Should Philosophy Books Be Treated As Fiction?

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ABSTRACT: The thought is canvassed that any reasonably heterogeneous collection of philosophy books accessible to any public is best shelved in strict alphabetical order by the author/editor names that appear on their spines, as we often find in public libraries with open access for a general reading public. The positive good that such an arrangement seeks is philosophical neutrality, given the highly controversial and fissiparous nature of the activities that are embraced under the rubric 'philosophy.' For the rest, support for our hypothesis is mainly negative, and derives from considerations concerning the difficulties that arise in persevering with any of the obvious alternative classifications. Though some of the ordering principles that motivate more adventurous and helpful arrangements can be applied to many philosophy books, the hard cases are so hard, so many and so prominent, that they would require any conscientious cataloguer to be continuously making make choices. The upshots of such choices cannot be predicted and hence make for arbitrariness. Someone who knows their own way around will find what they are looking for; and someone who doesn't is beyond help.

1. Suspend the 100s

The *Dewey Decimal Classification* (*DDC*) allots classmarks to novels and short stories, which are distributed in the subdivisions of the 800s. Nevertheless not a few municipal and other non—specialist libraries disregard this resource and prefer instead to operate a basic dichotomy between those items that are shelved by *DDC* and those that are not. In such libraries, what is generally to be found in the 800s are, in addition to perhaps poetry and drama, works of literary criticism, literary history and other studies that take what we might call belles lettres as their object. On the other side of the basic dichotomy, a library of this sort will place books that people read rather than study. Some of these will be among the objects discussed in the works to be found in the 800s; many will not. Those that are not are likely to be among the books that are most read, as lending rights payments amply demonstrate. Thus, in a fair number of libraries open to the general public, genre novels such as romances, thrillers or detective fiction, are not given their place on the shelf that strict

application of the *DDC* would indicate, but are arranged in alphabetical order by the name by which the author is known to the reading public (which, for simplicity, we shall sometimes call 'surname').

The rationale for not applying *DDC* to fiction generally is not hard to understand, though part of it may be patronising. The patronising part is the thought that the typical reader of genre novels and the like may not be a sophisticated library user. The realistic aspect of this is that, if, to find a novel by Catherine Cookson, one need only know the author surname, then the best way of allowing a reader to find what he is looking for is to place all fiction in alphabetical order by author. Author surnames—not least when they are not in reality the surnames of the authors—are salient in the identification of fiction. Setting aside the brand effects of such imprints as Mills and Boon, only a reader who was in possession of more information—such as date and place of birth and/or of publication—about his preferred author would be able to track down the book he was looking for within the *DDC*. The library user, presumed on this hypothesis to be unsophisticated, does not

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even need to know that the book he is looking for has a place in *DDC*, because the only information he has is, on the one hand, the author's surname and, on the other, the order of the alphabet. If the reader is not in search of any particular writer's works, the alphabetical order in which they are arranged on the shelf will be no greater hindrance to casual browsing than any other.

The claim of this note is that a similar suspension of *DDC* should be applied to philosophy books even, and especially, when the typical user is knowledgeable about the subject (say, from undergraduate major upwards). The *DDC* 100s should be empty and alphabetical order by author surname is no worse an order than any other, is better than most and recommends itself on its merits. Unlike the patronising part of the high—street library's treatment of fiction, the claim is not that typical users of a collection of philosophy books are unsophisticated to the point of not knowing that libraries need some sort of organisation. Nor is it the claim that someone with an interest in or knowledge about philosophy is somehow disabled from mastering a cunning system of classmarks. Rather, it is the claim that she should not have to think about how to classify philosophy books when looking for one: if that is what she is looking for, she should find Whitehead and Russell's *Principia Mathematica* under 'Whitehead' (though a certain remissness may take her first to 'R'), thus obviating one visit to the catalogue.

