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Stereotypes And Stereotyping: A Moral Analysis

Lawrence Blum

Abstract: Stereotypes are false or misleading generalizations about groups held in a manner that renders them largely, though not entirely, immune to counterevidence. In doing so, stereotypes powerfully shape the stereotyper's perception of stereotyped groups, seeing the stereotypic characteristics when they are not present, failing to see the contrary of those characteristics when they are, and generally homogenizing the group. A stereotyper associates a certain characteristic with the stereotyped group—for example Blacks with being athletic—but may do so with a form of cognitive investment in that association that does not rise to the level of a belief in the generalization that Blacks are athletic. The cognitive distortions involved in stereotyping lead to various forms of moral distortion, to which moral philosophers have paid inadequate attention. Some moral distortions are common to all stereotypes—moral distancing, failing to see members of the stereotyped group as individuals, and failing to see diversity within that group. Other moral distortions vary with the stereotype. Some stereotypes attribute a desirable characteristic to a group (being good students, for example) and, *ceteris paribus*, are less objectionable than ones that attribute undesirable characteristics. Yet the larger historical and social context may attach undesirable characteristics to the desirable ones—being boring and overfocused on academic pursuits, for example. The popular film *The Passion of the Christ* purveys negative stereotypes of Jews that have been historically powerful and damaging along with negative portrayals of Romans that have not.

Although the idea of stereotype was introduced into English only in the 20th century, it is now widely used in ordinary parlance. In general, to call something a 'stereotype', or to say that someone is engaging in 'stereotyping', is to condemn what is so characterized. Stereotype generally has a negative valence. What is the character of the value judgments accounting for this valence? Are these judgments warranted? Moral philosophers have given scant attention to these questions. Two fields have dominated the study of stereotypes. Cultural and media studies has examined the content of culturally salient stereotypes of particular groups, the processes by which these are historically and socially constructed and disseminated throughout society, and the social functions served by stereotypes. Social psychology has looked at the

individual psychic processes involved in constructing, holding, and operating with stereotypes. Both these literatures have implications for the question of what exactly is wrong with stereotypes and stereotyping, but this normative question requires the tools of moral philosophy to give it appropriate focus. This is what I aim to do here.

Stereotypes as cultural entities, and stereotyping as individual psychic process

The two disciplinary approaches suggest an important distinction regarding stereotypes. What we normally think of as stereotypes involve not just any generalization about or image of a group, but widely-held and widely-recognized images of socially salient groups—Jews as greedy, wealthy, scholarly; Blacks as violent, musical, lazy, athletic, unintelligent; women as emotional, nurturant, irrational; Asian-Americans and Asians as good at math and science, hard working, a 'model minority'; Irish as drinking too much; English as snooty, Poles as stupid; and so forth. When we say that group X is stereotyped in a certain way, or that 'there is a stereotype of group X,' we generally refer to the recognizable presence in a certain sociocultural context of salient images of that group—more precisely, of associations between a group label and a set of characteristics. In this sense, stereotypes are cultural entities, widely held by persons in the culture or society in question, and widely recognized by persons who may not themselves hold the stereotype. I will refer to stereotypes in this sense as 'cultural stereotypes'.¹

¹ Stereotypes do not exhaust objectionable cultural imagery of groups. Some images of groups are simply demeaning without attributing specific characteristics to the groups. For example, American popular culture has, especially in the past, utilized images of Asians with buck teeth, speaking a kind of pidgin English [the Chinese character played by Mickey Rooney in the film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is an example], or Blacks with huge lips and bug-eyes, which makes them the butt of humor. The images depict the group in a demeaning and insulting manner (and generally, though not always, intend to do so), but they are distinct from stereotypes. They do not particularly attempt to associate the group in question with a general trait meant to apply to the members of the group. They are more like the visual, or representational, equivalent of an ethnic slur, an insulting name for a group (like kike, spic, nigger, Polack, fag). Sometimes the word 'stereotype' is used broadly

Social psychology studies the psychic processes involved in individuals' constructing and using stereotypes. But the stereotypes in question operating at this individual level do not have to be cultural stereotypes. An individual can construct a purely personal, idiosyncratic stereotype of a group. For example, Jim might form a stereotype of Finnish-Americans as dishonest, perhaps based on some experience he has had with a few Finnish-Americans. Jim's image of Finnish-Americans as dishonest functions as a stereotype for him. He assumes that Finnish-Americans will be dishonest, and he applies this assumption to Finnish-Americans whom he meets or hears about. When he encounters a Finnish-American who appears to be honest, he either does not accept this appearance, or allows exceptions to his image of Finnish-Americans without changing his basic personal image of Finnish-Americans as dishonest. He expects Finnish-Americans to be dishonest. And so on. It is natural to say that Jim stereotypes Finnish-Americans, and he would naturally develop the deleterious attitudes we often associate with stereotyping—hostility, prejudice, aversion, and so on. Yet there is (as far as I am aware) no cultural stereotype of Finnish-Americans as dishonest.

We must distinguish, then, between stereotypes as culturally salient entities, and stereotyping as a psychic process that individuals engage in with respect to groups.² At this point, we must distinguish two aspects of that psychic process. The first is how stereotypes originate in individual

to refer to any objectionable image of a group; but stereotypes in the sense I am referring to in this paper operate by a particular logic of attribution of characteristics to group members that does not apply to visual slurs.

² I am taking groups as the target of stereotypes. In ordinary parlance, the targets are a broader range of entities. Individual entities, for example, can be said to be stereotyped, meaning that in the public mind certain general characteristics are generally attributed to the entity in question (A recent *New York Times* article is entitled, 'Boston Rises Above Unflattering Stereotypes' July 25, 2004, by Pam Belluck.), in a manner analogous to such attributions of groups. Moral issues about stereotyping do not apply in exactly the same way to groups, especially salient social groups, as to individuals; for example, the way stereotypes about groups bear on views and treatment of individuals within the group have no precise analogy in the case of individuals.

minds. The second is how stereotypes, once they have taken hold psychically, operate to shape the way the stereotyped group is viewed by the individual in question. On the first issue, some research locates the source of stereotype and prejudice in individual pathology—scapegoating, displacement, resentment, defensive rigidity, and the like.³ Without attempting to engage with this approach, I believe that the cultural dimension is more fundamental than the individual. Most stereotypical images of groups originate in a social or cultural process. Normal, unpathological individuals absorb stereotypes from the world around them just because they live in that world, not because of their specific personality traits.⁴

A different proffered explanation for individuals acquiring stereotypes is that they arise from individuals generating images of groups out of their own experience—for example, that they encounter or hear about several Jews who are stingy, or Blacks who are violent, and

3 A sophisticated, recent account of the individual pathology approach is Elizabeth Young-Buehl, *The Anatomy of Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

4 To elaborate just a bit: I think the individual pathology approach is much more plausible with regard to prejudice than stereotyping. The two are closely linked in popular thinking, and the psychological study of stereotypes is meant to, and does, contribute to an understanding of prejudice (and vice versa). The link is evident. People who are prejudiced against a group generally hold negative stereotypes of that group. Nevertheless, stereotyping is not the same as prejudice, and neither requires the other. Prejudice involves a negative affect toward a group and a disposition to devalue it and its members. Stereotyping does not always involve prejudice in this sense. For example, Jones might stereotype Asians as good at math; such a view does not characteristically support a negative feeling toward Asians (although it may—for example, resentment at their success). More generally, even holding a negative stereotype of group X does not always prompt negative affect toward group X. Someone might regard Poles as stupid (cf. Helmreich, *The Things They Say Behind Your Back*, 166-171), or Asians as bad drivers, yet not feel negatively toward those groups. Moreover, even if a stereotype is negatively evaluatively charged, for a particular carrier of that stereotype, this charge need not always trigger the corresponding negative affect. Stereotyping is, I believe, much more common than prejudice, and the latter seems to me more amenable to an explanation in terms of individual pathology than the former, although of course there are widely shared and culturally transmitted prejudices, just as there are cultural stereotypes; so individual psychology can never constitute the full explanation of why people in a given society hold the prejudices they do. Even less can it explain stereotypes.

they generalize these characteristics to the whole group.⁵ This is the way that the image of Finnish-Americans as dishonest took root in Jim's mind. But, given divergent individual experiences with a given group, it would be difficult to explain the established fact of widely-shared and commonly recognized stereotypes of any given group on the supposition that they arise from uncoordinated individual experiences of a given group. For the same reason, it is implausible to think that cultural stereotypes arise from an aggregation of individual stereotypes.

