Stereotypes, Epistemic Dilemmas and Epistemic Dispositions

1: Introduction

Stereotypes can be false and misleading; they can misrepresent social realities and lead to misperceptions of individuals to whom they are applied. There does not appear to be an epistemic dilemma with respect to stereotypes and stereotyping in these types of circumstances: the stereotypes provide a poor route to justified belief or knowledge, and stereotyping is epistemically impermissible.

Stereotypes can also reflect aspects of social reality. They can reflect the differing prevalence of traits (e.g. levels of wealth, susceptibility to medical conditions, etc.) across social groups (e.g. racial, ethnic, gender, religious, ability, sexual orientation or age groups). The application of such stereotypes to individuals appears at first glance to be only good from an epistemic perspective, facilitating rather than impeding the acquisition of justified belief and knowledge, and therefore epistemically permissible. Once again, there seems not to be an epistemic dilemma with respect to stereotypes and stereotyping in these types of circumstances.

This chapter argues that, contrary to these appearances, there is an epistemic dilemma that we face with regard to stereotypes and stereotyping. We face a dilemma in the second type of case, where there are differences in the prevalence of traits across groups in society that could be reflected in our social attitudes. The epistemic dilemma is this: we are susceptible to suffering epistemic costs whether or not we harbour and apply stereotypes that reflect these differences.

This chapter also argues that a new approach to epistemic evaluation that focuses attention on the dispositions associated with harbouring stereotypes is better able than other existing accounts of epistemic evaluation to capture the dilemma that we face. The approach is *evaluative dispositionalism*, a position with close affinities to existing accounts in epistemology that emphasise the role of dispositions in epistemic evaluations (Audi 1994; Lasonen-Aarnio 2010, 2020; Williamson forthcoming), but which differs from these positions because it argues that people *ought to* focus on the *full* dispositional profile of a stereotyping belief or other stereotyping social attitude when making an epistemic evaluation of it.

A note on terminology is needed before I begin. I adopt a *non-normative conception of stereotyping*, according to which stereotypes can be accurate or inaccurate, and might or might not lead to distorted judgements (see also Beeghly 2015; Fricker 2007; Jussim 2012). The following definition of stereotypes is adopted:

> Stereotype: a social attitude that associates members of some social group more strongly than others with certain trait(s).

Some stereotypes are beliefs but other social attitudes, such as implicit biases, which are automatic and unintentional responses to social actors, and can lead to discrepant treatment of members of different social groups, also count as stereotypes on this definition. Stereotyping is the application of a stereotype to an individual due to their perceived membership of the target social group.

On this conception of stereotypes, attitudes that associate members of certain social groups more strongly than others with particular attributes can count as stereotypes even if they reflect social realities. This means that I will talk about stereotypes that reflect social realities. It is worth noting, however, that those who endorse a *normative conception of stereotypes and stereotyping*, according to which stereotypes are always inaccurate (e.g. Allport 1954; Blum 2004; Lippman, 1965), can translate claims about stereotypes that reflect realities into claims about attitudes that reflect social realities to reflect their view that stereotypes by definition do not reflect reality. The main claims of the chapter—about the existence of an epistemic dilemma and the suitability of evaluative dispositionalism to capture the nature of the dilemma—do not depend upon the adoption of the non-normative conception.

2: The contours of an epistemic dilemma

Here are some examples of the types of case that are the focus of attention. Some people harbour a stereotype associating scientific expertise more strongly with men than women (Nosek et al 2009). As women are underrepresented in the sciences in many societies, a stereotype associating scientific expertise more strongly with men than women reflects the social reality of who occupies positions requiring scientific expertise in those societies.[1] Some people in the United Kingdom also seem to associate being a barrister with being white and/or a man. Evidence for this claim comes in the form of the experiences of Alexandra Wilson, a Black woman who is a barrister and has described how she is repeatedly not recognised as a barrister and instead mistaken for a defendant (see, e.g. BBC News, "Black barrister mistaken for defendant three times gets apology"). A stereotype associating being a barrister with being white and/or a man would reflect the social reality in the United Kingdom that women and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people are underrepresented among barristers, especially at senior levels (Bar Standards Board, "Diversity at the Bar 2019").

