

Classifying Philosophy at the Library of the *Scuola Normale Superiore* (Pisa, Italy), Part A*

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1. Introduction

In the late seventies, I was asked to work on classifying our Philosophy (and Psychology) collections, which were still located partly in the stacks and partly in the so-called Seminars—a traditional didactic and research structure of our School—where the books were mostly ordered by format or collection title. As often happens, my task was not completely free of restrictions: the general “new policy” of the entire Library was oriented toward accomplishing an open-shelf decimal classification, and the first step was to avoid an overly complicated schema, as this would probably have rendered more difficult the task of the end users, that is, our students but mainly our teaching staff.

At the Scuola Normale Superiore, where historicism has always had an illustrious though somewhat cumbersome tradition (I quote only two philosophers and/or historians of Philosophy: Giovanni Gentile and Eugenio Garin), ordering the Philosophy collection—with its divisions, topics, geographical nota-

tions, chronological tables et similia—strictly by the Dewey decimal system might have been unthinkable. A second requirement was to designate a main location to the large collection of the often “complete works” of the philosophical Tradition. This way, the ideal Reader, foreseen to linger for hours in the newly restored library building of the Palazzo della Gherardesca, could easily access the reservoir of the great texts, which were to be followed on the shelves by the secondary literature ad auctorem. All in all, the implicit message to our students and scholars was to be the virtuous necessity of finding, ready on the shelves, the substantial core of the textual Tradition.

Arranged only in alphabetic order without any chronological partition (with the Cutter numbers as additional support), the Authors were meant to constitute (and actually are) the main section of our Philosophy collection. However, there was a further, even more challenging exception: the Greek and Latin Classics had to be “attracted” by the underlying Philology Seminar, where a formidable collection that is constantly enriched by donors and former

professors of the Scuola Normale, from Giorgio Pasquali to Arnaldo Momigliano, had to embody the Ancient Philosophy as a tribute to the German traditional unity of the Antike.

Therefore, in our library, medieval philosophy is arranged as a new Beginning, perhaps in consolatory and coherent balance with the spectacular structure of the town, which can be admired from the windows of the magnificent building where we are housed, including Count Ugolino's tower!

The Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa (SNS), a university center for teaching and research, was founded by Napoleon in 1810 as a branch of the Ecole Normale Supérieure Paris. It has been educating students and carrying out research for nearly two centuries.

Professors, researchers and students all work together as one, teaching and studying, in classrooms as in laboratories, developing cultural activities and experimental initiatives.

The academic work at the Scuola Normale is traditionally grouped into two divisions, the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Sciences. Students can work towards an undergraduate diploma, finishing with a 2nd-level honors degree, or as graduate students, completing a course of study which grants a diploma equivalent to the PhD. The lessons, seminars and research activities are carried out by professors from within the Scuola Normale and by Italian and foreign scholars invited there.

The greatest resource of the Scuola Normale is the quality of the students who come there. Selected on a merit basis through an exam competition, once admitted they live and study in a completely free residential system.

(Text excerpted from the SNS Homepage <<http://biblio.sns.it/en/>>)

2. A first draft of a scheme

The first draft of a catalogue scheme vaguely similar to the Dewey decimal system introduced some preliminary divisions, as follows:

- 100. Philosophy.
- 100.5 Philosophy of science.
- 101. Handbooks. Outlines.
- 102. Dictionaries. Encyclopaedias. Bibliographies.

- 103. Miscellanea. Festschriften.
- 104. Interdisciplinary essays.
- 105. Anthologies.
- 109. History of Philosophy.
- 110. Metaphysics. Logic. Dialectics.
- 111. Aesthetics.
- 150. Psychology.
- 150.195 Psychoanalysis.
- 170. Ethics. Moral theories.
- 190. AUTHORS.

My task was to reorganize, redefine and implement this new schema.

After having easily solved the not-too-difficult problem of the "formal" subclasses 101, 102, 103 and 105, which could be easily replaced at the initial points of the new schema, I was compelled to recognize the isolation of Philosophy of science, 100.5, which sounded somewhat unorthodox in the historicist context mentioned earlier and yet too isolated, for example, from Logic. Moreover, if the latter could coexist, however uneasily, in those still predominantly Marxist (and/or Marxological) years with Dialectics, surely it could not cohabit with Metaphysics in division 110: as this would no longer be allowed by the contemporary philosophical status of Logic, a definitively formal discipline. Still other relevant candidates remained unquestioned. For example, wasn't Philosophy of Language entitled its own location, especially at a time when the works of the Chomskyan and structuralist waves dominated the shelves? Of course, no place was foreseen for History of Science (Dewey 509)—the beloved discipline of many "converted" philosophers (and scientists)—or for Philosophy of Religion, which would have clearly been incorrect to confuse with Metaphysics.

