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Implicit Bias and the Use of Evidentialism vs Reliabilism

What is implicit bias? And how exactly does it affect the way we perceive the world? Most importantly, if it has strong effects on perception, what philosophical ramifications does that have on our beliefs? These questions posed in the cognitive science field by philosopher Susanna Siegel should have very serious consideration by everyday people so that we understand and know our world better.

To understand Siegel's position on implicit bias we should first set out to define the term. Implicit bias is a reference to unconscious attitudes and stereotypes that affect the way we live in the real world. Simple examples of implicit bias include the stereotypes of Caribbean men being heartbreakers, or blondes being dumb. More serious ones such as black Americans being dangerous or Mexicans all being in drug cartels can have detrimental influence on how we interact with these people. Herein lies the issues that Siegel highlights. She contends that racial biases affect two areas; the content of perceptual experience and the role of perceptual experience in forming beliefs. Putting it into a practical context, this would mean that if someone has a racial bias, it will directly influence the very things they perceive when they experience the world. It does not mean they are seeing something that is not there, rather it is that the way they experience what or who is in front of them is filtered through a lens of bias. This lens does not permit the experienter to perceive how the world is presented in front of them accurately. In this way, bias adds non-existent aspects of reality to the perceiver and takes away pivotally true aspects of reality. If the first premise is true, then the second follows congruently. Because our

beliefs are made up by the way we perceive things, the bias becomes the primary scope of our beliefs. And if the content of our perceptions are biased and untrue, it leads to false beliefs.

Siegel, in a philosophical sense, is concerned with the epistemological consequences of having biased perceptions and in turn biased beliefs. Epistemology is the study of knowledge, its nature and the rationality that allows us to acquire and justify it. To further understand the concepts of epistemology and apply it to Siegel's views we should break down the nature of knowledge into three branches of belief, justification, and truth. In the context of implicit bias, epistemology questions the validity of our perceptions and beliefs as true and justified. According to epistemology, if a belief is true and accurate then it must be justified by either two avenues, evidentialism and reliabilism. Evidentialism means that our belief is justified and stands as true when they are based off of evidence whilst reliabilism are beliefs that are justified by being reached through reliable methods. The philosophical issue of using perception to justify beliefs as true is clear when understanding the influence of bias. If someone uses their perception as evidence to justify a belief, Siegel believes that since implicit bias can have an effect, it can be epistemically invalid. In the same manner, using perception as a reliable method for creating beliefs will also be contentious when the factor of implicit bias is identified. Because epistemically two contradicting truths can't exist one almost certainly is not justified. Siegel would argue that the reason it is not justified is because there is a perception issue at play. Of course Siegel specifically applies this rationality to racial bias, but it clearly has a broader scope that includes other issues. The work Siegel has cut out is one where implicit bias is removed from our perceptions so that we understand the world as it is, which in turn would lead us to have better beliefs and live more ethically.