To make our claim at least less paradoxical than it might seem at first blush, we begin with a brief review of why any composite system of classification is unsuited to arranging philosophy books in the linear way required by shelving: each item must occupy one and only one place in the scheme. Though we take *DDC* as an example, parallel remarks could be made about, say, the Library of Congress Classification or of the Cambridge University Library's classmark system. Granting that the size of a literature collection is an important practical constraint, we then set out a few simplifying idealisations, and then proceed to examine in turn the elements that play a role in *DDC*'s mixed taxonomy of philosophy books. Each, we suggest, runs into insuperable difficulties in assigning even—or, perhaps, especially—some of the best—known books to a place where even—or, again, especially—the most philosophically sophisticated reader could expect to find it.

In the field of knowledge organization, there is the category of the 'subject matter specialist' (e.g. Bosch 2006). The present author presents himself in that field in that rather ridiculous garb, i.e. as one who has been reading and studying philosophy books for upwards of thirty years and, over that period, has used numerous libraries of various dimensions, structures and degrees of specialisation for use by philosophers. But with this caveat: though many specialists in this field may be confident that their own word on the field is authoritative (because that of a specialist), the present author harbours the suspicion that it is precisely the specialists who have made the terrain particularly fertile for idiosyncratic categorisations of philosophy books. All this note aims to defend is the idea that, although the claim in favour of alphabetic shelving may itself seem idiosyncratic, at least one subject matter specialist is prepared to waive any authority that might be attributed to the category in the interests of simplicity and predictability in book finding.

2. Mixed modes

A compromise is an agreement out of which no party gets what they wanted, though each party can be satisfied that they are less badly off than they would have been if they had not reached the compromise. A taxonomy like that adopted in *DDC* is a compromise among divergent ways of thinking of philosophy as subdivisible into its constituent parts, mixing as it does considerations of genre (100), subject—matter (110, 120, 160, 170), doctrine (140) and time—and—place (180, 190). We set aside for present puposes the peculiarity of the inclusion of paranormal phenomena (130) and psychology (150), and their particular collocations within the scheme, which are mere artefacts of the philosophical culture in America in the time of Melvil Dewey (see Kuklick, 2001 ch. 7). Yet the employment of more than one criterion for classification means that virtually every book should be allotted to more than one place. Why is this a problem?

It is a problem because it requires a cataloguer to choose. We shall recur several times to this argument, so it is well to spell it out at the outset. Though it is not our present purpose to give a philosophical account of what choice is, let us say that an agent makes a choice when she perceives more than one line of action open to her and she determines for herself which to take. That is, consulting her own preferences and expectations, she deliberates in a way that another person in the same situation might not, either because of differences in preferences and expectations or because the differences between one line of action

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and another are insufficient to make one wholly preponderant to a rational agent with given preferences and expectations.

Let us consider as simple a case as is imaginable. We give an absolutely typical philosophy book, say, a monograph on pantheism in Stoic cosmology, under an unequivocal title such as *Pantheism in Stoic Cosmology*, to three cataloguers, A, B and C, and we ask them to assign it a *DDC* classmark. Even if A, B, and C are not experts on pantheism in Stoic cosmology, they may conscientiously consult not only the title but also the Library of Congress Cataloguing—in—Publication Data on the copyright page and find, among other things '1. Cosmology (Philosophy)', '2. Stoicism' and '3. Pantheism.' Making absolutely proper use of the data available, A may assign the book to 113 ('cosmology'), while B assigns it to 188 ('Stoic philosophy'); and C to 147 ('pantheism and related systems'). The behaviour of each of the cataloguers is perfectly consistent with *DDC*: A privileges subject—matter, B the school represented and C the doctrine espoused. These differences reflect choices made on the basis of the preferences and expectations of A, B, and C, each of which is perfectly rational and even philosophically defensible.

