

From practice to praxis: Exploring the road to developing and adopting a universal philosophy of librarianship

Moses C. Nwosu

Department of Library and Information Science, Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic Unwana, Ebonyi, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the road to developing and adopting a universal philosophy for librarianship. It adopted an exploratory study in the discussion. An understanding of what a philosophy of librarianship is its advantage, purpose and the bases for a philosophical approach were highlighted. It provides a brief bird's eye view of the distinct phases of the development of a philosophy of librarianship. The paper observed that despite the age-long conversation, and the seeming agreement as to why and how a philosophy of librarianship would serve the profession, librarians and librarianship do not coalesce around a philosophy of librarianship. The paper enumerates the reasons responsible for this as follows: librarian identity crises, language problem, none existence of a catchphrase or slogan for librarians and the multi-faceted nature of the profession librarianship. It concludes that engaging in a reflective and philosophically-based practice of librarianship, one that frames decision-making and library work with the question: "what we do and why we do it?" will enable the library community to have successful conversations with those they serve. The paper recommends that instead of searching for a unified philosophy of librarianship, we should move from having a practice of librarianship to praxis of librarianship.

Keywords: Praxis, philosophy, librarianship, philosophy of librarianship.

E-mail: holymoses1@yahoo.com.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy begins by calling itself into question, because the question of what philosophy is, is itself a philosophical question. As is the question of what a philosopher is.

Robert Wesley Angelo

From the ancient Greek period, the growing interests and quest for philosophy has been to find what knowledge is. Early thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle were followed by Hobbes and Locke, Kant and Hegel, and into the 20th century by the likes of Friedrich Nietzsche, John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith, Karl Marx and Noam Chomsky, Wittgenstein, Popper, and Kuhn, to name but a few of the more prominent western philosophers. In recent years, we have witnessed a booming interest in knowledge also from other disciplines; social scientists, librarians,

organisation theorists, information system analysts, and application developers. Today, it seems though that the interest is particularly strong from the Information Technology [IT] community (Stenmark, 2001). This quest for knowledge has occupied us for thousands of years as philosophers, scientists, poets, and artists all seek not just an understanding of the world, but the right understanding of the world. Today, philosophers can be found working in nearly every career field. Some are scientists developing ways to test household products without using animals. Some are politicians and human rights activists fighting for changes in foreign policy that will alleviate war and poverty for millions of Third World citizens. Some are economists seeking practical solutions to economic inequality. Still others are programmers working on the cutting edge of technology to develop

faster and more efficient computer software. There are also librarians like Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan, J. P. Danton, A.K. Mukherjee, and others. Taken as a whole, and developed over millennia, this quest for knowledge and understanding constitutes the social transcript... and the librarian is its steward. As librarians, it is our job to facilitate this organization of knowledge and, moreover, to assist others in identifying, accessing, and evaluating the recorded knowledge they seek. Philosophers as varied in viewpoints as Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, John Locke, Friedrich Nietzsche, John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith, Karl Marx and Noam Chomsky, St. Thomas Aquinas, Benedict de Spinoza, Immanuel Kant, and the fictional boy-feline twosome Calvin and Hobbes have exhaustively reflected upon philosophy, this quest for knowledge, its ethical values and decision making and their search for answers has left us an intellectual legacy of unsurpassed depth and richness (Multiple Professors, 2018). Therefore, if you want to know which beliefs best represent the human condition; look no further than the library.

Philosophy is an exercise of intellectual curiosity focusing on critical discussions. Philosophy is an academic discipline that exercises reason and logic in an attempt to understand reality and answer fundamental questions about knowledge, life, morality and human nature. The ancient Greeks were among the first to practice philosophy. The rather vague definition 'love of wisdom' comes from the origin and etymology of the Greek word 'philosophy': philo ("love") and sophia ("wisdom"). According to Angelo (2018) an ancient tradition Pythagoras of Croton coined the Greek word meaning 'lover of wisdom' (philosopher) to contrast with 'wise man' (sophist), saying of himself that he was only the first, not the second. And the example of Socrates -- namely that he did not think himself wise when he was not, that he did not think he knew what he did not -- further suggests that it was modesty invented the word 'philosopher', from whence the word 'philosophy'. As complex as the modern world has become, it seems unlikely that most of what surrounds us is actually the result of the ancient practice of philosophy. Everything from the structure of democratic governments to due process of law, from a physician's Hippocratic Oath to computer software, has its roots in philosophy. In library writings, the major focus is on a library purpose, with some writers relating librarianship to other disciplines. Philosophy of librarianship is considered a core of the discipline, necessary for understanding any library activities. It is a part of a societal communication network, storing and disseminating world knowledge. Mukherjee, (1966) maintains that although library philosophy is elusive, its value is in providing a systematic body of general concepts which validate library processes and clarify its purposes. Thus, a *"Statement of Philosophy of Librarianship"* presents a capsule summary of our understanding of the value and purpose of our role as

librarians in a library (Mihram, (2016). It gains an advantage over others for promotion or for a new position. This paper thus sets out to investigate the following: Is there a need for exploring the philosophy and is it necessary in librarianship? Why is the philosophy of librarianship elusive? Is it possible to have a unified or universal philosophy of librarianship?

