

An Introduction to Implicit Bias: Knowledge, Justice, and the Social Mind

Book Proposal

Erin Beeghly, PhD

erin.beeghly@utah.edu

Assistant Professor, University of Utah

Alex Madva, PhD

ammadva@cpp.edu

Assistant Professor, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

1) Introduction & Aims

It is now well-established that unintentional or unreported biases shape all aspects of social life. Imagine walking through a grocery store. The smaller the floor tiles, research shows, the slower people tend to walk. The slower people walk, the more they buy. These unconscious biases are well-known to marketers and consumer psychologists. Yet store shoppers do not notice the ways in which the floor's tile-size affects how they walk or their spending decisions.

Examples such as this are only the tip of the iceberg. Increasingly, psychologists cite unconscious mental processes to explain persistent social inequities and injustices in a broad range of contexts, including educational, corporate, medical, and informal contexts (Valian 1997; Fricker 2007; Antony 2012; Saul, 2013; Matthew 2015; Madva 2016). Implicit biases have been invoked to explain heightened police violence against black US citizens, as well as subtle forms of discrimination in the criminal justice system and underrepresentation of women and people of color in the workplace. Now a popular buzz word, "implicit bias" was even discussed by likes of Hillary Rodham Clinton and Donald Trump during the 2016 U.S. Presidential debates.

Our handbook is the first philosophical introduction for beginners on topic of implicit bias. It addresses fundamental questions about such biases, including:

- What is implicit bias?
- How do implicit biases relate to other, more familiar mental states, such as beliefs, desires, and intentions?
- What is 'implicit' about implicit bias?
- How do implicit biases relate to explicit biases and prejudices?
- How do implicit biases compromise our knowledge of others and social reality?
- How do implicit biases affect our social and political institutions, and what can we do to combat these influences?

No comparable volume currently exists. Much of the existing philosophical writing on implicit bias is highly technical, in that philosophers often try to explore the implications of implicit bias for sophisticated, longstanding debates about, e.g., moral responsibility or the cognitive architecture of the mind. Other writings attempt to persuade philosophers that implicit

biases are important to specific philosophical debates within, for example, the philosophy of perception.

In contrast, our volume aims to engage smart undergraduates, who may have little or no training in philosophy. We ask our authors—philosophical experts on the topic of bias—to write in an accessible, non-technical style, using engaging examples. Moreover, we cover a broad range of philosophical terrain—including topics in ethics, feminist theory, epistemology, and philosophy of mind. Among these topics, there will be something for everyone.

Our volume is also inclusive in a way that we believe will push forward philosophical discussions about implicit bias. Our volume includes authors who have been critical of common presuppositions within the existing philosophical literature on implicit bias. For example, a key challenge to implicit bias research—voiced by feminist philosophers and philosophers of race—maintains that the focus on individual psychology is at best obfuscatory of, and at worst totally irrelevant to, more fundamental causes of injustice, which are institutional and structural (Young 1990; Cudd 2006, Anderson 2010; Ayala 2015, Haslanger 2015). Similarly, phenomenologists have argued that traditional psychology mistakenly characterizes biases as entirely “in the head” whereas they may instead be actively embodied and socially constituted. Exploring criticisms such as these will ensure that our volume engages a wide range of contemporary philosophers and philosophy, leading towards a richer, less simplistic understanding of implicit bias and its relationship to social institutions and contexts.

Our volume also aims to respond to various skeptics about implicit bias, who have expressed doubts about its philosophical relevance, the quality of the empirical research, and the power of implicit bias to predict “real-world” behavior. As our authors show, thinking about bias leads directly to the deepest and oldest philosophical questions, for example, about our ability to know our own minds, as well as our ability to act in ways that support—rather than undermine—our most cherished ethical and political ideals. Moreover, the book’s fourth chapter argues that the existence of implicit bias is, as top psychologists have put it, “beyond a reasonable doubt” (Jost et al. 2009).

2) Readership

An Introduction to Implicit Bias could be used in lower or upper division philosophy courses in epistemology, ethics, philosophy of mind, political theory, feminist philosophy, or the philosophy of race. Great for beginners, it will include pedagogical features to facilitate classroom use, including initial chapter overviews and suggested reading lists for each chapter. Graduate students will also find it useful, as we draw attention to philosophical questions and puzzles that have not been sufficiently addressed in the existing literature, thereby pointing to exciting areas for future research.

Our book aims to reach a wider academic audience as well. Its interdisciplinary nature and readable—i.e., non-theory laden—prose will make it accessible to legal theorists, psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, as well as political activists and diversity trainers.