Tamar Szabó Gendler (2011) brought to prominence the idea that people face an epistemic dilemma with respect to stereotypes. Gendler's discussion focuses on implicit racial bias. Implicit biases are associations that are made automatically, unwittingly, and at times unconsciously, between individuals and particular concepts or affective responses, due to the perceived social group membership of those individuals. Because implicit biases can associate individuals with characteristics due to their perceived social group membership, on the definition adopted in this chapter they can be implicit social stereotypes (Puddifoot forthcoming).[2] Gendler argues that those who live in the United States suffer epistemic costs whether or not they harbour implicit racial biases associating certain crimes or occupations (e.g. being a valet) more strongly with Black people than white people where the crimes or occupations are more prevalent among the Black population than the white population.

[1] It has been found that people associate science more strongly with men in societies in which there are fewer women in science, strongly suggesting that the stereotype is tracking an aspect of reality (Miller et al. 2015).

[2] Where implicit biases associate people with affective responses—either aversion or attraction—they are not stereotypes under the current definition, but they are stereotypes where they associate people with certain characteristics or traits.

The epistemic costs that Gendler associates with harbouring the implicit racial biases are stereotype threat, cross-race face recognition errors, and cognitive errors that occur due to the cognitive depletion that follows from expending cognitive efforts to suppress the implicit biases. Stereotype threat occurs when a person is aware of a stereotype relating to an aspect of their social identity, the stereotype is triggered prior to them performing a task relating to the stereotype, and they consequently underperform on the task. For example, if Black students are aware of a stereotype associating Black people with low intellectual ability, and they are told that a specific task is a test of intellectual ability, they can subsequently perform more poorly on the task than if they are told that it is not a test of intellectual ability (Steele and Aronson 1995). Cross-race face recognition errors occur when people make errors when attempting to identify faces of people from other racial groups (Gendler 2011, see e.g. Meissner and Brigham 2001 for empirical work on this effect). Finally, according to Gendler, people suffer cognitive depletion if they harbour an implicit bias that they disavow and suppress the automatic associations made by the bias (see, e.g. Richeson and Shelton 2003). Cognitive resources that could be used to engage in cognitive tasks are expended suppressing the associations, leading to errors being made in the cognitive tasks.

The epistemic cost of not both harbouring and applying a stereotype that would reflect an aspect of social reality is base-rate neglect. Base-rate neglect occurs when a person fails to reflect in their judgements relevant background statistical information relating to the distribution of traits across groups. Gendler (2011) argues that those who fail to make associations between certain racial groups and involvement in particular crimes, or occupying certain jobs, commit base-rate neglect. Base-rate neglect is commonly taken to be a serious epistemic error, which can lead to drastically inaccurate judgements (see, e.g. Kahneman and Tversky 1973).

For Gendler, the epistemic dilemma relating to stereotyping therefore takes the following form:

> Horn 1: If we engage in stereotyping we are susceptible to the epistemic costs of (i) stereotype threat, (ii) cross-race face recognition errors, and (iii) cognitive errors due to the cognitive depletion that follows from expending efforts to suppress the bias.
>
> Horn 2: If we do not engage in stereotyping, we undergo the epistemic costs associated with base-rate neglect.

While I agree that there is an epistemic dilemma that people face with respect to stereotypes that reflect aspects of social reality, there are some problems with Gendler's formulation of the dilemma. The claim that people can suffer base-rate neglect if they fail to reflect social realities in their social attitudes is compelling but there are some reasons to reject Gendler's characterisation of the epistemic costs associated with implicit bias.

There is reason to doubt whether stereotype threat and cross-race face recognition errors are due to a person harbouring or applying an implicit (or explicit) stereotype. On many accounts of stereotype threat, including those of the leading proponent of stereotype threat research, Claude Steele, the person undergoing stereotype threat

need not harbour any implicit or explicit stereotypes relating to their own social identity to undergo the effect (Mugg 2013; Puddifoot ms.). As Steele puts it, "their susceptibility to this threat derives not from internal doubts about their ability (e.g., their internalization of the stereotype) but from their identification with the domain and the resulting concern they have about being stereotyped in it" (1997, p. 614). If Steele's explanation of stereotype threat is correct, a person can underperform on cognitive tasks merely due to being aware of a stereotype held by others. What this means is that the person who suffers from stereotype threat does not face the epistemic costs associated with stereotype threat due to harbouring or applying an implicit bias or explicit stereotype. The epistemic cost of stereotype threat is an epistemic cost to which people are susceptible whether or not they themselves stereotype.[3]

