Categorical imperfections: marginalisation and scholarship indexing systems

Simon Fokt

Abstract

The indexing systems we use to systematise our knowledge about a domain tend to have an evaluative character: they represent some things as more important, general, complex, or central than others. They are also imperfect and can misrepresent something as more or less important, etc., than it really is. Such distortions mostly result from mistakes made due to lack of time or resources. However, in some cases they follow systematic patterns and studying those can tell us a lot about the implicit judgements and values shared within a community who maintains and uses an index. I use the example of PhilPapers, the largest database of philosophy texts available, to show that the arrangement of its categories and the way items are assigned to those categories, can effectively marginalise certain topics, authors, and even entire traditions and perspectives. In my analysis, I draw attention to such issues as: value-laden ordering of same-level categories, size and depth of categories, the use of miscellaneous categories, localising indexes in category names, and assigning items to some but not other categories. I further suggest that the problematic structuring of the index can have an impact on the community of users, normalising marginalisation and effectively contributing to the perpetuation of inequalities. I finish by offering a number of suggestions for improvement which might help our databases flourish and become even more useful.

Keywords

1 INTRODUCTION

The lines of under-representation in the Anglophone academic philosophy seem to fall on several planes, including:

(1) **Traditions and Perspectives.** Some philosophical traditions and perspectives seem to be less represented than others. They tend to disproportionately include perspectives not central to the cultural experience of groups traditionally dominating Anglophone academic philosophy. This tends to be exhibited in low numbers of articles written from or discussing such perspectives being published in high-ranking journals (Olberding 2016), in relatively low numbers of courses taught from and about such perspectives, and in patterns of tokenism and exotification (e.g. including a token lecture on a Buddhist approach in a philosophy of science course) (Norden 2017).

(2) **Topics.** Some topics tend to be seen as less prestigious than others, or as less 'central' to philosophy (whatever this means). They tend to disproportionately include those in some way related to issues affecting members of under-represented groups (e.g. philosophy of race, feminist philosophy)[1], or ones where a higher proportion of authors are from under-represented groups (e.g. aesthetics, applied ethics). This tends to be exhibited in the low numbers of articles on those topics being published in prestigious journals (De Cruz 2018; Wilhelm, Lynn, and Hassoun 2018), fewer jobs with AOS in those areas being advertised and fewer people working on those issues finding employment (Botts et al. 2014), or in token classes on such topics which tend to be added at the end of a lecture series.

(3) **People.** There are entire social groups which are under-represented, often identified by such protected characteristics as race and gender. This tends to be exhibited in lower rates of employment (Beebee and Saul 2011; National Center for Education Statistics 2009; Botts et al. 2014; Conklin, Artamonova, and Hassoun 2019), of publications (Bright 2016; Schwitzgebel 2015b; 2015a; Wilhelm, Lynn, and Hassoun 2018; Haslanger 2008; Healy 2015; Guerrero 2015), of citations (Schwitzgebel 2014; Healy 2015; Schwitzgebel and Jennings 2016), of invitations (Kidd and Duncombe 2019) experienced by the members of such groups.

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[1] Naturally, many less prestigious topics have nothing to do with issues affecting members of under-represented groups, e.g. environmental philosophy or philosophy of education. The claim is not that most less prestigious topics are related to such issues, but that most topics covering such issues are less prestigious.

A number of likely causes of under-representation have been identified. Some of them might be easy to spot and measure, others are more complex. A likely example of the latter kind has to do with the background social and metaphilosophical beliefs and attitudes commonly shared within the philosophical community, the ways people tend to think about the discipline, the things that are commonly accepted as normal, as important, as valuable. In this paper, I hope to shed some light on them by examining the way in which philosophers systematise and index their discipline, and categorise particular works to fit into the system.

2   INDEXING PRACTICES

Subject indexing is a 'communicative practice' (Rafferty and Hidderley 2007, 398) which uses discoverability and subject representation (Bates and Rowley 2011) to carry implicit judgements about the relative importance, generality, and complexity of the subjects it includes. This is typically intentional and justified: an index would typically ensure that parent categories are more general than their sub-categories, more complex categories have more sub-divisions, etc. If done well, such structuring is extremely useful, providing people with a clear overview of the relations between the elements within the system and allowing easier navigation.

But naturally, any indexing system is a conventional representation of reality and will necessarily distort it. For example, the parent-child category system, an Aristotelian invention, might fail to adequately represent situations where (topics covered in) a child category are related to multiple parent categories, or similar to children of other parent categories.

Given such limitations and its evaluative function, an indexing system can also mistakenly represent particular categories as less general, complex, or important than they really are. This can be particularly problematic if it turns out that categories so misrepresented are those which contain content already marginalised in ways identified above: created by members of marginalised groups, covering marginalised topics, or offering a view from marginalised perspectives. Studying examples of such misrepresentations within an index can give us an opportunity to understand potentially problematic attitudes existing within the community which creates and uses it, and the mechanisms by which they are perpetuated.

