

Lesson 8

Sexual Stereotypes

Reading 1

Excerpts from Lawrence Blum (2004).

Blum, L. (2004). Stereotypes and stereotyping: A moral analysis. *Philosophical Papers*, 33(3), 251-298.

“A stereotype is a kind of generalization, linking a group to one or more general traits (Blacks as lazy, etc.). By and large, the literature on stereotypes (both social psychological and culture) agrees that the generalizations in question are false or misleading, and I think this view generally accords with the popular usage. It is false, or at least misleading to say, that Jews are cheap, Blacks lazy, Asians good at math, women emotional, and so on. The falseness of stereotypes is part of, and is a necessary condition of what is objectionable about stereotypes in general” (p. 256).

“While not necessarily wholly rejecting the idea that stereotypes are false or misleading, it is nevertheless sometimes said that stereotypes have a “kernel (or grain) of truth.’...Some say that the stereotype ‘Jews are cheap’ has a kernel of truth because some Jews are cheap. But on that reasoning, every ethnic group could be stereotyped as cheap, since some members of every ethnic group are cheap. But stereotypes imply that, if Xs are Y (e.g., Jews are cheap), this is something distinctive about Xs (there being Y, e.g., Jews being cheap). If there is to be a kernel of truth in the stereotype, it would have to preserve this distinctiveness. So, if it turns out that, on the proposed kernel of truth formulation (‘some Xs are Y’), many, or even almost every, group is also Y, this proposed formulation cannot be accepted as preserving a kernel of truth” (pp. 256-257).

“Although the scope of stereotypical generalizations is not generally specified—‘Jews are cheap’, ‘women are overemotional’, ‘Irish are drunkards’ is the typical form of a stereotypical generalization—in general they imply that the stereotypic attribute holds for at least a large majority of the target group, if not all, and in some sense is seen as applicable to the group as a collective entity. (Generally, those members to whom the stereotype does not apply are seen as ‘exceptions’. In this way, the link between the attribute and the group itself is preserved.) A merely comparative generalization goes nowhere near establishing that almost all members of the target group possess the stereotype trait, since a higher percentage of Xs than Zs could be Y (Jews than Christians could be wealthy, for example) without it being the case that a large percentage of Xs are Y (e.g., Jews are wealthy)” (p. 259).

"Part of the badness of both stereotypes and non-stereotypic false or unwarranted generalization is purely epistemic; it is epistemically bad to hold false and inadequately warranted beliefs. But when the beliefs are about other persons there can be a moral dimension to false and unwarranted belief as well. Beliefs are typically part of our forms of regard for other persons. I may disrespect or do someone an injustice by thinking ill of her—for example, by seeing him as stingy, or stupid, without adequate evidence for

doing so. Respect for other persons, an appreciation of others' humanity and their full individuality is inconsistent with certain kinds of beliefs about them. So false beliefs can be bad even if they do not contribute to harm to their targets. In addition, false beliefs can contribute to harm to their targets—for example, by providing rationales for treating others badly, rationales on which their holders, or others influenced by the presence of the rationale, act" (p. 262)

"Stereotyping involves seeing individual members through a narrow and rigid lens of group-based image, rather than being alive to the range of characteristics constituting each member as a distinct individual. Independent of the particular stereotype I might have of a group, all stereotyping involves this masking of individuality" (p. 271).

"A different bad [of stereotyping] is related to viewing the members of the stereotyped group as more different from other groups (and especially the stereotyper's group) than they actually are. To see a group through a stereotype is to intensify one's sense of its and its members' 'otherness'. It is to experience a sense of moral distance from them. ...As groups stereotype one another, they fail to experience a sense of commonality, of mutual identification—for example, of a shared civic fate, or of common humanity" (pp. 275-276).