Hegel’s epistemograph, classification, and Spivak’s postcolonial reason

Abstract
A major characteristic of classification is teleology interpreted as a linear progression toward knowledge. G.W.F. Hegel’s three stages of knowledge development: Being (Sein), Essence (Wesen), and Idea (Begriff), explicated in his Science of logic form such a progression. Feminist postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak calls this kind of progression as an “epistemograph”. Classification is a manifestation of Western logic and the sequence of main classes is illustrative of the progression that reflects Hegel’s epistemograph. DDC and UDC between them represent library classification globally and use a sequence of main classes derived from Hegel and indirectly from Bacon. The lingering consequences of this heritage still create dilemmas in our organization of knowledge.

1: Aim and scope of the study
A major characteristic of classification is teleology in the sense of presenting a linear progression toward knowledge. In this study I interpret Hegel’s teleological three stages of development of knowledge as laid out in his Science of logic as an example of the codified progression that Gayatri Spivak, in her A critique of postcolonial reason: toward a history of the vanishing present (1999), calls an epistemograph, “a graduated diagram of the coming-into-being of knowledge” (p. 41). I then apply this interpretation to bibliographic classification, the globalization of cataloging that has been the vehicle carrying Hegelian (Baconian) classification, and a possible version of hybridity that Spivak views as a glossing over of the cultural political realities of the postcolonial situation.

Hegel is, as Gayatri Spivak puts it, “a world-historical metonym” (1999, 47). That is, he can stand in the place of the tradition of which he is a part. It is a tradition of logic that threads its way from classical Greek through European and American mainstream thought. A manifestation of that tradition is classification.

For most people the two outlines of human knowledge that present themselves in everyday life are the array of academic disciplines in schools and universities and the arrangement of libraries. Since the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and, subsequently the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC), are organized by discipline the two outlines tend to coincide. In education, disciplines are typically grouped into broader categories such as the sciences, the humanities, etc., but they do not appear in a standardized sequence. The main classes of bibliographic classifications, on the other hand, do have an established sequence. For DDC and UDC the sequence of classes is largely derived from G.W.F. Hegel. Dewey derived his sequence of main classes from a classification for the St. Louis Public School Library developed by William Torrey Harris (Dewey 1876). Harris believed that Francis Bacon had the correct broad divisions of memory (history), imagination (poetry), and reason (philosophy), but he then left Bacon behind. Eugene Graziano has analyzed Harris’s description of his classification and argues that Harris, a widely recognized leader among American Hegelians, was actually applying Hegel. Wiegand (1998), drawing on primary sources,
confirms that the influences on Dewey were Hegelian – from Harris and from the faculty at Amherst College where he developed the classification.

One of the purposes of classification is to arrange topics next to related topics by using a logical sequence. The broadest and most encompassing instance of this characteristic of classification is the ordering of main classes. That ordering dictates what areas will be in proximity to each other. For example, in library classifications we see science and technology next to each other which makes sense since technology is conventionally viewed as the application of science. However, the sequence is not always so apt. Because of a different view of language in the nineteenth century, Melvil Dewey put language (philology) in the 400s and literature in the 800s. Now that they are commonly studied in conjunction with each other, the separation seems odd to us, which is why UDC relocated language to join literature in the 800s. That sort of major change indicates how important the sequence of main classes is. Given that DDC is the most widely used bibliographic classification scheme in the world and UDC is used globally by research libraries, their influence is significant making it worthwhile to examine the underlying philosophical basis of the sequence of main classes in DDC and UDC from a postcolonial perspective.

Hegel, like Harris later, accepted Bacon’s three stages in the development of knowledge. In his Lectures on philosophy, he notes: “The spirit of the philosophy of Bacon is to take experience as the true and only source of knowledge, and then to regulate the thought concerning it”. He then took Bacon’s three elements and adapted them into a dialectic:

“Empiricism is not merely an observing, hearing, feeling, etc., a perception of the individual; for it really sets to work to find the species, the universal, to discover laws. Now because it does this, it comes within the territory of the Notion – it begets what pertains to the region of the Idea; it thus prepares the empirical material for the Notion, so that the latter can then receive it ready for its use.” (Hegel, Part Three, Section one, A. Bacon)

In this way, Hegel connected Bacon with Hegel’s own three-fold progression of the development of knowledge: Being (Sein), Essence (Wesen), and Idea (Begriff) as elaborated in his Science of logic.