Moreover, in a classification schema in which our Philosophy collection risked being thrown off balance by having too large a body of classic Authors and the attendant secondary literature on the one hand, and a casual assortment of philosophical subclasses on the other, it seemed necessary to further ask whether the ontological status of Philosophy (Is a librarian allowed to put such questions?) was suitably and wholly represented by the historically documented classical Thinkers, and whether the lack of a broad representation of the so-called Philosophy in progress was justifiable. The true question wasn't, of course, to do justice to the absent (or to relocate the present) Thinkers: the deeper problem was—and always has been—about the conceptual nature of Author in itself. That is, what is a classic Phi-

osopher? On the other hand, maintaining a living philosophy library—to adapt the celebrated P. A. Schilpp’s collection title—entails maintaining constant and careful attention to the contemporary philosophical debate, and that even before posing any relocation problem. All of which is, one could ironically say, History’s necessary, perhaps listig (in the Hegelian sense) revenge. On the very concept of “classical,” a thorough analysis is in Settis (2004). For the interesting evolution of a prestigious, not *generalist* classification scheme, which turned out to be so exciting for no less a philosopher than Ernst Cassirer, see also S. Settis (1996).

In other words, if the historical legacy of Philosophy had to have its rightful place, what was the right place for theoretical, “ongoing” philosophical reflection? Is it only by chance that most university arrangements of Philosophy Faculties distinguish between historical and theoretical orientation?

A pedantic transcription of the academic disciplines and subdisciplines in the new classification schema perhaps would have been too unwieldy or too casual. Yet, the implicit core of the question was probably another, namely, that there are ontological grounds in Philosophy “in sich selbst” (that is, Philosophy as a structural subjective attitude, not as the metaphysical store of the so-called everlasting philosophical problems. For a comprehensive analysis of the relations between theoretical and historical attitude in Philosophy, see Semerari 1991) for the proliferating growth and the frequent historical appearance (and disappearance) of philosophical currents.

If we consider that philosophical research is a “normal” discipline only in a historical and sociocultural sense, we will more readily see that, while unveiling the historical “garb of ideas” (Husserl’s *Ideenkleid*), its true essential meaning lies at the core of accurately and genetically describing all the dimensions of the experienced world as well as those of the intentional structures of the experiencing Subject.

In other, more general terms, we have to recognize that the aim of Philosophical research is a critical investigation into the foundational sense of intentionally oriented operations, which concern the World only as experienced by Subjectivity in the World. Indeed, philosophy is not directly and immediately interested in increasing the knowledge of the World, unlike the other disciplines; it makes no direct experience of Nature, tells no stories, heals no illness and invents no mathematical theories or technical devices. Therefore, philosophy, as experience of the experience, is a transcendental activity that plays at the un-

derlying crossroad of all the disciplines, each of whose region is passed through by its intentional ray.

3. Representing the transcendental

The next step in my task was now somewhat clearer, although not easy: how to represent (or at least allude to) this transcendental (or phenomenological, or metalinguistic, if you prefer) status of Philosophy in my mandatory, traditional decimal classification scheme? Without any pretence to deeply exhaustive or highly technical organization, it would have perhaps been possible to develop the intentional knots of the regional ontologies (in the phenomenological sense), which are semantically “embodied” through the noematic equivalent of the philosophical subdisciplines. The complex problem of regional ontologies cannot be discussed here adequately; it is mentioned only because it is relevant to preliminary reflection on the role of an “applied” phenomenology in matters of bibliographic classifications. For a first, classic definition see Husserl (1950 and 2002). I am somewhat suspicious, moreover, of some recent ontological-realistic approaches, which are mainly interested in describing ontologies as static—Husserl would have said “*katastematic*” realities (Husserl 1952). This could be accomplished by arranging a consistent and hopefully comprehensive set of location points, all without giving up the notational value of the sections of the decimally ordered classification tree, but instead by recoding them.

