

COMMENT

WE DO NEED A PHILOSOPHY OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE—WE'RE NOT CONFUSED ENOUGH: A RESPONSE TO ZWADLO

Gary P. Radford¹ and John M. Budd²

Is there a philosophy of library science? The thesis presented here is that there is not, and we do not need one. That is, we do not need, nor do we have, one single philosophy.
(JAMES ZWADLO [1])

The title of Jim Zwadlo's recent essay, "We Don't Need a Philosophy of Library Science—We're Confused Enough Already" [1] is intriguing. There is, no doubt, a need for thoughtful, reflexive explorations of the nature of library and information science as a discipline. The paper's abstract, which states that "we do not need, nor do we have, one single philosophy, to either fill a philosophical vacuum, or to replace an existing philosophy," is a provocative thesis. However, the question remains as to whether or not Zwadlo has managed in this paper to offer a new way of thinking about the intellectual challenges confronting the discipline. On the whole we have to answer in the negative, for a number of reasons that we discuss below.

First of all, the title and the paper's stated purpose are misleading. Despite his central thesis that we do not need a philosophy of library science, Zwadlo needs to (indeed, he must) invoke a particular philosophical foundation to make his argument. In other words, Zwadlo needs philosophy to argue that we do not need philosophy. Zwadlo recognizes this in his abstract, where he states that "we need to find a way to manage a confusion, 'fused together' mass of many contradictory ideas, in order to do useful things, and to be helpful to our patrons. This search amounts to a philosophical discussion about why librarians and information scientists do not need a philosophy" [1, p. 103].

While we agree with the thesis that library and information science (LIS) could certainly benefit from philosophical discussion of "contradictory ideas" in the field "in order to do useful things," Zwadlo does not make the case for why a discussion of "why librarians and information scientists do not need a philosophy" would be

1. Department of Communication, William Paterson College of New Jersey, Wayne, New Jersey 07470; E-mail: radford@frontier.wilpaterson.edu.
2. School of Library and Information Science, University of Missouri at Columbia, 104 Stewart Hall, Columbia, Missouri 65211; E-mail: libsjmb@showme.missouri.edu.

[*Library Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 3, pp. 315–321]

© 1997 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved.

0024-2519/97/6703-0005 \$02.00

useful to anybody, whether they be practicing librarians, library users, or philosophers. How would this belief be useful to a library user? Or a librarian assisting that user? Or an LIS scholar empirically investigating the librarian-user relationship? More useful, in our view, would be a consideration of the philosophies, paradigms, and frameworks that do (and must) guide the day-to-day practices of library practitioners, users, and researchers.

A major problem with Zwadlo's argument is the particular way in which he characterizes the term "philosophy" as a straw man and inaccurately attributes this characterization to the recent philosophical discussions of John Budd [2], Gary Radford [3], and Archie Dick [4]. Zwadlo portrays philosophy as a kind of verbal mission statement or creed that is articulated, presumably by some form of authority, and then "followed" on a rational basis by its adherents. This characterization evokes images of acolytes following a religion. For example, Zwadlo writes that "we seem not to agree on which one [philosophy] we follow now, assuming we even have one, or which philosophy to choose to replace it" [1, p. 104] and that "even if positivism were the philosophy of LIS, it was not really followed, and was not an appropriate one to follow" [1, p. 105]. The continued use of the word "follow" characterizes philosophy as a conscious, articulable set of rules for the rational and deliberate guidance of thought and action. This is an easy straw man to knock down because it allows Zwadlo to argue that no such conscious and articulable philosophies, including that positivism, can be found in the everyday practices and discourses of librarians and library scholars and that, by extension, they do not need one. Thus Zwadlo speculates that "perhaps one reason why many librarians do not miss a philosophy of LIS is that writers on library and information science rarely discuss philosophy" [1, p. 104]. But by placing philosophy at the level of formal discourse and of clear and articulable codes provided by LIS philosophers, Zwadlo misses the point of philosophizing about issues germane to LIS.