Walter Lippmann, who first employed the concept of a stereotype in relation to human groups, seems much closer to the mark in saying precisely the opposite—that the existence of the stereotype in the culture shapes the stereotyper's perception of the group in question, so that the alleged characteristic (aggressiveness, dishonesty, emotionality) is 'seen' in the group and its members, whether it is actually present or not. 'For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.'⁶

The Falseness of Stereotypes

Regarding the psychic functioning of stereotypes once they are in place, culturally generated stereotypes are no different from individually generated ones; for a cultural image or generalization to be a stereotype is for it to operate in a certain manner psychologically within individual minds. Let us spell out the characteristics of stereotypes as they operate

⁵ Stangor and Schaller refer to a tradition in the psychological study of stereotypes in which it is assumed that 'stereotypes are learned, and potentially changed, primarily through the information that individuals acquire through direct contact with members of other social groups.' Charles Stangor and Mark Schaller, 'Stereotypes as Individual and Collective Representations', in Stangor (ed.), *Stereotypes and Prejudice* Philadelphia, Penn.: Psychology Press, 2000), 66. See also David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1993), 126.

⁶ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press, 1997 [1922]), 54-55.

at the individual level. 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 cultural) agrees that the generalizations in question are false or misleading, and I think this view generally accords with popular usage.⁷ 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 stereotype is part of, and is a necessary condition of, what is objectionable about stereotypes in general. I will use the term stereotype only in regard to false or misleading generalizations.

Do Stereotypes Have a 'Kernel of Truth'?

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'. I think this expression muddies the waters about the bad of stereotypes, and the matter deserves some attention. 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 will have to preserve this distinctiveness. So, if it turns out that, on the

7 However, some commentators use 'stereotype' in a way that does not require the generalization involved in the stereotype to be false or misleading. For example, P. Oakes, S.A. Haslam, and J.C. Turner, in *Stereotyping and Social Reality* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1994), say 'Stereotyping is the process of ascribing characteristics to people on the basis of their group memberships' (1); Stangor, 'Volume Overview', in Stangor: 'Stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics of groups of individuals' (1).

I am not claiming that such an account is flatly false, but only that my own account of stereotypes as necessarily false or misleading makes it easier to draw a clear distinction between false/unwarranted and true/warranted generalizations about groups, a distinction with both epistemic and moral import. It should be noted that one impetus behind some of the definitions just mentioned is a view that emphasizes the similarity or continuity between the mental processes involved in stereotyping and those involved in the more basic mental operation of categorization. This issue is discussed below, note 18.

proposed kernel of truth formulation ('some Xs are Y'), many, or even almost every, group is also Y, this proposed formulation can not be accepted as preserving a kernel of truth.⁸

A second, related, reason that 'some Xs are Y' can not be a kernel of truth in 'Xs are Y' is that 'some Xs are Y' is entirely compatible with *most* Xs *not* being Y (most Jews are not avaricious, most Hispanics care about education, and so on). But the truth—even a kernel of it—in the stereotype Xs are Y can not be compatible with most Xs not being Y.

A different proffered basis for the kernel of truth idea—one that is responsive to the comparative dimension of general attribution—is that stereotypes correspond to the comparatively greater presence of the stereotypic trait in the target group than in other groups. On this view, for example, the grain of truth in the stereotype of Irish people as alcoholics is the alleged greater statistical presence of alcoholism in Irish people;⁹ in Blacks as unintelligent, that, on the average, African Americans score lower on tests purporting to measure intelligence than other groups on the average; in Jews as money-grubbing, that Jews do have higher incomes on the average than many other ethnic groups.

In criticizing stereotypes, one should not fall into the trap of denying often regrettable but sound comparative statistical generalizations about

8 Frederick Schauer discusses this point. Suppose that by some measure, it were determined that 60% of humans are honest and, further, that 60% of Swedes are also honest. It would then, Schauer points out, be misleading to say 'Swedes are honest.' 'A key feature of a sound generalization is its comparative dimension.' (Frederick Schauer, *Profiles, Probabilities, and Stereotypes* [Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap/Harvard, 2003], 116). I don't think Schauer means to deny that specialized contexts could render such generalizations meaningful without being implicitly comparative to a norm. For example, if someone questioned whether Swedes were honest, a finding that 60% of them were honest would be meaningful, even if that was the norm for all human beings.

9 William Helmreich supports this particular account of the Irish/alcoholism stereotype with several studies plausibly regarded as backing up the generalization that there is greater alcoholism among Irish people than other groups—a 1947 study that showed hospital admission for 'alcohol psychosis' to be three to eight times greater for people of Irish descent than for five other American ethnic groups, a study in the 1960's finding Irish-Americans to be most likely of all studied ethnic groups to report drinking at least twice a week. (Helmreich, *The Things They Say Behind Your Back: Stereotypes and the Myths Behind Them* [New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1984], 143f).

particular groups. Comparative statistics, for example, about income, wealth, home ownership, health, crime commission, various measures of educational attainment (grades, highest degree earned, standardized test scores), and so on, are vital measures of the social well-being of groups and individuals, and arguably enable us to assess forms and levels of injustice in societies, even though some might use such information in an attempt to support unwarranted and demeaning characterizations of the groups in question.¹⁰ (At the same time, one should also be wary of the many ways that a given statement of a generalization can be misleading, either because of the use of emotive, imprecise or contested terminology—'cheap', 'intelligent', 'alcoholic', and so on—or because one's reason for accepting the generalization is a prior adherence to the

10 Although valid generalizations are very different from stereotypes (or so I am arguing), valid group generalizations present normative 'appropriate use' issues in their own right. Some of these issues bear some resemblance to problems with stereotypes. For example, Latinos/Hispanics have the largest school drop-out rate of any major ethnracial group in the United States. (See discussion of several studies to this effect, but with significantly different rates, in Abigail Thernstrom and Stephan Thernstrom, *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003], 106-08.) But this does not make it appropriate for a teacher of a given Latino student to treat that student as if he were likely to drop out. On the other hand, it might make it appropriate for the teacher to be especially sensitive to signs that a Latino student is having trouble in school, and to intervene earlier than she would with respect to a student from a less at-risk group—for example, to probe the student's home and personal situation to see what she might do to make his dropping out less likely.

The ethical and epistemological issues involved in the deploying of valid generalizations in relation to individual members of the groups in question is sometimes confused with the issue of the way that stereotypes distort treatment of individuals. They are different but related issues. Schauer compellingly argues that the fear of stereotyping has led to an inappropriate suspicion of all generalizations. He argues persuasively throughout his book that it is often rational and appropriate to base policies concerning groups on valid generalizations about those groups, even though one knows that this will result in some individual members of the group being treated in a manner at odds with their individual characteristics. (For example, it is rational to have a policy of requiring pilots to retire at age 60, based on a valid generalization about the correlation between age and piloting skills, even though some former pilots who are over 60 would be as good pilots as those who are allowed in (i.e. under 60) by the policy. *Profiles, Probabilities, and Stereotypes*, Chapter 4.) Although Schauer successfully argues that generalizations are essential to any serious social policy, he does not sufficiently differentiate generalizations from stereotypes.

stereotype.)

Sometimes talk of the 'kernel of truth' is meant simply to call attention to these regrettable but true or warranted generalizations. But this way of doing so is, in general, misleading. 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.¹¹ (Generally, those members to whom the stereotyper does not apply the stereotype 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).

One might reply that the 'kernel of truth' idea does not claim that the stereotypical generalization with its scope as stated or implied (all, most) is true, but only that there is a more modest form of the asserted link that is true. But it seems to me that what the comparative generalizations actually say are, generally, so far from the implied scope of the original stereotype that we would do best to abandon the 'kernel of truth' formulation entirely and say that the stereotype is false or misleading, but that some comparative statistical generalization of such-and-such a

¹¹ Lawrence Bobo suggests that, historically, stereotypes of Blacks by Whites in the U.S. did tend to take a categorical form, implying something like a universal generalization—all Blacks are this or that—but that contemporary stereotypes of Blacks are not as broad in scope (Lawrence Bobo, 'Racial Attitudes and Relations at the Close of the Twentieth Century', in N. Smelser, W.J. Wilson, and F. Mitchell (eds.), *America Becoming: Racial Trends and Their Consequences*, Vol 1 [Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2001, 275f]. The older, more categorical, conception of stereotypes lives on in the idea that stereotypes have disappeared because they currently seldom take the form of explicitly targeting every member of a group.

form is true (when it is). Perhaps Black Americans score less than Whites on certain standardized tests. But it is misleading to say that this is a kernel of truth in the stereotype 'Blacks are of low intelligence'.

