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Nonknowledge:
The Bibliographical Organization of
Ignorance, Stupidity, Error, and Unreason:
Part Two*

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ABSTRACT: Starting with the Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom paradigm in information science, it is possible to derive a model of the opposite of knowledge having hierarchical qualities. A range of counterpoints to concepts in the knowledge hierarchy can be identified and ascribed the overall term "nonknowledge." This model creates a conceptual framework for understanding the connections between topics such as error, ignorance, stupidity, folly, popular misconceptions, and unreason, by locating them as levels or phases of nonknowledge. The concept of nonknowledge links heretofore disconnected discourses on these individual topics by philosophers, psychologists, historians, sociologists, satirists, and others. Subject headings provide access to the categories of nonknowledge, but confusion remains due to the general failure of cataloging and classification to differentiate between works about nonknowledge and examples of nonknowledge.

1.0 Introduction to Part Two

Part one of this essay introduced a concept of "nonknowledge" based on negative counterparts to the hierarchy of data, information, knowledge, and wisdom (DIKW), consisting of an absence or lack of data, ignorance, misinformation, disinformation, error, stupidity, and folly. The model was further extended to unreason (the negation of reason), and was articulated through the use of *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (*LCSH*) for terms in the domain of 'knowledge' and their negative counterparts in the

'nonknowledge' sphere. The essay next expounded on the concept of stupidity as treated in the published literature. Part two continues the treatment of subtopics in nonknowledge and then treats the question of the nonknowledge as a subject (works about nonknowledge) versus nonknowledge as a form (works of nonknowledge).

2.1 Folly

The terms 'folly' and 'stupidity' are used so interchangeably that it is very hard to tell them apart con-

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ceptually. For example, Tabori, in *The Natural Science of Stupidity* (1959), used the word 'folly' and did not distinguish it from 'stupidity.' The book was followed up in 1961 with *The Art of Folly,* a collection of essays that continued the discussion, albeit in a somewhat breezier, more lighthearted manner, without explaining the difference between folly and stupidity. The OCLC WorldCat bibliographic records for Tabori's two books show that they are cataloged differently, even though they are similar in subject matter. *The Natural Science of Stupidity* has the subject headings 'Mental efficiency,' 'Superstition,' and 'Errors,' the LCC call number BF435 (an obsolete number corresponding to the obsolete heading 'Inefficiency, Intellectual'), and the *DDC* call number 151 (an obsolete number for the psychology of intelligence). *The Art of Folly* has the subject heading 'Folly,' the LCC call number BJ1535.6 (folly as a vice, from the viewpoint of ethics), and the *DDC* call number 901.9 (philosophy and theory of geography and history). Clearly, such classification through subject cataloging has its basis in the titles of the books. The concept of 'stupidity,' though now established as separate from mental deficiency, is rooted primarily in psychology, extending outward into cultural and social domains. The position of 'folly' in classification is different because of the concept's genealogy.

As a theme in literature, folly first emerged in Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* ("Ship of Fools"), written in 1494, which criticized folly in terms of moral and religious norms. Folly was identified as moral failure, and fools were portrayed as court jesters and merry-makers. The literature on 'folly' is dominated by a text by Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam first published in Latin in 1511 with the title *Morieae Encomium* and known in English translation as *The Praise of Folly.* Erasmus personifies Folly as a woman akin to a Greek goddess and, in the tradition of classical rhetoric, imagines her giving a long speech of self-praise. The essay combines satire and ridicule with a humanistic vision of folly within the Christian faith. Critics through the centuries have found profound insight in the humor of Erasmus's treatise, which identifies folly as the opposite of wisdom, or at least its counterpart.

Although 'folly' in the modern context seems virtually indistinguishable from 'stupidity,' its use in books cataloged as being about folly (most of which are commentaries on Erasmus's tract) hearkens back to an antique, quasi-religious notion of the fool created in medieval times, with implications of sinfulness as well as stupidity, along with those of parody and comedy.

A distinction was made between natural and artificial fools. Natural fools were "mentally deficient or just plain stupid, whereas artificial fools were those who counterfeited this state in order to amuse others" (Palmer 1994, 43). Natural fools were not viewed as "mentally disabled persons" in the modern sense but rather as "marvels of nature" to be collected and kept along with precious stones, ostrich eggs, and peculiar plants, given as gifts, and thought to possess magical powers (Bernuth 2006). Artificial fools included minstrels, who enacted stupidity or mental deficiency for comic effect, and participants in fool festivals, which also enacted folly in the guise of parody.

2.2 Errors

'Folly' can have the quite separate connotation of fallacies and misunderstandings resulting in devastation and calamity. The word 'folly' may sound rather lighthearted, but the disasters to which it refers go can go far beyond the appearance of foolishness, with utterly tragic and catastrophic consequences that may be understood fully only in hindsight, after the damage has been done. This kind of folly is summed up by Perkins (2002, 64) as "making a wreck of things."

