

Classifying Philosophy at the Library of the *Scuola Normale Superiore* (Pisa, Italy): Part B, Evaluation and Experience*

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ABSTRACT: The verification of the functionality of the Philosophy classification schema adopted at the Library of the Scuola Normale Superiore needs to take into account the context: the Library is both a special and a multidisciplinary library; its collections reflect the history of the SNS. The philosophy collection has a specialized and selective nature, as do others within the same Library; the Library is open shelves, and classification is used as a shelving and location device. Bearing in mind the above conditions, the second part of this paper examines the strengths and weaknesses of the schema in order to highlight its suitability to match a coherent classification of documents with the effective fruition by the users.

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1. Introduction

The verification of the functionality of the Philosophy classification schema adopted at the Library of the Scuola Normale Superiore (SNS) needs to take into account the context: the Library is both a special and a multidisciplinary library; its collections reflect the history of the SNS. The philosophy collection has a specialized and selective nature, as do others within the same Library; the Library is open shelves, and classification is used as a shelving and location device. Bearing in mind the above conditions, we will analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the schema in order to highlight its suitability to match a coherent classification of documents with the effective fruition by the users.

1.1. Points of strength

- adherence—to the studying and research needs of the SNS
- simplicity
- synthesis

1.1.1 Points of strength: adherence

As we have seen in the Part A (Giampetro), the choice of a special schema originated as a response to the arrangement need of a material that, because of its growth and development, requires a classification system that allows the easy retrieval of documents and at the same time meets the institutional users' needs, while maintaining its readability and adher-

ence to the main lines of research in philosophy at the SNS. Let us examine some of these needs and their relative responses.

The result of the “dialogue” between scholars and librarians is the choice of a classification and location by author in which the shelf location of the authors' works are followed by the pertinent secondary literature. The location by author corresponds to a very European and continental conception of philosophy that interprets philosophy as a history of philosophy through concrete figures, notably those who have developed the philosophical discourse. According to such a conception, the whole of philosophers' works constitutes an organic corpus, which often receives a name (e.g. criticism, idealism, etc.) even for the outcomes that it finds in other philosophers.

We had several options in disposing the authors' works on the shelf: in chronological order, in order of schools or schools of thought or in alphabetical order. The second criterion seems not to be responsive to the practical needs of a library that must come to terms with problems of space such as the arrangement of shelves and so forth, while the other two criteria appear to be substantially equivalent in terms of functionality. The choice fell to an alphabetical order, most likely because of its simplicity both with the initial arrangement and to its maintenance over time. For the same reason, documents included in the Dewey decimal system class 100 concerning supernatural phenomena (spiritism and alike) are not represented in the philosophy collection of the Library. Conversely, one can find works in psychology and in psychoanalysis on the contributions that these disciplines lead to or have led to in some areas of philosophy.

One of the main reasons why a special schema was adopted is because it allows intervention in the collection, as well as in the schema, on the basis of “points of attraction” that can be formed between the library and philosophy research. For example, ancient philosophy was dismissed from the philosophy classification schema, as a set of issues required that the presence of ancient philosophers was gathered in the field of Classical Antiquity; meanwhile, some more purely philosophical branches of studies at the SNS have pointed towards disciplines like theory of knowledge and history of modern philosophy, especially German.

On the other hand, in the philosophy collection, one can find works in the field of the history of science, due to the attention given to gnoseological and epistemological theories, where the collections in mathematics and physics have a theoretical composi-

tion that is more responsive to the development of research in these disciplines.

1.1.2 Points of strength: simplicity

The simplicity of the schema implies that call numbers are short and uniform. Hence, the brevity and clarity of codes allows them to be read without effort and also grants users and librarians the ability to memorize easily different locations (e.g. if Kant's works are located in 190 K16, then a book with call number 190 K16 is a work by Kant).

All this facilitates the ease with which books can be searched and retrieved from the shelf by librarians and library users. It also enhances the visual check of misplaced volumes; it is immediately noticeable if a 190 K16 book is shelved among books with call number 190 N677, that is, if a work by Kant is in the midst of works by Nietzsche. Conversely, there is a lower chance of shelving books in the wrong place once returned or consulted. Above all, it implies an exploitation of the schema that goes beyond the traditional functions of the classification systems; as call numbers and shelf marks are used as signposts in any library rooms where philosophical papers are located, they serve an orientational function and provide users with a direct understanding of the schema, an aspect usually quite complex and rare in standard classification systems.

1.1.3 Points of strength: synthesis

The schema is very synthetic; in fact, any ramification in subsections was avoided.

Despite an in-depth analysis that is certainly relevant in terms of pure classification theory but impractical once applied at library locations, with this choice, we mean to favour the need to not scatter information—whether similar or related to common sets—into too specific fractions.

1.2. Critical points:

- hospitality
- border regions: both within the philosophy collection and between the philosophy collection and the other Library collections.

1.2.1 Critical points: hospitality

The coexistence between simplicity and hospitality is not easy to manage by a classification schema. In our

case, inserting new classes or sections is quite simple, and then, from a purely notational standpoint, the schema meets the need to accommodate new class numbers for new documents. However, it is the very structure of the schema, or rather its informing criteria, to limit the possibilities of movement, at least in some cases. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between different situations as follows.

