The Librarian's Philosophical Thinking Affecting Library and Information Sciences

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Abstract: Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to introduce the importance of philosophical thinking, PT, in the field of librarianship and information professional which is a crucial feature in our present day. Design/ methodology/approach: This article places emphasis on the role of PT for librarians into accept the profession by other fields. Findings: The study demonstrates that PT helps librarians to mention their reasons and missions and also results to keep their opinion strong and safe. PT helps them to attract the positive judgements from the other professionals who say librarianship doesn’t have a real theory. Research limitations/implications: This paper is a literature review and we can improve the results by making a research paper. Practical implications: The results of this article can be utilized by organizations for their benefits. Originality/ value: The study is a literature review on the past articles.

Key words: Library and Information Sciences, Theory, Philosophical Thinking, Librarians.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophical Thinking has been described as reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do. It has also been described as thinking about thinking. It has been described in more detail as the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. More recently, critical thinking has been described as the process of purposeful, self-regulatory judgment, which uses reasoned consideration to evidence, context, conceptualizations, methods, and criteria. Within the critical theory philosophical frame, Philosophical thinking is commonly understood to involve commitment to the social and political practice of participatory democracy, willingness to imagine or remain open to considering alternative perspectives, willingness to integrate new or revised perspectives into our ways of thinking and acting, and willingness to foster criticality in others. The library- which has survived for centuries as the memory of mankind and a social force- librarianship, an old and influential profession, and librarians, whose professional identity enjoyed recognition, all face the challenge of opponents who claim that they are outmoded. Librarians must combine importance to Philosophical Thinking (PT) and produce philosophical thoughts. There are many definitions for “philosophy.” Passmore (1967:218), for example, says, “Philosophy can tell us what life and nature 'mean,' what value or purpose they have. …. In its most general form, philosophy elucidates the meaning of the 'universe as a whole'.” According to Cevizci (2002) philosophical thought emerges as a result of asking, and it develops along with interest in the problems of life. These thoughts mostly emerge from curious, questioning, investigating, and critical minds. Answers and solutions obtaining from PT are based on analysis and synthesis. Thought (the outcomes of information, experience, perception, and intuition) is analyzed and clarified, and is carried to a synthesis. PT, which may focus on any issue, simple or complex, enables an individual to assess life, nature, the world, the universe, and his or her own personal life through a systematic and rational approach; thus PT adds meaning and value to existence that is really important for us. As librarians in present day, which is time to transfer from libraries to information centers, we have to have strong reasons to remain within the information’s world.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This article places emphasis on the role of Philosophical Thinking (PT) in the place acceptability of library and information professional as a scientific field. The purpose occurs by study and review related literature. The paper has two main parts, "Philosophical Thinking of the Librarian", and, "Librarians' Interest in Philosophical Thinking". The first one discusses on the mining and concept of PT, and the second, talks about the reasons of librarian's disinclination to PT, from past to present. Furthermore the article tries to answer a questions: Why does PT have more importance in our present day?
Philosophical Thinking of the Librarian:

In librarianship and the information professions, PT reflects the critical and questioning intellectual activity of theorists and librarians engaged in exploration. PT makes this possible to disclose “whats”, “hows,” and especially “whys”. Theorists and practitioners may take different approaches. These differences come from this fact that librarians combine their thinking directly with their practices or their ability to engage in PT during their practices. From the practitioners view, PT is found in librarians who are open to conducting professional activities accompanied by thinking, questioning, and investigating. It is crucial for the librarians to know what they do not know. Reflective thinking may lead to the systematization of what exists in the mind.

PT may be influential in the emergence and development of a professional philosophy. The importance of theory is expressed by Shera (1971: 151), who bases his views on Butler (1933): “…librarians ‘know very well how to do things,’ they ‘have only vague notions of why they do them’. They have evolved… ‘highly efficient systems of practices,’ but they failed to formulate ‘a corresponding system of theory to elucidate, justify, and control that practice’. It may be fruitful to elaborate further and to discuss the PT of librarians in the light of the views of these authors. By saying “…philosophy which is blind to experiments and practice will be speculative only and of little or no value,” Danton (1934: 543) implies that the philosophy of librarianship must be born in the library itself and that it would not be correct to exclude librarians' philosophical thoughts resulting from these activities. The philosophical approaches of librarians during practice are of specific value. Nevertheless, librarians' PT processes must be based on theory too; any practice without a theoretical base may hinder understanding. The PT process does not exclude a “sense of purpose.” Efforts to clarify the purposes of their practices by making use of theory, and especially to establish a purpose-function relationship, are activities that develop or improve PT. Danton (1934) and Nitecki (1964, 1995) imply that the librarian should focus on a purpose-function relationship in the PT process. According to Danton (1934: 536), “a philosophy … is interested in aims and functions, in purpose, and meaning.” Also states that the “Philosophy of librarianship is a pursuit of truth, principles guiding action, and theories explaining reality: What is known, how it is put to work, and for what purpose it exists.”