The fact is that library institutions and the people who work within and use them are operating within epistemological frameworks or normative systems that enable people to understand what the library is, what it does, and how one behaves within its systems. For example, library buildings and the location of the stacks and the reference desk are something that most people take for granted. But Abigail Van Slyck [5] has recently described, through a historical and architectural analysis of the Carnegie libraries from 1890 to 1920, how particular norms, ideologies, and power relationships were actualized into the architecture of library buildings and the layout of their interiors. Zwadlo argues that "This paper is about the missing philosophy of library and information science (LIS). It is also about why so few librarians seem to miss it" [1, p. 103]. But it is not that philosophy is "missing" or librarians miss it, but that such practices and perspectives become, in Thomas Kuhn's terms, "invisible" [6, pp. 136-43]. With respect to science, Kuhn writes: "Though many scientists talk easily and well about the particular individual hypotheses that underlie a concrete piece of current research, they are little better than laymen at characterizing the established bases of their field, its legitimate problems and methods. If they have learned such abstractions at all, they show it mainly through their ability to do successful research. That ability can, however, be understood without recourse to hypothetical rules of the game" [6, p. 47].

Zwadlo makes a similar point with respect to practitioners and scholars of library and information science: of course they can carry out their occupational practices or research without being able to explicitly articulate the underlying paradigmatic bases of their acts. However, this does not mean that such a basis is "missing," in Zwadlo's terms. Indeed, it should be and is an object of great interest to library

and information scholars and philosophers to try to articulate the nature of these underlying systems of knowledge and power. It is this problematic that is addressed in the recent articles by Budd [2], Radford [3], and Dick [4]. It is in this context that Budd and Radford equate this invisible guiding paradigm with the tenets of positivism. They view positivism as a relevant problematic for LIS scholarship, not because it represents a framework that needs to be overthrown, but rather as an "invisible" epistemological foundation whose contours and structures have not been recognized as such in the practices of LIS practitioners and scholars.

The value of writers such as Budd, Radford, and Dick is that they attempt to generate an awareness within LIS that such an epistemological foundation is present at all, and that there are alternatives. As John Budd writes, "It is true that method, data, evidence, and analysis contribute to understanding, but something is antecedent to all these. The key to study, research, and discourse is a more fundamental understanding. This is achieved by delving into the nature of knowledge and knowing in the field" [2, p. 315]. Thus Budd's goal is "to shift, first thought, then discourse, then research, by initiating a questioning of assumptions and purpose" [2, p. 315]. Similarly, Radford's [3] objective is to question a prevailing positivist orientation toward knowledge in order to foreground different views of knowledge that have the potential of providing alternative frames of reference from which to re-create the perceived reality of the library experience. To articulate such alternative frameworks, one has to identify what these frameworks are an alternative to. Thus, the critique of positivism is necessary first in order to raise awareness that alternatives exist, and, more important, that the idea of an alternative worldview even makes sense. If the tenets of positivism remain implicit and taken for granted, then discussion ceases.

What Zwadlo claims to be the objectives of these writers is quite different and misrepresentative of their work. Zwadlo writes that Budd, Radford, and Dick seek to "imply that a power struggle is the way to choose philosophies, with a new philosophy adopted through a kind of cultural coup" [1, p. 117], and that "perhaps Budd and Radford see the confusion of LIS as a power vacuum, and therefore as an opportunity for a move to take power. They propose new philosophies that would justify the seizure of power, although it seems doubtful that the library has the kind of power that is seizeable" [1, p. 118].

What Zwadlo means by "seizure of power" is not made clear. Is it personal power that Budd and Radford seek? Or the power to impose a particular mode of thought and action? Who would be subject to this power? Librarians? Users? Library scholars? Clearly Zwadlo's use of the term "power" is totally inconsistent with Budd's and Radford's use of the term. Budd and Radford do not seek power of any kind, but only a discussion of power/knowledge structures inherent in prevailing library discourses and institutions. The misreading of Budd's, Radford's, and Dick's work is clear in the following statement by Zwadlo: "[They] convey the idea that for LIS, obtaining a philosophy is something like borrowing a book from our libraries. But like the borrowed books, the borrowed philosophies do not really belong to us, always seem to need to be renewed, and we end up returning them, only to borrow others" [1, p. 105]. The epistemological investigation and philosophical discussion found in Budd, Radford, and Dick is not about seizure of "power" or the mixing and matching of philosophical fashions. They are the first steps on a road to greater clarity about the nature of the LIS enterprise, not only in terms of what frameworks LIS might investigate in the future but also in terms of a greater understanding of the positivist foundation of LIS at the present.