The kernel of truth formulation is misleading for other reasons as well. First, many and perhaps most people who hold stereotypes are not aware of empirical support for a related comparative statistical generalization. They think of Irish people as drunkards without having the faintest idea about comparative statistics on alcohol treatment among different ethnic groups. Second, the target characteristic in many stereotypes is generally too imprecise, contested, or emotive to readily lend itself to straightforward empirical investigation. The characteristics used in the comparative generalizations are seldom equivalent to them. 'Being treated for alcoholism' is not the same as 'being an alcoholic' (much less the less clear and more loaded 'being a drunkard'). Scores on intelligence tests are not equivalent to 'intelligence'. 'Rich', 'stupid', 'aggressive', 'cares about education', and other terms standardly found in stereotypes, are often too vague to admit of ready empirical demonstration. This is why stereotypic generalizations can not always be said to be flatly false, but are more felicitously thought of as misleading. They do not state something sufficiently definite to be false.¹²

The fixity and resistance to counterevidence of stereotypes

Thus, stereotypes are, or involve, not merely generalizations, but false or misleading generalizations, i.e., overgeneralizations. A further feature of stereotypes is suggested by the linguistic history of the word 'stereotype'

¹² A different possible basis for the 'kernel of truth' idea is that there is an historical explanation for the link between the target group and the target characteristic in the stereotype. Often stereotypes do have historical explanations, but the explanations frequently do not bear on any current empirical truth to the stereotype. Stereotypes of Black inferiority were generated to rationalize slavery and segregation. This explanation provides no support for the stereotype. Even when the explanation bears on current realities—for example, Jews developed commercial enterprises and traditions because they were forbidden from many other occupations—the truth in the explanation is, as in the 'comparative generalization' case, too distant from what is implied in the stereotype to say that the former is a kernel of truth in the latter.

in the area of printing and typography, where it referred to text cast into rigid form for the purposes of repetitive use.¹³ This feature is the rigidity or fixedness of stereotypes.¹⁴

This fixity or rigidity is not an attribute of the generalization itself, but of the way it is held by the individual cognizer. One part of this mode of cognizing is that members of the stereotyped group are regarded as fundamentally the same; this dimension will be discussed later. Another dimension of the fixedness is that the cognizer tends to be resistant to evidence of the falsity or misleadingness of the generalization. When presented with evidence contrary to the generalization, he characteristically fails to revise the generalization appropriately. If someone holds the stereotype that Jews are stingy, and he is presented with numerous instances of generous, or at least non-stingy, Jews, his holding that image of Jews as a stereotype means that he will tend to resist adequately revising his view of Jews in light of this new evidence.¹⁵ There is an important difference, then, between stereotyping a group and merely making a false generalization about it.

The stereotyper might resist such counterevidence in one of several distinct ways. He might fail to perceive contrary evidence in the first place. He fails to perceive the non-stinginess of Jews whom he

13 Michael Pickering, *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 9.

14 Examples of accounts of stereotyping that emphasize their fixity or rigidity are, for example, 'Whether favorable or unfavorable, a stereotype is an exaggerated belief associated with a category ... [I]t is rather a fixed idea that accompanies a category'. (Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, [Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1958], 191) 'A stereotype is an unvarying form or pattern, fixed or conventional expression, notion, character, mental pattern, etc., having no individuality, as though cast from a mold.' (Larry May, *The Morality of Groups: Collective Responsibility, Group-Based Harm, and Corporate Rights* [Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1987], 136, citing Webster's dictionary). 'A stereotype is an exaggerated belief, oversimplification, or uncritical judgment about a category.' (Helmreich, *The Things They Say*, 2)

15 This evidence-resistance is only a tendency on the part of the stereotyper. Sometimes a stereotyper is able to 'take in' evidence against a stereotype that he holds, in a way that causes him to question or even abandon the stereotype. But this scenario obtains much less frequently than it does of a mere false belief held in a non-stereotypic, non-rigid, manner.

encounters. He either interprets non-stinginess as stinginess; or simply fails to notice it at all. Alternatively, he might recognize some individual exceptions yet continue to connect 'stinginess' to 'Jews' as a group. He might explicitly weaken the scope of the generalization (e.g. from 'all Jews' to 'most Jews'). Finally, he might acknowledge the counterevidence in the moment yet carry on with the exact same stereotype once the encounter has passed. All these are manifestations of the fixity or rigidity that many accounts of stereotypes attempt to capture.

The evidence-resistance of stereotypes is important to what is bad about stereotypes, beyond the holding of false beliefs. I will give a more detailed account of that bad in the second part of the paper (pp. 271ff), but a brief account is pertinent here. Part of the badness of both stereotypes and non-stereotypic false or unwarranted generalizations 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.¹⁶ 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.

If believing can be morally problematic, we can see why stereotyping

16 W.E. Jones, 'Indignation, Immodesty, and Immoral Believing,' (unpublished manuscript) defends the view that false beliefs about others can constitute a form of misrelationship to them. Such an argument could be construed as implying a broader one—that any form of cognitive investment in a proposition can constitute a form of misrelationship to other persons. This would, then, include stereotyping, which (as I argue below) requires a level or form of cognitive investment that need not rise to the level of belief.

is more morally problematic than false and unwarranted generalizations, when both have the same content (i.e. the same target group and target characteristic [Jews/stingy, Blacks/musical, women/emotional, and so on]). Let me draw the contrast more explicitly between stereotyping and holding a false or unwarranted generalization but in a non-stereotypic manner. Suppose I am taught that people who live in a certain part of my country—the Midwest—are unfriendly, and I believe this, although I have never actually met anyone from that area. Then I travel to the Midwest and find that some people there are friendly and others unfriendly, and the proportion of each does not seem noticeably different from other regions with which I am familiar. Suppose I immediately abandon the belief that Midwesterners are unfriendly. I say to myself, 'I was taught that Midwesterners are unfriendly, but I never had an adequate basis for that belief, and now I see that it is incorrect.'

Initially, I held an unwarranted generalization that Midwesterners are friendly; but I did not hold it as a stereotype, or in a stereotypical fashion. Why not? Because the generalization did not shape the way I perceived Midwesterners to anything like the extent that stereotypes do. I was not inclined to see unfriendliness where it did not exist, nor to overlook friendliness where it did. My belief was not resistant to counterevidence the way stereotypic beliefs are. I did see Midwesterners as unfriendly prior to contact with them, and this was a disservice to them. But this general view did not shape my perception of Midwesterners with whom I came in contact.¹⁷

The moral significance of this difference between stereotypic and false but non-stereotypic views of other groups is evident in the case of cultural stereotypes that attribute particularly objectionable features to groups, such as moral faults (dishonesty) or human deficiencies (lack of intelligence). Stereotyping means holding on to one's view of the other in interactions with them in which, in the case of false belief, one's view

¹⁷ The line between holding a false generalization in a stereotypic as contrasted with a non-stereotypical fashion is, however, a blurry rather than a sharp one.

would be corrected through such interaction.

Thus, generalizations or group images can function in either a stereotypic or a non-stereotypic fashion for an individual cognizer. Images that are cultural stereotypes typically function in a stereotypical manner for cognizers who hold those stereotypes; indeed, this is part of what it means to say they are cultural stereotypes. However, they do not do so in every instance. Suppose, for example, that Marion (a non-Black) is taught that Black people are good dancers. This is a familiar image of Blacks in the United States; it is a cultural stereotype. However, it is possible for Marion to hold this image of Blacks in a non-stereotypical fashion. Suppose that as Marion gets to know more Black people, she comes to the conclusion that she has no basis for the view that Blacks are good dancers; in her experience, many Blacks are not good dancers. She abandons her belief that Blacks are good dancers, just as I abandoned my beliefs that Midwesterners are unfriendly in similar circumstances described above. This is not the usual way that a cultural stereotype functions. Most people who think of Blacks as good dancers do not abandon this view so readily in the face of appropriate counterevidence. They continue to think of Blacks as good dancers, even when Blacks who are not good dancers come to their attention. They tend to notice Blacks who are good dancers and to fail to notice ones who are not; perhaps they even see so-so Black dancers as good ones. For them the cultural stereotype operates as an individual stereotype. But for Marion it does not. For her, the image of Blacks as good dancers operates as a non-stereotypical image or generalization, although the cause of her having this image of Blacks in the first place may well be the existence of the cultural stereotype.¹⁸

18 Clearly distinguishing stereotypic and non-stereotypic holdings of generalizations runs contrary to a strand in current thinking about stereotypes, which sees stereotyping as a normal and inevitable cognitive process. For example, 'As perceivers, we employ categories to help impose order and meaning on the steady stream of social stimuli impinging upon us at any given moment. It is both necessary and natural for us to do so. However, once social categories exist, and given a principle of efficiency ... it is likely that we exaggerate the degree of between-group difference and underestimate the degree of within-group

Stereotypes and cognitive investment

Stereotypes, then, are rigid false generalizations (overgeneralizations) about groups. To say that a stereotype is held is to say that the subject has some cognitive investment in the association between the target group and the characteristic in question. How can we more precisely characterize the cognitive relationship between an individual cognizer and a stereotype that he holds? Often stereotypes are held as beliefs, and that is how I have described them up to this point. The holder believes that Jews are dishonest, women emotional, Mexicans lazy. Many white Americans, for example, are perfectly willing to avow negative stereotypic beliefs about African Americans—that they are aggressive, boastful, complaining, lazy, and irresponsible.¹⁹ However, in many social

variation.' (Lawrence Bobo and Michael Massagli, 'Stereotyping and Urban Inequality', in A. O'Connor, C. Tilly, and L. Bobo [eds.], *Urban Inequality: Evidence from Four Cities* [New York: Russell Sage, 2001], 94.). 'Stereotypes and prejudice are the result of social categorization. Social categorization occurs when, rather than thinking about another person as a unique individual, we instead think of the person as a member of a group of people, for instance, on the basis of their physical characteristics ... or other types of categories (as an alcoholic, a policeman, or a schizophrenic).' (Stangor, 'Volume Overview', in Stangor (ed.), *Stereotypes and Prejudice*, 2). 'A long tradition has conceived of stereotyping as an automatic and inevitable consequence of categorization.' (Loretta Lepore and Rupert Brown, 'Category and Stereotype Activation: Is Prejudice Inevitable?' in Stangor, *Stereotypes and Prejudice*, 119).