To illustrate, let us assume that the work of Plato and Confucius is in fact comparably important and complex. An index would misrepresent this if it listed a category titled *Confucius* below a category titled *Plato* in an otherwise alphabetical grouping, or if *Plato* was further subdivided into twenty sub-categories covering detailed aspects of Plato's philosophy but *Confucius* was not, or if *Plato* was

featured prominently high up the category tree but *Confucius* appeared significantly lower or within a Miscellaneous section. In the Western philosophy-world context where Chinese philosophy tends to be marginalised, this would be problematic and potentially revealing of biased attitudes in the community which creates and uses such an index.

This type of marginalisation has been widely discussed in the context of public libraries (Bates and Rowley 2011). For the purpose of this article, I will be focusing on the example of PhilPapers, a widely used online database of philosophy texts. This is by no means because I think that this project is particularly problematic. Instead, it is because PhilPapers is both very popular and largely created and managed by members of the philosophical community.[2] Unlike 'monologic' projects such as edited encyclopaedias or managed collections where the communicative practice of indexing mostly involves the editors communicating to their audience, the shape and structure of PhilPapers is 'dialogic': the resource is co-designed by the members of the community who add and categorise entries (Rafferty and Hidderley 2007, 398). This gives us a peek into the community itself and into what is commonly accepted within it. It is a sort of litmus test for how philosophers think about philosophy.

In this paper, I will show that there are ways in which the PhilPapers' indexing system marginalises content along the three distinguished lines: traditions, topics, and people. I argue that this is a symptom of social and metaphilosophical biases entrenched within the philosophical community, and that any index displaying similar tendencies effectively plays a role in the perpetuation of those biases.

As with many other cases of marginalisation, this is unlikely to be intentional; instead, it likely reflects limitations following from lack of resources, reliance on volunteer editors, or lack of time. Thus the focus of my critique is to help identify issues and offer solutions which might help PhilPapers improve and become even more successful.

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[2] The notion 'philosophical community' is intentionally vague and covers very diverse groups of people. In practice, some of those groups are more powerful and priviledged, and play a greater role in shaping the mainstream culture of the community which PhilPapers reflects. My critique might thus apply differently to different groups and people, and I leave it to the readers to place themselves on this spectrum.

3   PHILPAPERS: A SUCCESS STORY

PhilPapers is the largest and most comprehensive database of philosophical works, including 2,436,367 research books and articles.[3] It was established in 2009 by David Bourget and David Chalmers, both based in Australia at the time and both serving as general editors until now. It is maintained by the Centre for Digital Philosophy at the University of Western Ontario and receives funding from a number of institutions based in Australia, UK and US. On its main webpage, PhilPapers is described as:

> *a comprehensive index and bibliography of philosophy maintained by the community of philosophers. We monitor all sources of research content in philosophy, including journals, books, open access archives, and personal pages maintained by academics.*

There are several features of the project which are important in the present context:

(1) PhilPapers is largely run by members of the philosophical community, with nearly 800 volunteer editors taking care of particular categories;

(2) It is widely used, with 338,500 registered users and up to 1,000,000 visits per month (according to an estimate by SimilarWeb.com, accessed 16/03/2020);

(3) It tends to grow organically, with content largely crowd-sourced through a public contribution system available to anyone who registers on the site; professional philosophers are the source of the majority of the content on PhilPapers, and they are the ones typically assigning works to categories, with moderation from volunteer editors;

(4) Its category structure has been in place in a largely unchanged form since 2009.

The PhilPapers category system has proven very successful and popular. It is recommended widely by institutions and individuals alike, described as 'of great value for instructors designing philosophy courses, or for students and researchers selecting material for a reading group or research project' (Bzovy and Ryman 2013), and 'providing a much more precise method for categorizing a particular item' (University of Illinois Library 2020). It informs the category system used by Wikipedia – the WikiProject Philosophy members who edit its philosophy pages described the PhilPapers system as 'valuable, reliable, and credible' (Wikipedia 2014). It is the basis of the Diversity Reading List

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[3] All references to PhilPapers, its content, category tree structure, numbers of items in each category, categorisation of specific items, etc., are drawn from www.philpapers.org and are accurate as of the time of writing, March 2020.

category tree (www.diversityreadinglist.org). It has been used as a way to identify the areas of philosophical specialisation in academic studies, including ones aiming to establish the views of academic philosophers (Bourget and Chalmers 2014), or investigating gender balance in different areas of philosophy (Schwitzgebel and Jennings 2016). There are even graphical representations of it (Lageard 2016), and its success can be seen in the fact that category editors tend to announce their role on their websites and in their CVs, clearly proud of their work and presenting it as a source of prestige and status.