The impact of decisions unfolds over time. Errors of fact can be corrected immediately, but whether a political decision is right or wrong may not be known until it is too late. Accusations of folly in the policies and actions of one's political opponents are often predictions of dangers to come rather than descriptions of errors known to have been made. A contemporary example is *Right is Wrong: How the Lunatic Fringe Hijacked America, Shredded the Constitution, and Made Us All Less Safe (And What You Need to Know to End the Madness)* by Arianna Huffington (2008).

The concept of folly as "policy contrary to self-interest" was most famously expounded by the historian Barbara Tuchman in *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam* (1984). The historical examination of 'folly' in the sense of foolish errors and misjudgments where the consequences are already known receives the subject heading not of 'Folly' but of 'History—Errors, inventions, etc.' From the standpoint of knowledge organization through subject analysis, a study of ongoing folly in this sense, for example, the failure to solve the global warming crisis, would not qualify as 'Folly' but as 'Errors.' The latter subject heading, not 'Folly' is assigned to *How to Lose a Battle: Foolish Plans and Military Blunders*, by Bill Fawcett (2006). Janis (1982) studies the mindset that sets the stage for policy fiascoes, whereby "members'

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strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (Janis 1982, 9). This mentality, which he calls "groupthink" in a nod to George Orwell, results in a "deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment" (Ibid.)—in short, stupidity.

The subject heading, 'History—Errors, inventions, etc.,' brings works such as Tuchman's, about the history of significant errors, together with completely different kinds of books concerning fallacies about history, as in *Not So! Popular Myths About America from Columbus to Clinton* by Paul F. Boller (1995) and *Legends, Lies & Cherished Myths of American History* by Richard Shenkman (1988). Books on hoaxes would fall into this category. However, the subject heading does not distinguish between books that identify hoaxes and those that manifest and perpetuate them. Thus, *Peoples of the Sea*, by the notorious pseudo-scholar Immanuel Velikovsky (1977), contains the subject heading 'Egypt—History—Errors, inventions, etc.' Shelving this book with legitimate books on Egyptian history and archaeology sends an unclear and potentially misleading message. (Besides being a subject heading in itself, 'History—Errors, inventions, etc.' is a free-floating subdivision under names of places.)

Note that the heading already combines errors with "inventions," that is, with fabrications. The two concepts are on the same level in the nonknowledge hierarchy in that they equally share an opposition to information. They differ, however, in their relation to intentionality. Error is unintentional at some level, though the role of intentionality in action is not black and white (see Reason 1990). Inventions, on the other hand, are deliberate falsifications, fraud, or in *LCSH* terms, "imposture," even if the consequences of the intended action cannot be foreseen. Such fabrications may result in errors, but they are not errors in themselves. The domain of error itself is hardly homogeneous. Reason's (1990) monumental treatise on human error classifies errors on two dimensions, type and form. Error type refers to the presumed origin of the error, while error form refers to universal cognitive processes underlying the error, including erroneous associations based on similarity and frequency.

Library classification concerning "errors in history" is structurally confused, potentially affecting retrieval. 'History—Errors, inventions, etc.' is a flawed heading, a grab bag containing several distinct kinds of materials. "Errors in history" is used in two entirely different senses: errors of fact in the writing or our understanding of history and errors of judg-

ment made over the course of history. 'History' seems to denote both chronology (the course of events over time) and history as a subject matter. 'Errors' is already an available heading, while the preferred heading for hoaxes is 'Impostors and imposture.' The crucial difference in the coverage of Tuchman's book on the history of errors and Boller's book on errors about history is obscured by assigning them the same subject heading. A slight amendment and reversal of the order of terms in the heading to 'Errors—History' in the former case would bring about a change of meaning that might better reflect the intended signification (cf. Chan 1995, 113-114). A book such as Velikovsky's, which presents what can charitably be called an alternative account of history, might benefit from a heading such as 'Egypt—History—Alternative accounts.'

2.3 Ignorance

The literature on ignorance falls into two categories: decision-making, from the viewpoints of psychology or economics, and epistemology. Smithson, in his important book *Ignorance and Uncertainty* (1989), divides ignorance into error, by which he means the state of ignorance, and irrelevance, by which he means the act of ignoring. Error is a cognitive state in which information is either distorted or incomplete, while declaring something is irrelevant may be based on untopicality (an "adaptive filtering mechanism," in Welles's [1986] terms), undecidability, or taboo. The shunning of information as taboo could be adaptive, or it could be the result of groupthink, leading to stupidity. The relationship between ignorance and stupidity has repeatedly been treated in the literature on stupidity. Uncertainty, itself an important topic in many scientific, technological, and social science disciplines, is only the subset of ignorance caused by incomplete knowledge (Smithson 1993).