It is true that some of the cognitive distortions involved in stereotyping are also involved in ordinary categorization—selective attention and memory, expectations of individual members of the categorized group that do not hold of all members, a tendency to exaggerate in-category similarity and out-category difference, and the like. And it is also true that intellectual laziness unrelated to specific stereotyping can serve to keep existing stereotypes in place in individuals' minds, and that any use of general categories runs a risk of rigidifying those categories. Nevertheless there is an important qualitative difference between the mere use of a social group category and the stereotyping of that category, which the definitions above blur; even assuming that categories necessarily entail generalizations about those categories (relating to their criteria of application), there is still an important difference between a true and a false (and warranted and unwarranted) generalization, and between a generalization cognized in an open manner and one cognized in a rigid and closed manner. I have suggested that 'stereotype' be confined to the latter, problematic, forms of generalizing.

¹⁹ Paul Sniderman and Edward Carmines analyze a 1991 survey that finds that 52% of Whites are willing to characterize Blacks as 'aggressive or violent', 42% 'complaining', and 34% 'lazy'. Sniderman and Carmines, *Reaching Beyond Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

contexts in modern Western societies stereotyping is frowned upon, and someone who holds a stereotypic belief might not be willing to avow doing so. A cognizer might not even be aware of holding such beliefs.

In addition, however, stereotypes can also be 'held' at a cognitive level below that of belief. Someone might hold an image or a view of Blacks as prone to violence without ever having formulated that link to herself and affirmed it. A stereotyper *makes an association* between a group (X) and a characteristic (Y), but does not necessarily *believe the generalization* that 'Xs are Y'. The way that cultural stereotypes circulating in the wider society come to take hold of individuals is not primarily through being put to individuals as explicit generalizations that the individual is invited to endorse. Diana T. Meyers puts this point well, referring to stereotypes as 'figurations,' a helpful term that captures the idea of salient imagery about important social groups: 'Culturally entrenched figurations are passed on without obliging anyone to formulate, accept, or reject repugnant negative propositions about any group's standing or self-congratulatory positive propositions about one's own.'²⁰

An individual's behavior may suggest that she has some cognitive investment in a representation that connects a group with a characteristic, without requiring her actually to believe the corresponding generalization. To illustrate with a familiar and depressing example from the United States, Blacks often report that many white people (especially women) grasp their bags or pocket books

University Press, 1997), 61-63. By 'willing to characterize', they mean that the respondent scores six or higher on a ten-point scale in which ten is a 'very good' description (of Blacks) and zero a 'very inaccurate'. It is worth noting here that the instructions to the (White) subjects asks how well the subjects think that an adjective presented to them ('aggressive,' 'lazy') 'describes Blacks as a group' and is 'a description of most Blacks', and includes the qualification, 'Of course, no word fits absolutely everybody [in a group]'. The conception of stereotypes used by these researchers is quite distinct from the older, categorical conception in which stereotypes involve a definitively universal generalization about a group. See above, note 11.

²⁰ Diana T. Meyers, *Subjection and Subjectivity: Psychoanalytic Feminism and Moral Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 53.

closer to them when passing a Black person (especially a man) on the street.²¹ These Whites may not even recognize that they do this; but their action is best explained by their cognitive investment in an image of Blacks as threatening, dangerous, or violent. Or a man might treat women in a manner that suggests that he has little confidence that women can handle positions of authority; he has some investment in the stereotype of women as incapable of leadership.

An individual can discover that she holds a stereotype by reflecting on her behavior, or by finding herself holding expectations of members of a group that she did not realize she held; she might find himself, for example, surprised that an Asian student wants to study literature, and, reflecting on that, realize that she held the stereotype that Asians are only interested in math and science. Of course it will often be quite difficult to tell whether someone actually believes the generalization (albeit unconsciously) or whether she has a lesser degree of cognitive investment in the stereotypic association; and the difference between actual belief and some lesser form of cognitive investment is, in any case, one of degree. But it is possible, and indeed not untypical, for stereotypes to function at sub-belief levels.

Devine on stereotyping vs. personal belief

Patricia Devine, a psychologist, has done important work on stereotypes that speaks to the ethical significance of the distinction between levels of cognitive investment.²² She distinguishes between 'stereotypes' and 'personal beliefs'. The latter are propositions about groups that are consciously endorsed by the cognizer. (Devine does not explore the

21 Black people often report this sort of behavior. See, for example, David Shipler, who interviewed scores of Blacks and Whites: 'White women clutch their purses, cross the street, choose another elevator', *A Country of Strangers: Blacks and Whites in America* (New York: Vintage, 1997), 357.

22 Patricia Devine and Andrew Elliott, 'Are Racial Stereotypes Really Fading? The Princeton Trilogy Revisited', in Stangor (ed.), *Stereotypes and Prejudice* [originally 1995]; P.G. Devine, 'Stereotypes and Prejudice: Their automatic and controlled components', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60, 1989: 5-18.

possibility or possible relevance of unconscious belief.) 'Stereotypes' are what I have called cultural stereotypes—associations between a group and a trait or set of traits. Devine argues that all persons are equally subject to the stereotypes circulating in their society. When asked about stereotypes of particular groups in their society, there will be striking agreement between subjects, suggesting the presence of distinct cultural stereotypes.²³ (However, Devine also argues that the specific content of stereotypes of Blacks, the group on which she focuses most of her work, have changed over time in significant ways).²⁴ Most persons, when 'primed' with the target category (that is, when presented with the target category in an experimental situation, and thus, presumably, in life also), will find the stereotypical associations with that category coming to mind. (Devine claims that when those associations are negative—Jews as cheap, Blacks as aggressive, Asians as taking over, Mexicans as lazy—negative affect will automatically be triggered toward that group as well.) But these stereotypic associations do not (necessarily or typically) involve the cognizer's actual belief in the association.

Devine argues that persons are capable of recognizing the operation of stereotypical associations in their own minds, and of deciding whether to personally endorse them—that is, whether to incorporate them as

23 'Results from our stereotype assessment suggest that (in the U.S.) there is a clear, consistent contemporary stereotype of Blacks and that this stereotype is highly negative in nature.' Devine and Elliott, 'Racial Stereotypes', 95. Devine and Elliott appear to use the singular in relation to stereotypes ('a stereotype of Blacks'), meaning that a particular group in question is subject to distinct cultural stereotypes. By contrast, I use 'stereotype' to refer to an association between a particular trait and a group in question, so that if Blacks are stereotyped as aggressive and lazy and complaining (see above, note 19), I say that there are three stereotypes, while Devine and Elliott would speak of that in the singular as 'a stereotype'.

24 For example, in one of the first, and still important and widely-cited, studies of stereotypes, in 1933, Katz and Braly found 'superstitious' to be the most common stereotypical attribute of Blacks; but more recent studies find that characteristic to be absent. (Devine's own study from 1995 puts 'athletic' as the most-cited attribute [Devine and Elliot, 'Racial Stereotypes', 91]; this trait was not cited at all in the Katz and Braly study.) See discussion of Devine and the Katz-Braly study in Lepore and Brown, 'Category and Stereotype Activation,' 124.

personal beliefs. And she finds a large movement in a positive direction in the past seventy years in Whites' personal beliefs about Blacks. Devine does not quite put it this way, but she implies that we are morally responsible for our personal beliefs about the attributes of groups, but not for the automatic stereotypic associations triggered in us as a result of growing up in particular social context. While this seems correct, it omits the forms of cognitive investment that are less than endorsed belief yet more substantial than the automatic and entirely unendorsed responses involved in culturally programmed associations. 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). Thus people may tell jokes that draw on stereotypes, make tacit assumptions that lead to expectations based on stereotypes, engage in avoidance behavior manifesting stereotypes, accede to remarks of others based on stereotypes, and so on, as described earlier. Stephen Carter, a Black writer and law professor, describes how he frequently takes a train and people seldom sit next to him but rather sit in other double seats. Carter assumes, not implausibly, that at least some of these fellow passengers have a stereotype of Blacks as threatening in some way (even on a train) and they avoid sitting next to him for that reason. This behavior involves expressing a stereotype, and someone could do so who would not endorse the generalization that Blacks are threatening.²⁵

25 Stephen Carter, 'The Black Table, the Empty Seat, and the Tie', in Gerald Early (ed.), *Lure and Loathing: Essays on Race, Identity, and the Ambivalence of Assimilation* (New York: Penguin, 1993). Carter describes the situation in the following way: 'Let me begin with an uneasy truth: I scare people ... I watch with mixed feelings the stream of fellow business travelers, the white ones, anyway, treating the seat next to me as though it is already occupied. Of white women this is particularly true: to sit next to a black man, even a well-attired one, is a choice to be made only when no other seat is available, and even then to be avoided if possible, occasionally by standing.' (58f.)