Suppose, then, a cataloguer like B, who consistently resolves his doubts by preferring the criterion of doctrine espoused. In such case, as many as nine of the top—level divisions can end up almost empty, with virtually all the library's holdings huddled under 149 ('other philosophical systems'), and those ordered alphabetically primarily by author surname. On the other hand, if the cataloguer uses now one and now the other of the basic differentiæ for classifying the parts of philosophy, then, even though the distribution of works will be more uniform over the classmarks, there is the following consequence for the reader. Not knowing which of the possible criteria has been adopted by the cataloguer who took the volume in hand, she will not know in advance where to look. If she does not know anything about pantheism in Stoic cosmology, then *DDC* will direct her to all of 113, 188 and 147. But, on our scheme, if she has just one name, such as Freudenthal, Sambursky or Reinhardt (or all three), then she will make as many hits as there are books by these authors and these will take her to further surnames by consulting the bibliographies of the books she finds, rather than detouring through the catalogue.

Because *DDC* does not guide either the cataloguer or the reader in the matter of determining how to 'cut philosophy up at the joints', uncertainty is generated. In particular, if the reader has to divine the cataloguer's choices, then a mixed system of this sort is worse than useless. As we shall see on an anecdotal basis, in philosophy, the hard cases are so hard, so many and so prominent, that they would require any conscientious cataloguer to be continuously making choices. Hard cases make hard choices make bad shelf—juxtapositions. Even supposing the choices made were wholly coherent one with another, they would nevertheless be unpredictable by anyone who did not share all and only the cataloguer's philosophical presuppositions—that is, by almost anyone with an interest in the subject.

3. A modest proposal

Let us sharpen a little the claim we are aiming to render palatable, which we may express by saying that any reasonably heterogeneous collection of philosophy books accessible to any public is best shelved in strict alphabetical order by the author/editor names that appear on their spines or title—pages. Perhaps the place to start is with some idealisations and some background assumptions.

The basic idealisations are that there should be no space constraints on shelving the collection and that there need be no duplication of texts; hence there is no justification for anything other than open shelving and there should be only one place where a given book should be found by a user with the minimum indispensable knowledge about what she is looking for. A further idealisation calls for catalogues by title and subject matter or key word that are reasonably complete, but that should be regarded as instruments of *second* resort. A library user's first port of call should be bookstacks. And the main assumption is that the primary users of the collection we are envisaging are following their autonomous interests in philosophy; supposing that they have no particular time constraints, questions of 'instant—use' collections and the like need not arise.

We should next get to grips with the notion of a 'reasonably heterogeneous collection of philosophy books.' One notable problem that arises concerns the demarcation of philosophy relative to other fields of enquiry. This is itself a question that philosophers pose themselves as a properly philosophical issue, the manner of confronting and resolving which can have consequences for the ways in which other philosophical problems are posed, confronted and resolved. Most philosophers more or less gaily admit to not having any decent definition of their

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subject, and not a few offer definitions that are wilfully misleading. Some, such as G.E. Moore, have been known to point to a reasonably heterogeneous collection of philosophy books (in Moore's case, his own) and say that philosophy is what those are about. Whatever philosophy is, we shall suppose that all those in a supposed collection are philosophy books at least in this sense: that someone pursuing a recognisable interest in philosophy might be (at least academically) interested in what is in them.

A negative reason for specifying our collection as 'reasonably heterogeneous' is that we do well to exclude from consideration cases in which a research library may have a clear focus or be the instrument of a definite programme of enquiry. For instance, where a collection specialises in works by and about a certain author or intellectual moment, the distinctions between 'primary', 'secondary' and 'reference' works can be staked out with some precision, and can offer effective help to readers whose interest in the holdings are already guided by a pre—established research project

If, then, we are supposing that our collection might be of use to pretty much anybody who is interested in one aspect or another of philosophy, it is worth recalling how heterogeneous, in terms of subject matter and genre (to name but two dimensions), a collection of philosophy books has to be to be anything like representative of the field. In at least one respect, this is the obverse of the demarcation problem: just as there is no straightforward and consensual way of determining what should fall outside the perimeter of philosophy, there is no straightfoward and consensual way of accounting for all the things that do in fact fall within it.