There is also reason to question whether cross-race face recognition errors are an epistemic cost of implicit bias. On a leading explanation of the effect, one to which Gendler (2011) appeals, people are poorer at recognizing the faces of members of other racial groups because some of their cognitive resources that would otherwise be used to encode information about facial features are used to process information about a person's race (see, e.g. Bernstein et al 2007). If this explanation is correct, merely recognizing and processing information about a person's race makes one susceptible to the error. It will not be necessary to harbour any implicit bias or stereotype to recognize and process information about a person's race. Therefore, implicit biases or other stereotypes do not seem to be responsible for the effect (see Mugg 2013 and Puddifoot ms. for a similar argument).

There is reason, then, to doubt whether stereotype threat and cross-race facial recognition errors are epistemic costs faced by a person due to them harbouring and applying a stereotype. In contrast, it seems clear that if the suppression of an automatic implicit association leads to cognitive depletion and poor performance on a cognitive task, the poor performance is due to the presence of the implicit association. However, it is unclear whether it is appropriate to describe the poor performance as an epistemic cost of implicit bias or instead a cost of suppressing an implicit bias (Lassiter and Ballantyne 2017; Puddifoot ms.).[4]

On the basis of this analysis of Gendler's argument one might conclude that there are few if any epistemic costs associated with harbouring and being influenced in our judgements by implicit biases and stereotypes that reflect social realities, but significant costs associated with suppressing our tendencies to make and apply these associations. The epistemic cost of cognitive depletion could be added, alongside base-rate neglect, to the list of epistemic costs that follow from *not* stereotyping,

[3] General doubts have also been raised about the robustness of the stereotype threat effect. For example, a meta-analysis of stereotype threat related to mathematics in young girls presents reason for thinking that there might be a publication bias that makes it seem that the effect is more common and robust than it really is (Flore and Wicherts 2015).

[4] Another point against accepting cognitive depletion as an epistemic cost of implicit bias is given by Mugg (2013). Mugg argues that suppression of one's automatic responses uses executive function, which is strengthened in the process, and that this is likely to bring long-term cognitive benefits. Mugg points to research on bilinguals and the effect of bilingualism on executive function. Whether or not the same effect is found in those whose executive function is used to suppress implicit bias is an empirical question yet to be settled, but if it does this is an additional reason to reject the idea that the cognitive depletion is an epistemic cost of implicit bias.

where there is a statistical pattern found in society that would otherwise be reflected in one's stereotype.

Next we see, however, that there are in fact substantial epistemic costs associated with harbouring and being influenced in our judgements by implicit biases and stereotypes, even where they reflect social realities. Psychological research on stereotyping has identified numerous epistemically costly psychological phenomena that occur due to the operation of stereotypes. Some if not all of the epistemic costs can occur due to the application of a stereotype that reflects an aspect of social reality.

People who engage in stereotyping have been found to consequently: (i) remember information about those who are stereotyped in a biased manner so that they form a false impression of what happened in the past: either being better able to remember information that is consistent with a stereotype or better able to remember information that challenges a stereotype (see, for a meta-analysis, Fyock and Stangor 1994 or Rojahn and Pettigrew 1992); (ii) misinterpret ambiguous information as unambiguously consistent with a stereotype (Devine 1989; Gawronski, Geschke and Banse 2003); (iii) assume those who are stereotyped are more similar than they are to other members of their perceived social group and less similar than they really are to members of other social groups (Tajfel 1981; Bartsch and Judd 1993; Hewstone, Crisp and Turner 2011); (iv) explain behaviours in terms of stereotypes when they should be explained in other ways (Duncan 1976; Sanbonmatsu et al. 1994); (v) fail to recognise certain aspects of the social identity of the person stereotyped that are not directly related to the stereotype that is applied (for philosophical discussion see Gardiner 2018; from the psychological literature see Goff et al., 2008; Johnson and Ghavami 2011); (vi) fail to give appropriate uptake to the testimony of people who are stereotyped (see, e.g. Lorde 1984; Collins 2000; Fricker 2007).

