The Hidden Mechanisms of Prejudice: Implicit Bias and Interpersonal Fluency

My dissertation is about prejudice. In particular, it examines the theoretical and ethical questions raised by research on implicit social biases. Social biases are termed “implicit” when they are not reported, though they lie just beneath the surface of consciousness. Such biases are easy to adopt but very difficult to introspect and control. Despite this difficulty, I argue that we are personally responsible for our biases and obligated to overcome them if they can bring harm to ourselves or to others. My dissertation addresses the terms of their removal. It is grounded in a comprehensive examination of empirical research and, as such, is a contribution to social psychology. Although implicit social biases significantly influence our judgment and action, they are not reducible to beliefs or desires. Rather, they constitute a class of their own. Understanding their particular character is vital to determining how to replace them with more preferable habits of mind. I argue for a model of interpersonal fluency, a kind of ethical expertise that requires transforming our underlying dispositions of thought, feeling, and action.