It should be noted that the avoidance behavior Carter notes might stem from sources other than stereotype-based fear. A white (or other non-Black) might just be uncomfortable with Blacks without necessarily being afraid of them, or even of holding any particular stereotypes of Blacks. (See Lawrence Blum, *I'm Not a Racist, But ... : The Moral Quandary of Race* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002], 66-69, on the distinction between racial

Even if an individual is less, or even much less, responsible for an unendorsed expressing of a stereotype than for an endorsed one, because the degree of cognitive investment is much smaller, merely expressed stereotypes can still serve to perpetuate the stereotype in the wider society; and some attribution of moral responsibility for this purveying of stereotypes would seem appropriate. (This is not a critique of Devine, who does not discuss expressed stereotypes as such, but only the stereotypic associations in the cognizer's mind.) By contrast, if Devine is correct about the entirely automatic and cognitively uninvested character of stereotypic associations, one has at best an extremely minimal epistemic, and moral, responsibility for these responses.²⁶

discomfort and the racial aversion that accompanies negative stereotyping.) Nevertheless, one must credit Carter's sense of what is going on in his own experience of the situation he describes.

26 Nevertheless, Devine does to some extent muddy the waters on the issue of cognitive investment and responsibility for stereotypic associations by implying that the automatic triggering of stereotypic responses is to be equated with mere awareness of the existence of the stereotype in the culture, that is, awareness that others make that association, even if one does not do so oneself. For example, she (and Elliott) criticize the Katz and Braly study [see note 24] for conflating, in the experimenters' instructions to subjects, personal belief in a stereotype with knowledge of its existence in the culture, thus confusing the subjects about what they were being asked to report—their own personal beliefs, or their knowledge of the existence of the stereotype. However, Devine and Elliott treat knowledge of the existence of the stereotype as if it were equivalent to the stereotypic attribute being triggered, or activated, in the subject's mind when presented with a prompt of the group in question.

These seem importantly distinct phenomena from a moral point of view. Someone could be aware of the existence of a stereotype in her own society without in any way being 'subject to it', that is, without the presence of the target group triggering the association with the stereotypic characteristic. Devine may believe that, empirically, the former never exists without the latter; if someone is aware of the stereotype, she always automatically associates the stereotype trait with the stereotyped group. Perhaps she is correct about this, but it does not seem plausible to me. Could not someone work so hard to counter a particular stereotype that she entirely stops associating the group with the stereotypic characteristic, while remaining fully aware that others in her society do make that association? Perhaps such a case is rare, given the power of cultural stereotypes; but it does not seem impossible. In any case, Devine tends to treat automatic triggering as the same as (not merely as always accompanying) knowing the existence of the stereotype. They are certainly not the same phenomenon, and the former involves a degree (albeit a minor one) of cognitive investment that the latter lacks entirely.

The Bad in All Stereotypes

We have seen that the notion of stereotype carries a negative valence not accounted for by the mere idea of a generalization or group image. Stereotypes are in some way bad, and stereotyping is a bad thing to do. But what exactly is bad about them? The badness is bound up with stereotypes being false and unwarranted—in particular, being overgeneralizations about groups—and being held by their cognizers in a rigid and fixed manner. The cognitive distortions involved in stereotypes and stereotyping are a source of moral distortions as well. 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. But individual stereotyping also involves an individual morally defective regard, that can lead to individual mistreatment of the other.

We can divide the moral badness of stereotyping and stereotypes into two very general categories—the bad involved in all stereotyping, no matter what the content of the stereotype in question; and the differential bad involved in some stereotypes more than others, depending on the content of the stereotypes, in connection with several other variables.

Not Seeing Members of Stereotyped Groups as Individuals

There are several distinct bads of all stereotyping. Some of the bads are linked to the feature of stereotyping that involves seeing members of the stereotyped group through a narrow lens in which they are viewed as much more alike than they actually are.

First, stereotyping a group involves not seeing members of the group as individuals. 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. I might

have a stereotype of Blacks as personally spontaneous and warm, or as dangerous and threatening. Though very different in the valence attached to the group in my mind, both stereotypes prevent a recognition of individual Black people in their individuality. Stereotyping, unlike generalizing in an open, revisable fashion, views individual members of the group only through a constricted, group-based lens.

Not every stereotyper is blind to the individuality of every member of the group she stereotypes. We have seen that a stereotyper can acknowledge a particular member of a group as being an exception to a stereotype. That member may therefore be seen as an individual without dislodging the general stereotype of the group *qua* group. And this individual may well be justifiably offended by the stereotyper's stereotype of her group, even if she herself is expressly excluded from that stereotype; but this is a different moral matter than whether one is oneself seen by the stereotyper as an individual.

Treating or seeing others as individuals is not always a required or appropriate standard of conduct. For example, some interactions with others are too fleeting for the idea of treating as an individual to get any traction; in others, it is appropriate to treat the other in an instrumental fashion, e.g., a cashier. (One still must treat that person as a human being and as a person; for example, one should not treat the other disrespectfully. But this is not equivalent to treating her as an individual.) In these situations, it is still wrong to stereotype the group of which that person is a member. And that suggests that the wrong of stereotyping is not fully accounted for by the wrong of not treating the other as an individual.²⁷ Nevertheless, insofar as being seen as an

27 Note that it is possible to fail to accord appropriate acknowledgment of individuality, and to do so in a manner connected with the group identity of the person in question, yet without stereotyping the person or group. For example, Mary may have a non-stereotyped view of the Japanese, appreciating the internal complexity of the Japanese as a group. Nevertheless, in her interactions with Noriko, a Japanese acquaintance, Mary constantly makes reference to Noriko's being Japanese, giving too little weight to the many other aspects of Noriko's identity (as woman, lawyer, daughter, political aspirant, and so on), so

individual is an important form of acknowledgment of persons, failure of such acknowledgment is a moral fault and constitutes a bad of all stereotyping.

Blindness to Internal Variety of Stereotyped Group

A second fault of stereotyping in general, also linked to the 'homogenizing' of the group, is that it involves being blind to the internal variety of the stereotyped group. There are two different ways that internal variety is masked by stereotyping. One relates to the stereotypical attribute itself. If we have a stereotype of ethnic Chinese as being shrewd, we are likely to be blinded to qualities in ethnic Chinese people that are the contrary of shrewdness, such as being gullible. We will fail to see that the group 'ethnic Chinese' contains a range of characteristics along an axis of shrewdness/nonshrewdness.

The second way that internal variety is masked by stereotypes is that the stereotype attribute is taken as somehow 'summing up' what the group is like; so that when the stereotyper thinks of the group, he thinks of it solely in terms of that particular attribute—for example, criminality in Blacks, cheapness in Jews, emotionality in women. The stereotypical associations the stereotyper has with the category in question dominate her view of the group, masking the full range of human characteristics

that Noriko feels that Mary does not see her as an individual. Giving undue weight to someone's group identity is not the same as, and does not require, stereotyping the group; but both involve failing to acknowledge individuality.

Christine Sleeter describes an interesting variation on the phenomenon of group consciousness masking others' individuality. She is a white American who traveled to Japan thirty years previously. She had never been to Asia before and apparently had also had little experience with Asian Americans. 'I recall that when I stepped out of the airplane in Tokyo International Airport, I had a vivid impression that the airport was filled with people who looked exactly alike,' Sleeter says. ('Foreword' to Stacey Lee, *Unraveling the 'Model Minority' Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth* [New York: Teachers College Press, 1996], vii.) It would, I think, be misleading to call what is going on here 'stereotyping,' because it is not so much that Sleeter wrongly attributed certain characteristics to Japanese people as that she simply failed to see the features regarding which they differed. But the latter does involve a typical effect of stereotyping, namely individuality masking.

that all groups possess, including qualities that are not contrary to the stereotype. If we think of Asian-Americans through the stereotype of the 'model minority'—hard-working, academically achieving, responsible—we forget that Asian-Americans like to relax, to party, to go to movies, that they fall in love, have sexual desires, care about their friendships, sometimes flout standards of propriety, and so on.