These effects can occur due to the possession and application of a stereotype that reflects an aspect of social reality. To see this point let us focus again on the stereotype associating being a barrister with being white and a man, and consider a case where the stereotype influences a person's perception of a young Black woman who is a barrister.

Under such circumstances the stereotype could lead the perceiver to remember information about the barrister that is consistent with the stereotype of barristers being white and a man but not information that contradicts the stereotype, or vice versa. For example, when she makes slight errors in her performance in court these might be better remembered than when she does well, or vice versa. The biased recollections could lead to a mistaken impression of the overall skills and abilities of the barrister.

The stereotype could also lead ambiguous behaviour to be interpreted in an unambiguous way, as consistent with a stereotype. Take, for example, one of the experiences of Alexandra Wilson. When trying to enter a courtroom in which she was due to provide legal representation she was repeatedly told to leave the courtroom and wait for an usher—something that a defendant but not a lawyer was required to do. Here Wilson could be said to be displaying ambiguous behaviour—entering a courtroom—and it is interpreted in a way that is consistent with the stereotype of barristers being white and a man, as involving her entering the courtroom when she should not.

People who apply the stereotype could assume that those stereotyped are more similar than they really are to others who are members of their perceived social group. For example, a Black woman who is a barrister might be assumed to be more like other Black women who a perceiver has previously encountered than she really is, and treated as indistinguishable or interchangeable with other Black women. [5] Meanwhile she might be viewed as less similar to other white and/or male barristers than she really is. This could lead to a false impression of her skills and abilities, and, for instance, her potential to occupy a senior role in her profession, of the type most commonly occupied by white men.

When applying the stereotype, a person is susceptible to falsely explaining the behaviours of the barrister that are consistent with the stereotype as being the result of dispositions that she has due to her social group membership. Minor errors that she makes that would be consistent with her lacking the skills and abilities required to be a barrister could be explained in terms of her being BAME and/or a woman when they might be better explained in terms of features of the situation she occupies (e.g. time pressures, limited peer support).

Those who apply the stereotype associating being a barrister with being white and a man could also fail to give recognition to relevant aspects of the barrister's social identity, such as her educational background.

Finally, if a perceiver engages in stereotyping of a Black woman who is a barrister then they might fail to give appropriate uptake to or credit to her for her testimony. The contributions of Black women have been found to be especially likely to be forgotten, or misattributed to others (Sesko and Biernat 2010). If a Black woman who is a barrister is viewed through her social identity, as a Black woman, due to the operation of a stereotype associating being a barrister with being white and a man, her contributions can consequently be denied uptake and credit.

The case of the Black woman barrister is not unique. There is little reason to doubt that similar errors can occur due to the operation of other stereotypes that reflect aspects of social reality, such as the stereotype associating scientific expertise more strongly with men than women (Puddifoot 2017).

It is important to note that the errors just described are *epistemic* errors.[6] I believe that stereotyping people can be morally costly, including in cases where stereotypes reflect an aspect of social reality (Puddifoot forthcoming; cf. Blum 2004). However, for the sake of the current argument, which is focused on an epistemic dilemma, it is crucial to emphasise that errors (i) – (vi) are epistemic errors. They are epistemic errors because they involve poor responses to the available evidence or information, which lead people to be susceptible to making false judgements and misperceiving individuals. If you notice and remember information in a biased way, misinterpret

[5] It has been found that Black women are especially likely to be viewed as interchangeable in this way (Sesko and Biernat 2010).

[6] My position here contrasts with moral encroachment views according to which it is necessary to appeal to moral considerations to explain how there is something amiss in cases where stereotypes reflect aspects of social reality (Basu 2019a, 2019b, 2020; Basu and Schroeder 2018; Moss 2018a, 2018b; Bolinger 2020).

ambiguous behaviour as unambiguous, develop uninformative explanations of behaviour, or fail to give good quality testimony uptake and credit, then you are failing to respond appropriately to the available evidence or information.

What this means is that people do face an epistemic dilemma with respect to stereotypes that reflect an aspect of social reality, although its specific features differ from those described by Gendler (2011). The dilemma is this:

> Horn 1*: If we engage in stereotyping we are susceptible to suffering numerous epistemic costs that follow from stereotyping: noticing and remembering information in a biased way, misinterpreting ambiguous behaviour as unambiguous, building uninformative explanations of behaviour, failing to give good quality testimony uptake and credit, and so forth.
>
> Horn 2*: If we do not engage in stereotyping, we can undergo the epistemic costs associated with base-rate neglect, and are also susceptible to cognitive depletion due to suppressing automatic stereotyping responses.

