is not simply a self-reflexive application of interpersonal trust, general considerations on the value of trust and conditions which influence the evaluation of trust (e.g., Hawley, 2019) also help elucidate collective intellectual self-trust.

In this paper I proceed as follows. First, I present evaluations of intellectual self-trust in accounts that focus on individual intellectual self-trust. In evaluations of intellectual self-trust authors often switch between valuable/pernicious and well-placed/ill-founded or warranted/unwarranted, but I suggest that these categories must be clearly distinguished. "Valuable" and "pernicious" are the generic terms that are specified by the other two distinctions. From the evaluations of individual intellectual self-trust I develop three frameworks: epistemically consequentialist, virtue-theoretic, prudential/pragmatic (§2). Then I introduce collective intellectual self-trust (§3). Against this background I explain what is distinctive of valuable collective intellectual self-trust (§4) and pernicious collective intellectual self-trust (§5) within the three frameworks. I close by discussing the relation between the three frameworks and argue that they constitute a multi-perspectival approach to evaluating intellectual self-trust. My contribution is neutral on the ontological status of the collectives that I discuss; I do not presuppose nor rule out the existence of a group self. Both reductionists and anti-reductionists can employ my analysis within their respective conceptions of collectives.

## 2 | THREE FRAMEWORKS FOR EVALUATING INDIVIDUAL INTELLECTUAL SELF-TRUST

In this section I focus on evaluations of *individual* intellectual self-trust. Philosophers have only recently turned to discussing the constituents and conditions of valuable versus pernicious individual intellectual self-trust. Tanesini (2021) distinguishes well-placed, optimistic intellectual self-trust from two kinds of ill-founded, unwarranted and uncalibrated intellectual self-trust. Tanesini evaluates intellectual self-trust within a framework that combines epistemically consequentialist and virtue-theoretical assumptions. Well-placed intellectual self-trust is knowledge-conducive and enables responsible inquiry because the subject with such well-placed intellectual self-trust has accurate beliefs, experiences doubt when it is appropriate, experiences certainty when it is appropriate (Tanesini, 2021, pp. 219–220). Well-placed intellectual self-trust is virtuous because it enables the subject to persevere in her intellectual endeavors. Moreover, “apt or calibrated” (p. 231) self-trust fits to the “trustworthiness of [the subject’s] faculties and abilities” (p. 232).

In contrast, unwarranted intellectual self-trust can be either self-satisfied or damaged. “Self-satisfied intellectual self-trust” (Tanesini, 2021, p. 231)—or also: “arrogant” (p. 224) intellectual self-trust—is motivated by a defensive attitude: the subject wants to avoid criticism and thus acts overly confident. Such intellectual self-trust is “unwarranted or decalibrated” (p. 231) because it is not aimed at accuracy but rather self-defensive. It misleads the subject into trusting unreliable (inaccurate) capacities. “Damaged” intellectual self-trust—or “obsequious mistrust” (p. 224)—on the other hand, is connected to intellectual timidity. The subject does not dare to voice their own opinion, they have low self-esteem and engage in strategies that further undermine their self-esteem such as self-sabotage. Even though Tanesini does not say so herself, we may surmise that this intellectual self-trust is decalibrated because the subject does not have adequate reasons for distrusting her capacities.

Note that in order to enable continuity with the existing literature and at the same time avoid confusions about the terms employed I will speak of *arrogant* intellectual self-trust, *damaged* intellectual self-trust and *decalibrated* intellectual self-trust to refer to cases of deficient intellectual self-trust.

Leefmann (2022) shares Tanesini’s basic consequentialist and virtue-theoretical frameworks and determines norms for “epistemically apt intellectual self-trust” (Leefmann, 2022, p. 119), such as that “[a]dequate intellectual self-trust matches the objective epistemic quality of one’s intellectual faculties” (pp. 119–120). Valuable intellectual self-trust on this conception, too, is adequate intellectual self-trust in the sense that it is well-calibrated to the actual trustworthiness of the capacities and therefore accurate.

Dormandy (2020) focuses on *epistemic* self-trust and criticizes traditional accounts of epistemic self-trust because they limit such self-trust to reliance on one’s capacities.<sup>2</sup> Instead, she suggests, epistemic self-trust works more like interpersonal trust, it consists in trusting oneself, not just one’s intellectual capacities. Her contribution is relevant to this discussion of valuable (and pernicious) intellectual self-trust because her alternative conception of self-trust enables her to argue that epistemic self-trust is a healthy relationship with oneself (Dormandy, 2020, p. 12). The value of a healthy relationship with oneself is not captured by the epistemically consequentialist or virtue-theoretic framework. We should thus add another framework that determines the value of intellectual self-trust in terms of its effects on an individual’s well-being, their health. I call this the “prudential/pragmatic framework”.<sup>3</sup>