UNDERSTANDING THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBRARIANSHIP

The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) defines philosophy as "the love, study or pursuit of wisdom, or of knowledge of things and their causes, whether theoretical or practical." The Online Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1973) defines philosophy as "literally, the love of wisdom; in actual usage, the science which investigates the facts and principles of reality and of human nature and conduct; specific, and now usually, the science which comprises logic, ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics, and the theory of knowledge." Various definitions have been suggested 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.'" In common usage in our culture, persons are said to be philosophical when they think and ponder about things, trying to understand why things are as they are. Philosophy is the study of general and fundamental problems concerning matters such as the nature knowledge, truth, justice, beauty, mind and language. Philosophy is the root of all knowledge (Sinha, 2018).

Philosophy itself is generally considered a type of social science, like sociology or psychology. That's because early philosophy was primarily concerned with describing the best way to live and organize society. From that spawned many other disciplines: economics, political science, law, linguistics, literary and art criticism, and theology—along with sociology and psychology. Though many of philosophy's original topics have evolved into other fields of study over time, the discipline remains rich and varied. Modern philosophy contains six main branches of thought, each with their own unique focus (Figure 1):

- Metaphysics: the nature of reality and the universe.
- Epistemology: the study of knowledge and how it is acquired.
- Logic: how to develop valid arguments; includes Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of mind, and mathematical logic.
- Ethics: the study of right and wrong and how people should live.
- Politics: the study of government, citizen rights and political obligations - Social and Political Philosophy-

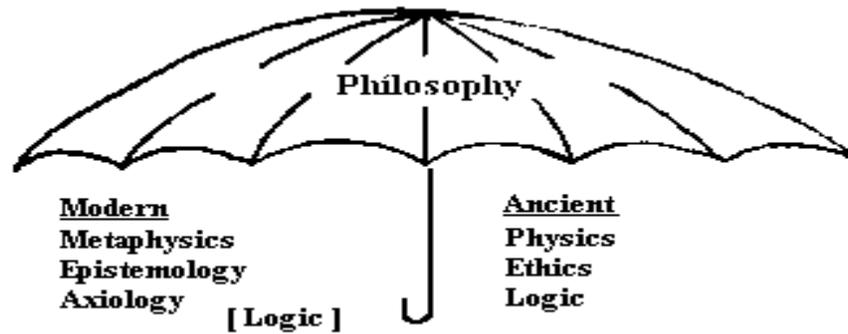


Figure 1. Branches of Modern philosophy. Source: Angelo. R. W. (2018). The Origins and Branches of Philosophy Retrieved from <http://www.roangelo.net/logwitt/philosophy-origin.html>.

which questions with how a government ought to be run, - Aesthetics: beauty, art and artistic perception - Philosophy of Education, Philosophy of Beauty (Aesthetics), Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Librarianship (Sinha, 2018).

At first glance, it would appear that such study has little application in the real world. Yet, philosophy shapes modern existence.

Philosophy of Librarianship has its roots in epistemology which is a division of philosophy that investigates the origin and nature of knowledge and its objective is to investigate the foundations upon which human knowledge rests (Shera, 1965). It goes therefore that philosophy of librarianship relates to the philosophy of knowledge. In many senses, Kaplan (1964) states that librarianship is similar to philosophy; the domain of both is the total culture and knowledge, and both philosophy and librarianship are expected "to be prepared under suitable conditions to be helpful with regard to any and every area of human concern. 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 and hence it should address the philosophy of the philosophy of knowledge. Philosophy of library, which Nitecki (1993) describes as the intellectual expression of librarianship, developed gradually from the theoretical research in library technology, after it shifted its focus from pure practice to the theory about its operations. The increased attention given to the sociological aspects of these operations provided better understanding of the library's role in the cultural processes of modifying behaviour of its individual patrons, and of the metaphysical principles governing these operations. Major components of philosophy of librarianship are:

(a) statements about fundamental purposes of librarianship, linking a library with some specific division of philosophy (e.g., epistemology, metaphysics, logic,

ethics, and esthetics),

(b) the principle of the freedom of individual and library provision of access to ideas, and

(c) the implementation of a library role to represent and preserve society's cultural contributions. Bekker (1976: 101) sees philosophy of librarianship "as a system of principles for guidance in practical affairs ... [agreeing with Johannessen], that! ... an applied philosophy should include standards of conduct for practitioners." In the context of this paper, philosophy of librarianship is defined as a systematic attempt to understand the basic concepts related to library and information sciences, by studying the essence, nature, and value of discourses in librarianship. It provides answers to questions about the essence of the library (connecting readers with books), the meaning of a generic book (as recorded knowledge), the nature of its patrons (storing information in their memories), and knowledge (a metaphysical reality in patrons' minds) (Richardson, 1927). According to Whitehead (1980) philosophy of library and information science cannot be defined. It can be found only by doing philosophy. Doing philosophy as admonished by Whitehead comes with a number of advantages. Danton (1934) lists these as follows:

- It defines the role of library in society;
- Validates librarianship as a discipline;
- Adds meaning to library practice;
- Clarifies knowledge of purpose, thus adding precision to actions: and,
- Provides distinctions within librarianship between the varying functions and duties performed by different types of libraries.