Librarians' philosophical approaches suggest that they are relatively closer to a practical philosophy. Quoting Houle (1946), Mukherjee (1966: 9) says: "... A philosophy of librarianship should be a practical philosophy, contrasting it with the philosophy of nature, which seeks to re-discover what nature is ….a philosophy which is practical achieves valid meaning only in terms of its operation… [It] has its fullest meaning when it is evolved by and operates to guide the actions of an individual librarian or a group of librarians, who are working together in a single institution.” However, the view that librarians’ PT activities should target practical philosophical approaches is more widely adopted.

Librarians' attention to Philosophical Thinking: From Past to Present:

While Shera (1971: 153) criticizes librarians for lacking a professional philosophy, he emphasizes that they can play an important role in the development of such a philosophy.

According to Çakin (1982), the failure of librarians to give enough weight to PT and their reluctance to build the intellectual fabric of the profession are reasons for the delay in the emergence of a philosophy of librarianship.

In Butler's (1933: xi-xii) well-known and often cited words:
"...the librarian is strangely uninterested in the theoretical aspects of his profession....The librarian apparently stands alone in the simplicity of his pragmatism: a rationalization of each immediate technical process by itself seems to satisfy his intellectual interest. Indeed any endeavor to generalize these rationalizations into a professional philosophy appears to him, not merely futile, but positively dangerous."

It is worth wondering whether the pragmatic librarians of the past have now been replaced by newer ones performing their work mechanically on a computer, without exploring the true meaning, value and purpose of their work. The points quoted from authors in the past are still being debated today.

PT is a process which may be developed by having interest in “praxis.” By focusing on praxis, librarians can base their work on theory, reach a synthesis through purpose-function relations, and head towards PT.

Examples of practices not purely pragmatic and activities that have the potential of leading to PT, include participation in continuing professional education and professional meetings; research and evaluation studies done in libraries; reading the professional literature; interest in national and international professional; use of professional websites; exchange of ideas with colleagues; sharing reflections with their colleagues or engaging in intellectual activity connected to the profession. Believing that the profession still has a practical philosophy, Brewerton (2003: 51) emphasizes that the reflective practice shared in various channels carries the profession and practical philosophy forward.

The librarian still has a long way to go toward a philosophy. In any case, philosophy is a continuous process of advancement. Thus there is a need to take steps to stimulate librarians' interest in philosophy and to strengthen and promote PT. These steps include, inter alia: including courses and/or themes related to philosophy of librarianship, history of libraries and librarianship, PT process, philosophical thought generation,
The Reasons of PT’s Neccessity:

The importance of PT in making the library, the librarian and the profession stronger has been discussed since the early 1930s. If librarians do their work without any interest in PT, and without questioning what they are doing, how can they give meaning and value to their profession and contribute to its development? This applies even to those librarians who are highly skilled in the use of computers and can perfectly conduct their computer-based work. Unless supported by PT, the practices of librarians may be approached with doubt by outsiders, some of whom claim that the time of the librarian, the library, and the library profession has passed due to revolutionizing changes in ICT and the Internet. As Brewerton (2003: 52) says, “it is increasingly commonplace to hear that we do not need libraries … [and] … librarians in the Internet Age.”

According to Subasioglu (2004), the library today is a social centre aiming to provide information services, to act as a gateway for access to information, and to create free access to information transmitted in any format by using technology intensively. There is still need for the physical existence of the library. Librarians have felt the need to find a niche in the market; they have assumed new roles and titles in order not to be overwhelmed by rivals; and they have transformed their information mediator role. In this new role of information manager, the librarian provides users with support to allow them to navigate the ocean of information. It is now the responsibility of the librarian not only to find information, but also to analyze, evaluate, organize, and present it. Librarians also want to create a future while respecting and protecting the past.