There are thus three frameworks within which one can determine whether individual intellectual self-trust is valuable or pernicious. First, an *epistemologically consequentialist framework* in which knowledge-conduciveness and/or true belief-conduciveness as well as conduciveness to reliable inquiry make for valuable intellectual self-trust. In addition, such valuable intellectual self-trust is well-calibrated to the epistemic quality of the capacities and beliefs of the subject. I want to add an implication for valuable intellectual self-trust that Tanesini does not mention: If well-calibratedness makes for valuable intellectual self-trust, then, if the subject knows that the epistemic quality of her capacities and beliefs is reduced and she lowers her intellectual self-trust accordingly, she still possesses *valuable* intellectual self-trust, because her self-trust is calibrated to her actual capacities. We can thus add that not only knowledge-conduciveness matters, but also avoiding false beliefs. Correspondingly, pernicious individual intellectual self-trust obstructs knowledge and inquiry, and fosters false beliefs. In addition, it is decalibrated, i.e., either too high or too low in comparison with the actual quality of the epistemic capacities. The second framework is the so-called *virtue-theoretic framework*. On this framework, valuable intellectual self-trust manifests itself in intellectual virtues such as humility. Pernicious intellectual self-trust comes with intellectual vices such as arrogance, timidity, servility (Tanesini, 2021). The virtue-theoretic framework could also include the notion of well-calibrated or decalibrated intellectual self-trust introduced above, when virtues are in some sense well-calibrated and vices are decalibrated. For the present study it does not matter where this subcategory goes.<sup>4</sup> The third framework is the *prudential/pragmatic framework*. On this framework, valuable intellectual self-trust is constitutive of psychological health as well as well-being and is related to secure self-esteem (cf. Dormandy, 2020; Tanesini, 2021). Pernicious intellectual self-trust comes with lack of psychological health and is harmful to a person's well-being. Since the considerations addressed in this framework are not merely prudential nor merely pragmatic, I will use the label "prudential/pragmatic".

I submit that an evaluation of intellectual self-trust—individual and collective—must consider all three frameworks.<sup>5</sup> The frameworks can co-exist and complement each other. But as we will see, the frameworks may also deliver conflicting verdicts for an actual case of individual or collective intellectual self-trust. Conflicting evaluations may be explained by different functions of individual and collective intellectual self-trust that are uncovered within the three frameworks. For example, in developmental stages a person's intellectual self-trust may be too high, i.e., decalibrated, and thus pronounced vicious on the epistemically consequentialist framework. At the same time, such decalibrated intellectual self-trust may be conducive to the person's well-being and provide the ground for calibrated intellectual self-trust that can deal with the fact that the person's abilities are sometimes not reliable. It would thus be valuable within the prudential/pragmatic framework.

So far these results are solely based on individual intellectual self-trust. The next question is what results we get when we employ the three frameworks for evaluating *collective* intellectual self-trust? Before we can turn to this question, I must specify what collective intellectual self-trust is.

### 3 | APPROACHING COLLECTIVE INTELLECTUAL SELF-TRUST

Collective intellectual self-trust is a disposition to trust the epistemic deliverances and capacities of one's collective. It consists of several constituents. The group has shared recognitional capacities and a shared heightened consciousness that enable group members to see things as group members do. They have a shared heightened consciousness regarding the topics of the domain

to which their collective intellectual self-trust applies.<sup>6</sup> Collective intellectual self-trust also consists in shared beliefs that the group holds. Note that these beliefs do not have to be true for a group to possess collective intellectual self-trust. A group may have collective intellectual self-trust despite having false beliefs. In addition, collective intellectual self-trust comes with shared feelings of confidence in the group's beliefs and perceptual experiences. Since it is a collective disposition, collective intellectual self-trust also consists in mutual (joint) awareness of the shared collective intellectual self-trust (meta-perspective) and mutual recognition of the members of the collective. These two mutuality-conditions ensure that collective intellectual self-trust is properly collective and interpersonally shared and not just a sum of several instances of individual intellectual self-trust.

Just like individual intellectual self-trust, collective intellectual self-trust can be valuable or pernicious. But what makes instances of collective intellectual self-trust valuable or pernicious? To discuss the relevant features, I introduce three examples for groups who have collective intellectual self-trust.<sup>7</sup>

**HONEST RESEARCH GROUP:** Research group  $RG_1$  jointly works on algorithms for aquatic plastic litter detection. Group members work on different subprojects, but they share their data and collaborate in different constellations on the subprojects. They have weekly group meetings in which they discuss developments and obstacles, can raise questions about their own research (studies, algorithms, methods used). There are rules for giving feedback and for reacting to criticism ensuring that feedback is respectful and reactions are not defensive but constructive.<sup>8</sup> The group members trust the research output of the group.

**ANTI-COVID POLITICAL GROUP:** A political group is critical of political decisions in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. They distrust all information that is not brought to them by fellow group members or jointly accepted sources. They have (implicit and explicit) rules that preclude self-critical statements. They trust the beliefs and perceptual experiences of the group members and the group blindly.

**VACCINE HESISTANCY GROUP:** A group is critical of political decisions in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, they flat out do not trust sources that advocate for the COVID-19 vaccine. The members of the group are mainly African American and are aware of the inhumane experiments carried out on African-Americans in the 20th century. They have warranted distrust of white medical institutions.<sup>9</sup> And they trust their group in being hesitant about vaccination.

Obviously, HONEST RESEARCH GROUP and ANTI-COVID POLITICAL GROUP are set-up as extreme cases in which we would intuitively suggest that they have valuable and pernicious intellectual self-trust, respectively. VACCINE HESISTANCY GROUP and two additional cases that I will present later in the text invite us to add nuance to the conception.

Collective intellectual self-trust does not require each group member to trust every other group member. It may include such distributed interpersonal trust as a contributing factor, but this interpersonal trust is not constitutive of collective intellectual self-trust.<sup>10</sup> For example, for security reasons the members of the nuclear Manhattan project in the 1940s were not informed about the tasks of every other project member and thus could not adequately trust every individual member of the project. Nevertheless, one may surmise that the group did have collective intellectual self-trust in their collective, joint epistemic output. In addition, collective intellectual self-trust

does not have to be reflected in individual intellectual self-trust. A group may have valuable (stable) collective intellectual self-trust without each of the group members having stable individual intellectual self-trust.<sup>11</sup>

## 4 | EVALUATING VALUABLE COLLECTIVE INTELLECTUAL SELF-TRUST

According to the three frameworks drawn from the accounts of individual intellectual self-trust, the value or disvalue of collective intellectual self-trust can be evaluated according to the epistemic consequences, virtues or vices involved, and prudential/pragmatic consequences of the group's collective intellectual self-trust. Let's see how this translates to collective intellectual self-trust.

