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Autism spectrum – social stereotypes and the limits of expert knowledge

Thesis summary

Over the preceding two decades, owing to an extraordinarily robust surge in scholarly inquiry and media prominence, autism has emerged as a conspicuous phenomenon profoundly ingrained within the collective public consciousness. Nevertheless, research endeavors aimed at comprehending autism, notably in terms of its etiology, have hitherto yielded only a paucity of unequivocal insights. This circumstance has engendered a profusion of information, often unverified, encircling the autism spectrum, replete with a plethora of stereotypes and preconceptions. These manifestations exert substantial, at times pernicious, ramifications across multifarious dimensions of existence for individuals existing within the spectrum.

This dissertation is consecrated to a meticulous scrutiny of the philosophical domain, with a particular emphasis on epistemological facets, underpinning the genesis, operation, and interplay between two distinct types of knowledge concerning the autism spectrum. Specifically, it delves into the realm of socially prevalent colloquial knowledge, juxtaposed against expert knowledge, typically the purview of a more circumscribed cohort of cognitive entities. While these categories of knowledge diverge markedly, they are not entirely insular in their operation. Rather, each wields a measure of influence in the sculpting of the other, and the processes governing their formation and metamorphosis evince considerable overlap in both instances.

Within the purview of my analyses and empirical investigations, my aim is to elucidate that the interrelationship between these two cognitive realms is notably more intricate than commonly posited. The diffusion of information between the domains of 'common knowledge' and 'expert knowledge' occurs bidirectionally, and demarcating distinct boundaries between these spheres can at times prove an arduous endeavor.

In the context of this dissertation, a comprehensive examination ensues into the configuration, configuration dynamics, and alterations within the broad 'epistemic field.' This inquiry extends to encompass the processes underpinning knowledge generation and the

nuanced modes by which divergent forms of knowledge pertaining to autism function and dialectically coalesce. The repercussions of these processes upon individuals contending with autism are a focal point of exploration.

The issues under consideration herein, although primarily centered on the examination of the epistemic landscape pertaining to autism, transcend the confines of mere theoretical inquiry emblematic of classical philosophical discourse. Indeed, the quandaries that form the crux of my investigation, encompassing facets such as the genesis of knowledge and the ostracization of entire collectives from this cognitive endeavor, the perpetuation of stigmatization and prejudicial constructs, the susceptibility to cognitive biases within decision-making processes, and the dynamics of power relations among key stakeholders in these undertakings, bear profound societal import.

The impetus propelling my scholarly pursuit derives not solely from a standpoint of intellectual inquisitiveness; rather, it emanates from the tangible dilemmas confronting the communities of individuals existing within the autism spectrum, predicaments that millions of families across the globe confront on a quotidian basis.

Marcj Wokinski 01.09.23