Conversely, there is very little published criticism of the category system (one example might be: Tremain 2019) and its longevity suggest that it is perceived as broadly adequate. The site has a forum dedicated to The Categorization Project, but this forum contains no serious critiques or discussions related to equality issues (one exception will be mentioned below). All this suggests that the structure of the index is accepted as broadly adequate by the philosophical community.

Overall, the success of PhilPapers and its category system is immense and well-deserved. It has helped countless people in finding and sharing a great variety of high quality work, and offered scholars a great way for making their own work more accessible.

However, with this success comes a need for additional scrutiny, as the better, the more popular and the more commonly used a system is, the more likely it is to become transparent, and the higher the danger of reification where people might mistake the way it represents its domain for the way this domain actually is. Consider the success of Google as an analogy. Its search results are commonly taken to accurately represent not only the content of a domain, a.k.a. 'if it's not on Google, it doesn't exist', but also the relative importance of items within a domain, a.k.a. 'if it doesn't come up on the first page, it's not important' (see e.g. Pan 2007). It is not inconceivable that philosophy-specific resources such as PhilPapers (likely alongside the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* and others) can hold similar position within the discipline, and be subject to similar problems.

PhilPapers is thus not only a litmus test showing us the implicit views commonly held within the philosophical community – it can also have the power to shape those views. Scrutinising it can help us support it in ensuring that this power does not serve to unwittingly reinforce harmful biases.

4   CATEGORICAL REPRESENTATION

The PhilPapers indexing system takes shape of a nested category tree, with top-level categories divided into sub-categories, which are themselves divided into sub-sub-categories, and so on. I will

focus on the following ways in which the structure of such an indexing system can embed implicit value judgements about the elements of that system:

(1) The ordering of same-level categories can imply the relative importance of those categories, with those listed first being most important, and the following being less important the closer they are to the end of the list.

(2) The levels at which categories appear can imply their relative importance and generality, with top-level categories being seen as the most important and general, first level sub-categories as less so, and so on.

(3) The number of sub-categories a category has can imply its importance and complexity, with categories with more sub-divisions likely seen as more important and complex.

(4) The name of a category can suggest whether it is universal or specific, with the presence of localising or contextualising qualifiers suggesting specificity and lack thereof suggesting generality.

(5) Placing an item in 'Miscellaneous' or 'Other' categories can imply its lack of importance or centrality to the issues covered within the parent category.

(6) Applying specific categories to an item can not only signal that this item belongs to those categories, but also that it does not belong to other, potentially more important, complex or general categories.

When working properly, an indexing system should cogently identify the relations between its categories, and the implicit value judgements it passes should be accurate: for example, a category represented as more complex should in fact be more complex, and one represented as marginal should in fact be marginal. Such a system is extremely valuable in systematising the discipline and helping people gain a clearer view of the field.

However, in some cases a system might identify and represent things incorrectly, unfairly implying in one or more of the ways identified that a given area or category is more or less important, central, etc. than it is. For the purpose of this article, I will refer to categories which are represented to be less important, central, etc. than they really are or should be, as 'marginalised categories.' In what follows, I will show that there is a problematic convergence between marginalised categories and the lines of under-representation I identified in the Introduction.

5 ANALYSIS

5.1 THE ORDERING OF SAME-LEVEL CATEGORIES

The great majority of categories in PhilPapers index are ordered alphabetically or chronologically. This approach is impartial and passes no implicit judgements about the relative importance of the categories, as those appearing closer to the beginning are clearly not more important, they just start with a certain letter or date. Another value-neutral way of ordering might be by size: the number of items within each category. PhilPapers top-level categories are listed as follows (size in brackets):

(1) Metaphysics and Epistemology (362,634)

(2) Value Theory (568,614)

(3) Science, Logic, and Mathematics (435,505)

(4) History of Western Philosophy (365,132)

(5) Philosophical Traditions (264,131)

(6) Philosophy, Misc (5,200)

(7) Other Academic Areas (68,507)

The top-level categories are not ordered alphabetically. Neither are they ordered by size. This suggests that the ordering follows some other method, and might betray value judgements behind it.

It seems likely that this is the case here, as the *Metaphysics and Epistemology* category, covering areas commonly seen as the 'core' of the discipline, is listed first, despite the fact that alphabetically it should appear second, and it is fourth by size. Indeed, the ordering of the categories seems to reflect a tacit acceptance commonly shared within the philosophical community on what is the 'core' of the discipline, with less 'central' areas appearing lower down the list. It is, for example, consistent with the coverage of those areas in high-ranking philosophy journals, or polls on 'what areas are most important for a strong PhD program' (Leiter 2016).

However, while representative of how those areas have been seen in modern Anglophone philosophy-world, the claims about centrality are difficult to justify and have been subject to well-reasoned criticism (see e.g. Barnes 2015). So it is unclear why the top categories should be so structured, instead of following the value-neutral approach of all remaining categories and be structured alphabetically or by size.