### 4.1 | Valuable collective intellectual self-trust within an epistemically consequentialist framework

From an epistemically consequentialist perspective collective intellectual self-trust is most valuable when it is knowledge-conducive and enables reliable inquiry. More generally speaking, it is valuable when it contributes to attaining the standard epistemic goals such as knowledge and true belief, but also understanding (e.g., Riggs, 2003). Less abstractly, a group with collective intellectual self-trust also engages in making sense of the world. Their shared heightened consciousness, their shared recognitional capacities contribute to seeing the world in a certain way and, on that basis, making sense of the world. For valuable collective intellectual self-trust this means making sense of the world as it is, without illusions or delusions. The HONEST RESEARCH GROUP not only contributes to knowledge and true belief in their research field, they also make sense of the world. They may even be said to want to make sense of the world with their collective research. Whether they reliably contribute to or produce knowledge, true belief, understanding determines whether they are successful with regard to these epistemic aims. Depending on one's favored epistemological conception the standard may also be more questions, more concepts. And the value can also be found in the shared recognitional capacities: whether they are useful for recognizing the world, whether they reliably contribute to achieving epistemic goals. The shared recognitional capacities of HONEST RESEARCH GROUP are their scientific concepts, their ways of looking at graphs, data, claims.

These recognitional capacities may also exist in individuals, but they are collective and shared because they are distributed within the group members and because they are complemented by the group members' mutual awareness of their collective intellectual self-trust and mutual recognition of the other group members as group members. The group members are aware that they are members of a group that has collective intellectual self-trust and recognize the other group members as group members. Since collective intellectual self-trust also has an affective component, the mutual awareness and mutual recognition can also consist in a feeling of community, e.g., "I'm not alone in seeing things like this". Or in a multi-person conversation it can consist in a group's joint audible intake of breath as a reaction to a hurtful or disrespectful statement by one of the participants. On the physiological level the group members individually take in a breath, but by audibly taking in a breath at the same time and based on a shared heightened consciousness and shared recognitional capacities, the audible intake of breath is a joint

exercise. Low-level and high-level processes contribute to the group intuitively reacting together to the inappropriate contribution (cf. El Kassar, *ftnc.*).

This shared ability of making sense of the world is not restricted to scientific knowledge but is also relevant for making sense of social and political conditions of the world. Recognitional capacities and true beliefs about unjust interactions, unjust decisions can also be grounded in collective intellectual self-trust. Customs police on trains between Germany and Switzerland often only ask a passenger who looks like a BiPoC for their ID and the details of their travel itinerary. When the passenger tells other people—who are fellow group members and share relevant recognitional capacities with the passenger—about this incident, they can also recognize this action as an instantiation of prejudice against non-white people who are crossing a border.<sup>12</sup> And the passenger does not have to explain to the same people what happened when they hear about the incident. They apply the appropriate recognitional capacities that they share qua group members. In addition, the passenger may expect them to recognize the incident for what it is, and they would be disappointed and feel let down if they did not. This is an obvious parallel to interpersonal trust (Baier, 1986; Jones, 1996)—and for intrapersonal trust, as Dormandy (2020) argues. These normative expectations do not exist for other individuals who possess the same recognitional capacities but are not group members. They do not possess these *shared* recognitional capacities and they are not part of the collective intellectual self-trust of the collective, thus, group members would not expect them to see things as they do and would not feel let down by them if they did not see things as they do.<sup>13</sup> In being part of the self-trusting community, the group and the members incur certain commitments, such as employing shared recognitional capacities, fostering their shared heightened consciousness (cf. Hawley’s commitment account for interpersonal trust, Hawley, 2019). The group members would therefore not trust non-group members to share these recognitional capacities and see things as they did.

Other less idealized cases, too, show that the epistemically consequentialist perspective is able to evaluate collective intellectual self-trust. In the case of VACCINE HESITANCY GROUP one may say that the group is successfully making sense of the world as it has been and is for African Americans in the USA. They take into account past experience, they are not gullible (which will be relevant on the virtue-theoretic framework below), and their vaccine hesitancy may be rational (e.g., Bunch, 2021; Hawley, 2020). They can also be said to engage in reliable inquiry—it would certainly be a sign of white ignorance to dismiss their distrust in medical institutions. African Americans should include past harms committed against Black communities by medical institutions in their inquiry if it is to be reliable and adequate. The group is able to produce knowledge, true belief and understanding, e.g., they understand how things are regarding medical treatments in the USA. Therefore, in this domain the collective intellectual self-trust of VACCINE HESITANCY GROUP is valuable. At the same time, this self-trust may undermine knowledge and true belief in other contexts. This mixed result is probably very common for all groups and can be explained by the fact that collective intellectual self-trust is (most often) domain-specific. Note that for the group’s collective intellectual self-trust to remain valuable on the epistemically consequentialist framework, they are required to update their ways of seeing the world, so they fit with how things are in the world.

More fundamentally, I want to emphasize that one’s environment can also affect whether the relation of collective intellectual self-trust should even be entered in. Hawley notes that trust “can be made appropriate or inappropriate by features of someone’s circumstances, not just by her character or underlying skills: it matters where and when she is required to act” (Hawley, 2019, p. 108). And this also applies to the relation of self-trust: whether collective intellectual self-trust is appropriate depends on the environment the group is in, whether the environment impedes

the exercise of the relevant capacities or not, whether it is an ‘easy’ environment or a ‘challenging’ environment (p. 108). When the collective is in an environment in which their intellectual endeavors are constantly challenged or faced by uncertainty, collective intellectual self-trust has to be re-calibrated. Think back to the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic: medical workers in the hospitals faced with patients who were suffering from this new disease found themselves and their standard assumptions challenged. That’s why high levels of collective intellectual self-trust in that domain and at that time was less appropriate than usually. At the same time such lowered collective intellectual self-trust was also apt, and even valuable, because it was an attempt at attaining epistemic goals despite the uncertain circumstances caused by a new disease.