The questions with which the book wrestles are, moreover, on the forefront of the public mind in places such as the United States and Western Europe. Books like Kahneman’s *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Banaji and Greenwald’s *Blindspot*, and Malcolm Gladwell’s *Blink*—books about implicit bias and stereotyping—have been bestsellers. The authors in our book use philosophical tools to think more systematically about the epistemic, ethical and political aspects of stereotyping and bias. Anyone interested in these aspects of bias is a potential reader.

3) Competing and similar titles

Our book is unique. We document its special contributions and approach below.

- Brownstein, M. & Saul, J. (2016). *Implicit Bias and Philosophy, Volumes 1 & 2*, Oxford University Press.

These volumes are the closest to our book. However, their contributions are largely pitched to professional philosophers, such that authors are directly intervening in ongoing professional debates. Neither volume purports to give a comprehensive survey of philosophical issues related to implicit bias. The ethical volume is, moreover, predominantly focused on the question of individual moral responsibility, and says less about broader structural concerns.

Our book, in contrast, is pitched to intelligent students who may or may not have a background in philosophy, rather than professional philosophers writing on these topics. The volume is well-balanced, both in terms of its coverage of epistemic and ethical questions. Throughout the book, we also ask our authors to investigate how individual psychology relates to broader social structures.

- Levinson, J. D., & Smith, R. J. (Eds.). (2012). *Implicit racial bias across the law*. Cambridge University Press.

This is an edited volume that focuses specifically on the implications of implicit racial bias for various fields of law. Each chapter is devoted to a different realm of law. Our book primarily asks philosophical—not legal—questions.

- Banaji, M. R., & Greenwald, A. G. (2013). *Blindspot: Hidden biases of good people*. Delacorte Press.

This is Banaji and Greenwald’s attempt to write an introduction to the topic of implicit bias to a broad, popular audience (pitched at the level, roughly, of a Malcolm Gladwell book).

We suspect that beginners “drown in the empirical details” of *Blindspot*. Our introduction—in contrast—aims to keep students engaged with more readable prose, as well as engaging and realistic (and even non-fictional) examples. Our authors also investigate the deeper epistemic and ethical questions that motivate worries about implicit bias in the first place. This philosophical—i.e., critical—aspect is almost entirely lacking in Banaji and Greenwald’s book.

- Kahneman, D. (2013). *Thinking Fast & Slow*. Delacorte Press.

In this best-selling book, Kahneman presents his own—and others’—empirical research about cognitive and affective psychological biases. He also makes suggestions about why biased judgments are ethically problematic. For example, Kahneman writes that,

“resistance to stereotyping (of one cause of biased judgments) is a laudable moral position, but the simplistic idea that resistance is costless is wrong” (169). But Kahneman never explains why resistance to stereotyping as such is morally laudable. Nor does he investigate the forms that resistance to stereotyping could take. Authors in our volume, in contrast, delve into claims such as his and critically examine them. We also have a chapter devoted to individual and collective interventions.

4) Table of Contents

Our book will have an introduction and twelve chapters. These chapters are organized into three broad subject matters: mind, knowledge, and justice. Each chapter will be followed by a list for further reading. We expect the volume to be approximately 90,000 words in total.

Introduction (written by Beeghly and Madva)

PART 1: Mind: Varieties of Bias

Chapter 1: The Psychology of Bias

Chapter 1 surveys accounts of the cognitive structure/s of implicit bias. Are biases beliefs or mere associations, or some alternative? Do they have generic content? What is “implicit” about implicit bias? What is the relationship between implicit and explicit bias? What is the relationship between bias and prejudice?

Confirmed Author: Gabrielle Johnson

Chapter 2: The Embodied Biased Mind

Are implicit biases best understood as “inside the head” of individuals? Many psychologists say yes. But others have rejected this presumption. Chapter 2 explores accounts that say implicit bias cannot be analyzed solely in terms of individual psychology. Might bias be located “in the mind of the world?” How do phenomenological methodologies challenge traditional conceptions of bias? What do increasingly *social* ways of understanding implicit and explicit bias teach us?

Confirmed Author: Céline Leboeuf

PART 2: Knowledge: Epistemic Questions

Chapter 3: Epistemic Evaluations of Bias

We might be less accurate and reliable knowers because we harbor implicit biases. For example, it is often said that biased judgments reflect overgeneralizations based on limited experience, that they are unreliable or insensitive to evidence, or that they are simply false. Is there a unifying epistemic objection present in all morally objectionable cases of bias? Might biased judgments be epistemically rational in some cases? Chapter 3 investigates questions such as these, exploring the relationship between bias and epistemic rationality.