The phrase 'accessible by any public' appears in our summary formulation of our claim because it is fairly obvious that individuals arranging their books for private use need not care how accessible their material is to people with different conceptions of the nature and scope of philosophy. The claim that an author—name arrangement is preferable depends crucially on the idea that a usable library presents books to users irrespective of their philosophical predilections.

The positive good sought by an arrangement on the shelves in alphabetical order by author is neutrality—specifically philosophical neutrality—given the highly controversial and fissiparous nature of the activities that are embraced under the rubric 'philosophy.' Assuming the Roman alphabet and consensual schemes of transliteration, simplicity and predictabil-

ity are the overriding desiderata, satisfaction of which can be measured by the minimum amount of information a reader has to possess in order to be able to locate unaided the material sought. Though there are cases of homonymy among philosophers, it is not so terribly difficult to distinguish– to take a surname very felicitous for their bearers, but perhaps not entirely appropriate in at least one case—between John Wisdom and John Oulton Wisdom. Obstacles such as pseudonymity, as in the case of Kierkegaard, and misattribution, as with the pseudo—Scotus, are not problems of principle. Cataloguers do well to act on what is on the spine or title page of a book, not because they have to believe it, but because users follow that information, however many further complications they are willing to envisage. Likewise, there is generally not much difficulty in distinguishing between the textual editing (transcribing, reconstructing or translating) of a work with an originator different from the person who submits the text to a publisher, which is an enterprise in philology, and the editing of, say, a collection of commissioned essays, which is an exercise in academic entrepreneurship. Unless they are housed in a separate alphabetical run, there is no theoretical reason—given that we are setting aside those practical factors that have to do with the housing of stock—why journals should not appear under their own names, as if they were surnames.

Just as it is not philosophically neutral to say in general terms what is and what is not philosophical, it will be urged that the thesis that texts have authors is not philosophically neutral. For, considerations have been adduced in favour of the thesis that the very idea of authorship is in one way or another misleading, misunderstood or even incoherent. We may concede that this is indeed a philosophical thesis. But, just as it does not follow from the fact that Darwinism is inconsistent with some religious doctrines of the Creation, that Darwinism is a religious doctrine, so it does not follow from the inconsistency between the philosophical thesis that texts do not have authors and the identification of authors in our cataloguing scheme, that that identification carries with it a philosophical thesis. All we need is the supposition that, if texts have authors, then the rule to follow is that of the ways they are identified on spines and title—pages. It is hard to resist the further observations: (i) that the books in which considerations are adduced for the death—or—absence of the author could, on the scheme we are advocating, easily be found under their authors' surnames;

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and (ii) that some of these authors did not disdain to collect royalties on their books.

4. The Standard Rivals

Granting that the idea of shelving philosophy books by author surnames will strike many knowledge organisation specialists as a depressingly unadventurous and unhelpful way of arranging such material, we may examine how the standard ways of being just a little more adventurous and helpful will backfire because they lack predictability.

Let us consider first the subject divisions recognised by *DDC*. As already noted, these are 110 (metaphysics), 120 (epistemology), 160 (logic) and 170 (ethics). With some pushing and pulling, these divisions can be seen as inheriting the trichotomy envisaged by the Stoics who, in one favoured image, likened philosophy to an egg, with logic as the shell, ethics as the white, and physics as the yolk (Diogenes, *Lives*, VII, 40). The pushing and pulling called for to make these distinctions line up with each other are themselves the product of what has gone on in philosophy since the time of Zeno of Citium (to whom the egg image is due): what the Stoics studied under 'physics' modern philosophers may recognise as metaphysics and epistemology. But let us suppose that we can be beguiled by the simplicity of some such scheme.

One question that might be asked is: 'are there any philosophy books that can be assigned with fair certainty, and therefore predictability, to one or other of these categories?.' To this, the answer is undoubtedly 'yes, there are some.' Indeed, there are quite a few. For instance, there would be no difficulty in placing G.E. Moore's *Ethics* pretty squarely under 'ethics' and, more specifically, under 171 ('systems and doctrines'). The crucial question, however, is not: 'are there any that can be assigned?' but, rather: 'are there any that can't?', where the proviso 'with fair certainty, and therefore predictability' remains in force. To this latter question, the answer is, as before, positive. Indeed, it is very emphatically positive. Not only are there very, very many philosophy books so hybrid as to fall into more than one of the basic subject categories, there are not a few that fit into none with any certainty or predictability.