Foskett (1973) expands the advantages by considering the contributions of classifications to the theory of librarianship. He points out that librarianship depends on technology, the primary motive of which is not to provide work for machine but to meet human needs. Man needs information to cope with his environment, not only by understanding it better but also by changing it; he

acquires knowledge to form rational ideas organized in an ordered and consistent structural system of concepts.

MAJOR PURPOSES OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBRARIANSHIP

The major purposes of the philosophy of librarianship, according to Mukherjee (1966:23) are:

- (a) To serve as a comprehensive and specialized tool for information and knowledge,
- (b) To express its social obligations for social services, and,
- (c) To provide a base for research and scholarship.

Following from this, Bekker (1976) enumerates three basic uses of philosophy in librarianship:

- (1) As a frame of reference, delineating the library's scope and providing for its unity,
- (2) As an explanation of
 - (a) A single notion describing library aims, ends, and objectives, or
 - (b) Its mission in terms of library means rather than ends – and
- (3) Applications of philosophy in formulating occupational ideals, or guidelines for conduct.

A BRIEF BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE DISTINCT PHASES OF PHILOSOPHY OF LIBRARIANSHIP

For a long time now, there has been internal dialogue regarding the philosophy of librarianship - *what do we do and why do we do it* (Ford, 2012). This discourse is not new. It goes back to the early 1900s, and possibly earlier. The following is a brief bird's eye view of the distinct phases which the search by philosophers for the philosophy of librarianship passed through. The phases are divided into four periods as follows:

- (a) Early period before 1500, showing conservative role of librarian,
- (b) Early modern period during 1500 to 1900, examining his struggling role as bridge maker between information and users,
- (c) Twentieth century, identifying his user-focused role for information dissemination, and
- (d) The contemporary age, exploring an interactive and collaborative role of librarian and users for knowledge organization and management (Nitecki, 1993).

The writers in favour of articulating a philosophy of librarianship were uneasy and unclear as to what it should be. To some it was not so much a philosophy of librarianship, as a philosophical approach to librarianship, providing ruling principles and statements of aims (Irwin,

1949). To others its focus should not be on the library but on books and readers (Miller, 1996), by providing a practical - not metaphysical - formulation of beliefs and aims. Finally, for some writers, a philosophical approach should make up for a lack of common denominators (Wilson, 1938).

The first call for a description of aims, functions, and meaning of library services was made by Danton, (1934) in his plea for philosophy of librarianship in *The Library Quarterly*, in which the author asks that librarians engage in philosophical exercise to the end of creating a philosophy of life and subsequently, a philosophy of librarianship. According to Danton (1934: 231), “a philosophy ... is interested in aims and functions, in purpose, and meaning.” The author believes that these descriptions would provide general concepts of librarianship thereby serving as the bases for its philosophy. This, he further observes could be accomplished through series of studies on individual aspects of the discipline. He also hoped that a consensus on the world view of librarianship would lead to the development of the field's own metaphysics in spite of the fact that librarianship was viewed in the context of social philosophy - the philosophy of practice that inquires into ‘what is Right or Good for man and society’ - at the time.

Among other early writers on philosophy of librarianship was Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan who adopted a philosophical approach that was limited to the service aspect of librarianship only in his five laws of librarianship. He believed that there can be no doubt however, that there are certain essential principles underlying the management of library according to the present days' need and conception. He further expounded these principles in a methodical form and reduced them to five cardinal principles. He has developed all these rules of library organization and management as the necessary implication and inevitable corollaries of his five laws. Many of Danton's readers, and certainly Lead Pipe readers, may argue that S.R. Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science addresses a philosophy of librarianship. These laws have provided a scientific approach to library science. Operational aspects of philosophy of librarianship are discussed in terms of Ranganathan's (1963) five laws and Broadfield's (1949) justification of library techniques in terms of their value to the patron. These laws constitute the philosophical basis for work and services of all types of libraries. These also provide guidance in the practice of Library and Information Science. These Laws became the cornerstones of the philosophy of the techniques of Western society's library experts. Most librarians worldwide accept them as the foundations of the philosophy of their work and service in the library. These are fundamental laws of library science, which provide the rationale for a unifying theory of library science. With the help of these, we can derive postulates, canons and principles applicable in different fields of Library and Information Science (LIS). These also provide guidance

in the practice of LIS. The 24 words of the Laws provided an intellectual framework for understanding all aspects of library work. The laws have been useful in the teaching of different branches of LIS. These are more than mere generalities because they are founded on observation and analysis.