2.4 Common fallacies

The most general form of nonknowledge, and the most clear-cut in bibliographical organization, is that of 'Common fallacies.' Many books in this domain are compendia of false beliefs, such as *Fabulous Fallacies: More than 300 Popular Beliefs that are Not True* by Tad Tuleja (1994), *A Directory of Discarded Ideas* by John Grant (1981), and *The Whole Truth: A Compendium of Myths, Mistakes, and Misconceptions* by Gerard Del Re (2004). These books identify fallacies as such and explain why they are wrong. Another ca-

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tegory of books expounds upon the phenomenon of misinformation as a large-scale sociological phenomenon. The most prominent of such books is Charles Mackay's widely reprinted *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds,* first published in 1841 with the title *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions.* Among the topics covered by Mackay are the tulip rage in Holland in the 1630s, alchemy, the witch trials in Europe, and beliefs about haunted houses. While 'Errors' refers to mistakes (including erroneous assumptions) made by particular persons, 'Common fallacies' cannot be attributed to any individual but are prevalent throughout society. They are also distinct from hoaxes. Like common fallacies, hoaxes may be widespread, but unlike them they are created and spread (at least initially) with the intent to deceive. For this reason hoaxes fall within the scope of 'Impostors and imposture.' Despite these distinctions, the lines dividing errors, common fallacies, and hoaxes are not only subtle but vague.

2.5 Unreason

'Unreason,' the contrary of reason, characterizes the deliberate turn away from knowledge, inquiry, and rationality. Synonymous with 'irrationality,' it is distinct from 'irrationalism,' which suggests a fully articulated philosophy of nihilism reacting in opposition to rationalism, logical positivism, or other philosophies based on the premise that reality can be comprehended and has meaning on some level (see Blocker 1974). The American analytic philosopher Alfred R. Mele's (1987) book *Irrationality*, which has the subject heading and LCC call number for 'Irrationalism,' is actually about irrational behavior, which falls in the scope of 'error' but not 'unreason' as treated here. A better conceptual starting point is *The Comforts of Unreason: A Study of the Motives of Irrational Thought* by Rupert Crawshay-Williams (1960). Crawshay-Williams thinks that human beings engage in two kinds of thinking: "reality thinking," which seeks to understand the external, objective world and "fantasy thinking," which seeks to evade reality and which arises from a wish to gratify desires that cannot be satisfied in real life. Fantasy thinking has important purposes that cannot be met by reality thinking, such as knowledge of the arts or of ultimate realities. Fantasy thinking becomes unreason when it is understood or put forth as reality thinking, that is, when subjective reality is confused with objective reality. This confusion between different modes of thought makes unreason a higher order of error.

Unreason in this sense is recognized by opponents, not sympathizers. The noted literary scholar Wayne C. Booth (1970, 7) criticizes the "attack on 'mere logic' in the name of intuitive truths that are deeper, more profound, and not amenable to logical testing." This "dissatisfaction with reason ... beyond a simple mistrust of logic and linear thinking" in extreme cases becomes "a repudiation of anything that deserves the name 'thought' at all, in favor of a feeling or of a 'wisdom of the body'" (Booth 1970,8). Booth is talking about the notion that there is "truth beyond reason," but he also mentions "self-righteous bullying fanatics" (1970, 23), whose rhetoric is often political, and can represent either leftist or rightist causes.

'Unreason' used in this sense appears in the title of another book published the very same year, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-wing Extremism in America, 1790-1970* (1970) by sociologists Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, who, like Booth, identify unreason with fanaticism. More specifically, their use of this word signifies a rigidity of opinion in which any disagreement with a doctrine is considered wrong and evil. This rigidity of response and use of blinders to block out unwanted opinions are attributes of stupidity in Welles's (1986) view. It will be noticed immediately, however, that Lipset and Raab restrict their examination of political unreason to *right wing* extremism, without even suggesting that left wing extremism might also be unreasonable, perhaps showing their own glaring blind spots. As with stupidity, the accusation of unreason is reserved for one's political opponents, and it is inconceivable that it would be thrown at political allies. Unreason emanates equally from the left and right, yet "both sides accuse the other of being the sole source of irrationality." Unreason is a centrist phenomenon as well, since it attains legitimacy by being "fueled by the American credo of tolerance that places all opinions on an equal footing and makes little effort to separate fact and opinion" (Jacoby 2008, 211).

A somewhat different perspective on unreason can be found in Wheeler's (1993) appraisal of the credulity of those who get involved in cults organized by hucksters who can induce the suspension of critical faculties through powers of suggestion (Wheeler 1993, 21):

> Unreason is fomented by collective suggestibility .... Sometimes the results are limited to silly capers—relatively innocuous flurries of irresponsible "acting out"—as during the zany period of goldfish swallowing, flagpole sitting, and mara-

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thon dancing during the ebullient 1920s. More often, however, the consequences are tragic social upheavals; racist conflicts; sudden explosions of religious fanaticism, as demonstrated by the Crusades and the Thirty Years' War; and the infamous careers of Stalin, Hitler, and other megalomaniacs.