These observations have important implications for the task of evaluating collective intellectual self-trust at large: if the group’s environment affects the results of the evaluation of a group’s collective intellectual self-trust, then collective intellectual self-trust and its evaluation necessitate a relational framework. This means that we cannot just look at the internal state of the collective’s intellectual self-trust to determine a group’s collective intellectual self-trust, rather we must include their environment, the state of the world in which the collective itself and their collective intellectual self-trust are located.<sup>14</sup> Second, any evaluation of collective intellectual self-trust should include a relational perspective on this disposition of a group. I cannot discuss this insight in this context, but still want to point it out for further discussion

Finally, what about luck cases for the intellectual performance of a collective? Imagine that HONEST RESEARCH GROUP has a true belief that  $p$  based on a joint analysis of satellite data using an elaborate algorithm. Group member Stella is responsible for writing and applying the algorithm that is used for these analyses to a particular dataset. She presents the results of the satellite data analyses in the work group and the results are correct, i.e., they aptly capture the state of the ocean that the analysis was meant to capture. Unbeknownst to Stella her original algorithm was faulty, but, while she was working from her home office, her cat happened to walk over the keyboard and accidentally changed the original algorithm so that it did provide the correct result. When Stella and her group use the results from this study, are these results manifestations of the groups’ valuable collective intellectual self-trust? I don’t think so, but I don’t think that such cases harm the general verdict about the consequentialist value of a group’s collective intellectual self-trust. Their collective intellectual self-trust generally leads to epistemically valuable products, and luck cases don’t change this verdict. Luck cases affect the epistemic status of the individual case and not the collective intellectual self-trust in general. They don’t justify not trusting the collective intellectually or evaluating a group’s collective intellectual self-trust as pernicious.

## 4.2 | Valuable collective intellectual self-trust within a virtue-theoretic framework

Tanesini employs considerations from a virtue-theoretic framework for evaluating individual intellectual self-trust. Optimistic self-confidence is manifested in a person being “humbly proud of their abilities” (Tanesini, 2021, p. 219) or “humbly proud of their achievements” (p. 224).<sup>15</sup> Can collective intellectual self-trust be valuable in the sense of being virtuous? Yes, collectives can also be humbly proud of their achievements—the HONEST RESEARCH GROUP can be proud of new findings or a new algorithm that can be widely employed for analyzing satellite data. Their humility would be also manifest in the rules and procedures that they employ for feedback and reactions to feedback—they accept relevant feedback and reply appropriately to feedback that is not relevant or not apt.

In addition, virtuous valuable collective intellectual self-trust can also be found in a collective being aware of the possibility of blind spots and errors in their epistemic deliverances. They are open-minded and curious and look for blind spots and errors by following maxims similar to José Medina's maxims for dealing with one's own blind spots and avoiding overdemanding expectations in dealing with blind spots and the possibility of error. The "Maxim of Eminent Relevance" (Medina, 2013, p. 157) helps determine what beliefs are relevant for one's self-reflection. The "Maxim of Openness and Vigilance ... says that we should remain forever open to find out more about other 'others' and forever vigilant about possible oversights in our social perceptions" (p. 157). The "Maxim of Shared Responsibility to Interrogate Relevance" (p. 158) addresses the individual and collective level of the task of avoiding and correcting for blind spots and errors. They must examine the judgments of relevance and correct each other's perception. Medina focuses on "perceptions of social relevance" (p. 158), but the maxims are amenable to being applied to perception in general. The members of groups with virtuous (valuable) collective intellectual self-trust jointly reflect their shared recognitional capacities, their shared heightened consciousness, their shared beliefs.<sup>16</sup>

### 4.3 | Valuable collective intellectual self-trust within a prudential/pragmatic framework

As we have seen for the individual case, the framework for determining whether intellectual self-trust is valuable is not restricted to epistemic dimensions. Individual intellectual self-trust contributes to psychological health and individual well-being. Trusting oneself intellectually amounts to a healthy relationship to oneself (Dormandy, 2020). Similar considerations matter for valuable collective intellectual self-trust.

Since collective intellectual self-trust also consists in mutual recognition and mutual awareness of the group's collective intellectual self-trust, the collective intellectual self-trust supports the group's unity and cohesion. Well-placed, valuable collective intellectual self-trust thus plays a causal role for group cohesion. Solid group cohesion in turn is conducive for the group's well-being, their stability, their inner dynamics. The group thus has prudential reasons for developing and sustaining valuable collective intellectual self-trust.

It is also conducive to the group member's well-being qua group member. Being a member of a stable group with stable collective intellectual self-trust reflects on the state of the member. Note that this does not mean that collective intellectual self-trust consists in a collection of individual intellectual self-trusts, rather the collective intellectual self-trust may affect the individual's intellectual self-trust. This is not a necessary connection but a possible connection: being a member of a group with collective intellectual self-trust may be beneficial for trust in one's abilities that are connected to the shared abilities.