Confirmed Author: Erin Beeghly

Chapter 4: Skepticism about Implicit Bias

Does implicit bias really exist? How much “real-world” behavior does it actually explain? Is the empirical evidence as clearcut and decisive as many social psychologists and philosophers have suggested? In fact, recent political events in the United States and Western Europe suggest that *explicit* prejudice and discrimination are alive and well. While leading views often emphasize that implicit biases are entirely unconscious, perhaps these recent events suggest that biases have been “implicit” simply because most individuals have been unwilling to admit them out loud—until now. Chapter 4 examines skeptical challenges regarding the research and social implications of implicit bias and reflects on the so-called replication crisis in social psychology.

Confirmed Author: Michael Brownstein

Chapter 5: Perception and Bias

Chapter 5 explores the relationships between bias, attention, and perception. What evidence is there that biases—both implicit and explicit—shape what we see? Is perception cognitively permeable, i.e., penetrable? If vision is biased, why—if at all—does this epistemically matter? Would it be an epistemic boon or a curse or something in-between? Must we assume, that is, that the potential for bias to influence our patterns of attention or perception necessarily entails that our resulting beliefs will be less accurate, or is it possible that such biases might improve the ways we perceive, believe, and react to the world?

Confirmed Author: Susanna Siegel

Chapter 6: Epistemic Injustice and Bias

Chapter 6 examines the ways in which implicit biases have been implicated in a range of epistemic injustices, including motivated ignorance, unjust credibility deficits, silencing, and epistemic exploitation. It also asks how helpful it is to raise the problem of implicit—rather than explicit—biases in the context of such injustices. Lastly, should epistemic injustice and oppression be conceived primarily in terms of individual’s biases (e.g., when a police officer fails to believe someone’s testimony because she’s black) or in terms of structural relations (e.g., when social institutions are designed to give some individuals more credibility, as well as greater opportunities to acquire and share knowledge, than others).

Confirmed Authors: Jules Holroyd and Kathryn Puddifoot

Chapter 7: Epistemic Responsibility and Bias

When we make epistemic errors because of bias, should we be held epistemically responsible? Chapter 7 explores questions such as these as it surveys the growing literature on epistemic responsibility, blame, and implicit bias. In doing so, it explores whether claims about epistemic responsibility are best directed towards individuals or groups.

Confirmed Authors: Nancy McHugh and Lacey Davidson

PART 3: Justice: Practical, Ethical, and Political Questions

Chapter 8: Moral Responsibility and Bias

Are individuals morally responsible or blameworthy for harboring or acting on their implicit biases? Chapter 8 explores questions of moral responsibility—questions that have dominated the early philosophical literature on implicit bias—and asks why and how individuals might be held responsible for their biases.

Confirmed Author: Noel Dominguez

Chapter 9: The Specter of Normative Conflict

Do ethical norms demand irrationality? For example, is there an ethical requirement to treat others as individuals which sometimes requires us to ignore our justified beliefs about what is more and less likely to be true of people *qua* member of a certain social group? In an early groundbreaking article on the epistemic costs of implicit bias, Tamar Gendler (2011) says yes. Chapter 9 considers instances of bias in which epistemic and ethical norms supposedly conflict. Are these really cases of deep normative conflict? If not, why not? If yes, how should such conflicts be resolved? Do we really face a tragic normative dilemma because we live in an unjust world, as Gendler claims?

Confirmed Author: Rima Basu

Chapter 10: Stereotype-Threat, Identity, and Habit

Implicit biases don't just affect our judgments about other people; they can also negatively influence how we see and judge ourselves. This phenomenon is known as *stereotype threat*, which occurs when being reminded of one's social identity and associated stereotypes leads to anxiety, alienation, and underperformance. Chapter 10 investigates the phenomenon of stereotype threat and introduces readers to different ways of modelling its practical importance, especially as it relates to personal identity and habit.

Confirmed Author: Nathifa Greene

Chapter 11: Structural Analysis & Anti-Individualism

What is the relationship, if any, between appreciation of implicit bias and the structural factors that contribute to discrimination and inequality? Is attention to implicit bias a distraction from more pressing structural concerns, or do implicit biases themselves reflect the ways in which broader social structures and patterns become “imprinted” in individuals' minds and replicated in their everyday social habits and reasoning? How have theorists tried to integrate psychological and structural explanations of injustice? Chapter 11 investigates question such as these, exploring a growing area of interest for both theorists of bias, as well as their critics.