Wheeler (1993, 25) is skeptical that knowledge always leads to wisdom, since it does not immunize people against "destructive delusions and inner betrayal" (see also Thornton 1999). If factual knowledge alone could obliterate unreason, no one would have taken up smoking once information about its harmfulness became common knowledge.

3.0 Documents of Nonknowledge vs. Documents about Nonknowledge

Jastrow (1967, 16) coined the term "errorology" to refer to the study of errors; not only to identify them but to understand their causes and how they get in the way of correct knowledge. Clearly an aspect of errorology would be the history of errors, be they scientific, political, or military; another would be the classification of kinds of errors; another branch would cover the sociology of errors, and so on. Errors comprise data for the errorologist, who must put them into context for them to become information. By analyzing, critiquing, comparing and contrasting, or otherwise synthesizing this information, the errorologist produces new knowledge. The insights gained from this can result in wisdom.

The term "errorology" neatly sums up the necessary distinction between works of error and works about error. Just as a work of music is not the same as a work about music and just as a dictionary is not a book about dictionaries, so a book of nonknowledge is usually not the same as a book about nonknowledge. Errors are connected in a larger framework of nonknowledge that includes ignorance, misinformation, propaganda, stupidity, and unreason, among others. One may use these terms to search a database or library catalog for information about all these forms of nonknowledge. In this way, nonknowledge is part of the system of knowledge. But such a search will only yield explorations or studies of nonknowledge: they may identify nonknowledge, but in general they are not nonknowledge.

A compendium of nonknowledge, such as *The 776 Stupidest Things Ever Said* by Kathryn Petras and Ross Petras (1993), contains nonknowledge but is also about nonknowledge in that the materials in the book are presented not in the original context of any speaker's statements but picked out and identified as examples of stupidity, along with other stupid statements. The stupidity aspect is emphasized. More particularly, the statements are held up for ridicule. A book about nonknowledge could be a psychological, sociological, philosophical, or historical study. But such a work is not necessarily limited to these or any other specific disciplines. It could be a work that points out and corrects errors in any domain of knowledge and life: science, technology, religion, law, music, business, education, language usage, government, warfare, etc.

Nonknowledge can be borne in a written work rather than being its subject. For example, errors in sources or in analysis of data may lead to erroneous conclusions. An author may accept as true the statements of an ignorant person interviewed as a source, leading to misinformation. A writing connected to an ill-conceived venture (for example, the diaries or correspondence of persons involved in a doomed military operation) contains stupidity. In a different way, errors in production and typography can contribute to the stupidity of a document (which may be amusing, though probably not to those responsible for the errors). In all these cases, nonknowledge is not recognized by the author as such: it is not identified as the subject, nor is it indexed. It remains for a reader to discover it.

In the examples just given, the author or other creator need not have knowingly, purposely, or mischievously injected nonknowledge into a book. There is a chance the nonknowledge was accidental or at least unintentional. Authors also unknowingly perpetrate or perpetuate nonknowledge by falling victim to an existing hoax. An example is *The Elvis Files: Was His Death Faked?* by Gail Brewer-Giorgio (1990). The author expounds the view that Elvis Presley is alive, though she did not create this hoax (as most people believe it to be). Reports of seeing him alive after August 16, 1977 are contrary to accepted evidence. However, no one denies that Elvis ever lived. A book claiming he is alive despite a preponderance of evidence to the contrary can be classed with other books about him and given the existing subject heading 'Presley, Elvis, 1935-1977—Death and burial' even though it disputes the proposition that he died in 1977.

The same cannot be said about descriptions of the Loch Ness monster, Sasquatch, Yeti (the Abominable Snowman), or other creatures about which human knowledge is based only on anecdotes and folklore,

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without conclusive physical evidence. These creatures are anomalous in that they do not fit into any accepted system of scientific explanation, the quality of evidence is poor, and claims for their real existence cannot be proved (Westrum 1979). A book about the Loch Ness monster is cataloged under the subject heading 'Loch Ness monster' whether or not its author takes the position that the Loch Ness monster really exists. However, classification by call number of such a book reflects the position of Loch Ness monsters as non-validated knowledge. The LCC number, QL89.2.L6, classifies the Loch Ness monster as an "alleged animal," while the *DDC* number, 001.9'44, places such creatures as "Monsters" under "Controversial knowledge." The book on Elvis sighting avoids such a derogatory, stigmatized classification.

