RESEÑA

Review of Puddifoot, K. (2021). *How Stereotypes Deceive Us.* Oxford University Press. 214 p.

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"How do stereotypes deceive us?" asks Katherine Puddifoot in her eponymous book, *How Stereotypes Deceive Us*, published in 2021 by Oxford University Press. The book's ambition is clear: it is not a matter of determining whether stereotypes are deceptive but rather of determining the various ways they can be. Stereotypes, or the "social attitude that associates members of some social group more strongly than others with certain trait(s)" (p. 13), are studied here as hermeneutical tools that may or may not lead us to acquire knowledge. Nevertheless, as the title chosen by Puddifoot suggests, they can deceive us, and thus stand in the way of knowledge.

The stereotype is, therefore, the central focus of this book, which fills a major gap in the landscape of analytic social epistemology. Although the question of stereotype has been sporadically present, for example, in the recent book *Prejudice: A Study in Non-Ideal Epistemology* (Endre Begby, 2021), it has been largely overlooked by mainstream analytic epistemology. Puddifoot's book offers theoretical and practical tools for questioning and understanding stereotypes.

After the first introductory chapter, which provides insight into the ambitions and structure of the book, Puddifoot starts her reflection with Chapter 2, clarifying the concept of stereotype, which will be discussed in the book. Stereotypes are not reduced to beliefs but can also be unconsidered or implicit social attitudes. The author begins her analysis by choosing between several positions on stereotypes,

which can be grouped into the following categories: normative or non-normative. A normative position implies making a judgment about using stereotypes, i.e. that they are always misleading and allow only distorted judgments to be made. A non-normative position, on the other hand, allows us to understand stereotypes as being true or not and thus to make correct or incorrect judgments (p. 8). This position was chosen and defended by Puddifoot, who produces several arguments to support that choice in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 begins the construction of an epistemological theory of stereotypes aimed at proposing tools for determining the factors by which a stereotype can influence the chances of forming a correct judgment. To this end, Puddifoot defends a multi-factorial understanding of stereotyping, which she contrasts with the uni-factorial and bi-factorial visions (p. 8). The British philosopher explains that the former considers only the truthfulness of the stereotype: if it reflects reality, then it increases the chances of making a correct judgment. The second adds to truthfulness the quality of the information perceived about the stereotyped individual. Puddifoot suggests that other factors exist and should be considered when assessing stereotypes. This chapter is an opportunity to defend such a position and to criticize the common idea that a stereotype reflecting reality can necessarily be used to make a correct judgment.

Chapter 4 aims to highlight the difficulties raised by a conception Puddifoot deems intuitive, i.e. that recourse to a stereotype reflecting reality necessarily increases the chances of "achieving epistemic goals like knowledge and understanding" (p. 9). The author demonstrates here that this use of a stereotype reflecting reality can, contrary to common belief, lead to incorrect judgments and, therefore, not promote knowledge acquisition. She confronts this idea with contemporary analytical literature, adressing epistemic innocence, the analysis of epistemic injustice, and the moral dimension of beliefs. She also shows the consequences of a position like hers for these different theories.

Chapter 5 tests the multi-factorial position developed in Chapter 3. Puddifoot sets out what she sees as a dilemma we commonly face. We must choose between using stereotypes that reflect reality to achieve our epistemic goals or our ethical goals, which would be better achieved by not using stereotypes (for example, using racial or gender stereotypes would not be ethically correct, although, according to the common idea criticized by Puddifoot, it could enable us to form correct judgments). The multi-factorial position allows for a more in-depth analysis of the means of achieving these goals, which Puddifoot ultimately demonstrates are generally more easily achieved simultaneously, i.e. they often go hand in hand. Puddifoot shows that, while ethical and epistemic goals are sometimes in conflict, they are not always. She also shows that there are no predetermined ethical gains from avoiding the use of stereotypes

and that this use will sometimes be favorable, sometimes not, from both an ethical and an epistemic point of view.

Chapter 6 also highlights a dilemma. The dilemma is not whether to use stereotypes but whether to take the risk of being stereotyped. This dilemma arises for some people who might choose to hide aspects of their identity (Puddifoot takes the example of people with psychological difficulties) for fear of being stereotyped. The multi-factorial position again allows us to approach the dilemma differently. Puddifoot shows that, while these people may indeed be disadvantaged by revealing these features of their identity, they may also be disadvantaged by hiding them. In fact, certain mental states and the behaviors that result from them can be better perceived and understood in the light of certain psychological conditions, particularly by care staff. Puddifoot then explains how this argument can also be extended to other identity traits.