It is, however, more clear why the top categories should *not* be so structured. This ordering seems problematic in at least two ways: firstly, the areas it identifies as more central tend to be those with

lower representation of scholars from under-represented groups (see e.g. Lageard 2016); secondly, the low position of the Philosophical Traditions category which tends to include a large number of under-represented topics and traditions, suggests its low importance.

To see how this issue can manifest itself in practice, consider the example of the abovementioned survey of philosophers' views (Bourget, Chalmers 2014). In it, participants were asked their views on 'thirty central philosophical questions.' The paper does not specify how this particular set of questions was selected, or point to any impartial method of determining which questions should count as 'central.' Perhaps unsurprisingly then, twenty of the thirty questions are about issues covered in the category *Metaphysics and Epistemology*, seven in *Value Theory*, and three have to do with *Science, Logic, and Mathematics*. Not a single one had to do with *History of Western Philosophy* or any topics related to non-Western thought covered under *Philosophical Traditions*. None of the relatively small number of questions in *Value Theory* engaged with feminist philosophy, questions of race and justice, or any applied issue at all. This suggests that none of those issues are (seen as) central. As a result, we now know what philosophers think about such detailed issues as the Newcomb's Problem, covered by a sub-sub-sub-sub-category of *Metaphysics and Epistemology*, but not what they think about any of the significantly more general issues in *Philosophy of Gender, Race, and Sexuality*, or *Asian Philosophy* – sub-categories of *Value Theory* and *Philosophical Traditions* respectively.

All this suggests that the ordering of categories is a symptom of problematic implicit judgements about the discipline, and serves to entrench them as members of the community are led to believe that even very specific issues in metaphysics and epistemology are more worth knowing than much more general ones in, say, Asian philosophy.

5.2   HOW BIG IS YOUR CATEGORY?

There are a number of categories which one could reasonably expect to be symmetrical with respect to size and richness of detail exhibited in the number of their sub-categories. This is most clearly seen in historical or geographical categories. For example, one would expect that category A which covers the work of a prominent philosopher A and contains 1000 items, would be structured with a similar degree of complexity as category B which covers the work of an equally prominent philosopher B and also contains 1000 items.

This is not always the case on PhilPapers. While the symmetries hold for the most part, there are some exceptions. For example, the *17th/18th Century Philosophy* category within *History of Western Philosophy* is home to three nation-themed sub-categories covering British, French, and German

philosophy. The largest, *17th/18th Century German Philosophy*, contains 37,007 entries and is divided into a total of 170 sub-categories going down up to five levels. *17th/18th Century British Philosophy* contains 32,837 entries and has a total of 253 sub-categories also going down up to five levels. *17th/18th Century French Philosophy* has 9,081 entries, and a total of 13 sub-categories going down only one level.

This seems rather unsymmetrical – even with fewer entries, French philosophy seems surprisingly poor in sub-divisions. This is particularly surprising as neither the area devoted to Descartes (4,269 entries) nor the one covering Rousseau (1,956) have a single sub-category. Meanwhile, Locke (4,453) and Berkeley (2,464) have been given 75 and 41 sub-categories respectively.

Things get complicated further as we step beyond Western Philosophy. Histories of philosophy in other traditions are not given top-level categories at all. They appear further down the *Philosophical Traditions*, but their periodization is unclear and not symmetrical. There are no such categories as *17th/18th Century Chinese* or *Indian* or *Islamic Philosophy*. While one could justifiably argue that meaningful lines of division in other traditions might fall in other places, it is unclear that those lines are identified by the index with similar attention to detail as they are in the case of Western Philosophy. Instead, the respective traditions are sometimes divided historically (e.g. *19th* and *20th Century Japanese Philosophy*), sometimes by topic (e.g. *Indian Logic*), other times by school of thought (e.g. *Chinese Neo-Confucianism*). Thus while the *17th/18th Century French Philosophy* category seemed poor in comparison with its British and German counterparts, the equivalent categories for Chinese, Indian, and other traditions are even poorer, to the point of non-existence.

This relative richness of categories gives us further insight into the likely implicit views on the relative importance and complexity of those categories, shared within the Anglophone philosophical community. The historical examples discussed fall neatly into two types: the precursors of modern Anglophone analytic philosophy, and everything else. The category structure of PhilPapers seems to indicate that the former are significantly more important and complex than the latter. In other words, the indexing system effectively marginalises the latter categories and those areas of research.

Outside of history of philosophy the problem manifests by broadly following the implicit judgements about centrality of various topics identified in the previous section. Pretty much any category in *Metaphysics* has more subsections than a category holding more entries in *Applied Ethics* or *Philosophy of Social Science*. Compare for example *Interlevel Metaphysics* (2,089 entries and 44 sub-categories two levels deep) with *Professional Ethics* (10,716 entries and 7 sub-categories one level deep) or *Philosophy of Education* (28,259 entries and 12 categories two levels deep). Another

striking example is found in *Normative Ethics*, where *Consequentialism* has half the number of entries *Feminist Ethics has* (2,393 and 5,746 respectively), yet it has 27 sub-categories going down two levels, while *Feminist Ethics* has none. This treatment seems to indicate that issues traditionally perceived as central to Anglophone analytic philosophy are more important and complex than everything else.