Reports contradicting popular or respected opinion are unlikely to be well-received, especially when assertions are not supported by hard evidence, but this rejection can be taken as a denial of facts, leading to accusations of conspiracy and cover-up. Conspiracy theories are active in writings about UFO (unidentified flying object) landings and alien abductions (Featherstone 2002). Such conspiracy theories set off alarm bells in readers, further isolating from the mainstream those reporting anomalies or expounding deviant theories or explanations about known phenomena. For example, an author claiming that Elvis Presley is alive and that all the proof that he died constitutes a big cover-up is bound to be considered delusional, as is a person who claims to have been abducted by space aliens. Conspiracy theories also abound in the sociopolitical realm, and conspiracies are a common theme in popular fiction. The inclination to react skeptically to conspiracy theories can lead experts and general readers alike to reject valid accounts of actual clandestine and covert activities as paranoid or crackpot (Bale 2007).

Books by quacks, who have a commercial interest in their products and therapies, can lead to errors in the writings of honest authors who unwittingly become proponents of unproven treatments such as Laetrile. These testimonials feed into the claims of promoters and can lead to conspiracy theories about the medical establishment purposely blocking the new cure to protect their own interests (Young 1992). Pseudoscience is also evident in movements such as creation science, which promote explanations and chronologies based on Biblical genesis scriptures as legitimate biology, paleontology, and archaeology. Works promulgating such views should arguably be classified as religion rather than science (Woo 1994),

though in some cases it may be preferable to classify them as scientific errors or historical errors and fabrications. The problem of differentiating scientific nonknowledge from legitimate science could be solved were the Library of Congress to develop a separate classification with subject headings for all pseudosciences, as Donnelly (1986, 246) appears to suggest.

So far we have discussed nonknowledge caused by errors, stupidity, unreason, and their near-synonyms mistakes, folly, and irrationality. We have not yet considered the knowing and intentional dissemination of nonknowledge either through fabrication or falsification. The major categories of deliberate deception in documentation are fraud (including forgery) and propaganda. Works in these categories don't just contain nonknowledge, they are nonknowledge.

Fraud is a knowing as opposed to inadvertent misrepresentation resulting in false conclusions by fabricating or distorting evidence. The *LCSH* heading covering fraud is 'Impostors and imposture.' A claim of witnessing the Loch Ness monster would not be fraud, but creating, making up, or planting false evidence to back up such a claim is fraud. Quackery implies fraud: if the promoter of a cure has not falsified testimonials, clinical evidence, or other information, the dubious treatment could be classified as 'Alternative medicine' (LCC call number RC733) or subdivided as 'Alternative treatment' under the name of a specific disease, as in 'Cancer—Alternative treatment.' An entire LCC subclass, RZ, is set aside for nonstandard treatments falling outside the domain of professional medicine.

Distinct in many cases from fraud is propaganda. Lasswell (1995, 13) defines propaganda as "the technique of influencing human action by the manipulation of representations." Lasswell avoids the word "information," and indeed, propaganda can be differentiated from information (Welch 2005, 1922): "Whereas information presents its audience with a straightforward statement of facts, propaganda packages those facts in order to evoke a certain response." Propaganda is not always or necessarily false: it can contain truthful information as long as it supports the cause being promoted. However, since the primary goal of propaganda is to persuade rather than to present facts in a way that lets the reader draw his or her own conclusions, treating propaganda as information can easily lead to error, making it helpful for readers to be able to distinguish propaganda from information.

Propaganda is usually disguised as information, and may also be contained in art, literature, film, and ad-

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vertising. It would be counterproductive for propaganda to be self-identified as such to its intended audience. Frank Rich (2006) and Nancy Snow (2003) are among the writers who believe that mass media are prime vehicles of United States government propaganda. In their opinions, propaganda is published in the guise of news—that is, as information. The cataloging of both of their books contains the subject heading 'Propaganda, American' because they analyze the presentation of information from the U.S. government perspective as mind control. Commentators on the other side of the political spectrum would no doubt label Rich and Snow propagandists. In any case, a reader seeking actual propagandistic texts rather than works about propaganda could not find such texts by searching the subject heading 'Propaganda.'

Propaganda is often constructed to persuade at an emotional level, and one of the emotions appealed to is hatred. The mobilization of national hatred is an important function in wartime propaganda. Such propaganda represents the enemy as a "menacing, murderous aggressor, a satanic violator of the moral and conventional standards, an obstacle to the cherished aims and ideals of the nation" (Lasswell 1995, 18). "Hate propaganda," a term used in Canada's Criminal Code, can advocate or promote genocide or promote hate by blaming a specific ethnic or racial group for serious economic problems or make claims about their threat to the larger society (Marlin 2002, 236-40).