This tradition of a progression towards a goal moves from concrete to abstract and it is the progression that Harris inverted and used in his classification:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bacon ← Reason Philosophy</th>
<th>Imagination Poetry</th>
<th>Memory History</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hegel ← Idea Notion</td>
<td>Essence Being</td>
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<td>Harris ← Science (Philosophy)</td>
<td>Art (Poetry) History</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dewey 1 Philosophy Psychology &amp; Religion 2 Social Sciences 3 Language 4 Natural sciences &amp; math 5 Technology 6 The Arts 7 Literature &amp; Rhetoric 8 Geography &amp; History 9</td>
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(an earlier version of this table was published in Olson (2001)).
This progression is the significant factor in this study. It is, in essence, what postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak calls Hegel’s “epistemograph”. When viewed in a cultural context, the progression is about development over time through a series of predefined stages to reach some advanced state of knowledge. It codifies this path of development by writing a Time constructed as Law (1999, 38). Spivak takes as an example Hegel’s discussion of Indian art in his Lectures on the aesthetic. Seeking compliance with his predefined progression, Hegel considers Indian art to be monotonous because it does not follow this progression. Spivak deconstructs the perceived binary formed by Hegel’s text and the text of the Srimadbhagavadgītā to illustrate that “Time graphed as Law manipulates history seen as timing [actual lived sequence of events] in the interest of cultural political explanations, both in Hegel and the high Hindu contexts” (1999, 43). The cultural political context that Spivak is addressing is “the often unexamined opposition between colonizer and colonized implicit in much colonial discourse study” (1999, 46).

In what follows I will confront Hegel’s three-stage sequence in Science of logic with Spivak’s interpretation of Time as Law written as an epistemograph and then link the results to working bibliographic classifications.

2: Hegel’s three stages
An overview of Being, Essence, and Notion/Idea as a progression toward knowledge in Hegel provides a basis for further analysis. Hegel prefaces his Science of logic with the statement: “The progress of culture generally, and of the sciences in particular, gradually brings to light higher relations of thought, or at any rate, raises these relations to greater generality, and thereby attracts to them more attentive consideration” (1969, 40-41). In his introduction, he develops two forms of logic that produce knowledge: objective knowledge and subjective knowledge. Objective logic includes both Being and Essence combined into Becoming and subjective logic encompasses the Notion/Idea. Logic leads Thought to the Absolute Truth (1969, 70). So the sequence of Being, Essence, and Notion/Idea is a progression toward the Absolute Truth.

Hegel is interested in the process of knowing as a way to understand the beginning of philosophy. He argues that the beginning must be absolute and pure; it must not be mediated by thought; it must be immanent. Being (Sein) is “what is there before us”; it is “simple immediacy” (1969, v. 1, bk. 1, sections 95; 97). Beginning arises from a unity of nothing and Being which is discovered in the ground of what is primary and true; “that which begins already is, but equally, too, is not as yet. The opposites, being and non-being are therefore directly united in it, or, otherwise expressed, it is their undifferentiated unity” (1969, v. 1, bk. 1, s. 111). Being as the first source of knowledge is somewhat parallel to what Bacon, more concretely, calls Memory, the self-experienced knowledge that produces History. Although Hegel says that Being is not concrete, he attributes to it three quite empirical-sounding determinations: quality, magnitude or quantity, and measure which he sees as qualitatively determined quantity (v. 1, bk. 1, s. 125). However, as Hegel asserts in his preface to the second edition, while philosophy in general may think about concrete objects, “Logic is concerned with such thought wholly and solely on account of the thought itself, in complete abstraction from its objects” (1969, 42). In this sense, Hegel is very different from Bacon who was a practical philosopher interested in the here and now.
Essence (Wesen) is identified by the supposition “that at the back of this being there is something else, something other than being itself, that this background constitutes the truth of being” (v. 1, bk. 2, s. 807). Hegel develops his arguments regarding Being in Volume 1, Book 1 of the *Science of logic* as a process that establishes unity of being and nothing, of infinity and finitude, and other binaries. This dialectic progression takes him to the last sentence of Book 1: “Being, in its determinacy, has thus determined itself to essence, a being which, through the sublating of being is a simple being-with-itself” (v. 1, bk. 1, s. 806). As he begins his discussion of Essence in Volume 1, Book 2 he notes that “this path is the movement of being itself. It was seen that being inwardises itself through its own nature, and through this movement into itself becomes essence” (v. 1, bk. 2, s. 809). For Hegel, Essence is the product of reflection on the immediate. Through introspective reflection, Being is mediated to become a higher knowledge, that of Essence. That this is a progression, an epistemograph, Hegel makes clear in several statements of which the following is a good example:

“Since knowing has for its goal knowledge of the true, knowledge of what being is *in and for itself*, it does not stop at the immediate and its determinations, […] This knowledge is a mediated knowing for it is not found immediately with and in essence, but starts from an other, from being, and has a preliminary path to tread, […] essence is past – but timelessly past – being.” (v. 1, bk. 2, s. 807)

In this progression he notes that “Essence stands between being and Notion […] essence is to have proceeded from being, or to be the first negation of being” (v. 1, bk. 2, s. 815). Here Hegel sets up the dialectic that is his epistemograph. Reflection is the tool for this stage of the progression: “Reflection is the showing of essence within essence itself. Essence […] is not immediate but negative simplicity; it is a movement through distinct moments, absolute self-mediation” (s. 860). Hegel keeps this movement going by developing dialectics within dialectics to move from existence to appearance to actuality to the relations of causality and reciprocity. It is the cognitive process of reflection that drives this progression through opposition to unity with each advance along the path. In reflection to develop Essence we again find a parallel to Bacon, in this case his idea of Imagination that processes Memory to produce Poetry. Being and Essence together are the products of Objective Logic through which they form the Becoming of knowledge. The two books of Volume 1: *Objective knowledge*, treat of “being and essence [constituting] properly the genetic exposition of the Notion. […] the dialectical movement of substance through causality and reciprocity” (v. 2, s. 1281).

Hegel develops the Notion (sometimes referred to as the imperfect Idea) in Volume 2 of the *Science of logic*. His initial discussion describes the Notion as a synthesis of Being and Essence. As the stages progress, Being is sublated by the mediation of reflection to Essence. Essence in turn is sublated by Notion. Hegel gives two definitions for *to sublate* which “means to preserve, maintain, and equally it also means to cause to cease, to put an end to” (v. 1, bk. 1, s. 185). Hegel combines the two meanings to suggest that Being is preserved, but set aside as knowing progresses to Essence and Essence is preserved, but set aside as knowing progresses to Notion. So the epistemograph advances with each of the three stages, going beyond the previous stage which is left behind. Notion, however, only reaches the pinnacle of knowledge when it achieves an explicit identity and thus possesses an external totality, becoming the *Idea*.

“The Idea [called the perfect Idea when Notion is called the imperfect idea] is the adequate Notion, that which is objectively *true*, or the *true as such*” (v. 2, s. 1631). The
Idea is not merely a constantly sought but unattainable goal; it is the true. It is first, “the simple truth”, the Notion elevated to the universal (v. 2, s. 1640). The Idea (or perfect idea) is generally regarded as Hegel’s conception of God. As William Torrey Harris describes Hegel’s dialectical progression: “Each thing arises in the course of divine self-knowledge and is a step in the revelation of God” (1895, 145). It is the culmination of Hegel’s epistemograph. Notion/Idea is roughly parallel with Bacon’s use of Reason to analyze and classify Memory and thus develop Philosophy.