Collective intellectual self-trust that contributes to making sense of the world is also prudentially/pragmatically valuable because the collective is in contact with their surroundings, with the world. They understand the world and are not ignorant of the conditions in which they are living. In addition, the ability to make sense of the world (jointly) enables the group to engage in honest self-reflection. The collective is able to acquire self-knowledge and knowledge of others, two components that are conditions of responsible agency (see Medina, 2013, p. 127). And in the context of trust, we can also say that these collectives are in a healthy relationship with themselves, they have relevant self-knowledge and knowledge of the world that does not impede this relationship with themselves.

Marginalized groups that exist in unjust or non-ideal societies have further prudential/pragmatic reasons for sustaining collective intellectual self-trust: it equips the group with a solid foundation for cohesion and for reacting against injustice. They are able to defend (themselves) against unjust and oppressive conditions and engage in acts of resistance. If the HONEST RESEARCH GROUP would exist in a society in which their research and results were systematically discredited and rejected by reference to badly conducted research, their collective intellectual self-trust would sustain their own research as well as their fight against the oppressive environment.

Clearly, epistemic considerations also come into play in determining whether the group's collective intellectual self-trust really is valuable: HONEST RESEARCH GROUP does not break epistemic norms but rather produces knowledge and engages in reliable inquiry. So their pragmatically valuable collective intellectual self-trust is also based on epistemically valuable results and output. Nevertheless, the pragmatic dimension is not limited nor reducible to the epistemically consequentialist or virtue-theoretic dimension. In unjust conditions there may be pragmatic/prudential considerations for developing and sustaining collective intellectual self-trust even if the basis for this shared collective intellectual self-trust is not solid or has epistemic deficiencies. In other words: collective intellectual self-trust may be overly defensive and fail to meet standards of accuracy (cf. Tanesini, 2021) and yet be judged to be pragmatically valuable. This is the case, in particular, for nascent, developing collective intellectual self-trust and collective intellectual self-trust of groups that face systematic oppression and exclusion (Dotson, 2012). Imagine a shaky activist movement within an unjust community. When the central aim of a group is to survive systematic oppression, the standards for survival are more important than epistemic standards. Of course, epistemic standards will also matter—the group should not succumb to delusions or misperceive the world if they want to survive and reject oppression—but survival is more directly important than epistemic accuracy (cf. Pohlhaus, 2020 on epistemic agency of oppressed individuals and groups). When we combine the evaluations of the three frameworks, we may thus find that a group can lack strictly valuable collective intellectual self-trust within an epistemically consequentialist framework and/or a virtue-theoretical framework but possess it within a prudential/pragmatic framework. I return to the relation between the frameworks at the end of the paper.

## 5 | EVALUATING PERNICIOUS COLLECTIVE INTELLECTUAL SELF-TRUST

### 5.1 | Pernicious collective intellectual self-trust within an epistemically consequentialist framework

Within an epistemically consequentialist framework, groups have pernicious collective intellectual self-trust when their collective intellectual self-trust does not contribute to producing knowledge, true belief, understanding or reliable inquiry because their capacities are not really reliable. More specifically, their capacities are not reliable because their shared recognitional capacities do not get at how things really are, but rather are biased and shaped by prejudice and misconceptions. Groups with arrogant collective intellectual self-trust—excessive collective intellectual self-trust—often are indiscriminately distrusting of non-members. Like individuals with arrogant intellectual self-trust, they need to defend themselves and their beliefs and cognitive capacities against outside input in order to sustain their pernicious collective intellectual

self-trust. As a consequence, they lose access to evidence. We might say that their identity issues and biases interfere with their epistemic performances. The group is “out of step with reality” (Tanesini, 2021, p. 232) because making sense of the world is a self-centered and biased exercise for such groups. This can be illustrated for ANTI-COVID POLITICAL GROUP and with the help of psychological research on epistemic effects of identity beliefs (e.g., Kahan, 2017): the group is unable to (reliably) acquire knowledge, true belief or understanding because they distrust outside sources that deliver contradictory or alternative evidence without considering whether the evidence is reliable or not. In fact, the group cannot recognize outside sources or evidence from non-members because their *collective intellectual self-trust* induces them to distrust outsiders and be overly trusting towards insiders.

One may object that it may indeed be rational to exclude particular sources, e.g., not wanting to be distracted by absurd beliefs, or because one knows that the other group’s reasoning is harmful. So, strictly speaking, it is not the exclusion itself that is pernicious. This is correct, but finding a principled way for distinguishing pernicious and justified exclusion of outsider evidence is a difficult task that I cannot pursue in this context. I suggest that being open to revising one’s exclusionary attitudes in the face of new relevant evidence—updating one’s rejection—may be a crucial factor of justified exclusionary strategies.

In pernicious collective intellectual self-trust, the other constituents of collective intellectual self-trust can also be deficient. The exclusionary attitudes are also reflected in the shared heightened consciousness and shared recognitional capacities of the group. For example, in ANTI-COVID POLITICAL GROUP the group develops a shared heightened consciousness of statements or speakers that support government decisions in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Their shared recognitional capacities enable them to single out such statements and relevant speakers. And they trust group members’ distrust of such statements and relevant speakers. In addition, the group in ANTI-COVID POLITICAL GROUP, unlike HONEST RESEARCH GROUP, does not employ rules and procedures for voicing and reacting to feedback. Any outside feedback is rejected and, given the internal structure of the group, insider feedback is prone to be self-congratulatory and not self-critical. Some groups, e.g., marginalized groups, may have good reasons for limiting self-criticism—it may be exhausting, weaken the group and ultimately harm their intellectual self-trust—but in pernicious collective intellectual self-trust this defensive attitude is not adequately attuned to the environment, not well-calibrated and thus not part of a valuable disposition.