Propaganda and fraud become one in fraudulent hate literature (Drobnicki et al. 1995, 123), in which claims made against an enemy group with an intention to persuade are based on falsified information. Perhaps the most notorious case of fraudulent hate literature is *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which purports to be a set of instructions assembled at a secret meeting of Jewish leaders crafting a diabolical plan to dominate the world through a range of means including propaganda and brainwashing, which it describes in detail. The text first appeared in Russian as early as 1903, though it appears to be based on (and perhaps even plagiarized from) French sources, becoming widely known during the Russian revolution when it was circulated as anti-Bolshevik propaganda. It was translated into several languages, including English, in 1920, and was popularized in the United States by being published in serial form in a newspaper run by the automobile magnate Henry Ford. The American version of the conspiracy theory was shipped back to Europe and further popularized there, becoming a pillar of Nazi ideology, despite be-

ing proved fraudulent in 1921. Characteristically, and significantly, this deceptive, propagandistic, and conspiratorial work attributes precisely these sins to the Jews who are falsely represented as having composed the book.

Such was the propaganda value of this fraudulent text crafted to defame the Jewish people and their religion that it has continued to be reprinted and cited even after its fraudulence was conclusively proved. Adolf Hitler opined in *Mein Kampf* (1925) that *The Protocols* was a true document even if it was forged, and the book's denunciation in the media fed into the conspiracy theories the book itself expounded (Kuzmick 2003). The book was reissued with a new purpose when it was published in full as an appendix to *Jewish Conspiracy and the Muslim World* by Mishabul Islam Faruqi (1967), a book whose subject headings are 'Zionism,' 'Judaism—Relations—Islam,' and 'Islam—Relations—Judaism,' and whose *DDC* call number 956.94'001, refers to the history of Israel. (Significantly, the LCC call number for the book, DS125.P7, refers to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* itself as an example of anti-Semitism.)

The cataloging of this work reveals much about how it is viewed. A 1934 edition, published in London by the British Publishing Society with the title *The Protocols of the Meetings of the Learned Elders of Zion: With Preface and Explanatory Notes*; translated from the Russian text by Victor E. Marsden, has as its subject heading 'Jews—Politics and government.' Another bibliographic record for what is probably the same edition has somewhat different subject headings, 'Jewish question' and 'Communism.' These subject headings reveal that the book is accepted at face value as factual history rather than historical fabrication. Most interesting are the different implications of the LCC and *DDC* call numbers for this version. The LCC call number, DS145, corresponds with 'Antisemitism' (sic). If subject headings were assigned to books based on what they were rather than what they were about, this would be an appropriate heading. The book is a work of anti-Semitism, but it is only about anti-Semitism in the unconventional sense that it justifies anti-Semitism. The *DDC* call number, on the other hand, is 296, which refers to 'Jews' as a religious grouping. Whether a work fraudulently purporting to be written by Jews ought to be cataloged under the subject heading 'Jews' is a puzzling question. But something seems amiss with a classification that merges books about anti-Semitism with examples of anti-Semitism. The *LCSH* heading 'Antisemitism' appears to be used both as a topical heading and a form

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heading "indicating what a work is rather than what it is about" (Aluri et al. 1991, 74). Maintaining 'Jewish question' as a subject heading is problematic, since it lends legitimacy to the anti-Semitic notion that the existence of Jewry constitutes a question in need of an answer. Such reasoning led to the final solution, namely, the Holocaust. Berman (1981) discussed this matter at some length, but it still remains unresolved despite the objections of many.

Similarly, the cataloging and classification of Holocaust denial literature, which "deliberately [misleads] the reader by presenting false information as if it were true" (Drobnicki and Asaro 2001, 122), raises questions about how such literature should be identified and shelved so as to differentiate it from historical materials. For example, *The Dissolution of Eastern European Jewry* by Walter Sanning (1983), which denies that the Holocaust actually happened, has the subject headings 'Jews—Europe, Eastern—History' and 'Europe, Eastern—Ethnic relations,' suggesting that the book is accepted as a legitimate contribution to knowledge. The subject heading 'Holocaust denial literature' was created to classify works such as this and the more notorious *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* by Arthur Butz (1976), which, like Sanning's text, was published by the Institute of Historical Review in Torrance, California, an organization well-known to those who track the activities of hate groups. Books about the denial of the Holocaust now receive the subject heading 'Holocaust denial.' The availability of these two headings solves the problem of distinguishing form from topic in classification.