This does not mean, of course, that stereotypers are *totally* unaware of the presence of these other characteristics in the group stereotyped, or that they would deny their existence if explicitly asked about them. It would be a rare stereotyper who would explicitly *deny*, say, that Asian-Americans sometimes like to party or that some are poor students. But, as we have seen, stereotypes generally function as screening devices for the perception of groups although the stereotyper is generally only dimly aware that this is going on. They generally operate below the level of explicit consciousness. This is how stereotypes operate to mask internal diversity. That people can have images of groups that do incorporate internal diversity is generally shown in our image of our own groups, which generally is non-stereotypical and is able to incorporate such internal diversity. (This is not to deny that persons can internalize stereotypes of their own groups, especially when such stereotypes are particularly salient in their social milieu.)

This second deficiency of stereotypes—masking internal diversity—is related to the first—masking individuality. But they are not the same. The former bears on the group itself as well as on an individual in respect to her group identity, whereas the latter bears on an individual in respect to her individuality. Suppose Robert is a Black of Caribbean origin. Robert's co-worker, Margaret, talks about Black people in a way that makes it clear that she is not fully aware that Blacks are of different ethnicities and cultures. In particular, she seems unaware of the difference between African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans. Robert may well experience Margaret's failure to appreciate the difference between these two Black ethnic groups as a failure of acknowledgment of him,

and perhaps a failure of respect as well.²⁸ There is a failure of recognition here that is directed toward a group, and to individuals insofar as they are members of that group. This is not the same as the failure of recognition involved in not seeing someone as an individual because of seeing her through a stereotype of her group. Just as we wish our individuality to be acknowledged by others, we also wish our group-based identities to be acknowledged in appropriate ways. Failing to do either can be a form of disrespect.

In some situations, the way that stereotyping masks group internal diversity can result in a subgroup of the stereotyped group being unseen or unacknowledged in a way that is damaging or harmful to it. One oft-cited example of this is Asian-American students who are struggling in school. The stereotype that Asian-Americans are all good students can lead educators to fail to recognize those Asian-Americans who are not good students, and thus to fail to accord them the educational attention they require.²⁹ This damage is, then, over and above the value of recognition in its own right.

Moral distancing

The two aspects of the bad of all stereotyping so far discussed relate to the feature of stereotyping that involves viewing the members of the stereotyped group as more similar to one another than they actually are—not only in the sense of possessing a particular target characteristic to a greater degree than they do, but more generally. A different bad 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

²⁸ Although this example is of ethnic diversity within a racial or panethnic group, there are many other kinds of diversity masked by stereotypes. I earlier mentioned diversity of traits (generosity/cheapness), but there is also diversity of socio-economic status, political beliefs, life styles, tastes, age, and so on.

²⁹ See Lee, *Unraveling the 'Model Minority' Stereotype*.

of moral distance from them.

This sense of moral distance is distinct from the specific construal of the stereotyped group in the particular stereotype in question—for example, as inferior to one's own group, a typical dimension of racial stereotyping. Of course, seeing a group as inferior is a form of moral distancing in its own right. But any stereotyping intensifies a sense of difference and separateness between the stereotyper and the stereotyped, even when the latter is not seen as inferior, and even when a kind of grudging admiration is involved in the stereotype, as of Asians and Asian Americans as good students or Jews or Chinese as good in business.³⁰

This moral distance at the level of the individual stereotyper thus characteristically involves an intensified social division with regard to cultural stereotypes. 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.

Differential Badness of Stereotypes Dependent on Their Content

Apart from the bad and wrong involved in all stereotypes and stereotyping, the particular content of stereotypes renders some stereotypes and forms of stereotyping worse than others.

Explicit content of stereotypes

The explicit content of some stereotypes is more insulting, demeaning, or offensive than that of others, and this is one respect in which some stereotypes are worse than others. Some stereotypes cast the stereotyped group in a more negative light than do others. The existence of positive stereotypes is the most obvious example. Although most existing cultural stereotypes are negative, for many groups there are positive as well as negative stereotypes among the cultural repertoire within which they are

³⁰ When the stereotyper is herself a member of the target group, the act of stereotyping implies a distancing of herself from her own group.

viewed by members of the larger society. In the U.S., Blacks are stereotyped both as good dancers and as prone to violence. Both stereotypes are bad, making individuality, internal diversity, and so on. However, it is much worse to be stereotyped as violence-prone than as being a good dancer. The former generates fear and antipathy, which are both bad in their own right, and can lead to stigmatizing of a group and failing to pay them a due civic regard (as reflected in social policy, for example). Stereotyping a group as good dancers does not characteristically generate such deleterious sentiments or effects.

Everything else being equal, it is worse to stereotype negatively than positively. Positive stereotypes involve much less in the way of disparaging, demeaning, and objectionable views of the group than do negative ones—although, to reiterate, negative stereotyping still involves the bad of masking individuality, masking internal diversity, and moral distancing.

The point about degrees of objectionability is more general. Even among negative stereotypes, there are important differences of degree. Muslims are stereotyped as terrorists and as fundamentalists. Although both characteristics are negative, obviously it is a much greater moral fault to be a terrorist than a fundamentalist. Similarly, with regard to Blacks, being lazy and being prone to violence are two familiar negative stereotypes; but it is generally worse to be seen as violent than lazy. So, everything else being equal, it is worse to stereotype a group with a more than a less negative stereotype.

Historical Associations and Cultural Meaning of Stereotype Content

The manifest content as a desideratum in the badness of stereotypes must be supplemented with and informed by the historical and social context that provides the full cultural meaning and significance of that content. For example, although in its own right the stereotype of Asian-Americans as hard-working, conscientious, intelligent, high-achieving students is flattering, in the context of American society, this stereotype tends to invoke others that help to shape its overall meaning. So,

although being 'nerdy' is a more negative stereotype than being academically accomplished, as applied to Asian-Americans, the latter attribution often tends to imply, or carry with it, the former.³¹

Historical and social context introduces an important level of complexity to the overall assessment of the content of a stereotype. For example, I earlier mentioned the positive stereotype of Blacks as good dancers. But considering this attribution in historical context suggests a different or at least more complex evaluative valence. The good dancing stereotype arose from the slave era, and was part of an image of the 'happy-go-lucky' slave, dancing and singing and having a good time. It carried with it 'assumptions of an inherent inability to be serious, rational, responsible, busy, industrious.'³² It was an image that served as part of the elaborate ideology that rationalized slavery (and colonialism) to Whites. Since the legacy of slavery continues to haunt contemporary Blacks, this historical resonance tends to infect the 'good dancer' stereotype, adding an element of negative valence to it. Related to this, the good dancer stereotype itself tends to invoke the idea that Blacks are mentally weak—they are good at activities 'of the body' (like dancing) but not of the intellect.

Not everyone who expresses a stereotype is necessarily aware of the historical associations that would be likely to be made in the minds of the targets of the stereotype. (Indeed, not every member of the target group is aware of these associations either, although some may have absorbed the valence of the stereotype without fully knowing what that valence is based on.) In this way, the historical association differs from the explicit content from a moral perspective. Every competent agent is aware of the difference in moral valence between 'terrorist' and 'fundamentalist', 'violent' and 'good dancer', 'money-grubbing' and 'intelligent'. But not

31 In her research on Asian American youth, Lee reports a distinct group (which she calls 'new wave' Asian Americans) who 'feared that the model minority stereotype contributed to the image that Asians are nerds.' (Unraveling the 'Model Minority' Stereotype, 117).

32 Pickering, *Stereotypes*, 13. Pickering is actually discussing the Sambo image in the British context, but his description suits the American one as well.

every competent agent knows the historical associations of particular stereotypes. A more fine-tuned assessment than can be provided here of the moral fault involved in stereotyping would have to set standards for what historical, cultural, and social knowledge it is reasonable to expect of differently placed persons and groups. But we can at least say that in assessing the bad of stereotypes, both their explicit content and their historical and social associations must be taken account of.

Stereotyping in The Passion of the Christ

The extraordinarily successful 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ*, created and directed by Mel Gibson, is a particularly useful text for illustrating the role of historical context in the assessment of the bad of cultural stereotypes. The film portrays the final twelve hours of Jesus's life, dwelling primarily on his brutalization, mutilation, suffering, and crucifixion. Two distinct groups—Romans and Jews—are shown as responsible for Christ's suffering and death. In assessing the filmic portrayals of these two groups, one must keep in mind the particular genre of the film—the historical drama. Many films, of course, portray members of distinct groups in unsympathetic ways. However, whatever is morally problematic in such portrayals is greatly intensified when it is taken for granted, and intended, that the audience will see the film as 'the way things really were.'