Naturally, a great deal of the differences in how rich or deep particular categories are, can be ascribed to the organic way in which PhilPapers develops and such contingent issues as the availability of volunteer editors in a given area, their interest in expanding their sections, etc. Indeed, one can find multiple examples of categories covering philosophers who are part of the modern analytic tradition but have few or no sub-categories (examples include Wittgenstein, Russell or Quine). However, these exceptions are relatively few and overall the regularity with which the described asymmetries are found suggests that this is not the whole story.

5.3   HOW DEEP IS YOUR CATEGORY?

There are a number of categories which one could reasonably expect to be symmetrical with respect to where they are placed in the category tree. Again, this is probably most natural to expect in the case of categories which have to do with historical figures and traditions. In order to find a key philosopher representative of a given historical period, one needs to typically travel three levels down. For example, we find Kant under *History of Western Philosophy -> 17th/18th Century Philosophy -> 17th/18th Century German Philosophy -> Immanuel Kant*. This holds for every figure in the Western tradition. However, to find a key philosopher representative of a given historical period in any other tradition, one needs to travel five levels down. For example, we find Confucius under *Philosophical Traditions -> Asian Philosophy -> Chinese Philosophy -> Classical Chinese Philosophy -> Classical Confucianism -> Confucius*.

More broadly, most of the philosophical traditions covered on PhilPapers branch out at the second or third level down the category tree, for example *Philosophical Traditions -> Asian Philosophy -> Chinese Philosophy*. It is at this level that we find categories which divide the tradition alongside historical or thematic lines. The only exception is the Anglophone analytic tradition, which doesn't have its own defining branch. Instead, it starts from a tacit level zero, with the top-level categories dividing it similarly alongside historical or thematic lines.

This way of presenting the content can effectively marginalise some categories and areas by suggesting that they are less general or less important, and in practice potentially harder to find for people using the index. One needs to search longer and deeper to find Confucius than to find Kant,

and likewise one needs to search deeper to find *Chinese Philosophy: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, (five levels down) than to find *[Western Philosophy:] Metaphysics and Epistemology* (top level). These categories are represented as, literally, not on the same level.

5.4 QUALIFIERS AND LACK THEREOF

While the above point might not seem as pressing, it points to a more worrying issue: the Anglophone analytic tradition is not explicitly placed in a named category, but the thematic categories within the Chinese tradition are prefaced with 'Chinese Philosophy:'. Such a convention effectively presents the Anglophone analytic tradition as just philosophy, universal and devoid of any geographical or cultural background, while the other traditions are presented as somehow tied to their place or culture of origin (see e.g. Park 2013).

Doing so not only falsely presents it as universal and devoid of the context which shaped it, but also effectively marginalises the other traditions. It contributes to the problem described above: the Anglophone analytic tradition, the one without a qualifier and with all categories appearing at least two levels above parallel tradition-specific categories, is thus presented as more general, as the norm, while the other traditions seem like special cases, alternative approaches. They are not equal, not on the same level.

5.5 MISCELLANEOUS

One can learn a lot about an indexing system by looking at what it labels as 'misc'. Collins English Dictionary states:

> A miscellaneous group consists of many different kinds of things or people that are difficult to put into a particular category.
>
> *...a hoard of miscellaneous junk.*
>
> *...miscellaneous items that don't fall into any group.*

Note that the explanation and the examples have slightly different imports here. As per the explanation, miscellaneous sections in indexes tend to contain an unstructured mix of 'everything else' – all things that are not easily classified elsewhere, not common enough to have their own category. But there is more to it – as the Collins' example suggests, 'Miscellaneous' tends to have a slightly negative valence: it describes the leftovers, the misfits, the 'junk.'

On PhilPapers, there are a number of categories labelled 'miscellaneous', typically placed within broader categories divided into topics. For example, *Epistemology* holds topic categories such as

Epistemological States and Properties or *Knowledge*, as well as the category *Epistemology, Miscellaneous.* This and other miscellaneous sections are presumably intended to hold content which is not easily classified under any of the topic categories. This and some other miscellaneous categories have sub-categories of their own, and those tend to be the most interesting to analyse.

The following second level categories contain a sub-category covering the feminist approaches to the area (e.g. *Feminist Epistemology*): *Epistemology*, *Philosophy of Language*, *Philosophy of Religion*, *Normative Ethics*, *Philosophy of Gender, Race, and Sexuality*, and *General Philosophy of Science*. In all except *Philosophy of Gender, Race, and Sexuality*, the feminist approach categories are in the respective *Miscellaneous* sections. While they tend to have fewer items than most categories other than the *Miscellaneous,* this is not always the case: *Feminist Ethics* which lives under *Normative Ethics, Miscellaneous*, has 5,740 entries, more than six out of seven of the non-Miscellaneous categories.