Confirmed Author: Saray Ayala-Lopez

Chapter 12: Individual and Collective Interventions

Is it possible to get rid of implicit biases or—at the very least—reduce their negative impact? If biases are part of normal human cognition, must we throw up our hands and do nothing? Is there empirical evidence that individual or structural inventions make people less biased, or at least less likely to *act* on their biases? Which, if any, inventions are likely to be most effective and fair? How can we reengineer social spaces and institutions to counteract bias and promote more ethical patterns of behavior? How can we reduce the negative impact of implicit bias and background structural injustices on the procedures, decisions, and evaluations being made in medicine, education, criminal justice, and employment? Should we experiment with novel social norms for interpersonal interaction? What kinds of collective movements are possible and desirable for helping to bring about a debiased social world? Chapter 12 investigates questions such as these, looking for answers about how best to cope with both the epistemic and ethical costs of bias.

Confirmed Author: Alex Madva

E. Timeline

We will begin soliciting contributors in May 2017. We will distribute Erin Beeghly's draft of Chapter 3, on the range of epistemic objections to implicit bias, to contributors at the beginning of July 2017. This will serve as a sample to facilitate continuity among the volume's chapters. Contributors will submit chapter synopses by August 2017, which we will read and return to them with feedback in September. Contributors will have an additional 6 months to complete drafts, by March 2018. We editors will then read all contributions, return comments on the chapters by May, and authors would then revise their contributions. That, in addition to the inevitable delays from contributors, means we could realistically return the final manuscript to Routledge in August 2018.

F. Author Biographies

Alex Madva is an assistant professor of philosophy at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. He received his BA in Philosophy and English at Tufts University and his MA and PhD from Columbia University. His research centers on the questions that research in social psychology raises for philosophy of mind, philosophy of race and feminism, and applied ethics, especially prejudice and discrimination. Alex has taught courses including *Race and Racism in Western Thought*, *Feminist Philosophy*, *Feminist Philosophy of Science*, *Cognitive Science*, *Phenomenology*, *Social and Political Philosophy*, *Contemporary Moral Problems*, and upper-division undergraduate and graduate seminars on implicit bias, social psychology, and philosophy.

Publications

"A Plea for Anti-Anti-Individualism: How Oversimple Psychology Misleads Social Policy," (Forthcoming), *Ergo*.

“Stereotypes, Prejudice, and the Taxonomy of the Implicit Social Mind,” (Forthcoming), co-authored with Michael Brownstein (Assistant Professor, John Jay College of Criminal Justice), *Noûs*.

“Why Implicit Attitudes Are (Probably) not Beliefs,” (2016), *Synthese*, 193, 2659–2684.

“Virtue, Social Knowledge, and Implicit Bias,” (2016), *Implicit Bias and Philosophy, Volume 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, eds. Jennifer Saul and Michael Brownstein, Oxford, peer-reviewed.

“The Normativity of Automaticity,” (September 2012), with Michael Brownstein, *Mind and Language*, 27:4, 410-434.

“Ethical Automaticity,” (March 2012), with Michael Brownstein, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 42:1, 67-97.

“Implicit Bias and Latina/os in Philosophy,” (Fall 2016), Special Issue of the APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy, eds. Caroline Arruda and Amy Reed-Sandoval, 16 (1), 8-15.

Erin Beeghly is an assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Utah. She earned a BA in History at UC Berkeley and a BA in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at Oxford University, before getting her PhD in philosophy at UC Berkeley. In 2016-2017, she is the Philip L. Quinn fellow at the National Humanities Center. Her current book project—*What's Wrong With Stereotyping?*—examines the conditions under which judging people by group membership is wrong. She regularly teaches classes on equality and discrimination in the workplace, ethical theories, the philosophy of implicit bias, as well as philosophy in literature.

Publications

“Discrimination and Disrespect” in *The Routledge Handbook to Discrimination*, edited by Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, Forthcoming

“What is a Stereotype? What is Stereotyping?” *Hypatia*, (3) 30, 2015

During 2016-17, Professors Beeghly and Madva are also organizing a series of interdisciplinary conferences called *Bias in Context* with Professor Jules Holroyd at the University of Sheffield. The four conferences in this series bring together researchers from philosophy, political science, law, sociology, and social psychology to discuss the interface between individualistic and structural explanations of injustice. The third of these events will be held at the University of Sheffield in January 2017, and the final conference will be held at the University of Utah in October 2017.