Both the Jews and the Romans are represented, in the main, in a very unflattering manner. The Jews' spiritual leader, Caiaphas, is shown as concerned primarily about power; there is no hint of a genuine religious or spiritual presence. The Jews themselves are mainly shown as a mob, screaming for Jesus's death as a false prophet. A Satanic figure flits through the Jewish crowd in several scenes, forging an association between Jews and the Devil. The Jews are bloodthirsty, and the film suggests that it is they who are historically responsible for Jesus's death, as the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, is portrayed as sentencing Jesus to death not because he wants to but because he is afraid of a Jewish

uprising against him.³³

The Romans are also very unsympathetically portrayed. Most of the Romans in the film are soldiers, and it is they who are the immediate agents' of Jesus's suffering. They are portrayed primarily as brutal and sadistic.³⁴ As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops states in its review of the film, 'The Roman soldiers are unimaginably—even gleefully—sadistic in flaying Jesus within an inch of his life.'³⁵

From the point of view of content of the images of these two groups in the film, it would not be easy to say which was worse. One group sets in motion Jesus's suffering, but does not actually carry it out; the other has no important stake in Jesus's death, and no ultimate responsibility for making it happen, but is its direct agent. However, the larger historical context relevant to an assessment of the harm of the stereotypes of the two groups reveals a substantial moral difference. The representation of Romans does not correspond to an historically based cultural stereotype of that group, while the representation of Jews does. That is, there is no existing salient stereotype of Romans as brutal or sadistic, nor, indeed, is there any contemporary group that popular thought clearly associates with Romans. By contrast, the film's image of Jews as Christ-killers, as in league with the Devil, as stubbornly refusing to accept Christ and Christianity, as spiritually bankrupt and misguided, are all deeply embedded in Western culture³⁶ and have continuing cultural salience in the present.

Furthermore, these stereotypes have been an important source and component of Jew hatred throughout history and into the contemporary

33 There are occasional sympathetic Jewish characters in *The Passion* (almost entirely in the second half of the film) emerging from the crowd following Jesus on the way to his crucifixion to extend kindness or help to him.

34 There are some sympathetic Roman characters in *The Passion*—Pilate's wife, who suspects that Jesus is an authentic savior, a soldier who eschews the brutality and is kind to Jesus, and others.

35 U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, review of *The Passion of the Christ* at Film and Broadcasting website: www.usccb.org/movies/p/thepassionofthechrist.htm.

36 Robert Wistrich, *Anti-Semitism: The Longest Hatred* (New York: Schocken, 1991).

era. In particular, especially during the Middle Ages but after as well, presentations of 'passion plays' on Easter utilizing imagery of Jews similar to that employed in the film, often led to pogroms against Jews. The historically deleterious effects of the sorts of images prominent in *The Passion of the Christ* have been officially recognized by the Roman Catholic Church. In its efforts to root out or diminish anti-Semitism within the Church, and in recognition of the distinctly Christian contribution to historical anti-Semitism, the Vatican has disseminated 'Criteria for Evaluation of Dramatizations of the Passion'. Opposing 'negative stereotypes' that it says 'seem to form the stock ideas of many Christians,' the document puts forth guidelines such as 'Jews should not be portrayed as avaricious (e.g. in Temple money-changer scenes); bloodthirsty ... or implacable enemies of Christ (e.g. by changing the small 'crowd' at the governor's palace into a teeming mob).'³⁷ *The Passion of The Christ* clearly violates such guidelines.

Thus, when one looks at cultural imagery not only in terms of its manifest content but in its historical and cultural context, a large difference in moral valence opens up between the negative portrayals of Romans and of Jews in *The Passion*. The power of film as a medium, and the linking of the imagery to religious belief render particularly disturbing the potential harm of the images of Jews in the film, that has no counterpart in the case of the Romans.

The Different Bads in Stereotyping: A Rough Classification

How does the bad connected with the two dimensions of stereotype content—manifest content and historical/cultural associations—relate to the bad involved in stereotyping *per se*? We normally assume that it is a bad thing if Jews are seen as Christ-killers, if Blacks are seen as stupid or violent, if Asians are seen as deceitful, and that badness is not only the bad of being morally distanced or 'othered,' not being seen as an

³⁷ U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Bible, the Jews, and the Death of Jesus: A collection of Catholic Documents*, 75, 76, 77. The Bishops' review of the film, cited in note 35, fails to take note of the film's violation of the Church's own strictures as set out here.

individual, and having one's group not be seen in its full diversity. It is a more particularized bad, connected with a group being seen in a particular demeaning, unjust, socially stigmatizing, or otherwise undesirable and unwarranted manner. If I am Black, I would naturally feel wronged if I were viewed as violent simply because I am Black, and I would also wish to be seen as an individual, and for the other to see me as a fellow human being with whom she is able to identify. But these are distinct disvalues (and values); they are not simply different names for the same thing.

The bad in being seen in an unwarranted and socially disvalued manner can be thought of as falling into two categories—an intrinsic and an instrumental bad. The instrumental bad involves the way that being seen as having the trait in question in a stereotypic fashion leads to further bad consequences. When *The Passion of the Christ* was first released, some commentators objected to the image of Jews in the film on the grounds that it might incite anti-Jewish violence or vandalism. (Although such anti-Semitic incidents are on the rise in parts of Europe, I know of no reports of such incidents anywhere the film has been shown [the U.S. included].) Such incidents would render the stereotypical imagery in the film instrumentally bad.

In a moment, I will discuss forms of instrumental badness in more detail. Here I want to focus on the intrinsic badness of being stereotyped in a socially undesirable manner. Earlier, I argued that stereotyping someone or a group is a form of misrelationship to them—a failure to accord proper respect or acknowledgment. Something similar can be said of stereotyping them with a socially disvalued trait, such as violence-proneness, dishonesty, overemotionality. Independent of any further bad consequences, this stereotyping constitutes a form of disrespect, a way of misrelating to the stereotyped other. As I argued above, it is a *different* form of misrelationship than that involved in (content-independent) stereotyping—masking individuality, masking internal diversity, and intensifying moral distance. But it is a form of misrelationship nevertheless, the badness of which is not analyzable in

terms of further bad consequences to which the stereotyping, or presence of the cultural stereotype, leads.

Moreover, this content-dependent misrelationship comes in something like degrees—roughly, the more disvalued the trait in the stereotype, the greater the disrespect to the group. This is why it is more disrespectful (everything else being equal) to stereotype a group as violence-prone than as overemotional.

Instrumental bad of stereotypes

One might question whether the instrumental bad of stereotypes really plays a substantial part in what is wrong with stereotypes. For it seems that we can seldom point to a direct causal link between the presence of a cultural stereotype, or a particular expressing of a stereotype, and an undesirable effect. We seem generally to condemn stereotypes without feeling that we need to demonstrate such a causal link. This may suggest that the intrinsic bad of stereotypes is carrying the moral weight of their condemnation.

At the same time, I think that if we reflect on it, our condemnation of particular stereotypes, i.e. of stereotypical content (not only of content-independent stereotyping in general) seems to us bound up with a supposition that these objectionable stereotypes do play some causal role in harming the groups stereotyped, even if the precise nature of the causality can not be spelled out with any degree of precision. We assume, with good reason, that stereotypes of indigenous people as uncivilized was part of a rationale employed by Europeans for subordinating, enslaving, displacing, destroying their culture, and killing them. We assume that stereotypes of Jews as economic parasites, Christ-killers, allies of the Devil were part of a toxic stew of ideas and images, discussed above, that led to persecution and pogroms against Jews throughout the Christian world, and, with the later addition of other stereotypes of Jews as international conspirators and financiers, leeches, and socialists, contributed to the Holocaust.

A particularly good case study to examine this matter is Blacks in

segregated areas (often called 'ghettos') of large cities in the United States. This group has been much studied, with a view to understanding the causes of the severe deprivation of these communities. The causes seem to be multiple, complex, and intertwining; they are historical, social, economic, political, cultural. They include, for example, direct discrimination in housing, the changing character of available jobs (for example, their increasing requirement of higher education, and their location to the suburbs), the effects of concentrated poverty itself, inferior schools, patterns of behavior and values adopted by residents of these communities, the political unwillingness of the American electorate to support substantial public expenditure in these communities, and others.

Some researchers have recently begun to focus on the role of stereotypes in this mix—for example, Whites' negative views of Blacks and their affecting 'whites willingness to share residential space with blacks' and that, in turn, contributing to Blacks' confinement in hypersegregated and severely disadvantaged communities.³⁸ (The focus is not only on stereotypes as bringing about these conditions, but as the product of them as well.) This attention to stereotypes is interesting because a familiar tradition of social science explanation eschews such 'mental' factors in favor of measurable economic conditions, institutional structures, historical forces, and the like. It lends some scientific legitimacy to the intuition mentioned above, that stereotypes are part of a complex mix of causal factors, and that they play an inextricable part in these factors causing harm to stereotyped group.