To stick with a homonym of the example just cited, Spinoza's *Ethics* falls, for those parts that are not purest theology, under a bewildering range of different categories, almost none of which figures in the 170s. In such a case, the considerations to do

with cataloguer choice kick in. If, on the basis of Part I, we put the book under 111 ('ontology'), 122 ('causation') or 147 ('pantheism and related systems' again), then we have ignored Part II, which might go under 129 ('origin and destiny of individual souls') or perhaps 126 ('the self'), Part III, which looks fairly surely like a 152 ('perception, movement, emotions, drives') and Part IV, which we might slot into 123 ('determinism and indeterminism') or perhaps, at a stretch and on one reading of the text, 171 ('ethical doctrines and systems'). Any of these choices could be defended. But none is certain. More to our present point, none could be predicted. And especially not by someone who, not having yet read the book, is looking for it on the shelves of a library.

Moving slightly crabwise, and without intention to suggest that every book written by an author who has written one philosophy book is itself a philosophy book, we might consider another work by Spinoza, the *Tractatus Theologico—Politicus*. Although its twentieth and final chapter might justify a *DDC* classmark under 172 ('political ethics'), the rest does not find a place at all in the 100s. Yet the work is undoubtedly a philosophy book, so much so that a colleague of the present author devoted an entire course of what is known in Italy as 'theoretical philosophy' to it in the academic year 2006—7. The *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico—Politicus* have very little in common by way of subject matter or doctrine; but they should not be isolated one from the other. Hence, any shelving arrangement that leaves the finder of one oblivious of the existence of the other, and, in the best hypothesis (i.e. that the reader does know something about their contents), quite in the dark about where to find either, is defective for the purposes of someone using a reasonably heterogeneous collection of philosophy books.

Our claim is not that there are not differences in subject matter that have been hallowed by tradition and have proved useful by common consent even by the most disputatious of philosophers, but that the differences thus established have been so in spite of their not corresponding to the areas that attract investigation and analysis. Though we do not intend to make a grand metaphilosophical statement, it is noticeable that much philosophy is done precisely at the crossovers between the disciplines that make up the Stoics' egg and indefinitely many others: these are the points at which things become genuinely philosophical. Even if this is a mere appearance in need of some other explanation, it is at least a perceived feature of the subject itself to be continually revising

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the categories on which a subject catalogue functions, generating just the sorts of uncertainty that a librarian should be concerned to minimise.

If we seek any greater fineness of grain than the Stoic tripartite division, even using the most explicit of criteria, the effects are devastating. As already indicated, the inventor of *DDC* was in thrall to the learned consensus of his time and place (not, be it said, one of the recognised heydays for philosophy), and was fully aware that the cataloguer can do no better than consult those who are at the leading edge of the various specialisms. This has proved a proper flexibility for encompassing developments in and of the hard sciences and their associated technologies. But there are at least three emergent phenomena in philosophy over the last century and a quarter that do not seem to have been taken into account in the 2004 version of *DDC*. One is the explosion of work in logic, both in formal systems and in philosophical logic, as well as the latter's offspring, the philosophy of language (decidedly not to be put in the 400s), which makes the subdivisions of the 170s look quite inadequate. Another has been the growth of autonomously philosophical theorising about aesthetics, which does not fit easily in the 700s or 800s. And a third is the development in recent decades of cognitive science. The trouble, however, is that there is no obvious referee to determine how these should be collocated. Insofar as—to take the last instance—cognitive science calls on loudly disputed philosophical presuppositions, the cataloguer should be wary of trusting to a putative classification by one of the disputants. The very different, schemes, projects, proposals and evaluations that are still on the table are in competition in such a way that an extension or modification of *DDC* in line with the views of, say, any one of John Searle, Jerry Fodor or Andy Clark (all leading lights in the field, but unable to agree with each other about almost anything), might not necessarily add to the confusion, but it would certainly enrage at least one of the participants to ongoing debates.