People who fall foul of horn 1* of the dilemma are influenced in their judgements by the demographic evidence found in their surroundings, but are likely to form beliefs that are not in alignment with other evidence (testimonial, behavioural evidence, etc.) that is available to them. Meanwhile, those who do not engage in stereotyping, thereby falling foul of horn 2* of the dilemma, will be making judgements that fail to reflect the demographic evidence found in their surroundings. In each type of case judgements will be made that are out of alignment with the available evidence.

3. Epistemic evaluations of stereotypes and stereotyping

An adequate approach to the epistemic evaluation of stereotypes and stereotyping ought to be able to capture the nature of this epistemic dilemma. If an approach to epistemic evaluation is adopted that fails to capture the dilemma then we will be conceptually impoverished and susceptible to misunderstanding the situation we face with respect to stereotypes that reflect social realities. This section considers the shortcomings of existing epistemological frameworks in relation to this task. It taxonomises approaches to epistemic evaluation as upstream, downstream or static approaches (Easwaran 2017). Then it shows that each of these types of approach fails to capture, and manages to obscure, aspects of the epistemic dilemma.

Upstream approaches to epistemic evaluation attribute positive or negative epistemic value to a belief based on its past history, considering whether things went well upstream of the formation of the belief. On upstream accounts, those engaging in the process of evaluating a belief consider questions like the following: Is the belief fitting with and based on the available relevant evidence?[7] Did a reliable belief-forming process produce the belief?[8] Was the belief formed as a result of the

[7] For example, on an evidentialist approach to epistemic evaluation, a doxastic stance is evaluated by considering whether it fits with and is based upon the relevant evidence available to the epistemic agent (Feldman and Conee 1985; Conee and Feldman 2004)

[8] See, for example, Alvin Goldman's process reliabilism (Goldman 1979).

operation of a virtuous character trait or cognitive capacity?[9] Was the believer responsible, and did they do their duty, in forming the belief?[10]

Upstream approaches to epistemic evaluation provide the conceptual tools needed to identify why it is undesirable to neglect base rates. If we do not associate members of some social groups more strongly than others with characteristics that are more prevalent in their social group, and commit base-rate neglect thereby, it is likely that something has gone wrong upstream from some of our social attitudes. We are likely to have failed to reflect relevant information or evidence in our social attitudes. Forming beliefs in a way that fails to reflect the evidence is plausibly an unreliable way to form our beliefs. It could be viewed as vicious rather than virtuous thinking. A person could be viewed as being epistemically irresponsible in forming their beliefs in this way.

Although upstream approaches have the advantage of capturing the epistemic costs associated with base-rate neglect they are problematic because they draw attention away from the poor consequences of holding a belief or other type of social attitude that associates members of a particular social group more strongly than others with particular characteristics (i.e., the costs described in horn 1*). Harbouring an attitude of this type disposes people to respond poorly to evidence and information about individual social actors and events. By focusing on factors upstream of the social attitudes, upstream accounts do not capture these poor consequences.

In contrast, downstream approaches to epistemic evaluation are able to capture the poor consequences of harbouring stereotypes. Downstream approaches consider whether things are likely to go well as a result of a belief or other attitude being formed. On downstream accounts, those engaging in the process of evaluating a stereotyping belief or other social attitude would consider questions like the following: Does harbouring this social attitude produce good epistemic consequences?[11] Does harbouring this social attitude make it more or less likely that any beliefs formed downstream are true or accurate?

Because downstream approaches focus on the consequences of adopting a doxastic stance, they have the potential to capture the ways that, as a result of harbouring a stereotype, a person can be disposed to respond poorly to the evidence. However, because they shift focus onto the consequences of adopting a social attitude they do not capture how base-rate neglect is epistemically costly.