Steele's 'Stereotype Threat' Hypothesis

Some stereotype research takes the issue of causality one step further, attempting to make a direct causal connection between the existence or salience of a cultural stereotype, and a deleterious consequence to the group stereotyped. A particularly elegant example of this research is

³⁸ Bobo and Massagli, 'Stereotyping and Urban Inequality', 97.

Claude Steele's 'stereotype threat' hypothesis. In a series of remarkable and oft-cited experiments, the psychologist Claude Steele has suggested a direct causal link between the existence of a cultural stereotype and underperformance on various tasks by members of target groups. His most studied group is African Americans, although he has constructed experiments with Whites, women, men, Asian Americans, and other groups, with comparable outcomes of the experiments.

Steele makes the plausible assumption that, in the United States at least, there exists a cultural stereotype of African Americans as less intelligent than Whites and other groups.³⁹ Matching African American and white students at a major university on previous levels of achievement, he places them in a test-taking situation. Some African Americans are subjected to an activating of the cultural stereotype—for example, by being told that the test is a test of intelligence. Others are told something that can plausibly be seen as muting or canceling the effect of the stereotype—for example, that the test is a study of the way different people solve problems, but is *not* a test of intellectual ability. Steele finds that the first group performs poorly compared with the White group, while the second performs as well as the White group.⁴⁰

What produces this differential? One seemingly plausible hypothesis is that the Blacks have actually internalized the stereotype of themselves as intellectually inferior—that is, they have some cognitive attachment (which may or may not rise the level of an actual belief) in the view of themselves as intellectually inferior—and that the activating of the stereotype brings discouragement or self-doubt to the fore in the test-

39 Bobo provides support for this supposition, in 'Racial Attitudes and Relations at the Close of the Twentieth Century', in Smelser *et al.* (eds.), *America Becoming*, 278. Bobo notes the change in the form of this stereotype in the past five decades, from an innatist to a culturalist understanding of why, in the mind of Whites, Blacks are 'less intelligent'.

40 Claude Steele, 'Stereotype Threat and African-American Student Achievement', in Theresa Perry, Claude Steele, and Asa Hilliard III, *Young, Gifted, and Black* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003): 109-130. See also Steele and Joshua Aronson, 'Stereotype Threat and the Test Performance of Academically Successful African Americans', in Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips (eds.), *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1998): 401-427.

taking situation. The internalization of the stereotype thus has the unfortunate effect of being self-validating by perversely producing behavior (doing poorly on the test) that conforms to the stereotype. Indeed, internalizing of stereotypes, especially negative ones, is an important way that stereotypes harm their target groups.⁴¹

However, Steele rejects the view that stereotype threat works through stereotype internalization.⁴² He hypothesizes that the way stereotypes operate to depress achievement for the African American students is that the fear of confirming the stereotypes in the eyes of others makes them unable to give their full and productive attention to the task at hand. It is thus the bare existence of the cultural stereotype, and the subject's salient awareness of it in the performance situation, that depresses achievement.

Steele's argument seems to assume two distinct forms of awareness of cultural stereotypes by individual target group members. One is their mere awareness of the existence of the stereotype as widely shared in the culture. A second is the activating of the stereotype in a particular setting. (Presumably, the latter would not take place without the former. If a Black test taker were not aware of the existence of the stereotype, saying that the test she was about to take is a test of intellectual ability would not be sufficient to put that stereotype in her mind.) Steele's findings suggest that 'mere awareness' is not enough for the harm to the group in question. For we can assume that the control group that is told that the test before them does *not* test their ability is still aware of the stereotype of blacks as being intellectually inferior; yet Steele finds that this latter group performs as well as Whites of comparable ability. So it is the heightened awareness of the stereotype caused by its activating in the performance situation, rather than mere awareness, that causes the harm

41 Research on stereotypes and prejudice suggests, for example, that Black Americans share many of the same stereotypes of their own group than non-Blacks do, although Blacks are more likely than Whites to affirm positive attributes of their group along with the stereotypical negative ones. See Paul Sniderman and Thomas Piazza, *The Scar of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993: 45-46.

42 Steele, 'Stereotype Threat,' 116f.

in question.⁴³

Note also that the harm caused by stereotypes operating in the mode of stereotype threat is not dependent on a specific stereotyper or, more generally, an agent of stereotyping. Stereotype threat depends on two conditions, neither one involving a distinct stereotyper—an awareness of the cultural stereotype, and a situational activation that heightens consciousness of the stereotype in the moment.

It is remarkable to have such a direct and partially quantifiable empirical link between the existence of a cultural stereotype and a harm to the target group.⁴⁴ Were such measures able to be developed with respect to specific stereotypes in general, it might become easier to distinguish the instrumental from the intrinsic bads of stereotyping and of particular cultural stereotypes. For now, we may have to be content with plausible suppositions of stereotypes' role in extrinsic harms to groups; but also with an inability to sharply distinguish recognitional and respect harms of particular stereotypes from extrinsic or instrumental ones.

43 As far as I know, Steele does not further discuss the significance of the distinction between a standing, background awareness and a situationally-activated awareness. But it is suggestive of an important line of inquiry concerning the harm of stereotyping. For example, perhaps not everyone who is aware of the existence of a negative stereotype of her group is subject to stereotype threat. Perhaps some people are so confident in their own ability to achieve, or to perform in the manner that the stereotype calls into question, and are so deeply convinced of the falsity of the implied view of their group, that they do not experience anxiety about confirming it. Perhaps this suggests that, while those who are vulnerable to stereotype threat have not necessarily internalized the stereotype, they may well remain in some way beholden to or cognitively invested in it. With respect to 'Black intellectual inferiority' stereotypes, Lani Guinier suggests that second generation Black immigrants (from Africa or the Caribbean) may not be vulnerable to stereotype threat, although they may be perfectly aware of its existence. (L. Guinier, 'Our Preference for the Privileged', *Boston Globe*, July 9, 2004, A13.)

44 Steele's data is confined to experimental situations. Massey *et al.*, *The Source of the River: The Social Origins of Freshmen at America's Selective Colleges and Universities* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003) finds some evidence that college students' levels of actual achievement in college is affected by stereotype threat as Steele understands that concept. Cited in Larry L. Rowley, 'Dissecting the Anatomy of African-American Inequality: The Impact of Racial Stigma and Social Origins on Group Status and College Achievement', in *Educational Researcher*, vol. 33, #4, May 2004, 19.

Conclusion

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.

Stereotypes and stereotyping, in the sense described, involve cognitive distortions in the subject's view of other persons (members of the stereotyped group). Such distortions involve various moral bads as well. All stereotyping, qua stereotyping, involves a masking of the individuality of individual members of the stereotyped groups, a masking of the internal diversity within the stereotyped group, and an intensified moral distancing from the stereotyped group.

Beyond these failures of recognition and respect, the particular content of stereotypes involves other harms and forms of wronging of others. In assessing these bads in light of the particular content of a stereotype, one must assess how demeaning or otherwise disrespectful that content is, as well as historical and cultural associations of that content. No doubt other features of stereotypes and stereotyping are pertinent to this sort of moral assessment as well.⁴⁵ Moral philosophy

45 An example of a further dimension of the moral assessment of stereotypes beyond the scope of this paper bears on the assessment of specific, individual manifestations of a cultural stereotype—such as a filmic portrayal or a picture in a textbook, meant to indicate something general about a group. For example, when Halle Berry, an African American, won an Academy Award in 2001 for her performance in *Monster's Ball*, some people felt that her portrayal was stereotypic in the sense that her character was oversexualized and hysterical, a stereotypic image of Black women familiar in American popular culture and thought. However, it is possible to accept such a characterization while also believing that Berry's character was a richly complex and human one, not at all one dimensional. So it would be stereotypical in the sense of exemplifying a cultural stereotype; but it would not be as objectionable as a one-dimensional portrayal that conformed to the same stereotype. (Some might say that, in the former case, there was no stereotype at all, that two-dimensionality renders a portrayal non-stereotypical, even if the character possesses traits

should join social psychology and cultural studies in investigating this central dimension of the significance of stereotypes.

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corresponding to a cultural stereotype. I am not taking a stand on this semantic issue, but only noting the moral difference between the two types of portrayals.)

A further variable in the assessment of individual stereotypical portrayals or images is whether that portrayal exists in the context of several other portrayals or images of the target group in question, and whether the range of portrayals associates the group in question with several non-stereotypic attributes. For example, if a film has one Black female character who is hypersexualized but several other Black female characters who are not, then the former may be, for that reason, less objectionable, since the larger context taken as a whole does not portray Black females in a stereotypic fashion. (Again, some might take this one step further and say that the one portrayal of the Black female as hypersexualized is not stereotypic, precisely on the grounds that Black females as a whole are not so portrayed.)