Denial exists in discourse not only about historical events such as the Holocaust, but in cases where claims rely on scientific and medical facts, such as the cause of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Evidence that AIDS is caused by Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is so pervasive as to be taken for granted by scientists, yet a small number of contrarians, including some with strong academic credentials (such as Peter H. Duesberg, a professor of molecular and cell biology at the University of California, Berkeley), have proposed alternative theories. These theories are so far from mainstream views of the nature of the AIDS pandemic as to be termed "AIDS denialism" by those working in the treatment and prevention of AIDS. The connection between AIDS denial and Holocaust denial has been noted by Cameron (2003), who writes that

> For denialists, the facts are unacceptable. They
> engage in radical controversion, for ideological

purposes, of facts that are accepted by almost all experts and lay persons as having been established on the basis of overwhelming evidence .... Both forms of denial make great play of the inescapable indeterminacy of figures and statistics .... Denialists seek to suggest that the inability to achieve historical or epidemiological exactitude renders the Holocaust and AIDS themselves imaginary. Both rely, spuriously, on that fact that history is replete with orthodoxies that have been supplanted by the heterodox, and invoke the memory of Galileo Galelei, who was nearly martyred for scientific truth .... The difference is that heterodoxies that have achieved acceptance have complied with the basic logic of scientific and evidentiary postulates, whereas it is precisely these qualities that the denialists' assertions lack.

Should a subject heading like "AIDS denial literature" be constructed to accommodate a book like *The Invention of AIDS* by Peter H. Duesberg (1996), and who should have the authority to assign it? The usefulness of such a heading is apparent, but so is the potential for abuse.

Cataloging and classification decisions play a significant role in access to fraud and hoaxes in other realms as well. Carlos Castaneda's numerous books on Don Juan, an alleged "sorcerer" from the Yaqui tribe in Mexico, were published as legitimate ethnographic studies, but have subsequently been exposed by De Mille (1976) as fraudulent or fictional at best (see also De Mille 1980). This discovery was disturbing to some professional anthropologists, but such a debacle seemed bound to happen sooner or later, since the validity of all social anthropology depends on the honesty and trustworthiness of field ethnographers, who often work alone in remote places. Nor, it should be noted, did the revelations stop the flow of Castaneda's books, which had found a market and have become canonized in a way that recalls the persistent reissuing of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. What is alarming is that Castaneda's books have retained their subject headings 'Yaqui Indians—Religion' and 'Hallucinogenic drugs and religious experience.' The latter heading is only valid if it is taken to mean that the books could have been written under the influence of mind-altering drugs, not that they document actual drug use by the Yaqui. The *DDC* and LCC call numbers reflect these headings: E99.Y3 (Yaqui people) and 299.7 (religion of non-Western peoples in Mexico). Castaneda's first Don Juan book was published by the University

of California Press and the author succeeded in submitting the third book in the series as a dissertation for which he received a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of California, Los Angeles. To add the perfect touch of irony, Richard De Mille's (1976, 1980) books exposing Castaneda as a fraud have the subject heading, 'Anthropologists—United States—Biography.'

Treating Castaneda's books as ethnographies is misleading since their basis in fact is no longer disputed but has been conclusively debunked. Castaneda should not be viewed as an anthropologist despite having a Ph.D. in the field, since his dissertation was fraudulent, reflecting badly on the UCLA anthropology department's own credibility. Perhaps it is constructive to view Castaneda as a spiritual or literary author, which would result in his works being cataloged correctly as imaginative or as contributions to spirituality rather than ethnography.

The only other good alternative is to view them as fraud: as nonknowledge posing as knowledge. A solution that would aid users in distinguishing nonknowledge from knowledge would be to extend the applicability of the subdivision 'Errors, inventions, etc.' beyond historical subjects, allowing the subject heading of Castaneda's books to be amended to 'Yaqui Indians—Religion—Errors, inventions, etc.' One could reasonably add 'Ethnology—Errors, inventions, etc.' Another candidate for revision of subject headings is *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey (2003), published as a memoir but subsequently acknowledged by the author (after being exposed by others) to be imaginative and at least partly made-up. Subject headings would then have the form of 'Drug addicts—Rehabilitation—Minnesota—Errors, inventions, etc.' The proposed modification of subject cataloging policy would also facilitate information retrieval and provide clarity in the cataloging of fraudulent hate literature.

Since patrons may find materials by browsing open stacks without using a classification guide or examining bibliographic records, labels to identify nonknowledge may be helpful in indicating a work's usefulness as a primary source of nonknowledge rather than a legitimate source of information to be taken at face value. Labeling is opposed as "a censor's tool" and "prejudicial" by the American Library Association (2005; cf. Hitchcock 2006), but Pendergrast (1988, 85) thinks the labeling of books that "*clearly* deserve it" would not "open a Pandora's box of a permissible form of censorship" since patrons would still have access to the materials and the freedom to make up their

own minds. The labeling of materials whose cataloging subject headings indicate that they are fabrications or forgeries would appear to aid rather than prejudice the reader who has found materials without the use of a catalog. The question in labeling is identical to that in cataloging: where and how to draw the line between legitimate controversy and indisputable falsehoods.

