

Editorial

Classification and Philosophy

It is only with a certain sadness that we turn to this subject today, for the philosopher on our Board of Editors, Alwin DIEMER, recently left us forever (see the obituary on p.46 of this issue). And yet precisely at this point in time, fruitful cooperation in the fields of both philosophy and classification strikes us as more urgently needed than ever before.

Historically speaking, philosophy, and especially logic, has always been concerned with the tools of classification: concept, judgement, definition, and last not least system-related problems (vide Kant). This concern started with Plato and Aristotle, was most heatedly debated in the Middle Ages by conceptualists and nominalists, was instructively summarized in the Logic of Port Royal by Antoine Arnauld and eventually produced proposed solutions by G.W.Leibniz, I.Kant, and G.Frege which can find useful applications in our modern classification theory. Also, the art of manufacturing systematically ordered systems of knowledge has been honored in the past few centuries by the noble efforts of various philosophers, as is impressively testified to by the outstanding work of the Russian E.I.Shamurin ("Ocherki po istorii bibliotechno-bibliograficheskoy klassifikatsii", Moskva 1955, 2 vols.; i.e. History of library-bibliographical classification), available in German from K.G.Saur Verlag (1218p.) but regrettably still unavailable as yet in an English translation.

It can safely be said that, from the point of view of theory, classification may be regarded as a field which has grown out of philosophy, considering that for a great many branches of knowledge philosophy has come to exercise a hermeneutic function. From a practical point of view, however, classification is a field which has developed from such domains of application as library science, information science, terminology and others and which is applied more or less successfully in many branches of knowledge in need of systematic representations of objects.

More recent approaches to classification originate though from mathematics and statistics with the use of cluster formation and analysis as well as the use of algebraic methods (lattice theory) for the visualization of classes and characteristics in various application fields.

The past few decades have twice seen the beginning of an apparently quite fruitful co-operation between philosophers and classification experts: In April 1967, hence exactly 20 years ago, a group of Düsseldorf philosophers headed by Prof.DIEMER assembled at a conference on the subject "System and Classification in Science and Documentation", which gathering marked the first occasion that the system concept, in reverting to I.Kant's classic formulation, was recognized in its full modern significance and was confronted with the questions of knowledge ordering and classification. In a follow-up to this conference (as described in the proceedings volume concerned), the concept fields "classification" and "system" were clarified in depth

from the points of view of terminology and subject-matter and inventoried in a collection of definitions. The results of these reflections have found expression in the work of the Committee for Classification and Thesaurus Research of the German Documentation Society, which Prof.Diemer presided over from 1967 to 1974. Four years later, hence in 1971, Prof.J.A. WOJCIECHOWSKI of Ottawa University organized an international meeting of philosophers and classificationists on the subject "Conceptual Basis of the Classification of Knowledge". Calling to mind that in his foreword to the proceedings volume (K.G.Saur Verlag, Munich 1974) Prof. Wojciechowski expressed the wish "May it become an invitation to philosophers and classificationists to become better acquainted with each other and try to bridge the gap which exists at present between them", can it be said that this wish has borne fruit?

Ever since its founding, the German Society for Classification has kept trying to interest philosophers in its problems, regrettably, however, with nothing more to show for its efforts than a very few contributions at annual conventions. In contrast, it can be gathered from the corresponding conferences in Soviet Russia that a great many philosophers from that part of the world are actively concerned with research work concerning the problems of the organization and representation of knowledge and the application of systemology in the sciences.

We are now asking ourselves: Quo vadis classificatio? The programs of the "11th Annual Conference of the Gesellschaft für Klassifikation" (June 29-July 1, 87, Aachen) (p.32) and of the "International Congress on Terminology and Knowledge, Sept.29-Oct.1, 87, Trier (p.39) undoubtedly testify to the fact that changes are under way in the field of the organization of knowledge. Though they draw heavily upon modern technology, this should be no reason for philosophers to withdraw in utter disinterest. Wholly on the contrary: their contributions are the more urgently needed, the more pure technology seems to dominate the scene.

Interdisciplinary research centers should come into existence at which the practical work problems in the organization and representation of knowledge are jointly dealt with and carried towards a solution by representatives from classification and philosophy alike. I would offer a strong plea for a situation in which research in our field - which so far seems to be composed wholly of individual initiatives as exemplified once again by the contributions to this issue, coming as they do from Canada, Denmark, India, and Poland - would find the public support it has been in need of for so long a time already. On a worldwide scale, the tasks involved in the administration and dissemination of knowledge are tremendously big, whereas knowledge on the methods required generally is not as widespread as would be necessary. Quite certainly it would be in the interest of higher-educational policies in most of the nations if the methods of knowledge organization could be upgraded to the level where they would be acceptable as teaching subjects at universities and colleges. And to this end, in my opinion, co-operation between classification and philosophy is urgently necessary.

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