Zwadlo spends much of his paper discussing positivism and whether "positivism

ever really was the philosophy of LIS" [1, p. 105]. The heart of the matter is not whether or not positivism has worked or is overdue for replacement. Indeed, positivism has a history of success on a number of fronts. As an epistemology it has allowed for the establishment and growth of some of the social sciences, has given a basis for knowledge claims, and has been useful in enabling research initiatives to grow. Further, it has afforded a rationale for objectivity and value neutrality that have been mainstays of social science practice and inquiry for many years. One of the problems with positivism in the social sciences in general, and LIS in particular, is that its functioning as an epistemological foundation has not been recognized. It has remained latent, assumed, and taken for granted, and, as such, has not been subjected to much critical scrutiny. What Budd, Radford, and Dick have done is generate an awareness that there is indeed an epistemology present in LIS, and that there are alternatives to the tacitly accepted one—positivism. Part of the author's intent is to make just such a point. Zwadlo states, "The advantage of beginning without the assertion that positivism is the philosophy of LIS is that it obviates the need to specify an alternative to positivism" [1, p. 106]. While this may be true on the surface, the task of examining the foundations of knowledge and knowledge growth in LIS remains the same—exploring alternative ways to envision the structure, methods, and validity of knowledge.

Statements such as the foregoing render it very difficult to discern Zwadlo's central points. There appear to be some contradictions and apparent misunderstandings regarding what positivism is and what Budd, Radford, and Dick observe. For instance, Zwadlo writes that positivism, when found wanting, is changed by philosophers, scientists, and others; Zwadlo then infers from the alterations to positivism that it is too variable a philosophical stance to critique. For instance, in a note Zwadlo claims that the variances in expressions of positivism negate any possibility of identifying some common precepts among the several stances. There is a seeming rejection of the premise that there are some consistent claims inherent in a positivist epistemology, but there is no accompanying explanation of the rejection, save to differing versions of what has been called positivism over the years. Zwadlo then almost willfully misreads Budd and Radford, who illustrate that adherence to the common claims of positivism is not necessarily conscious in the minds of those in LIS. At one point he cites Budd as making a statement that is actually a reference to James Faulconer and Richard Williams [7]. He then asserts that "attacking positivism actually is a positivist thing to do" [1, p. 108].

These and other misunderstandings demonstrate a particular shortcoming of the assumed epistemology that has been dominant in LIS. Steve Fuller [8] recognizes that Comte and Mill were epistemological pioneers and that they were concerned with the social construction of knowledge. Not only do Budd, Radford, and Dick not dispute such an assertion but they too recognize the inevitability of the social aspect of knowledge and knowledge growth. Fuller goes on to say that "the continuity of this concern [for the social construction of knowledge] is nowadays lost, however, mainly because logical positivism's legacy has been greater in the techniques it introduced for doing epistemology than in the actual project for which those techniques were introduced" [8, p. 149]. It might be even more appropriate to say that the legacy of positivism is the persistence of its claims. If there is a quest, stated or not, for underlying laws, along with an accompanying reductionism and phenomenalism, the social becomes lost in the individual. Zwadlo appears to miss this point.

Zwadlo further misses the point of the social in Hans Vaihinger and the philosophy of "As If" [9]. If we were to accept Vaihinger's thesis that knowledge grows by the use of fictions, we would have to reach the conclusion that some fictions are

only effective if they are shared; that is, certain fictions that are constructed for, say, disciplinary purposes to propose theories or offer explanations would fail unless they are shared by others in the discipline. If, to use Zwadlo's example, classification in libraries is a fiction that works, it can only work if most of us in LIS agree to the premises of the fiction. That much is required to assure that the fiction is maintained and maintained in a workable form. While such social acceptance is implied by Vaihinger, he focuses more on the individual and the psychic mechanisms that the individual employs in both abstract and practical endeavors. It is not very surprising that Zwadlo chooses Vaihinger as a foundation for critiquing the work of Budd, Radford, and Dick. Vaihinger himself was in some ways a precursor of logical empiricism and was influenced by nineteenth-century French positivism. The influence of the past and the connection with the contemporary and future is evident in statements such as the following: "Only through the reduction of the concepts, 'thought, action, observation,' etc., to elements ultimately physiological, to sensation, do we obtain a correct standard for the valuation of logical work, which converts elements of sensation into logical structures" [9, p. 5].