Ranganathan – (1892 – 1972) made two fundamental contributions to the world of library and information profession:

i) He created an ideology which is perceived today as the philosophy of librarianship in his classic “The Five Laws of Library Science” in Ranganathan (1931). These are:

- 1 Books are for use
- 2 Every reader his or her book
- 3 Every book its reader
- 4 Save the time of the user
- 5 The library is a growing organism.

This is considered a landmark in the history and development of library science as a whole and the second is -

ii) Colon Classification Scheme in 1934 – described as “an analytico- synthetic scheme and major theoretical development of 20th century classification” (Sharma, 2009). Whereas Reitz (2005) and Das and Patra (2008) describe Ranganathan as “the Father of Librarianship in India”, Siddiqui (2006) labels him as “Father of Library Science”.

The Five Laws of Library Science are the most influential concept in the field of library science. They are fundamental and discuss the basic philosophy of library science. They concisely represent the ideal services and organizational philosophy of all types of libraries, even today. These laws provide scientific basis and general principles which serve as guidelines to librarians in organizing and managing information products and services. These laws convey the fundamental philosophy of library science and convey a deep understanding of libraries. The basic tenet of these laws is to unite users with their desired information. The laws bridge the past and future by underlining the enduring need for “books” “information”- “both,” of course, representing the quest for knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. This stress on ‘use’ and the ‘utility’ of the book or information material as a form which enables and facilitates communication gains a particular emphasis in librarianship of (relatively) ‘modern’ times, highlighted by librarian scholar, and “father of library science” Ranganathan, in his seminal work *The Five Laws of Library Science* (Jeevan, 2005; Ranganathan, 1957).

Following technological advancement and modern development particularly with increased documentation activities, Ranganathan reworded his laws as follows:

1. Documents are for use

2. Every user his/her document
3. Every document its user
4. Save the time of the user
5. Documentation centre is a growing organism. (Kumar, 1992).

Similarly, variants of Ranganathan’s Five Laws have been espoused as follows:

In 1975, for instance, an American Interpretation of Ranganathan’s Five Laws of Library Science was clearly developed and expanded to reflect the impact of the Five Laws in the library world. Ranganathan’s Five Laws of Library Science (American Revised Version) (1975):

1. *Books are for use*
Tapes, films, records, relics and books are for use in the information delivery system.
2. *Every reader his book.*
To every media - ite his/her medium.
3. *Every book its reader.*
To every tape, record, etc its utiliser.
4. *Save the time of the user*
Save the downtime of the patron.
5. *A library is a growing organism.*
A learning resource center is a growing organism.

In the Ranganathan Memorial Lecture Series No. 8 held at the National Aeronautical Laboratory Wales on January 15–17 1985, Anthony H. Thompson updated the Five Laws further in the context of Information Science in the following way:

- Information is for use*
Every information user his/her information
Every piece of information its user
Save the time of the information user
The universe of information is an ever growing organism.
(Cited in Kumar, 1992).

Retting (1992) on his part postulated a Sixth Law as an extension of Ranganathan’s laws as follows:

- Every reader his freedom.*

His idea is that this law is applicable only to the type of service (that is, instruction or provision of information). Reflecting on Ranganathan’s laws, Thompson (1992) in that same year while protesting against a library services, revised the laws as follows:

1. Books are for profit
2. Every reader his bill.
3. Every copy its bill
4. Take the cash of the reader
5. The library is a groaning organism.

Gorman (1995) while reflecting on the validity of

Ranganathan's Five Laws in today's fast changing library scene, expanded and added a more contemporary focus to the Laws. The idea of re-working the laws represent an attempt to meet the challenges of fast paced social and cultural changes affecting library users and the rapid proliferation of technology in library operations (Crawford and Gorman, 1995). Gorman's five laws are as follows:

1. Libraries serve humanity
2. Respect all forms by which knowledge is communicated.
3. Use technology intelligently to enhance service.
4. Protect free access to knowledge
5. Honour the past and create the future.

Middleton (1999) opines that Gorman's laws are not a revision of Ranganathan's laws, but another completely separate set, from the point of view of a librarian practicing in a technological society. Kuronen and Pekkarinen (1999), two Finnish authors giving example with the theory of Newtonian physics as only being valid with small masses and velocity but subsumed by the theory of relativity under space travel, suggest a need for supplementary laws. Arguing that although those five laws are still generally applicable in the computerized library and information services of the 1990s, they require two supplementary laws in the context of technological advances of today. The reason for this is to be able to cope with the prodigious growth in user service demands in the libraries. For Kuronen and Pekkarinen(1999);

The 'new' supplementary laws relate to Ranganathan's Five Laws the very essence of the virtual library: the library configured by the individual reader. The virtual library makes it possible for the reader to make his/her documents and writings publicly available and part of the global collection.