Likely due to the organic development of PhilPapers, many first level categories do not contain sub-categories covering the feminist approaches; instead, *Feminist Aesthetics*, *Feminist Metaphysics*, etc., are listed under *Philosophy of Gender, Race, and Sexuality -> Feminist Approaches to Philosophy*. This has been raised by several people as a potential issue on the PhilPapers forum in 2009/10, with the suggestion that (1) some users had problems finding the categories and considered their placement counterintuitive, and (2) it is not clear this categorisation is correct as it is not clear that, say, feminist metaphysics need be a special case of, or indeed have anything to do with gender, race, and sexuality (Crasnow 2009).

Placing categories covering feminist approaches to philosophical topics in the *Miscellaneous* sections can marginalise them by suggesting that they are not common or important enough to appear in the main category tree, or worse – that they are the 'junk' in the topic. Naturally, few philosophers would explicitly hold that feminist philosophy is junk. However, their explicit views need not be correlated with their behaviour, as they browse the index rarely looking into any miscellaneous section quite like they would rarely look at a pile of junk. In the context of an indexing system, it is not unreasonable to presume that Miscellaneous categories will not be as commonly visited by users searching for content as the other categories, which in practice might mean that feminist work will not be found as easily or as often as other work. This seems in line with some more general worries about the precarious place of feminist philosophy in the profession:

> *The effects of institutional marginalization and encapsulation is that feminist philosophy can be made unrecognized, unrewarding, unattractive, and unhelpful to one's career prospects to the point where it, or the people who do it, can be made to*

> *go away. [...] Feminist work can be ignored without being examined.* (Walker 2005, 162)

It is certainly easier to ignore something without examining it, if it is tucked away in a 'Misc' drawer.

5.6 CRYPTO-MISCELLANEOUS

Another facet of this issue relates to sections which are not explicitly labelled 'Miscellaneous', but effectively play a similar role: they 'consists of many different kinds of things' which are joint not by any positive feature they share, but by a negative one: not being part of the other categories. In PhilPapers, the most likely candidate for a crypto-Miscellaneous category, is the *Philosophical Traditions*.

The main sub-division of *Philosophical Traditions* is geographic, covering Asian, African, American, European, and continental traditions. The only thing that unites them all, is the fact that they are not part of the Western analytic tradition. As mentioned above, the category tree presents the Western analytic tradition as the one without a prefix, without a qualifier – it is just philosophy.

The 'miscellaneousness' of the category is further visible in how it is structured. The geographic division does not seem meaningful: one tradition might span multiple continents (e.g. Islamic) and one continent can be home to multiple distinct traditions (e.g. Indian and Chinese). Further, while the tacit *Western Analytic Philosophy* over-category is clearly divided into historical and thematic areas which are systematic and largely exhaustive, such attention to detail is largely absent in the *Traditions*. Instead, each tradition is divided into a much less systematically structured mix of historical and thematic categories which are not similarly exhaustive. And after all, 'miscellaneous' comes from latin *miscellus*: 'mixed.'

If this analysis is true, then the community which creates, maintains and uses the index, effectively labels everything except the Western *analytic* philosophy as 'miscellaneous': misfits, probably less important, not worthy of a detailed treatment, potentially even 'junk'. Categories covering whole philosophical traditions are thus effectively marginalised. This can be seen as displaying what Freter suggests is an attitude of historically rooted disregard and contempt for non-Western thought, and even contributing to what Lebakeng calls 'colonial epistemicide' (Lebakeng 2004; Freter 2018; cf.

Park 2013; van Norden 2017), as well as a general disdain for continental philosophy not uncommon in analytic departments.[4]

Naturally, there are good historical reasons why this approach in constructing the category tree was taken: PhilPapers is a project hosted at a Western department specialising in the analytic tradition, funded by Western institutions, and aimed at an audience whose main interests are in Western analytic philosophy. The reader might now be justified in pausing to suggest that perhaps the issues identified above are not problematic, because of the context in which PhilPapers is created and received.

But if this is the case, then, to draw on Garfield and Norden's 'If Philosophy Won't Diversify, Let's Call It What It Really Is' (2016), perhaps the project should be more aptly named AngloAnalyticPhilPapers. Or perhaps it should be more open about its background and the demographic it caters to. Yet as it stands, in no place does PhilPapers website state that the project's main focus is on the Anglophone analytic tradition. Instead, the *About* page states that PhilPapers is 'a comprehensive index of the research literature *in philosophy*' offering 'a comprehensive structured bibliography *of philosophy*' and monitoring 'all sources of research content *in philosophy*' (all emphases mine). And while the editors are making serious and laudable efforts to increase the amount of content in other traditions and languages, the issue is not only in the lack of content – it is in how this content is structured and presented using the category tree.

