



Branden Fitelson

May 26, 2018 · 🌐



Terrific paper on bias (in both human and artificial contexts) by [Gabbrielle Johnson](#):

What is a bias? Standard philosophical views of both implicit and explicit bias focus this question on the representations one harbors, e.g., stereotypes or implicit attitudes, rather than the ways in which those representations (or other mental states) are manipulated. I call such views *representationalism*. In this paper, I argue that representationalism about bias is a mistake because it conceptualizes social bias in ways that do not fully capture the phenomenon. Crucially, such views fail to capture a heretofore neglected possibility of bias: one that influences an individual's beliefs about and actions toward other people, but is, nevertheless, nowhere represented in that individual's cognitive repertoire. In place of representationalism, I develop a functional account of bias that treats it as a mental entity that takes propositional mental states as inputs and returns propositional mental states as outputs in a way that instantiates, or at the very least mimics, inferences on the basis of an individual's social group membership. This functional characterization leaves open which mental states and processes bridge the gap between the inputs and outputs, ultimately highlighting the diversity of candidates that can serve this role.

1 Introduction

Over the last five decades, our concept of *social bias* has changed dramatically. In the early 1970s, it seemed obvious to many that social biases were constituted by consciously accessible



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12

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