These two supplementary laws to the original five are:

1. *Every reader his library* – This relates to technological changes, particularly telecommunications that have taken place since Ranganathan's time.
2. *Every writer his contribution to library* – This concerns individual reader's freedom of expression as a right that can be put into practice and not merely articulated in principle.

Cana (2003) in a paper "Open Source and Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science replaced the 'book' element in Ranganathan's Laws with 'software' as follows:

*Software is for use
Every user his or her software (or software is for all)
Every software its user
Save the time of the user
A software library is a growing organism.*

Given the wide scope and range of what can digitally be stored, the basic element of a digital library is perhaps a digital information object a document in digitized form, Cana further replaces the book element with digital information objects as follows:

*Digital information objects are for use
Every person/user his or her digital information object (or digital information objects are for all)
Every digital information object its reader/user
Save the time of the reader/user
A digital library is a growing organism.*

In the inaugural lecture of the Dr. S.R. Ranganathan Lecture Series organized by the Delhi Library Association, Satija (2003) proposed the following variants of Ranganathan's Five Laws even though he noted that they were sufficient and quite valid in the pre-virtual library's days:

1. Information is for use
2. Information is for all
3. Every byte of information its user.
4. Save the time of the citizens is to ensure timely information
5. Library is a trinity of users, staff and collection.

Satija relates further that these laws are a bit inadequate in the face of high speed and flow of huge quantities of information, changing modes of its storage, access and communication. For ease of reproduction of information as well as remote access, he recommends new proprietary laws Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) while also proposing a serious consideration of the two supplementary laws advanced by the two Finnish authors -T. Kuronen and P. Pekkarinen. The reason adduced is for their wide and insightful dimension of the information age as they dwell on the new cooperative and interactive relations between the users and the documents of the virtual library.

Noruzi (2004), a librarian recommended applying Ranganathan's Laws to the Web in his paper – "Application of Ranganathan's Laws to the Web" as follows:

1. Web resources are for use
2. Every user has his or her web resource
3. Every web resource its user
4. Save the time of the user
5. The web is a growing organism.

Michael Stephen, a lecturer at the Dominican University River Forest Illinois, United States of America twice in 2007 gave his Library and Information Science students' assignment on re-writing Ranganathan's Five Laws of Librarianship in the face of recent developments in the field. In January, the students came up with a variant thus:

1. Collections are for use
2. Every collection its user
3. Every user his collection
4. Save time and energy of user
5. The library is a growing organism.

In September of the same year, the same set of students modified their earlier submission to read:

1. Materials are for use and not just in library
2. Every user his or her material
3. Materials are for all
4. Save the time of the user
5. The library is an evolving organism (catering to the needs of the community. Available online at [http://tame the web.com](http://tame.the.web.com)).

Similarly, Simpson (2008) recommends a revision of Ranganathan's Laws to reflect the place of the media in information services delivery as follows:

1. Media are for use
2. Every patron his information
3. Every medium its user
4. Save the time of the patron
5. The library is a growing organism.

This author has also reworked Ranganathan's Five Laws into two variants to what in his opinion best fit today's fast-paced paradigm shift as follows:

- A. *Information is for use*
Every information its user
Every user his/her information
Easy access saves time
The library is ever changing.
- B. *Information is for access*
Every information seeker his information
Every information its information seeker
Information availability enhances information seekers accessibility
The library is a changing organization (Nwosu, 2012).

Writing in The Chronicle of Higher Education of April 17 2011 about the false consciousness generated by the nature of the so-called information age, Darnton (2011) redesigns Ranganathan's laws by addressing the five myths that stand out thus:

1. The book is dead
2. We have entered the information age
3. All information is now available online
4. Libraries are obsolete
5. The future is digital

Several other writers have presented different principles and laws taking their points of departure from

Ranganathan's Five Laws. Such researchers include:

1. Mishra, S. (1998). Principles of Distance Education
2. Walter, V. A. (2004). Five Laws of Children's Librarianship
3. Bjerneborn, L. (2004). Five Laws of Web Connectivity.
4. Hall, T.O. (2004). Five Laws of Diversity/Affirmative Action

Whichever way one looks at the original laws of Ranganathan or the many new interpretations or variants, the central idea in all of them is to serve users information needs – by providing access to trust worthy, authoritative knowledge (Campbell, 2006).