The groups are also unable to include their actual epistemic states—as they are—in their epistemic considerations because they cannot access their actual epistemic states. Their view of things and themselves is also biased by their self-defensiveness and identity issues. Their collective intellectual self-trust is thus also pernicious because it is not calibrated to the group’s actual competences. Here we should include Hawley’s considerations about “reckless or incompetent promise[s]” (2019, p. 28) because they help illuminate this facet of collective intellectual self-trust. Promises can be bad because they are reckless or incompetent, or because they are insincere and contain immoral intentions. Groups with arrogant collective intellectual self-trust are incompetent in their field of collective intellectual self-trust: they lack the “intrinsic qualities and dispositions” and their competence may, in addition, be impeded by a challenging environment (Hawley, 2019, p. 40). Their collective intellectual self-trust is incompetent in the sense that it does not live up to the commitments entailed by collective intellectual self-trust: the constituents of their collective intellectual self-trust, e.g., their recognitional capacities, shared beliefs, shared heightened consciousness, mutual recognition, are not working correctly and thus do not reliably produce epistemic goods (like knowledge/true belief/understanding, etc.). Their collective intellectual self-trust is inappropriate and thus pernicious.

In groups with damaged collective intellectual self-trust—collective intellectual self-trust that is too low—the collective intellectual self-trust is not appropriate to the actual state of the group’s cognitive capacities and shared beliefs. They are thus too timid and cannot reliably achieve epistemic goods. We can imagine the following example for a group with damaged collective intellectual self-trust.

**CHRONIC PAIN GROUP:** The members of a self-help group for people with chronic pain all suffer from a specific type of chronic pain for which physicians do not find any medical explanation. Their reports are not taken seriously by physicians and their surroundings. And the members have been led to believe that their symptoms are merely signs of individual stress and that it is their own task to change how things are. They do not recognize that the shared experiences of the group members and recognitional capacities that they all have regarding their cases of chronic pain can be turned into shared recognitional capacities that are co-constituents of reliable collective intellectual self-trust.

The group has epistemic and practical justification for manifesting valuable collective intellectual self-trust, but their collective intellectual self-trust is damaged by their experiences of being dismissed and not taken seriously. That is one reason why they do not take themselves seriously and do not dare contribute to exchanges about chronic pain or epistemic injustice in medicine (cf. Kidd & Carel, 2017). Their collective intellectual self-trust is decalibrated and epistemically pernicious.

Note that the effects of pernicious collective intellectual self-trust are not necessarily general but mostly rather domain-specific. For example, in **ANTI-COVID POLITICAL GROUP** the shared capacities, heightened consciousness and beliefs concern measures against the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, and, quite possibly, circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic (origins of the virus, vaccines, etc.). This focus may extend to climate change measures or anti-racism measures or the group members’ individual professions, but it does not have to. There may be other areas in which the group’s collective intellectual self-trust is well-founded, it is just for the COVID-19 pandemic that their collective intellectual self-trust is pernicious and epistemically deficient.<sup>17</sup>

## 5.2 | Pernicious collective intellectual self-trust within a virtue-theoretic framework

Within a virtue-theoretic framework collective intellectual self-trust is pernicious when it co-exists with intellectual vices, such as closed-mindedness and arrogance, in a group. In the case of **ANTI-COVID POLITICAL GROUP**, they manifest closed-mindedness because they blindly distrust non-members and they are arrogant because they rank their own beliefs and epistemic deliverances higher than those of non-members—without good evidence for this epistemic behavior. Again, it is very likely that these vices are domain-specific rather than general.

Groups with damaged collective intellectual self-trust manifest vices because they are too timid, engage in self-sabotage and similar self-deprecating strategies. There would be grounds for trusting their shared capacities—and the other constituents of their shared intellectual position—but because they have been led to misjudge their capacities, they do not actually trust themselves. They are not trustworthy because they misjudge their capacities and do not possess calibrated collective intellectual self-trust. This also holds when they implicitly trust their shared capacities

and shared beliefs but explicitly distrust their shared capacities and shared belief (or vice versa). There are implicit processes which make them trust their collective intellectual set-up, but they do not connect them with explicit trust. Note that here, too, relational considerations may have to be factored into evaluating a particular group's collective intellectual self-trust.<sup>18</sup>

### 5.3 | Pernicious collective intellectual self-trust within a prudential/pragmatic framework

Within the prudential/pragmatic framework, pernicious collective intellectual self-trust manifests itself in the lack of well-being of the group and its members. They have a faulty conception of the world because their epistemic abilities of making sense of the world are disturbed by their pernicious collective intellectual self-trust (and related relevant causes). Thus, they are unable of making sense of the world and misconceive of incidents and contexts. They live in a world of illusions and with delusions—such living conditions are hardly ever conducive to individual or collective well-being. These issues apply to groups with arrogant and damaged collective intellectual self-trust alike.

Arrogant collective intellectual self-trust that is ultimately interested in defending the group's self-esteem, identity, and so on, is also unhealthy because the group's collective intellectual self-trust is mainly centered on self-defense rather than engagement with the world. And damaged collective intellectual self-trust is unhealthy for the group because the group itself contributes to reducing the self-esteem and the happiness of the group. The group engages in self-sabotage and regards and treats itself as inadequate, sub-standard. It is pernicious because it is its own worst enemy, we might say.

One might object that—just as in the case of the prudential evaluation of valuable collective intellectual self-trust discussed above—the group members' mutual awareness of their collective intellectual self-trust and mutual recognition that is part and parcel of collective intellectual self-trust ensure the group's well-being in the case of arrogant collective intellectual self-trust, as well. Group members are recognized by other group members, they are valued as excellent sources of information, they are trusted by the other group members. But this awareness and recognition only seem like genuine goods that have prudential or pragmatic value. Rather, the epistemic deficiencies also tarnish the mutual awareness and mutual recognition among the group members. Their recognition is rooted in unwarranted outsider-distrust and fueled by self-defensive attitudes. This basis is unstable and cannot ground group cohesion or unity, nor pragmatically valuable collective intellectual self-trust. Such groups are likely to self-destruct when they encounter internal issues. When faced with internal opposition the self-defensive stance is conducive to self-destruction rather than to reconstruction or renewal. In general, groups with pernicious collective intellectual self-trust—both arrogant and damaged—do not have a healthy relationship among themselves.