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| 101 | Handbooks. Guidelines. Treatises. |
| 102 | Encyclopaedias. Dictionaries. |
| 102.1 | Bibliographies. |
| 102.2 | Anthologies. |
| 103 | Miscellanea. Festschriften. Workshops. Congresses. Seminars. |
| 104.1 | Subjectivity. Interpretation. Perception. Hermeneutics. |
| 104.2 | Metaphysics. Ontology. |
| 104.2.1 | Religion. Myth. Cosmology. |
| 104.3 | Civilization. Society. Praxis. |
| 104.4 | Language. Communication. |
| 104.5 | Science. Knowledge. Logic. |
| 104.6 | Ethics. Behaviour. Values. |
| 104.7 | Argumentation. Dialectics. Ideology. |
| 104.8 | Aesthetics. |
| 104.9 | Philosophy of History. |
| 104.[...]9 | <i>n.9, if postposed to the subclasses, which begin with 104, means: History of the related subject.</i> |

History of philosophy

109	History of philosophy (General works).
109.1:	<i>History of ancient philosophy: classify in Antiquity Seminar.</i>
<i>deleted number</i>	
109.2	History of medieval philosophy.
109.3	History of modern and contemporary philosophy.
109.9	Methodology and history of the philosophical historiography.
150	Psychology.
150.1	Encyclopaedias. Handbooks. Dictionaries.
150.9	History of psychology.
151	Experimental Psychology and Psychophysiology.
152	Psychoanalysis.
153	Psychology of cognition.
154	Clinical psychology and psychopathology.
155	Social psychology.
190	AUTHORS (Works and Essays).

Table 1. Philosophy classification scheme.

The 104 subclass of the scheme (denoting Interdisciplinary studies—a probable home for a repository of chaotically located essays) was first recoded and articulated as a relevant division number that was to be transcendently, that is, intentionally connected with the philosophically equivalent “regions” pertaining to the disciplines of the Universal Decimal Scheme. Melvil Dewey’s 10 subdivisions could therefore be seen as the reservoir *a parte objecti*, that is, the ontological areas that the philosophical work in progress thematises (thematisiert, in phenomenological jargon).

The result of this intentional reorientation was that, if class 100 designates the Philosophy class, the 104.1 division (or subclass) could host works on Philosophy of Subjectivity in itself (Analysis of pure Subjectivity, Hermeneutics, etc.). If class 200 is devoted to Religion in the General Scheme, its philosophical pendant, Philosophy of Religion, could obviously be found in the 104.2 subclass, just as Social Philosophy had its natural place in 104.3, corresponding to class 300 (Social Sciences). Linguistics (class 400) obtained its philosophical counterpart in 104.4—Philosophy of language. The Behavioural and Moral sciences were in place with code 6 of the class 600, which was also possible (despite a little forcing in the parallelism with the class 800) for 104.8, Philosophy of Art and Literature. The 104.7 division was “Solomonically” adapted to Dialectics: a historically

conditioned but emendable compromise between the dialectically oriented works and, for example, Chaim Perelman’s argumentative neorhetorics, both of which were regarded as study areas for a Philosophy of technical tools of “disputation” (according to class 700). Philosophy of Science could finally escape its singular isolation in the scheme, inserting itself as 104.5 between the other subclasses, so happily joining the number 5 pertaining to the large family of scientific disciplines (class 500). As a further benefit, History of Science—often the academic twin of Philosophy of Science in curricula—could also become contiguous with that parent discipline, only by assuming the “history” code of 9 from the general Classification scheme (class 900). This last simple, surely unorthodox classification device granted the end user not only the advantage of finding epistemological works in comfortable proximity to the historical studies on Sciences, but also made it possible to locate the history of the “philosophical reflections” on each disciplinary region in the corresponding section of the region within the 104 division by merely adding the history coding number .9 (in homage to our historicist tradition). Therefore, Philosophy of History could finally be coded, with the usual History code, as 104.9 (Psychology gained a slightly better articulation in the local schema by only distinguishing some few disciplinary or methodological orientations (or adding, for instance, the just then increasing Cognitive studies).

4. Genus-species hierarchy

Upon evaluating this attempt, it is not likely that someone would automatically say, “All’s well that ends well.” I am not so naïve as to ignore that the key principle of each decimal classification is a hierarchical one, that in the genus-species structure of its Porphyrian tree lies the foundational part-whole-oriented logic of the arrangement, and that notation rules are binding requirements. On the other hand, it is probably not so paradoxically an open question that the classic hierarchical models of arranging Philosophy on the shelves are widely deficient.

Faced with so many influential and authoritative frameworks, I hope that my archaic arrangement might be tolerated only as a minimal effort at getting to the bottom (to the *arché*) of that paradoxical question. Even if positively accepted by the end users, it is still only a rudimentary, homemade device. What is more, in the matter of *library* classifications, the *relocations phantom* always waits in ambush on

the shelves. That is why an attentive librarian always has to watch for the inner developments of the disciplines. But, perhaps the transcendental mode of Philosophy—a discipline at the same time equal and different from the others—had worked out an attempt which, even if disrespectful of the canonic tradition and probably irreverent to the scientific Librarianship, was aiming at least to pursue, just in ordering a Philosophy library, the idea itself of Philosophy as a rigorous science (Husserl 1910-11).

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