3: Gayatri Spivak on Hegel and his epistemograph
In her *Critique of postcolonial reason* (1999), Gayatri Spivak examines Hegel’s view of history and the interpretation of history in Indian art, specifically in the *Srimadbhagavadgītā*. Hegel, writing about art, establishes three stages of development (form, content, and meaning) which Spivak refers to as one of Hegel’s epistemographs: “maps of stages of knowing rather than the story of the growth of an individual mind that knows” (1988, 258-259). In Hegel’s interpretation, Indian art does not achieve the superior stage that Western art does. Rather he viewed it as “just thrown hither and thither” reaching no solution (quoted in Spivak 1999, 42). Spivak demonstrates that both Hegel and the writer of the *Gītā* “dramatize most successfully [her] thesis that Time graphed as Law manipulates history seen as timing in the interest of cultural political explanations” (1999, 43). Here, “timing” is “[o]ne common way of grasping life and ground-level history as events happening to and around many lives”. Timing fleshes out the events making time a “sequential process”. In contrast, “Time graphed as Law” reshapes the events of history to fit into a predetermined structure – an epistemograph. “Time” starts with the structure while “timing” starts with the events. Spivak notes that Hegel found the *Gītā* “extremely monotonous, and on the whole empty and wearisome” (p. 44). Hegel is unable to go beyond his teleological concept of goal orientation to recognize a different epistemic stance in a different culture – it is culturally specific.

How can we apply this type of deconstruction to Hegel’s dialectical, teleological epistemograph of Being, Essence, and Notion/Idea? First, it is clear from the above discussion of these three moments of knowing that they form a teleological epistemograph by Spivak’s definition. Further, within the three books (two volumes) of the *Science of logic*, Hegel nests smaller scale dialectics. The teleological nature of these dialectic strings is related to Time. The progressions of the epistemograph presume that once a new stage sublates the old, the old is preserved but no longer sufficient. The epistemograph is the law that governs this process. So reflection moves the knowing subject from Being to Essence and the unity that brings Being and Essence together into becoming leads to the Notion/Idea. Just as Plato in his *Theaetetus* cornered the sophist with a linear chain of dialectics, so Hegel creates his epistemograph to lead or bully us through these three stages; “because Hegel places all of history and reality upon a diagram, everything fits” (Spivak 1999, 39).

Spivak is operating outside of Hegel’s Western discourse. In a postcolonial world she demonstrates the often hidden situation that cultural diasporas and hybridities muddy mainstream conceptualizations of the development of knowledge. “The mainstream has never run clean, perhaps never can. Part of mainstream education involves learning to ignore this absolutely, with a sanctioned ignorance” (Spivak 1999, 2). To overcome this
ignorance we need to examine the discourses that produce the apparently solid structures of the mainstream.

4: Globalization and teleology

Hegel’s epistemograph lingers on in artifacts like the DDC and UDC which continue to influence the everyday encounters that people have with knowledge. As noted above, Dewey was clearly and heavily (though indirectly) influenced by Hegelian thought and the main classes of the DDC are derived from Hegel and UDC is, of course, derived from DDC. Hegel, although not necessarily consciously or in a direct causative line correlates with the epistemograph developed by Francis Bacon. Bacon and Hegel may have been men of the world, but they were definitely men of their culture. They follow in Plato and Aristotle’s footprints. The problem with this is that the world is no longer a spacious environment for cultures to grow separately from each other. This is not news, but its ramifications may not have been entirely considered.

DDC is generally described as the most widely used library classification in the world. In the United States, the main classes are taught to children from an early age. Worldwide it is used by 200,000 libraries (OCLC 2009a). DDC is exported through conduits like OCLC’s WorldCat making it one of the most convenient standards for use in the 112 countries that use OCLC. The OCLC website calls WorldCat “a global catalog”. DDC’s influence is enormous (OCLC 2009b).

UDC is published in 39 languages and while it doesn’t have a vehicle like WorldCat to aid dissemination of records using UDC, it does have an international database, the Master Reference File, that is a resource for forming different types of UDC editions. Its executive board, editorial team, and advisory board are overwhelmingly European, but it describes itself as “the world’s foremost multilingual classification scheme for all fields of knowledge” and claims that it is “more than ever the reflection of an authoritative international consensus” (UDCC 2008). Yet, except for the 400s (now vacant with the move of languages and linguistics to the 800s) the main classes are still the same as those in DDC.

