

## Stereotypes and Stereotyping

### I. Questions and Recap

- Under what conditions is a belief *reasonable*?
- Under what conditions is a belief *unreasonable*?

Examples:

- Is belief in God reasonable?
- Is belief in stereotypes reasonable?
- Is belief in racist propositions [e.g., people of race R are inferior] reasonable?
- Is belief in scientific theory reasonable?

We've seen that belief can be considered as a *practical* matter, or an *epistemic* matter (or both).

- Insofar as it is an epistemic matter, then norms for *knowledge* and evidence of the belief's truth or falsity are relevant.
- Insofar as it is a practical matter, then the norms for action and the *moral* and/or *pragmatic effects* of believing are relevant.

Usually when we consider whether a belief *p* is reasonable, the issue is really whether it is reasonable for *an individual* to believe *p*. This allows that it may be reasonable for me to believe things (based on my evidence) that it is not reasonable for you to believe.

Based on our discussion so far, we've considered three different criteria for reasonable belief:

*Practical Rationality Principle*: The practically rational thing to do is the thing with the highest expected value, where the expected value ( $x$ ) = the sum of the values of the various possible outcomes that  $x$  could give rise to, weighted according to their probabilities.

- 1) *S's* believing *p* is reasonable *if S's* holding the belief is practically rational (has the highest expected utility).

*Evidentialism* (Clifford): "*It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence*" (p. 101)

Examples: ship-owner, minority religious group

- 2) *S's* believing *p* is reasonable *if and only if S* can support *p* by compelling evidence.

*Pragmatism* (James): "...our *passional nature* not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds." (105)

*Pragmatism restated*: *Faced with a genuine choice about what to believe, and where evidence does not decide the matter, we are free to decide it (passionally?) however we want.*

Examples: James considers belief in God; belief in one's capacity to act, e.g. leap a chasm; belief that the one you love reciprocates your love. He is especially interested in beliefs that are self-fulfillingly true:

'where faith in a fact can help create the fact, that would be an insane logic which would say that faith running ahead of evidence is [wrong].' (107)

What about other beliefs that have good consequences, even if one has insufficient evidence, e.g., belief that one is doing God's will, belief that the medication will cure one's disease?

- 3) S's believing p is reasonable *if and only if* S can support p by evidence, where evidence is available; OR if evidence is not available and a choice to believe must be taken, then if S chooses to believe p, [wishingly, for its good consequences, on a hunch or feeling?].

Questions:

- How hard must we look for evidence?
- If evidence is, in principle, available, but not available to me (at the time when I must make the choice to believe p or not), then is it still reasonable for me to believe p?
- Is it only reasonable to believe p without evidence if I also believe that doing so will have good consequences? What if, in fact, believing p does not have good consequences. Was it reasonable for me to believe p?
- Are self-fulfilling beliefs always reasonable? Are they always good? Consider: members of group G are violent, or are less intelligent, or are inferior. Could a beliefs like these be somehow self-fulfilling, i.e., could the (widely held) belief in claims such as these "help create the fact"?

## II. Stereotypes: What are they? What's wrong with them?

A. What are they?

"Stereotypes are false or misleading associations between a group and an attribute that are held by their subjects in a rigid manner, resistant to counterevidence. To stereotype a group (or an individual qua member of the group) is to have some cognitive investment in such an association; the cognitive investment need not rise to the level of an actual belief, but it must be more than the mere recognition that such an association is widespread in some relevant social milieu, such as one's society" (Blum 288)

B. Where do they come from?

- Contrast role of stereotype in individual psychology v. cultural role of stereotypes
- Stereotypes do not arise from over-generalization from individual experience; rather, "the existence of the stereotype shapes the stereotyper's perception of the group in question" (255).
- What is ideology? Are stereotypes ideological?

C. What's wrong with them?

i. *Epistemic wrong*

- They are false or misleading. (256)
- They are held rigidly.

But, don't stereotypes contain a "kernel of truth"? Aren't some stereotypes empirically supported?

ii. *Moral wrong*

"Stereotypes are a form of morally defective regard of persons. Cultural stereotypes involve a defective regard that is widely shared, and that can therefore do a kind of damage to stereotyped groups that goes beyond individual stereotyping." (271)

For those who hold a stereotype about group G:

- Members of G are not seen as individuals, but are assumed to have the stereotypical features of the group (though there can be individual exceptions).
- The different sub-groups of G are invisible. Everyone is lumped together in the same undifferentiated group.
- The difference between G and other groups (e.g., the dominant group) is over-exaggerated. This creates a perception of moral distance from the dominant group (also known as “Othering”).

Wrongness of stereotyping depends on what one “does” with the stereotype, and its content.

- Stereotypes may not, strictly speaking, be believed, and generalizations involving stereotypes may even be denied, and yet carry some “cognitive investment”.
- We may not be morally responsible for the broad associations imbedded in our culture, but are we responsible for “personal beliefs” and actions that “express” stereotypes? (269) (“Let us say that someone “expresses” a stereotype if she engages in any public behavior, or has a conscious mental response, that draws on a stereotype (and the individual does not repudiate the stereotype).” (269)
- Some stereotypes are worse than others due to their content, e.g., because they seem to warrant greater degrees of disregard or hostility?
- Some stereotypes are bad because of their historical associations and impact, not because of what the individual has in mind in holding them.

It is wrong *intrinsically* to stereotype a group, for in doing so one views members of the group in a “demeaning, unjust, socially stigmatizing” way (282). It is a “failure to accord proper respect or acknowledgment.” (282-3).

It is wrong instrumentally to stereotype a group for even though it is often difficult to trace a direct causal link between the stereotype and unjust treatment, the very existence of stereotypes harms members of the stereotyped group, e.g., through the phenomenon of stereotype threat.

Question:

Does Pragmatism provide sufficient safeguards against stereotyping? Would it allow that it is reasonable to stereotype groups?