The Five Laws of Library Science was an instant success despite the doubts of Danton like other authors on the five laws addressing the philosophy of librarianship as well as other skeptics on the scientific nature of library work. The second edition was published in 1957 and this reflected his teaching experience and observation of documentation work in research and development gained and garnered over years in India, Europe and United States of America. It contained a chapter on 'the nature of science and scientific methods'. The idea was to convince these skeptics that library service laid in the domain of science and scientific methods. At the risk of over-generalizing, philosophy is perceived as a practice that allows for external recognition of the library's role in society and institutions, strengthens the esteem of librarians and the profession, and encourages a reflective and intentional practice of librarianship. However, Danton (1934) dismisses Ranganathan's seminal work:

"But this treatise, as stimulating and interesting as it undoubtedly is, does not attempt to define the functions of library activity on any other basis than that of present-day good library service; the discussion is not an open-minded enquiry into the validity of functions and activities. Most of it is, furthermore, limited to public-library work." (p. 532)

However, despite some of the misgivings about the Five Laws contemporary views of librarians seem to suggest that although Ranganathan's Five Laws are still very relevant today, however the scope may appropriately be extended to reflect the vicissitudes of our changing world.

Danton's second essay addressed the philosophy of the university library and its dependence on the parent institution. He recommended a sociological approach, connecting library philosophy with its function-- that is, to be practical, comprehensive, and responsive to patrons' needs (Danton, 1941). On his part, Butler, (1933) overlooked the distinction between library science (librarianship) and its philosophy.

Nitecki (1964) says, as quoted by Mukherjee (1966:11)

"... a philosophy of librarianship presupposes a theoretical formulation, which would relate the objectives of the library to its operations in a consistent, logical pattern." Nitecki (1995: part 2. 2. 1.) further 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."* Foskett (1962:5) states that librarians' outlook may depend *"... upon the function that libraries carry out, the purpose for which they are established."*

In his contribution, Richardson (1927) visualized a philosophy of librarianship that would be based on librarianship as a repository of human knowledge. For Coney (1939:4), his position was for *"a classic statement of the value of library to the society."* Librarians' philosophical approaches suggest that they are relatively closer to a practical philosophy. Quoting Houle (1946) and 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 isa 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."

The writers in favour of articulating a philosophy of librarianship were uneasy and unclear as to what it should be. To some, it was not so much a philosophy of librarianship, as a philosophical approach to librarianship, providing ruling principles and statements of aims (Irwin, 1949). To others, its focus should not be on the library but on books and readers (Miller, 1996), by providing a practical -- not metaphysical -- formulation of beliefs and aims. Finally, for some writers, a philosophical approach should make up for a lack of common denominators (Wilson, 1938).

The slow emergence of the philosophy of librarianship coincides with the maturity of the discipline. The emerging themes include: (a) library operational objectives, purposes, and use, (b) aims and objectives of librarianship, (c) professional consciousness, (d) theoretical foundation, based on individual country's faith in democracy, appreciation of the power of education, and dedication to the general welfare of the people. It becomes critical analyses of the mission of librarianship (the 'why' of what it is), of its application (how it is being implemented), and of its meaning (the nature of relationships between purposes and methods of performance). It focuses on interrelationships between society's needs and institutional resources and on its role in scholarship. Scholarship produces books; librarianship provides books as a stimulus for scholarship and learning. The important characteristics of a good librarian, therefore, according to McCrimmon (1975) include

knowledge of books, professional motivation, and interest in individual patrons' needs.

THE BASES FOR A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH

Mukherjee (1966: 266) lists the following assumptions as the bases for philosophy of librarianship:

- (a) The discipline is based on social process bound with the life of community.
- (b) Library's social role is to educate, inform, and entertain; it provides tools for needed information and knowledge.
- (c) It contributes to the development of new ideas by stressing the reading habit and by means of patrons' and librarians' sensitivity to group interests and community values.
- (d) Librarianship is defined in terms of its purposes, goals, and relationships to other disciplines.

Although many librarians are aware of the need for a philosophy of librarianship, there is little agreement as to what it ought to be. Clayton (1940) expects a philosophy of librarianship to help people realize their abilities, and Wilson (1936) feels that librarianship needs an institutional philosophy of education which would serve individuals' needs as well as those of society. Butler (1945) expresses his optimism by hoping that the vagueness of philosophical contributions will be slowly replaced by a need to explain the role of the book and the importance of the library's loyalty to truth, justice, and beauty. Many writers referred to a need for a philosophy of librarianship as a means for improving the professional status of librarians (Berthold, 1933). Such a philosophy could clarify its uncertain purpose (Wheeler, 1946), validating the library as a discipline with its own scientific method (Danton, 1941), ethical motives (Bliss, 1935), and an intellectual role in society. Finally, some writers have seen a philosophy of librarianship as a way of providing analyses of subjective judgments of library functions (Carnovsky and McDiarmid, 1934) and of justifying library dedication to facts (Borden, 1931). Others would limit a philosophy to explaining the meaning of the intellectual contributions of innovators such as Dewey, Bowker or Cutter (Wilson, 1938).