4.0 Conclusion

The categories or levels of nonknowledge identified and described in this essay each have individual histories and bibliographic heritages. Just as concepts of wisdom, knowledge, information, and data have evolved over time and varied over cultures, the same is the case for stupidity and folly; the understanding of ignorance and error have also been extended by sociological and psychological research. Indeed, recent inquiries by authors such as Welles (1986), Ronell (2002), Smithson (1989), and Reason (1990) have sharpened the context of our understanding of these domains and set up new formulations for interpreting them.

Although none of these books (with the possible exception of Ronell's) is connected with postmodern theory, such reformulations appear at some level to be made possible by the culture of scholarship of postmodernism, which approaches knowledge as a cultural construct or negotiated product of interactions rather than a body of fixed objective truths. In postmodern thought (Miksa 1998, 86):

> The world and human relationships do not exist independently of an observer. Instead, the search for truths about the world and humankind is always colored by the participation of the observer within the realm being observed. And further, arriving at truths about the world and about humankind is actually an involved process of human discourse which is, in turn, subject to various human propensities, not least of which is the need to exercise power over the world and over one another. Given this context, assertions about the truth of some matter or another and especially the truth of matters regarding humankind are fundamentally relative, with a propensity to serve human convenience.

By disavowing the notion that knowledge is absolute, objective, and disinterested we open the door to reformulating nonknowledge as something that could be valid in some context. If knowledge is a cultural

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construct, so must be error, misinformation, ignorance, and the rest. Such thinking provides the distance needed to perceive error, stupidity, ignorance, and unreason. It enables one to view these as determined by interested parties, and opens the way for a critique of knowledge and received wisdom. The postmodern epistemological stance has contributed to our awareness of the politics of knowledge construction and legitimization, creating a context for understanding rejected knowledge, or nonknowledge.

It seems reasonable to assume that the consumer of information would like to filter out all nonknowledge before it reaches him or her. But it is not known what any reader wants or needs, and it is hard to justify the decision to block access or to decide what is best for an adult reader. Furthermore, who decides what knowledge and nonknowledge are? In many cases, of course, differences of opinion, even heterodoxy, can be found. In such cases libraries can take an agnostic view and let the reader make up his or her own mind. But in cases where library materials are known to be fraudulent, be it *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, *The Hoax of the Century*, or *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, it is irresponsible for libraries to catalog and classify them as if they represented legitimate information (Donnelly 1986); indeed, a case can be made for labeling them if they are not self-labeled.

Patrick Wilson (1983) calls attention to the problem of "cognitive authority," the factors determining an individual's decision to trust a source of information as reliable in the absence of first-hand knowledge. On the one hand, readers want to make their own decisions about what information can be trusted and what cannot. From this perspective, it can be argued that libraries have an obligation to collect materials representing every point of view, no matter how little accepted it is. In the area of reference, however, librarians operate on the assumption that patrons only want correct information. The reference librarian is needed to evaluate information. This assumes that accurate, valid information can be differentiated from inaccurate, erroneous information, and that the librarian can differentiate between the one and the other. Why should the validity of knowledge as objective and certain as opposed to being artificially constructed and hegemonic be an issue in one context but not the other?

The reason, I think, is that the line dividing knowledge and nonknowledge is an interpretive one. The patron approaching a reference desk requests assistance in navigating the textual terrain and in approaching a question that has been formulated or needs guidance in approaching a search for information. By contrast, the browser in the library is on an individual discovery process. Similar to stack browsing, Internet searching typically is unmediated by librarians or other professionals, leaving it up to the individual searcher to judge the quality, credibility, and authority of information. Nor do Internet users benefit from subject headings or shelving order, relying instead on the vagaries of keywords, hyperlinks, metadata, and search engine relevance rankings. With growing reliance on Web sites, not least of all the controversial *Wikipedia* (see Baker 2008), the question of cognitive authority on the Internet is gaining significance, and the processes whereby users assess the trustworthiness of information found on the Internet has emerged as a topic of study for information scientists such as Rieh (2002). It is in the context of perceiving and making connections between data that information emerges, as does the potential for misinformation and error. By the same token, the ability to place knowledge in context leads to wisdom, enabling one to make useful judgments about the adequacy of information by applying concepts across domains to new situations and problems. Although it would be simplistic to attempt a straightforward explanation of stupidity or folly based on this hierarchy, but I suggest that some kind of unawareness of or failure to make useful connections between concepts can help explain them.

The view of nonknowledge presented in this essay is a multilevel concept based on an inversion of the DIKW hierarchy linking error, ignorance, misinformation, stupidity, folly, and unreason. While the various categories or levels of nonknowledge have been addressed in the literature over the years and have seen enlightening recent developments, the concepts have not been linked together in a single system or brought to bear on knowledge organization. As for "nonknowledge organization" as an area of inquiry in its own right, the distinction between works that identify or examine nonknowledge and those that instantiate nonknowledge emerges as topic calling out not only for further investigation but changes in existing cataloging and classification schemes to better reflect this difference in meaning.

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