5.7 EXCLUDING BY INCLUDING

As the *Western Analytic Tradition* over-category remains tacit on the site, it is natural for people to treat any categories not explicitly labelled as belonging to a tradition as universal. Thus one would expect that under *Normative Ethics* one would find texts discussing what is right and wrong irrespective if they were written from the analytic, Chinese, or Afro-American perspective. However, this is not always the case. To illustrate this, consider Yang Guorong's *Morality and Human Existence: From the Perspective of Moral Metaphysics* (2012) as an example. Gourong begins:

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[4] It is instructive to compare the content placed in the (crypto-)miscellaneous sections with content highlighted by independent projects aiming to promote marginalised areas in philosophy. The Pluralist's Guide to Philosophy, for example, lists the following categories in its programme recommendations: *Africana Philosophy, American Philosophy, Continental Philosophy, Critical Philosophy of Race and Ethnicity, Feminist Philosophy, LGBT Studies, Latin American and Latino/a Philosophy* (Alcoff et al., 2020). The lists seem nearly co-extensive.

Although morality and ethics are often seen as synonyms, some philosophers have endowed these terms with different connotations. For example, in his late ethical work The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant distinguished the two parts of the metaphysics of morals: the doctrine of right and the doctrine of virtue. While the latter concerns ethics, the former touches on legal relationships and falls roughly under the categories of the philosophy of law or the metaphysical domain of law. Here, morality seems to cover a domain that is more vast, ruling over both ethics and philosophy of law.* (Guorong 2012, 27)

Gourong moves on to discuss Spinoza, Hegel and Williams, trying to find connections between their thought and that present in the Confucian tradition, discussing the notions of duty, moral agency, moral cognition, etc.

This paper is classified on PhilPapers under *Chinese Philosophy* and *Chinese Philosophy: Ethics*, found within the *Philosophical Traditions* top category. What it is not classified under, is any relevant category in *Meta-Ethics* or *Normative Ethics* under *Value Theory* top category.

Similarly, Victoria S. Harrison's *Feminist philosophy of religion and the problem of epistemic privilege* (2007), is classified solely under *Feminist Epistemology* (in the miscellaneous section of *Epistemology*) – it is not classified under any other sub-category of *Epistemology* or *Philosophy of Religion*.

There are multiple similar examples of works which present a non-Western or a feminist perspective on a topic X, which are not classified under the main category covering X, but instead are found under *Feminist X* or *Chinese X*. Assuming that the non-tradition-specific categories are meant to be universal rather than Western, analytic and non-feminist, every single item categorised as *Feminist* or *Chinese X,* should also be classified as just *X*. Indeed, including an item in the tradition-specific category but not including it in the general category, effectively excludes it: although the content is available in the index, it will not be found by anyone browsing the general category. Thus although we have good reasons to believe that many Western analytic philosophers interested in topics such as virtue or the moral significance of family could benefit from engaging with, say, Confucian ethics (Olberding 2015), the tools we use to help them find scholarship to engage with make it less likely that they will. In practice, such content is marginalised.

The combination of several of the abovementioned issues can further lead to exotification and tokenism. The index presents users with two options: the general and the indexed one. This might lead some users to go to a higher-level, non-prefixed, non-miscellaneous category to find the

general, central and important content, or go to the feminist or tradition-indexed version of the same category to find some 'diversity baubles'[5]: inconsequential adornments that can be used to make a paper look more diverse, or to include in the last week of teaching. Naturally, this is not to say that such categories cannot be used in better ways – but it seems that this sort of problematic use might be unwittingly facilitated if users will not find a large portion of the 'exotic' content unless they are looking for it, as it does not appear in the general categories.

6 SYMPTOM AND CAUSE

The selected issues found in the most popular Anglophone database of philosophy works, are closely related to broader problems of lack of equality and diversity still prevalent in Anglophone academic philosophy. This should not be surprising. In fact, it merely confirms the supposition that projects such as PhilPapers – managed, edited and created by members of the community – are a good litmus test indicating the state of that community. On one hand, this can be seen in the way the resource is created, with people structuring the category tree and adding items to categories in the ways described.

But on the other hand, and perhaps much more tellingly, this can be seen in the way the resource is used, which is: without much reflection given to the issues I identified. Seeing that there is virtually no written criticism of the existing state of affairs, this might indicate that: (1) members of the community explicitly think that the issues identified are not a problem; (2) they do not notice them because they implicitly think those issues are not a problem; (3) they do not notice them because they have become so normal as to be invisible, (4) they do notice them, but do not care enough to try and influence a change; (5) they do notice them, want to influence a change, but do not feel they have the power to do so. Naturally, neither of those possibilities is welcome.