Negative assertions persist despite the fact that libraries have already entered a process of transformation. This means either those critics simply ignore successful professional work or that librarians fail to publicize their successes. It may be safe to assert that this failure of librarians is related to their lack of PT. PT can help create a strong debate and convincing arguments. In order to stand truly firm against opposing arguments, librarians must understand the historical background of the book, library, librarian, and the profession through PT, and focus once more on the meaning, value, and purpose of all these, as well as on the role of mediator between those who need information and the sources of information. The question, “why does PT matter today?” has been answered by Butler (1933), Danton (1934), Foskett (1962), Shera (1962, 1969, 1971), Nitecki (1964, 1993), and Mukherjee (1966). Some of their views were discussed in broad terms by Alkan (2004). The answers given by these authors are timeless. Among the key messages, Ranganathan’s (1931), “Save the time of the reader” is especially important.

Discussing and sharing philosophical thoughts on professional platforms may be influential in ensuring their adoption by colleagues and LIS theorists and may contribute to building consensus on the right direction for the profession to follow and to the emergence of a professional philosophy. Librarians’ PT, however, should not be isolated from the philosophy of a given society.

Librarians are sensitive to the problems of their respective societies, and should be expected to challenge negative trends and ideas. For example, when a librarian is fully engaged in a user's IR problems and helps find a solution through a humanistic approach, this is tantamount to the rejection of what is observed as negative in a society. In our present day societies where individuals behave selfishly, where the strong can oppress the weak and money is held above everything else, true librarianship can be performed so as to present a good model and librarians can win their potential opponents to their side.

Result and Conclusion:

Since the early 1930s librarians have been criticized for not showing any interest in theory, philosophy of the profession, or PT. Today there are glimmerings of an affinity with philosophical. Products of their thinking processes appear in the professional literature. This is of course encouraging. However, the level of interest in reflection is not yet enough to demonstrate PT in its true and fullest sense and PT is not yet commonly accepted by librarians. PT enables the librarian to challenge strongly the views of extreme adherents of the Internet dogma and/or those who oppose the book, library, librarian, and the profession, to invalidate such views based on sound philosophical evidence and to convince such opponents to change their views. PT may enable the librarian to contribute to development in the right direction, strengthening and carrying the profession into future by giving it meaning and value, and to the creation of a sound professional philosophy. PT may enable the librarian to contribute to efforts to stop the threat to the very existence of the library, which has survived for some 5,000 years as the body of memory of humanity. PT may enable the librarian to contribute to the preservation of the basic mission of the library, which has not changed since it came into existence, as well as its important role and force in society. PT keeps librarians at a distance from pragmatism; it gives them the discipline and habit of questioning; it gives them a positive outlook and self-confidence; it helps them gain value in the professional sense; it enables them to ascertain the importance and value of their professional existence in society and to prove their indispensability for users; and thus it makes it possible for librarians to gain a respectable and distinguished professional identity.
PT also enables librarians to carry such an identity into the future. Today there are conditions both necessitating and facilitating the adoption of PT activity; opposing views stimulate librarians to engage in this activity. Indeed, such views offer extraordinary chances to librarians to prove the essential importance of books, libraries, librarians and the profession through philosophical approaches and to put on their agenda the real meaning, value and purpose of things related to them. It is the task of the present day librarian to convert criticisms and threats into opportunities, to use these opportunities to move towards PT to produce evidence-based philosophical thoughts, and to impress society with such thoughts. They must undertake the responsibility of proving the indispensability of the library, the librarian and the profession and to keep them alive. This respectable responsibility, which librarians can undertake only through full involvement in PT activity, should be accepted at least to pay homage to the toiling librarians of the past. It is probable that contemporary librarians will be recalled with respect by future members of the profession (their titles may have changed) and by humanity as a whole for having fulfilled this responsibility.

It will be appropriate to conclude this paper with a view by Shera (1965: 176) : "Librarianship is the management of human knowledge, the most interdisciplinary of all the disciplines – and because it is concerned with the philosophy of knowledge it is potentially the most deeply philosophical of all the professions'. Thus it is most fitting for present day librarians, as members of such a profession, to carry on their careers embracing PT.

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