Adjacent to the employment of subject matter as a principle for distributing books on shelves, there is the criterion sometimes known as the 'happy neighbour', which itself shares ancestors with the 'primary'—'secondary' distinction. Here, the idea is to group books according to some focus, which in turn may be subject matter or author. Although the present writer does not know of any attempt to apply 'happy neighbour' in a publicly accessible philosophy library, the Warburg Institute arranges its

books in such a way that the primary and secondary literature on certain artistic and cultural themes will snuggle up to each other, so that someone looking for something on a given topic—so long as it is well—recognised within the Warburgian paradigm of studies in the classical tradition—will find several things on it without extra legwork or catalogue consultation.

As applied to philosophy, this might have the enjoyable outcome that, in a subdivision of a section directed by John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, we would find a string of books on the question of personal identity, because Bk II ch. xxvii of Locke's book has effectively set the terms of that particular debate for three hundred years. Enjoyable, no doubt. But lacking in predictability and hard to generalise. Cataloguer choice on such a scheme would be either agonising or entirely frivolous; to find what they are looking for, users would have to have intuited what (the cataloguers think) are the core things in a subject in which core things are few and far between. The principle of 'happy neighbour' can be used effectively outside philosophy, perhaps for some dedicated holdings for special use within it, and, not without some inconvenience, by the individual owner—user of a private collection, but hardly for our reasonably heterogeneous collection of philosophy books accessible to a public.

The other major way of organising philosophy books is by reference to a time and/or a place. *DDC* divides these into the 180s ('ancient, medieval and Oriental') and the 190s ('modern Western'). The reasons that have been adduced for ordering books chronologically seem peculiarly weak when applied to philosophy.

One can understand ordering history books by the periods that they have as their subject—matter. But it does not follow at all easily that books concerning the history of philosophy should be treated likewise, for it is very hard to tell when a book written by a philosopher is a history—of—philosophy book. For instance, Russell's critical exposition of the philosophy of Leibniz may be said to be a history book because its ostensible subject is a philosopher long dead when its author wrote. But a slightly sour reader might think that one learns at least as much about Russell's thought at the turn of the twentieth century as one does about Leibniz' at the turn of the eighteenth. Though it is a slightly extreme case, it is not unique nor even untypical of the ways that, even when a book of history of philosophy aspires to the neutrality of the most imbecile

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forms of doxography, there is always and inevitably a powerful refractive effect in the composition of such works. Moreover, not a few history books explicitly set themselves to make comparisons over long lapses of time aiming to bring out the character of one or more of their named subjects. Thus, a book with the title *Descartes and Augustine*, which happens to dedicate as much space to Plotinus as it does to Augustine, might quite reasonably be shelved as Cartesian scholarship because its author's primary purpose in discussing forms of Neo—Platonism was to throw light on a strand in Descartes' thought.

As indicated at the outset, many of the books in the 800s have works of fiction as their objects. In this respect, they are often called 'secondary' in terms of the distinction already referred to. Such a distinction can frequently be made in pairwise fashion among philosophy books; but it is not without its problems. For instance, one of the most influential logic books of all time, the *Isagoge* of Porphyry of Tyre is declaredly an introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*, a work on which Porphyry also wrote two commentaries. One might be tempted, therefore to shelve these books together. The trouble, however, is that, starting with Boethius, a tradition grew up of writing commentaries on the *Isagoge*: should these be shelved under Aristotle, under Porphyry or under their authors? Our present claim is that the last solution is the simplest and least demanding.