We call internal hospitality the event of the relocation of an author from the sections of 104 to its own place in class 190. Such migration usually happens when a critical edition of his or her (collected) works is published or when the corpus of the author's works and its weight within the studies in philosophy are likely to meet those canons that characterize an author as a "classic author" (but the value of these criteria is not absolute). The process of collecting documents is not easy, especially with regard to secondary literature. This activity is mainly based on keyword searching through the online catalogue, on retrieving documents with the same Cutter code, as well as on the help of bibliographies. The activity of retrieving is rather mechanical but effective since it allows the identification of authors assigned the same Cutter number and thus their clean-up. However, the final purpose of all these activities is clearly and simply realized: to follow the string 190 by the Cutter number, disambiguating at most the new Cutter number through the appropriate procedures if already present among the locations of the authors.

Concerning the so-called internal hospitality, other issues are those addressed by interdisciplinary works. In the context of the philosophy collection at the SNS, the attribute "interdisciplinary" is used in cases of the relationship between philosophy and parts of philosophy and between philosophy and different disciplines. Of course, interdisciplinary issues are common to many classification schemas, but they often offer an exclusive dislocation. These kinds of solutions are not present in the classification schema at the SNS. Therefore, it is always necessary to select the suitable section in the event, for example, that one needs to classify a work about logic and ethics.

More specific examples of how the scheme works include those regarding works on many authors, each one classified in 190 (e.g. a book on Marx and Nietzsche), or works by authors who are classified in 190 and wrote on authors who in turn are also classified in 190 (e.g. Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, a case that we pragmatically resolved by locating two copies of the work, one with Heidegger and one with Nietzsche).

In all these cases, we look at solutions in order to assess how the work in question can be better integrated with the others, not only as it could be in a philosophy handbook or in a volume of history of philosophy, but as it is within the special type of collection that is the philosophy collection at the Library of the SNS. For example, if a work on ethics and logic is written by an author whose works are all classified in the class of Logic, then the work has a good chance of being classified in Logic unless the issue in question does not cover one of the most relevant topics represented in the Ethics subclass. Compromise solutions are inevitable; they are often offered by the sections of history of philosophy, as in the case of works on multiple authors classified in 190. In case of works by philosophers on philosophers, where both are classified among authors in 190, the selection criteria should be different. Typically, it must be taken into account either the weight, or role, that the two philosophers have in the context of the history of philosophy, as well as within the library collection.

1.2.2 Critical points: border regions and some final remarks

Different problems are posed by the so-called "border regions." These are fields of study whose disciplinary boundaries are made uncertain and changeable by the increasingly inter- and multi-disciplinary nature of contemporary knowledge, which combines tools, theories and models pertaining to different disciplines.

Nonetheless, this is not the appropriate context to linger over such an issue; at the risk of going beyond the boundaries of the librarian's tasks, let us consider only a couple of examples:

- 1) Philosophy of language, ontology and linguistics;
- 2) Cognitive Sciences and its many "components," such as psychology, logic, linguistics and so on.

In both cases, the question is: how to classify works by analytic and cognitive philosophers?

In the case of the works of analytic philosophers, for example, can they be hosted in their native regions, putting together works that, in these areas, are deeply rooted with works that undoubtedly branch outside the boundaries? Otherwise, should they receive a new "citizenship," so to say, in the regions towards which are they migrating, penalizing the original connection with their roots to enhance their current development?

We have not found the optimal solution to the open questions above. We try to focus the dialogue with our users on these issues, to trace trends in the reference literature that could legitimize a sort of territorial belonging, debating and analyzing, until the evidence of the postulate “a place for every book; every book in its place” leads us to a decision.

For about a decade, the library collections have been enriched by publications related to the line of research of the so-called cognitive sciences. As we have discussed above, Cognitive Science represents well facets that are typical of the multidisciplinary and crossing nature of contemporary knowledge. In fact, cognitive science is itself a convergence of multiple disciplines; it is not the simple sum of the parts, but rather a new line of research.

How then to classify works whose authors, from one hand, may come from different disciplines and, from the other hand, do not yet have a corpus of works, nor a statute, to the point that they can be clearly recognized as psychologists, philosophers as well as linguists?

Unlike the case of works in analytic philosophy, a solution has been found. Maybe it is a compromise solution, but it is still somehow useful. As there is a section devoted to “cognitive psychology” in the Library’s classification schema, we created a sort of

“reception center” within it for such documents, to be able to find in one place works with such a “nomadic” character.

Let us conclude with a definition of catalogue taken from the *Encyclopaedia of Memory*, edited by Nicolas Pethes and Jens Ruchatz (2001, 78):

Organization of knowledge by an order as external and mechanical as that represented—along with lexicons, inventories/registers, indexes, bibliographies—in the library catalogues that appeared for the first time in ancient Alexandria. These tools allow you to find at any time that knowledge that cannot be immediately preserved in memory.

References

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