Chapter 7 opens the final movement of this book, namely the development of a theoretical framework to account for acts of stereotyping. This theoretical framework is pluralist and is based on a critical reflection on the various epistemological theories. The author divides these into three categories: theories that explore the causes, those that explore the status, and those that explore the consequences to distinguish between knowledge and mere beliefs (p. 11). By showing that a proper understanding of stereotypical acts requires explaining causes, status, and consequences at the same time, Puddifoot reveals that none of the theories she has previously outlined can fully account for stereotype use. The need for a "pluralist" theory capable of questioning aspects falling into these three categories is thus defended. Puddifoot proposes that this pluralist theory should be constructed by borrowing features from several existing epistemological theories.

This book's eighth and final chapter sets out in detail the pluralist approach mentioned in the previous chapter. This is the evaluative dispositionalism. It can be summarised as follows: to account for all the ethical and epistemic aspects of using a stereotype, it is necessary to evaluate the dispositions implemented by the subject. In other words, we need to assess how the subject is prepared to evaluate the stereotype she uses and how she is prepared to deal with any contrary evidence she might face.

The theoretical framework proposed by Puddifoot is *evaluative dispositionalism*. The author quickly demonstrates its necessity and how it responds precisely to the challenges she takes up throughout the book. Moreover, the author's neutrality towards her subject and her lack of prejudice, precisely towards those who would use stereotypes, is attractive. Despite coming from a field where stereotypes are notorious for causing all kinds of injustices, the author takes a refreshing and necessary step back from her subject. By proposing a framework that does not condemn stereotypes by default but allows them to be assessed according to various factors, Puddifoot is making an important statement within the field of social epistemology.

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Although convincing, evaluative dispositionalism nevertheless lacks, I believe, an acceptance of stereotyping. Throughout the book, Puddifoot gives numerous examples of a subject stereotyping another – and evaluative dispositionalism is no exception to this pattern. However, it seems possible to imagine a subject stereotyping *herself*. For example, a little girl might associate herself with certain traits insofar as she belongs to the "little girls" social group and considers that dancing would be preferable to playing football. However, the mere possibility of such situations is not evoked in Puddifoot's book. Committing to a nowadays traditional vision of a proper *social* epistemology, the author seems to conceive of knowledge and beliefs being formed only in contexts of information exchanges between several subjects. In so doing, she misses a crucial possibility of stereotype, namely, the ones a subject can hold towards herself and, although they result from the social environment, are not formed in exchange with another but somewhat internally. I argue that a proper exhaustive framework for stereotypes should be capable of assessing such occurrences.

Another remark one could make is about the practical effects of such a theoretical framework. What would be a well-disposed or poorly disposed subject? While the examples produced by Puddifoot allow her to sketch an answer for such a question, it is less obvious how it could be done for other cases. Recall the example of the little girl from the previous paragraph. How can we determine whether she is well or poorly disposed by associating herself with a certain identity group? Moreover, Puddifoot's evaluative dispositionalism seems to associate a moral judgment with the epistemic judgment she makes. By being poorly disposed, the subject appears to be blameworthy for bad conduct, whether epistemic or ethical. Should we say, however, that a little girl living in a sexist society and subject to stereotypical injunctions daily is to blame for any misconduct, given the unjust beliefs she generates against herself? Suppose we accept such cases to count as stereotypes, and I cannot think of reasons not to do so. In that case, this might require clarification on ethical blame and epistemic responsibility matters.

Finally, it would have been profitable to have the consequences of the theoretical framework proposed by Puddifoot on the mainstream theories of knowledge developed further. Evaluative dispositionalism seems capable of more than the simple evaluation of stereotypes. If stereotypes exist, and if they cannot be accounted for by mainstream theories, as Puddifoot suggests, then those theories cannot account for all doxastic phenomena that exist. Consequently, the framework developed by Puddifoot is a strong argument against such views. Yet very little, if anything, is written on the subject.

In conclusion, these few remarks do not detract from the book's quality. Better still, they promise a promising future since it seems to open numerous debates. This book deserves to be known for its rigorous analysis and innovative proposals.

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