On the other hand, there is almost nothing compelling to be said in favour of classifying philosophy books by the time and place of their original elaboration. Much has been said about the peculiarly intimate dialogue that philosophers keep up with the past of their subject. Some of what has been said has led to the thought that philosophy ought to be studied in chronological order, starting with Thales of Miletus. In Italy, for instance, this is the absolutely standard practice in schools where philosophy is taught, and derives from the Hegel—inspired doctrine of a certain Giovanni Gentile, a philosopher who took improper advantage of being Minister of Education under Mussolini. The doctrine espoused by Gentile, and adopted by his successors for reasons that are not our present concern, is known as 'historicism.' Historicism has a very slim chance of being anywhere near the truth of the matter as a point of pedagogy; and it seems to the present author to be not—even— wrong as a theory of what is involved in understanding a philosophical text, so wildly misconceived is it. In our view, considering philosophical books in descending order of their authors' body weights at the age of 25 would be no worse criterion than what historicism proposes, and it might remind us of an interesting dialogue between the corpulent St Thomas Aquinas and the distinctly pudgy David Hume.

Apart from its arbitrariness, the historicist criterion seems to fail all possible tests as a principle for determining the shelving of a reasonably heterogeneous collection of philosophy books: it can hardly be applied consistently; it requires too much of readers; and it produces unpredictability. Though one could imagine a consistent version of the principle, one that specified, for instance, that a book's place on the shelf is determined by the date of birth of its author, so that Spinoza, born on the 24th November 1632 comes after Locke who was born on the 28th August of the same year, it is hard to believe that any librarian has ever set up such an arrangement. In its pure form, the historicist principle runs into problems of practicability. Not only should library users not be expected to know the exact date of birth of even the most famous philosophers, in many cases, the best scholarship available cannot determine to within a greater accuracy than, say, a decade, when many were born, though it is pleasantly easier to know the dates of death.

As a result, a collection that respects a watered— down historicist principle subdivides the last 2,500 years into periods or, in the case of the *DDC* 180s, both periods and schools. Even so, this seems to require that a reader know more than necessary about his quarry. If, for instance the Professor of Philosophy in the University of Cambridge, publishing with the Oxford University Press, can classify Epicurus as a 'Stoic' (Blackburn, 2001, 17), thus straddling, not to say muddling, 187 and 188, what hope is there for the rest of us? When, for instance, did 'Medieval philosophy' (189) begin? Before or after Iamblichus (whose dates are, in any case, a bit approximate)? And when did it end? Before or after Suárez? Did philosophy immediately become 'Modern' (190s)? And what will we get next?

While it may—or may not—be conceptually impossible for a philosopher, or any other human being, to have more than one beginning in time, the fact that people can move in space makes the *DDC* organisation of the 190s utterly unpredictable. The notable nomads of the twentieth century, such as Wittgenstein, Popper, Carnap, Hintikka (is Finland in 'Scandinavia': 198?), Marcuse, Arendt, Levinas and Derrida (like Camus, 194: 'France' or 199: 'other geographical areas'?) all require cataloguer choices of just the sort we are aiming to avoid.

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More generally, we may note that within these unstable and inscrutable categorisations, at a certain point of subdivision, a system like *DDC* relents and goes alphabetical by author surname. If later, why not sooner? And this is what underlies the foregoing polemic: given (i) that library—users want to get at books; (ii) that the easiest, least contentious, least theory—laden and most compatible—with—ignorance way of identifying a book is by its author's name; and (iii)—and this is the crunch—that most library users believe (ii), and would act on it, if free to do so; there is no reasonable alternative to organising a reasonably heterogeneous collection of philosophy books accessible to any public in any order other than that of alphabetical order by author surname.

5. Some temptations to make exceptions

As we have noted, the first decade of the 100s is subdivided, internally and relative to the rest of the century, by genre; specifically, it is devoted to what we might call 'reference' books. If our analogy between the arrangement of philosophy books and the municipal approach to handling books of fiction (i.e. not contemplating Barbara Cartland under *DDC*) holds good, then it might give rise to the following thought relative to our present interests. Even supposing that all the philosophers and philosophy books we have alluded to so far should be shelved in alphabetical order by author surname, are there not categories of books, such as dictionaries (103), encyclopedias, bibliographies (some, presumably, in 105), guides and overviews (106?) biographical repertories (108) and histories (109) that should be exempted from our levelling zeal?