What about research groups who ignore external evidence? Let's look at this less-obviously valuable version of a research group:

**DOGMATIC RESEARCH GROUP:** Research group  $RG_2$  jointly works on algorithms for aquatic plastic litter detection. Group members work on different subprojects, but they share their data and collaborate in different constellations on the subprojects. They have weekly group meetings in which they discuss developments and obstacles, can raise questions about their own research (studies, algorithms, methods used). They reject all

evidence that speaks against their favored theories, e.g., by questioning the validity of the methods used in the other studies. Their reactions to criticism are defensive. The group members trust the research output of fellow group members and of the group only.

At first glance, DOGMATIC RESEARCH GROUP looks like another case of decalibrated, arrogant collective intellectual self-trust. The group also rejects and even ignores external contradictory evidence that challenges their shared beliefs. But there may be more to their behavior. Weatherall and Gilbert (2016) discuss the case of the scientific community of string theory researchers who have been criticized because they ignore ideas of outsiders and have “tremendous self-confidence” (see Smolin, 2006 for further criticism). Weatherall and Gilbert provide a more sympathetic reading of the group’s behavior. By ignoring or criticizing results that speak against their findings or methodology the research group guards their shared beliefs, their shared works and thus the group itself. After all, “acceptance of a challenge to a given foundational belief is apt to bring down the whole edifice of beliefs within which this community has been working—perhaps for a very long time” (Weatherall & Gilbert, 2016, p. 202). By rejecting criticism or even ignoring it, a research group guards their core beliefs to which they are jointly committed.<sup>19</sup> Such behavior that “appear[s] irrationally dogmatic or epistemically irresponsible” (Weatherall & Gilbert, 2016, p. 201), Weatherall and Gilbert argue, is warranted from an internal perspective because it sustains the group and ensures group cohesion. It is even so strong that it can silence critical voices from within the group. Weatherall and Gilbert suggest that this behavior is not epistemically irrational because it fits with the group’s joint core beliefs and commitments.

With the three-part distinction of evaluative frameworks that I have distinguished in this paper, we can see that the behavior of DOGMATIC RESEARCH GROUP may be prudentially/pragmatically valuable, even though it is not per se epistemically consequentialistically valuable. The group may be doing the best from their perspective, but it is also likely that the group’s attitude makes them exclude relevant criticism and that they are thus not engaging in reliable inquiry or reliably produce knowledge. Moreover, their main motivation for rejecting the criticism is securing the stability of their group, not any straightforward deficiencies in the criticism rejected.

These conflicts are related to an important question that turns into an objection against the distinctions and claims in this paper: What is the relation between the three frameworks? I discuss the question and the objection in the next section.

## 6 | THE RELATION BETWEEN THE FRAMEWORKS

I have noted above that the prudential/pragmatic framework is not reducible to the epistemic framework. But the case of DOGMATIC RESEARCH GROUP may be taken to indicate that the epistemically consequentialist framework is after all more fundamental and thus weightier than the prudential/pragmatic framework. Since we are interested in evaluating *intellectual* self-trust, epistemic or intellectual standards are bound to be primary. At least, that is what the objection holds. But the fact that the three frameworks may provide different answers regarding the evaluation of collective intellectual self-trust by itself does not lead to direct repercussions for the approach taken in this paper nor for collective intellectual self-trust itself. We need to ask what follows from the different answers and a conflict between the different frameworks. First, one may react to the conflict by determining which of the frameworks is more fundamental or more important and then claim that the verdict of this framework trumps the other results. Second,

one may introduce another dimension for assessing the verdicts of the three frameworks, e.g., the stakes involved in the group with collective intellectual self-trust. Third, one may unite the three frameworks and argue that they focus on slightly different but related properties.

Let's start with the first strategy: I don't think that we may elevate either of the frameworks to being most fundamental or most important. Rather, we have seen that the standards of the first two frameworks—consequentialist and virtue-theoretic—ultimately, go together. In a non-misleading environment, virtuous collective intellectual self-trust reliably produces knowledge because it is led by epistemic virtues. And collective intellectual self-trust that is valuable from a prudential/pragmatic perspective is also valuable because it enables the group to maintain a healthy internal relation and not suffer from delusions. Delusions are epistemically deficient and the claim that a healthy relation to oneself is valuable is clearly virtue-theoretically motivated. Thus, the three frameworks overlap, and we cannot find that one of them is most fundamental.

As regards the second strategy, I do not see how the stakes involved might be justifiably taken to determine the value in cases of conflict. One might try to argue that the three frameworks could be organized by a meta-framework—e.g., quite parallel to 'understanding' as an overarching epistemic standard that settles conflicts between the epistemic goals of striving for the truth and avoiding falsehood (cf. Riggs, 2003). But I am not sure that there is such a standard since the frameworks address separate yet connected facets of evaluations of collective intellectual self-trust.