Vaihinger, in his philosophy of "As If," is proposing a metaphilosophy—a far-reaching program of thinking about thinking. At the root of this metaphilosophy is the assumption that almost all thought is governed by a psychic attraction to fictions that can be used in place of fact, or even of truth, and that can embody contradictions that enable us to conceive things that would otherwise be impossible. A problem with Vaihinger's program is that, if it is correct, his own metaphilosophy may itself be a fiction. Jay Newman sees this problem with Vaihinger and says, "We are now in a position to see that fictionalism is self-defeating. There is Vaihinger, looking down from the empyrean heights of metaphilosophy at the mortal metaphysicians who vainly seek Truth. But if Vaihinger is going to be consistent, he must admit that metaphilosophical theorizing is no more objective than any other kind of theorizing" [10, p. 55]. Zwadlo cites Richard Rorty and says he "concluded that, if we have no way to choose between theories, we cannot choose at all, and so we cannot have one theory at all. If no theory of knowledge can tell us, a priori, that it is better than a competing one, then we must live without such certainty, and live without a theory that claims the special privilege of telling us what is true" [1, p. 9]. If Zwadlo believes Rorty, then he would have to reject Vaihinger along with other alternative epistemologies.

In completing the critique of Budd, Radford, and Dick, Zwadlo takes in turn the alternatives presented in the three papers. In addressing phenomenology (a large component of Budd's proposition) he speaks only of the personal ambitions of Edmund Husserl and again cites Rorty as evidence that other phenomenologists modified Husserl's philosophy and sometimes adamantly disagreed with him. Certainly there are differing versions of phenomenology, and Budd makes mention of others, such as Martin Heidegger and Paul Ricoeur. Further, Budd notes the complexity of dealing with phenomenology in a single journal article and the limitations of a phenomenology based solely on Husserl: "I recognize from the outset that Edmund Husserl's phenomenology is idealistic; that is, he envisions phenomenology being able to make determinations of essence and intention (for example) that approach absolute statements. Husserl does, however, provide elements that form an epistemic basis for phenomenology; that is, he constructs a framework for an approach to knowing which is useful here" [2, p. 304]. Zwadlo's superficial dismissal of phenomenology is indicative of the lack of clarity that permeates the paper.

Zwadlo's critique of Radford's discussion of Michel Foucault is equally superficial

and consists of the following statement: "Although Foucault wrote an essay about libraries it is difficult to see what his philosophy can do for librarians and libraries" [1, p. 28]. First of all, Foucault's essay "Fantasia of the Library" [11] was not about libraries as institutions but was a literary appreciation of Gustave Flaubert's "The Temptation of Saint Anthony" [12]. Foucault used the idea of "the library" as a metaphor for order and rationality in contradistinction to the idea of "fantasia." Second, library scholar Michael Harris [13] has described Foucault's contribution to LIS in terms of a desire to overturn the power of positivism in the social sciences and understand the political economy of knowledge in new and innovative ways. Harris states that "one can only wonder at the extent to which Foucault's work has been ignored by such professions as librarianship and social work that would seem to be in a position to benefit significantly from his insights" [13, p. 116] and that "librarians, who consider their practice to be 'neutral' and apolitical, might find Foucault's work both challenging and disconcerting and, perhaps, redemptive" [13, p. 116]. Zwadlo's conclusion that "librarians should use methods that work, that serve the ends of the library, its users, and the community, instead of trying to justify privileged claims to truth" [1, p. 119] clearly embraces the idealistic idea that librarians can somehow escape from the systems of power/knowledge that Foucault describes in his genealogies. Foucault's work develops the thesis that, at any point in history, institutions attempt to legitimate current versions of knowledge and truth by controlling the manner in which texts are ordered with respect to each other. Claims to power and knowledge rely on "institutional support: [they are] both reinforced and accompanied by whole strata of practices such as pedagogy—naturally—the book system, publishing [and] libraries" [14, p. 219]. The library is a key institution in the legitimation of particular orders of discourse and acts to enforce the "ensemble of rules according to which the true and false are separated" [15, p. 132]. While Zwadlo is correct in stating that Foucault did not write a book about libraries, Foucault wrote much about the systems of power/knowledge in which libraries operate and derive their purposes and identity. Clearly, Foucault's philosophy has much to offer as a means of describing, understanding, and critiquing library institutions and their practices.