So the main classes that William Torrey Harris derived from Hegel’s epistemograph are still governing the organization of much of the world’s formally-recorded knowledge and form the knowledge structure most frequently encountered by many people in their everyday lives. The placement of traditional disciplines into Hegel’s epistemograph does not seem to fit the “timing” of everyday life. It may work well for educational settings where the disciplines reflect the institution and its curricula, but even there the now well-established value of interdisciplinarity presents problems. Departments in universities are often faulted for being disciplinary silos unconnected with other departments when interdisciplinary research could produce new knowledge and fruitful results. Programs in women’s studies, African American studies, and the like are often marginalized because they do not fit into the structure. In the same way, interdisciplinary areas in classifications like DDC are difficult to classify. For example, the role and status of women and the women’s movement are appropriately classed in the 300s under social sciences. However, feminist philosophy ends up there as well rather than in the 100s with philosophy. A good example is The Blackwell guide to feminist philosophy (2007) which the Library of Congress classified in 305.4201. The -01 indicates theory or philosophy, but this book is still collocated with the social
sciences, where it is conveniently located with other feminist resources, but is a long way from other philosophical tomes. Arguments have been made that the BISAC Subject Headings overcome this problem of interdisciplinarity, but it actually does the same thing. For the topic of feminist philosophy it directs the classifier “PHILOSOPHY / Feminism see SOCIAL SCIENCE / Feminism & Feminist Theory” with the same collocative result as DDC. UDC does better with interdisciplinarity because it allows the classifier to change the citation order of the facets to make the collocation appropriate to the context.

Taking this one example further, it reflects the dichotomous thesis and antithesis of Hegel’s dialectic without a synthesis. Feminist theorist Seyla Benhabib finds that Hegel associates women with particularity, immediacy, naturalness, and substantiability and men with universality, mediacy, freedom, and subjectivity (that is, being the knowing subject as opposed to the known object) (1996, 29). In this characterization, women are associated with characteristics of Being (immediacy, naturalness), the first stage to be sublated in Hegel’s epistemograph and men are associated with characteristics of Essence (mediacy) and Notion (universality, subjectivity and freedom). Just as Hegel makes the evidence of Indian culture fit into his epistemograph of art, so our classifications make topics such as feminist philosophy fit into the epistemograph of our classifications. However, if we follow Spivak’s deconstruction of Hegel and the Gitā, we can see that there is the potential to deconstruct the teleology of the epistemograph and our use of classification. Harris began the deconstructive process by inverting the direction of Hegel’s three stages – beginning at the end with the generalities, philosophy and religion and ending with history. If a topic like feminist philosophy were moved to collocate it with its discipline it would be recognized as a part of the Idea (100s), the perfect one, rather than the Notion (300s), the imperfect idea. The difference between these classes is clearly a constructed one. There is nothing that defines the history as immediate or mediated, creative topics of technology, the arts, and literature as needing to be together or technology and science as needing to be separate. In fact, the proximity of science (500s) to technology (600s) in DDC suggests that Harris and Dewey were either pragmatic in linking the two across the Being/Essence boundary or were enacting the unity of Being/Essence into becoming.

Hegel, and Bacon before him, provide a rationale for the sequence of main classes just as disciplinary distinctions define them, but it is now more of a convention than a teleological progression. We do not move from history through the arts to philosophy much less to generalities as Absolute Truth. Nevertheless, bibliographic classification, at least DDC and UDC, reflects and reinforces this mainstream epistemograph even though its meaning and significance are obscured. Specifically, we need to be aware of how our classifications are founded on a particular concept of knowledge that may not fit a global context any better than Hegel’s epistemograph accommodated Indian art. More generally, we need to avoid sanctioned ignorance and take a critical look at the underlying foundations of our work and their unintended consequences.

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