I suggest that the third strategy is on the right track. It unites the three frameworks since they all focus on slightly different but related properties that constitute being valuable or being pernicious. Within the consequentialist framework one can determine whether collective intellectual self-trust is epistemically valuable because it fits to one's capacities and environment and thus reliably produces epistemic goods. Within the virtue-theoretic framework one can determine which collective intellectual self-trust is praiseworthy and which is blameworthy. Within the prudential/pragmatic framework one can determine which collective intellectual self-trust is valuable on prudential, self-regarding grounds or on pragmatic, moral other-regarding grounds. Neither of the frameworks can deliver evaluations without the other frameworks, but their evaluations still focus on separate aspects. Together they constitute a multi-perspectival approach to evaluating intellectual self-trust that is able to capture different facets of the value or disvalue of this disposition.

## 7 | CONCLUSION

In this paper I have examined evaluations of collective intellectual self-trust. The exploration reveals that such evaluations should combine (at least) three frameworks: an epistemically consequentialist framework, a virtue-theoretic framework and a prudential/pragmatic framework. Collective intellectual self-trust is valuable within an epistemically consequentialist framework when it contributes to the production of knowledge/true belief/understanding, reliable inquiry and making sense of the world. Within a virtue-theoretic framework, collective intellectual self-trust is valuable when the collective possesses virtues such as humility and open-mindedness. And collective intellectual self-trust is prudentially/pragmatically valuable when it supports the group's cohesion, puts the group in contact with the world as it is (without illusions) and enables the group to react to oppression and injustice.

Collective intellectual self-trust can be pernicious in at least two ways: either it is inflated and thus a form of arrogant collective intellectual self-trust or it is deflated and thus a form of damaged

collective intellectual self-trust. The two types of collective intellectual self-trust are pernicious within an epistemically consequentialist framework when they fail to produce knowledge or guide reliable inquiry. They are pernicious within a virtue-theoretic framework when they are bound up with epistemic vices such as closed-mindedness or dogmatism. And they are pernicious within a prudential/pragmatic framework when they harm the group's health or well-being, e.g., when they undermine group cohesion.

Finally, a note on further directions of these explorations. Whether a given case of collective intellectual self-trust is pernicious or valuable cannot just be determined by looking at the internal structure of the group's collective intellectual self-trust because external conditions and the group's environment must also inform the evaluation. It thus is plausible that any account of the value of collective intellectual self-trust must be relational.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>I am very grateful to Natalie Ashton, John Greco, Joshua Habgood-Coote, Sebastian Schmidt and Deborah Tollefsen for valuable and inspiring comments on this paper.
- <sup>2</sup>Like most authors in the literature, I use *epistemic* and *intellectual self-trust* interchangeably.
- <sup>3</sup>Tanesini also employs psychological research that shows how secure self-esteem that is a causal foundation of optimistic intellectual self-trust is related to "psychological health" (Tanesini, 2021, p. 228), but she does not count these effects on the subject's health as a separate set of standards for evaluating intellectual self-trust and focuses on virtue-theoretic and consequentialist considerations.
- <sup>4</sup>I adopt Tanesini's largely responsibilist reading of epistemic virtues because it contributes a sufficiently different and relevant perspective to evaluating collective intellectual self-trust. A reliabilist reading of epistemic virtues may produce considerable overlap with the epistemically consequentialist framework.
- <sup>5</sup>Further frameworks may have to be included in such evaluations.
- <sup>6</sup>See McHugh (2017) for a case of shared heightened consciousness in a writing group of prison inmates and philosophers.
- <sup>7</sup>Both groups are strongly collective (cf. e.g., Salmela, 2012) because the structures of such groups make them more prone to developing a form of collective intellectual self-trust that is clearly valuable or pernicious.
- <sup>8</sup>Cf. Longino's rules for objectivity (Longino, 2002).
- <sup>9</sup>Cf. e.g., Bunch (2021), Hawley (2020), Pohlhaus (2017).
- <sup>10</sup>Such interpersonal trust may be necessary for collective action, as suggested by Lahno (2017).
- <sup>11</sup>At this point my discussion may be taken to move towards an anti-reductionist conception of collectives after all. But the three frameworks and the respective evaluations that I develop do not entail any ontological decisions regarding the constitution of groups.
- <sup>12</sup>Note that the other passenger members do not have to be BiPoC, they are simply members of the relevant group of a collective of which the BiPoC passenger a guest.
- <sup>13</sup>One may also be disappointed or let down by others when they do not see racism when it happens because one has a general level of trust that other people share fundamental values. But if there is a group with collective intellectual self-trust and shared recognitional capacities and shared beliefs, the disappointment is grounded in the specific group relations rather than hope that another person sees things as one does.
- <sup>14</sup>Cf. relational accounts of autonomy (Elzinga, 2019; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000).
- <sup>15</sup>The virtue-theoretic framework is also reflected in Tanesini's terminology: she talks about virtuous and vicious intellectual self-trust rather than valuable and pernicious intellectual self-trust. As I have noted above, I have decided to use the valuable-pernicious distinction for the general discussion of good or bad collective intellectual self-trust because the virtue-theoretic terminology entails a narrower focus on virtues and vices when alternative frameworks may be equally productive. But in the discussion within the virtue-theoretic framework I use the virtuous-vicious terminology because it is at the center of the description of the value within this framework.

<sup>16</sup>I do not have the space to address two further issues that are highly relevant within the virtue-theoretic framework. First, the issue of responsibility regarding valuable or pernicious aspects of collective intellectual self-trust: is every member responsible or are some members more responsible given their standing in the group? Second, the question of which conception of collective virtues one should endorse (e.g. Astola, 2021; Lahroodi, 2007). I simply start with the assumption that there can be collective virtues, and that there can be collective *intellectual* virtues.

<sup>17</sup>Of course, that is assuming that the same group can have and does have two distinct areas of focus.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. footnote 16.

<sup>19</sup>Note that such shared core beliefs do not presuppose Gilbert's commitment account. The defensive behavior could also be identified on another account of joint belief.

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