Three kinds of reason might be given for thus bending the rule. One is that a reference section is a natural enough category: these are books about philosophy, rather than of philosophy, just as a handbook of the characters in Dickens is not a work by Dickens. A second is that it is handy to have such works concentrated in one zone of the library: if a user fails to find what he is looking for in the *Routledge Shorter Encyclopedia*, he may find it in the adjacent *Oxford Companion*. A third is that, as in the cases just cited, works of this sort are more easily remembered by title and/or publisher than by author, compiler or editor (to the chagrin of Edward Craig and Ted Honderich respectively).

Taken together, these three considerations seem to make a strong case for separating reference material from the run of philosophy books. But, though

the second and third of them are certainly cogent from the point of view of the user, the difficulty of elucidating the highlighted prepositions in the first (and thus explicating the 'such' and the 'of this sort' in the others) in a way that is philosophically neutral, and thus predictable by users, seems to set the proposal at naught. This is not a matter of mere vagueness, but a reflection of the fact that philosophers often use titles, styles and manners of presentation that mimic those of reference works, and, vice—versa, sometimes end up writing what can become a standard or institutionalised reference work in the course of pursuing other expository purposes.

We may consider, in the first category, the uses made by, say, Pierre Bayle or Voltaire of titles including the word 'dictionary:' though perhaps there was a moment in which the former could have been regarded as a somewhat polemical antidote to other reference works then on the market, both are now consulted not to know how things stand, but to know what Bayle or Voltaire thought about things: they have become objects, rather than instruments, of study. The tradition in question is by no means exhausted, as Quine's *Quiddities: an intermittently philosophical dictionary* of 1987 attests.

In the second category, we might cite Guthrie's *History of Greek Philosophy*, which may be regarded as predecessors in the series that bears the title *Cambridge History of* x *Philosophy*, where for '*x*' we may substitute names of other periods. Though its author disavows 'encylopedic' intent in discussing Aristotle (Guthrie, 1962—81, vol. V, p. ix), his magnum opus deserves a 109 classmark if any does. Likewise, in logic, a number of textbooks, such as Hughes and Cresswell's *Modal Logic*, have taken on the status almost of texts for consultation, although that was by no means the original intent.

Further trouble is raised by this second category. Even if the present author might want to classify the works just mentioned as, in one way or another, reference works, he would be less than happy to see some—without saying here which—of what a publisher would call their 'market competitors' similarly honoured. This, then, is the judgment of one subject—matter specialist, and one that would not be shared by other, equally or more specialist, users of our collection of philosophy books. Hence, the cataloguer should not be put in the invidious position of attributing to this book or that an authoritativeness that is not philosophically neutral. We do not deny that many reference works in philosophy are to be trusted about many matters. But it is in part a phi-

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losophical commitment to say which, how much and about what.

Where multiple authorship, collaboration or committee approaches to composition might recommend that a work be regarded as anonymous, the hypothesis of simplicity would indicate shelving by the name of the publishing house. It is true that such a flattening of the terrain means that our collection calls for a fairly articulate subject and title catalogue; but that is a matter for separate consideration.

6. The long and the short of it

Our argument for alphabetical ordering of all the books that would fall within the *DDC* 100s has been mainly negative. It derives from considerations concerning the difficulties that arise in persevering with any of the obvious alternative classifications of a reasonably heterogeneous collection of philosophy books, and in making some of the most apparently commonsensical exceptions. Though some of the ordering principles that motivate more adventurous and helpful arrangements can be applied to many philosophy books, the hard cases—in which philosophi-

cal judgment is demanded of a cataloguer—are so glaring to anyone who knows about what is between the covers of this stuff, that someone who knows their own way around will find what they are looking for, and someone who doesn't is beyond help.

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