Static approaches to epistemic justification and rationality focus on features of a belief itself rather than the belief's causal history or consequences. Those adopting a static approach to evaluating a doxastic stance consider whether it has positive

[9] Virtue theorists assess whether a doxastic stance is the result of virtuous character traits or cognitive capacities. See, e.g. Sosa 1991, 2007; Montmarquet 1992; Zagzebski 1996.
[10] For upstream accounts that focus on the epistemic responsibility displayed in forming a belief see, for example, Kornblith 1983 and Bonjour 1985.
[11] It is surprisingly difficult to identify downstream approaches of this type. Most consequentialist approaches focus on the consequences of adopting a particular rule, process or policy that produces a belief rather than focusing on the consequences of holding a belief (Dunn and Ahlstrom-Vij 2018). However, epistemic innocence approaches to belief, which focus on how epistemically faulty beliefs can bring epistemic benefits, are partially downstream approaches because they focus on positive consequences that follow from believing (e.g., Bortolotti 2020).

features independently of how it was formed or other beliefs that it might lead to downstream. On static approaches, those engaging in the process of evaluating a belief or other social attitude consider questions like the following: Is the target attitude coherent with other beliefs in the believer's belief system?[12] Does the attitude meet epistemic norms – for example, is it true?[13] Is harbouring the social attitude the type of thing that one would judge to be an effective way to believe the truth if one were to reflect carefully on how to achieve this goal?[14]

Static approaches provide conceptual tools that could be used to identify why horn 2* of the dilemma is undesirable. Harbouring a social attitude that fails to reflect the evidence that is readily available in one's social environment violates epistemic norms like *form beliefs that fit the evidence*. In addition to this, harbouring a social attitude that does not reflect the available evidence is not something that in general one ought to do if one wants to believe the truth. However, because static approaches focus on the nature of the belief itself, they shift the focus of attention away from the consequences of harbouring a particular social attitude and therefore do not capture the way that stereotypes dispose us to respond poorly to evidence about social actors and events.

What this discussion illustrates is that existing approaches to epistemic value are not suited to capturing the epistemic dilemma we face with respect to stereotypes and stereotyping. Each of them has the potential to capture some of the epistemic costs associated with the dilemma, but none of the approaches captures all of the costs. As a result, those approaching stereotypes and stereotyping using any of the approaches risk failing to fully comprehend the nature of the dilemma that we face with respect to stereotypes that reflect aspects of social reality.

4. Introducing evaluative dispositionalism

The aim of this section is to outline and defend an alternative approach to evaluating the epistemic standing of stereotyping social attitudes: evaluative dispositionalism. On an evaluative dispositionalist approach, those engaging in epistemic evaluation of a stereotype consider the whole dispositional profile of the stereotype: the dispositions manifest in coming to harbour the stereotype and those possessed as a result of harbouring the stereotype. Evaluative dispositionalism is a prescriptive view, arguing that people *ought to* evaluate stereotyping by focusing on dispositions. One of the pay-offs of this approach is that those adopting an evaluative dispositionalist approach will be well placed to understand the contours of the epistemic dilemma we face in relation to stereotyping.[15]

On an evaluative dispositionalist approach, dispositions are defined in the same way as they are on dispositionalist approaches to belief, as counterfactuals, which might or might not be realised (Baker 1995). One can be disposed to act, but also to think and feel certain ways, depending on the presence of particular eliciting conditions (Audi 1972; Baker 1995; Price 1969; Schwitzgebel 2002, 2010). Because evaluative

[12] See, e.g., Bonjour 2002 and Harman 1986 for coherentist approaches that assess beliefs in this way.
[13] This type of question will be asked by those who take a deontic approach to epistemic norms (for discussion see Pritchard 2014).
[14] Foley's (1987) Aristotelian conception to rationality exemplifies this type of position.
[15] Other pay-offs are described in Puddifoot forthcoming.

dispositionalism is an approach to epistemic evaluation, the dispositions that it targets are what I call *epistemic dispositions*; dispositions that determine whether or not we believe truths and avoid believing falsehoods. In particular, they are dispositions to respond in positive or negative ways to evidence. If we display poor epistemic dispositions, we display dispositions to respond poorly to evidence, ignoring evidence or responding to it in a biased way. If we display good epistemic dispositions, we display dispositions to respond appropriately to the evidence, for example, forming beliefs or other social attitudes that are fitting with the evidence.[16] The current proposal is that an approach to epistemic evaluation that is focused on these dispositions can capture the nature of the dilemma that we face with respect to stereotypes.