Philosophy precedes science and offers meaning and direction to research. Its major expression in librarianship is the statement of library purpose. Philosophy is shaped by society, its group interests, and the conflicts between them. This is the humanistic basis of librarianship. Everything in the library must ultimately be related to its uses, and these uses in turn must ultimately be dependent upon the users. Foster (1979:133) outlines four philosophical models in librarianship:

- (i) custodial, focusing on intrinsic worth and conservation of library material,

- (ii) humanitarian, stressing contributions of library collections to knowledge,
- (iii) mediating, relating a library to the development of its patrons, and,
- (iv) promotional, describing a library as a community service.

Danton (1934:547) concludes that any philosophy of librarianship should and must be “derived from the predominating ideals of that society. Consequently, before a library philosophy can be formulated, there must be an understanding and recognition of the ideals and purposes of the society into which that philosophy must fit”. The Internet has fundamentally altered the characteristics and behaviour of information – and users. Information – once scarce and difficult to find - is now ubiquitous, abundant, ephemeral, primarily born digital, and does not demand - or respond to - being managed in the old ways. People expect access 24/7. Digitally mediated communication allows ideas and research to flow without the imprint of a traditional publisher. Scholars and students find vast quantities of information without going to a library or asking for a librarian's help. Librarians, once gatekeepers to scholarship, no longer serve that role.

WHY THERE IS NO PHILOSOPHY OF LIBRARIANSHIP

Commenting on a lack of a well-developed philosophy of librarianship, Peirce (1951) - probably the first chronological compilation of writings on philosophy of librarianship covering essays published in English between 1930 and 1950 - stresses constant change in library functions and scope, suggesting that the change itself may be the only enduring library philosophical principle. ‘The lack of a philosophy of librarianship is explained by the lack of interest in the theory (Butler, 1933), caused by a pragmatic orientation of librarians (Joeckel, 1932). The argument for a philosophy is prompted by a desire for professional status (Berthold, 1933) and for clarification of the uncertain scope and purposes of librarianship (Wheeler, 1946). Shera (1971:151) expresses the importance of theory nicely by basing his views on Butler's (1933) assertion that “...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’.” He continues: “...a theory tells librarians not how to do things, but why such things should be done” (Shera, 1971:153). For Richardson (1927), it is a mistake “to forget that thinking comes before doing, reflection before action, looking before leaping, knowledge before business... [what is needed is] more theory, more philosophy, in short more thinking”. Despite the age-long conversation, and the seeming agreement as to why and how a philosophy of

librarianship would serve the profession, librarians and librarianship do not coalesce around a philosophy of librarianship. Perhaps this is not without good reason. The following according to Ford (2012: 4-6) are some of the reasons:

Librarian identity crises

With increasing academic interest in the sociological perspectives of LIS, questions of identity have begun attracting attention in the wider context of the information industry. Traditionally, librarians are information professionals. They select, organize, and manage information sources so that they can then help others to find the knowledge that they seek. They are also, of course, generalists – they need to know a little about “everything” so that they can better help our broad population of patrons. Some of us may pick up a subject specialty in one specific area, but that does not diminish the need for an assortment of skills and knowledge in a wide variety of areas. It is for these reasons, and others, that they wear so many different hats in our profession. The modern librarian is called upon to do a variety of things that, though necessary, may not fall within the strict definition of “information professional.” They are experiencing convergence with aspects of other fields and that is affecting what we do and how we do it.

It's a language problem: Value vs. philosophy

Going through literature on librarianship philosophy from librarians who serve in different capacities and work in different types of libraries, there are common themes that arise, most frequently instruction, access, and intellectual freedom. However, there is so much value and variety in the work librarians do on a daily basis, it can be challenging to boil it down and pinpoint exactly what, at its heart, gives our work meaning. This tension between the how and why is difficult. Whereas the *how* of what we do is clear but the issue of *why* we do what we do has not been explicitly addressed.

It is a language problem: Catchphrase or slogan for librarians

Librarians, it would appear do not have a catchphrase, or not a good one, anyway. For many years, librarians have grappled with the idea of fashioning a catch phrase or clarion call that gives them a fillip in their quest to up the ante of their identity in the world of professions. Doctors abide by the Hippocratic Oath during their induction ceremony: “*first do no harm.*” Police Officers “*protect and serve*”, lawyers revel in being addressed as “*my learned colleague*” and librarians wait anxiously for theirs Even the American Library Association's [ALA]

interpretation of library mission as *'best books for largest numbers at least costs'*, is described by Roden (1923) as a shopkeeper's superlative only. At a point, the Nigerian Library Association, decided on their own to launch a campaign for a suitable catchphrase or slogan that will shape the profession and the professionals in the business of connecting people to information. It would appear that for the Nigerian Library Association there is a tentative catchphrase making the rounds though not yet adopted - *"my informed colleague"* or *"my knowledgeable colleague"*. The choice of this is based on the fact that the librarian is not only informed but also knowledgeable not merely as to the books but as to the reader. He understands him/her and what actuates him/her. Agreeing on a meaningful catchphrase or slogan for this noble profession will require continuous engagement with the study of our profession philosophically. There is need to understand the personal practice of librarianship so that this can, in turn, translate it into meaningful conversations with the library communities who, *'if they desire to know should ask the librarian'*.