In conclusion, we return to Zwadlo's central claim that "we don't need a philosophy of library and information science, we're confused enough already." Our questions are, Who is confused? And what are they confused about? If, as Zwadlo states, "writers on library and information science rarely discuss philosophy" [1, p. 104], then the scholars are not confused. Librarians and library users in their everyday discourse and practice are not confused. They know what libraries are, what they do, and how to interact within their confines. In our view, there is not enough confusion. The invisible epistemological structures and paradigms of our field have not been raised, until very recently, to philosophical scrutiny. As a result, library practitioners and scholars operate within the field as a ready-made and given entity where confusion is minimized by an underlying ideology. If we, as a field, are prepared to accept this situation as Zwadlo proposes, then we have no way to determine the limits of that field and the means to transgress them if we should wish. We have no means to describe the processes by which the field enables certain types of practices and knowledge and marginalizes and forbids others. We have no way to describe and understand how the roles and relationships within library institutions become constituted and the systems of power that they inevitably serve. We have no means of understanding how knowledge about library processes is generated and given validity in library scholarship. The status quo is cozy and easy to manage. It discourages confusion in its constant movements to preserve itself against alterna-

tive worldviews. We need to understand that process in order to overcome it. Thus, in response to Zwadlo, we loudly advocate that we do need a philosophy of library and information science; we are not confused enough!

REFERENCES

1. Zwadlo, James. "We Don't Need a Philosophy of Library Science—We're Confused Enough Already." *Library Quarterly* 67 (April 1997): 103–21.
2. Budd, John M. "An Epistemological Foundation for Library and Information Science." *Library Quarterly* 65 (July 1995): 295–318.
3. Radford, Gary P. "Positivism, Foucault, and the Fantasia of the Library: Conceptions of Knowledge and the Modern Library Experience." *Library Quarterly* 62 (October 1992): 408–24.
4. Dick, Archie L. "Library and Information Science as a Social Science: Neutral and Normative Conceptions." *Library Quarterly* 65 (April 1995): 216–35.
5. Van Slyck, Abigail A. *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890–1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
6. Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 2d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.
7. Faulconer, James E., and Williams, Richard N. "Temporality in Human Action: An Alternative to Positivism and Historicism." *American Psychologist* 40 (November 1985): 1179–88.
8. Fuller, Steve. "On Regulating What Is Known: A Way to Social Epistemology." *Synthese* 73 (October 1987): 145–83.
9. Vaihinger, Hans. *The Philosophy of "As If"*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1925.
10. Newman, Jay. "The Fictionalist Analysis of Some Moral Concepts." *Metaphilosophy* 12 (January 1981): 47–56.
11. Foucault, Michel. "Fantasia of the Library." Translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977.
12. Flaubert, Gustave. *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. Translated, with introduction and notes, by Kitty Mrosovsky. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981.
13. Harris, Michael. Review of "Michel Foucault." *Library Quarterly* 63 (January 1993): 115–16.
14. Foucault, Michel. "The Discourse on Language." Translated by Rupert Sawyer. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, by Michel Foucault. New York: Pantheon, 1972.
15. Foucault, Michel. "Truth and Power." Translated by Colin Gordon. In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, by Michel Foucault, 1972–1977*, edited by Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon, 1980.

We Do Need a Philosophy of Library and Information Science -- We're Not Confused Enough: A Response to Zwadlo

Author(s): Gary P. Radford and John M. Budd

Source: *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (Jul., 1997), pp. 315-321

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40039736>

Accessed: 22-11-2017 17:06 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

http://www.jstor.org/stable/40039736?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*