By focusing attention on dispositions, evaluative dispositionalism draws attention to how people can acquire problematic stereotypes as a result of displaying good epistemic dispositions. For example, people can acquire a stereotype associating scientific expertise more strongly with men than women, or a stereotype associating being a barrister with being a man and white, by responding to evidence available in their society about the demographics in science or the law. Someone who is disposed to form beliefs and other social attitudes that reflect the makeup of our social environments can be viewed as possessing a positive epistemic disposition. They would be adopting a policy that would produce good epistemic results, i.e., true social beliefs or accurate social judgements, across many settings.

In addition to this, focusing on the dispositions associated with harbouring a stereotype draws attention to how people are disposed, under circumstances in which stereotypes are applied, to display biased responses to evidence. Due to harbouring stereotypes, people are disposed to notice and remember only a biased subset of evidence, to misinterpret ambiguous behaviour as unambiguous, develop uninformative explanations of behaviour, and to fail to give good quality testimony uptake and credit. These are each poor epistemic dispositions that are associated with harbouring stereotypes, even those that reflect aspects of social reality.

Combining these two points gets to the heart of the dilemma that we face with respect to stereotypes that reflect aspects of social reality: even if we respond to evidence found in our social environment when acquiring these social attitudes, thereby displaying good epistemic dispositions, we can be disposed, due to harbouring the stereotypes, to make biased responses to information about individual social actors and events.

[16] There are other discussions within epistemology that focus on the dispositions that are displayed in coming to believe something. Virtue theorists argue that beliefs or inquiries leading to beliefs can be judged positively only if the believer or inquirer displays positive dispositions in the process of belief formation or inquiry (e.g. Sosa 1991, 2007; Zagzebski 1996). Maria Lasonen-Aarnio (2010, 2020) and Timothy Williamson (forthcoming) both argue that it is possible to explain people's responses to some philosophical cases in terms of people focusing in their evaluations of beliefs on the dispositions manifest in their formation. Meanwhile, Robert Audi (1994) argues that dispositions to believe count towards our rationality: whether or not I am rational depends in part upon what I am disposed to believe, e.g. am I disposed to believe p if I entertain the thought that p? Each of these positions has something in common with evaluative dispositionalism because each highlights the relevance of dispositions to epistemic evaluations. However, evaluative dispositionalism is distinctive because it (a) is prescriptive and (b) focuses on both the dispositions manifested in coming to harbour a stereotype *and* those possessed as a result of harbouring a stereotype.

When viewed with a focus on the epistemic dispositions, the epistemic dilemma relating to stereotyping initially appears to be intractable. This is because evaluative dispositionalism emphasises how one is susceptible to displaying poor dispositions whether or not one harbours and applies a stereotype.

It is important to note, however, that evaluative dispositionalism also contributes to an understanding of how we can respond to the epistemic dilemma. Evaluative dispositionalism highlights the importance of keeping track of how we are disposed to respond to information about individual social actors and events due to the stereotypes that we harbour. It encourages us, for example, to consider whether we are noticing or remembering a person's behaviour in a way that is fitting with a stereotype relating to their social group. If we develop an increased awareness of the types of dispositions that we might manifest as a result of stereotyping then there is the potential to control or correct for the operation of these dispositions, so that we can harbour stereotypes that generalise about social groups without suffering (as many) epistemic costs as a result.

The evaluative dispositionalist approach also encourages us to accept that sometimes it can be best from an epistemic perspective to try to avoid stereotyping even if we have acquired a stereotype by displaying good epistemic dispositions, that is, by responding to evidence in our environment about demographic regularities. Evaluative dispositionalism therefore provides reason for us to reflect upon and critically evaluate even those stereotyping attitudes that we believe to have been formed by manifesting good epistemic dispositions.

5. Conclusion

It can be profitable to evaluate the epistemic value of believing or harbouring a stereotype by considering both (a) the dispositions manifest in the acquisition of the stereotype, and (b) the dispositions that are possessed as a result of harbouring the stereotype. One of the pay-offs of adopting this method of evaluation is that it is possible to fully comprehend the epistemic dilemma that we face with regard to stereotypes that reflect social realities. Whereas other approaches to epistemic evaluation have the potential to obscure aspects of the epistemic dilemma that we face, the evaluative dispositionalist approach outlined here illuminates the contours of the dilemma.

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