But the issues identified are not only a symptom of underlying cultural problems. A structured index can also shape the implicit views of a community of users by implying what is the relative importance, generality, centrality, and value of the things it categorises. In the above analysis, I presented a selection of ways in which this can happen, showing how items and categories can be effectively marginalised and exotified, leading to the reproduction of problematic power structures similar to that identified in traditional libraries (Bates and Rowley 2011). This can lead to further entrenchment of the existing discrimination on the three lines identified in the introduction to this paper:

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[5] I borrow the term from Ian Kidd who used it in personal communication.

(1) **Traditions and Perspectives.** All world philosophical traditions except the Western analytic tradition are grouped in the crypto-miscellaneous category *Philosophical Traditions*, which appears towards the end of the non-alphabetical list of top-level categories, is not divided in a careful or meaningful way, and its specific topics are found lower down the category tree and given tradition-specific indexes which distinguish them from un-indexed (and thus presumably universal) categories where Western analytic scholarship is found. Similarly, feminist perspectives tend to appear in miscellaneous sections, with similar indexes distinguishing them from un-indexed scholarship. In practice, such an approach can lead to the marginalisation and exotification of traditions and perspectives which are already marginalised and exotified.

(2) **Topics.** The ordering of top-level categories suggests a gradation of importance of philosophical topics, with those more abstract and more dominated by white male authors appearing closer to the top. Categories devoted to times, figures and topics more relevant to the Western analytic tradition tend to appear higher up the tree, have more sub-categories, and lack tradition-specific indexes. Scholarship discussing other times, figures and topics is listed under (crypto-)miscellaneous or tradition-specific categories and often not found in the general, un-indexed, categories. This approach can imply that some already marginalised topics are in fact less important, less central, less valuable, and mainly useful in exotic contexts.

(3) **People.** Authors from marginalised groups are more likely to engage in research on topics and in traditions which are marginalised by the indexing system (see e.g. Botts et al. 2014). Hidden in categories which are presented as less important, less central, less valuable, their work might be less often read, less often cited, less often remembered. Listed in the mixed bag of 'miscellaneous' topics, it might imply the authors lack intellectual coherence, are random, unfocused. All this in turn can lead to missed professional opportunities, difficulties in building a strong reputation, and ultimately diminished chances for entering into and advancing through the professional pathways of academic philosophy.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Fortunately, many of the worries presented above can be addressed through a careful, judicious redesign of an indexing system. I have made some attempts at doing so in adjusting the PhilPapers category system for the needs of the Diversity Reading List. Naturally, such changes can be difficult, time consuming and resource intensive, and should not be expected overnight. But I hope that the

following recommendations might offer a good starting point to address the problem on a wider scale.

(1) Adopt a less value-laden convention for ordering same level categories. This might be alphabetical, chronological, by size, or in any other order that does not imply that categories listed earlier are more important.

(2) Make efforts to ensure that categories of similar size, complexity or generality are divided into a similar number of sub-categories, to avoid inaccurately implying that some are more important than others.

(3) Make efforts to ensure that categories of similar generality or covering similar ground are listed at a similar level, to avoid implying that those listed deeper down the tree are less general or important.

(4) Avoid implying that the Western analytic tradition is universal or context-less, by either adding tradition-indexes to categories covering works written in that tradition, removing them from categories covering works in other traditions, or stating explicitly that the index covers scholarship focused on this tradition.

(5) Re-evaluate the use of Miscellaneous sections to avoid including categories covering otherwise marginalised subjects, or creating crypto-Miscellaneous sections.

(6) Ensure that content categorised in a tradition-specific category is also included in the parallel general category, to ensure that it can be easily found by people browsing the general category.

In lieu of a conclusion, let me clarify the 'who' and what' of the issues discussed. I used the example of PhilPapers to make a general point about how indexing systems can allow us to inspect existing biases and inequalities present within a community and how they can unintentionally serve to perpetuate those biases and inequalities. But this is only an example. I do not think that PhilPapers is particularly problematic and similar or worse faults could easily be found with a number of other resources. In fact, the editors have made multiple attempts at making it value-neutral and have been using their limited resources to increase its diversity.

I have chosen it, because those efforts were made yet the problems still exist. I have chosen it, because PhilPapers' popularity means its impact is particularly visible. But mostly I have chosen it because of its community-based development model. The philosophical community – hundreds of volunteer editors and thousands of users – engages with it every day, adding content, moderating, browsing, yet it is as if the issues I identified were invisible. We gloss over them every day without a second thought, effectively perpetuating them. We explicitly hold that, naturally, unjust

marginalisation of certain topics and areas of research is wrong and should stop – yet when we engage with resources where this marginalisation takes place, we do not notice and behave as if all was as it should be. As such, this example offers support for the view that the way to improving the discipline does not (only) lead through removing some 'bad apples', offering a few more 'diverse' courses, and balancing conference panels. It leads through a major cultural shift revising our implicit and often unrecognised beliefs on what and who is important, valuable and worth paying attention to in our discipline.

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