Librarianship is a multi-faceted profession

Librarians have always played an essential role in research and information services, providing scientists with essential information and helping students find what they need. However, the modern librarian's role has evolved into one of the most multifaceted jobs on a university/polytechnic campus. Scientific librarians, in particular, are tasked with engaging their patrons with the latest resources and technological developments, which is not an easy feat given how quickly technology changes. The nature of librarianship and scholarship in the profession is a point in which Rayward (1990) describes librarianship as 'complex, multi-faceted, [and] rather fragmented' which differs from other fields because 'there is not the same notion of a research-front or cutting edge'. It is unclear if Rayward uses the term 'research-front' in the same sense as Price (1965) who applies the words 'research front' to explain his finding that scientific literature evidenced high frequencies of citations to the most recent publications, creating a closely bound network of papers. The breadth of librarianship is so vast that one unified philosophy could not possibly capture the enormity of impact we bring to the library communities. The librarianship umbrella is just too big and the vast arrays of work librarians perform, from serving within elementary and higher educational institutions, to public libraries, archives, and preservation of human knowledge are too diverse.

FROM PRACTICE OF LIBRARIANSHIP TO PRAXIS OF LIBRARIANSHIP

The significant shift in the philosophy of librarianship from

the passive role of librarian as a custodian and conservator of knowledge in the past has been shifted towards more active role as a mediator and disseminator of knowledge. Today, there is an active contribution and sharing of knowledge by librarians and users of Web 2.0 technologies and this therefore calls for a paradigm shift in the philosophy of librarianship. Although Danton (1934) did not himself offer any concrete philosophy, he asserted that any philosophy of librarianship would be a social philosophy that ties the library to its roots in democratic society commons licenses. Instead of searching for a unified philosophy of librarianship, we should move from having a practice of librarianship to praxis of librarianship. The noun praxis comes from the Latin and Greek words of the same spelling, based on the Greek word *prattein*, which means to do. Praxis as an established custom and practice is the process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is enacted, embodied, or realized. Vocabulary.com Dictionary (2017) "Praxis" may also refer to the act of engaging, applying, exercising, realizing, or practicing ideas. This has been a recurrent topic in the field of philosophy. In Marxist terms, praxis according to Doherty (n.d.) is the process of applying theory through practice to develop more informed theory and practice, specifically as it relates to social change. The progressive ideal implied in this is obvious, and is of particular relevance to librarianship. Praxis is defined here as the critical, rational, interpretive, epistemic, and ethical work of a discipline or profession. Praxis refers to action that carries social and ethical implications and is not reducible to technical performance of tasks. It has a richer meaning; 'practice' is used when narrower senses of action are referred to." (Budd, 2003:21).

In our long history of debate regarding a philosophy of librarianship, there are common threads in the discussion. Danton like other authors point to philosophy as a practice that allows for external recognition of the library's role in society and institutions, strengthens the esteem of librarians and the profession, and encourages a reflective and intentional practice of librarianship. From Danton in 1934 to Lankes in 2011, it is clear that librarianship should be a reflective and intentional practice.

"The philosophy of librarianship, then, is the theoretical integration of library practice as a unity, the encompassing understanding of the meaning of the profession. Through a method that is at once critical and reflective, it attempts to form a synthetic whole out of the disparate facets of librarianship to better direct its application." (Cossette, 2009: 9).

To cultivate praxis is to remain curious about our practice and engage with it. It is to want to know internally and externally what is changing and what is steadfast in our profession. It is to think critically about our greater purpose and current goals when we make decisions.

Praxis brings philosophical underpinnings to our daily routines and professional decision-making.

CONCLUSION

Philosophy is questioning. Were there absolute answers to philosophy's questions, the Greeks would have found them millennia ago, but philosophical questions and answers are not that way. Robert Wesley Angelo

This paper has examined the question of the philosophy of librarianship, its meaning, the road to the development of a universal philosophy of librarianship, why it is necessary to have a universal philosophy that will address what we do and why do we do it. Ranganathan's five laws of LIS considered as the nearest thing to the philosophy of librarianship was also discussed in line with this desire and their implications. The common threads in the discussion point to philosophy as a practice that allows for external recognition of the library's role in society and institutions, strengthens the esteem of librarians and the profession, and encourages a reflective and intentional practice of librarianship. Reflective practice is an intentional thought process undertaken to examine experience and improve action. In librarianship, it involves taking time to think and reflect on library practice and information service and learning for evaluative purposes and to improve future teaching. Engaging in a reflective and philosophically-based practice of librarianship (a praxis of librarianship), one that frames decision-making and library work with the question: "what we do and why we do it?" will enable the library community to have successful conversations with those they serve. This writer, like some of the authors cited, is of the view that instead of searching for a unified philosophy of librarianship, we should move from having a practice of librarianship to praxis of librarianship.

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