Chapter 5

THE PERSONALIA
Referential Analysis in Philosophy

One of the most characteristic and in some ways revealing features of philosophical authorship is the way in which philosophers take the views of others into account in their own deliberations. For all of them tend to pursue their own projects and positions in a way that bears relationships to that of others, nevertheless they all have their own characteristic way of operating in point of dependence on or indifference in this regard. And in this regard, next to knowing the questions being addressed, perhaps the most revealing nondoctrinal index of a philosopher’s way of thinking is the inventory of thinkers he considers and the way in which he does so. A good deal of insight into the tenor and tendency of a philosopher’s tendency of thinking is afforded by seeing whom he takes notice of and whom he ignores, whom he respects and whom he scorns.

Every philosophical writer has what might be called a referential horizon of others whose work is taken into account. The structure of this field and the nature of its composition afford instructive insight into this philosopher’s way of thinking about the issues.

This matter of authorial attention—of a thinker’s sources of inspiration and foci of opposition—can be pursued either in the philosopher’s corpus in general or in the context of a particular work. It is only the second perspective that will be at issue here. A great deal will, of course, depend on just what sort of philosophical work is under consideration. Obviously, an historical study—and in particular one devoted to the life and thought of a single philosopher—is bound to have a rather narrow author-reference focus, with comparatively few individuals being the target of a substantial proportion of the references. But our concern here is not with such works of history-of-philosophy scholarship but rather with works of creative philosophizing.

From this standpoint it transpires that the information afforded by the name index of a philosophical book reveals its author in an illuminating and not always flattering light. (That, perhaps, is why many philosophical writers do not trouble to have one.) Different philosophers have different—and sometimes rather eccentric—views on the subject of name indexes.
For example, F. H. Bradley in the prefatory note to the index of his Appearance and Reality suggested that if one did not find the index helpful one should simply ignore it. His index then went on to offer no entries whatever for proper names—a circumstance that managed to obscure the fact that virtually half of the personal mentions in the book refer to Bernard Bosanquet.

A striking example of an author with an idiosyncratic personal-reference policy is G. F. W. Hegel. Thus in the opening section (“Consciousness”) of his Phenomenology of Mind, a segment of some 60 pages, there is not a single mention of any philosophical author (unless we are willing to regard a somewhat oblique reference to Goethe as an exception to this rule). At the other extreme stands the G. W. Leibniz of the Theodicy, who was always painstaking in taking note of the relevant works of his predecessors and contemporaries, and moreover also remarked that it was the points of agreement rather than disagreement that alluded his particular attention. The referential horizons of different philosophers are very differently constituted. Some authors only refer to those they deem congenial, other are more “objective” and mention everyone who has something significant to say on their subject.

The idea of the author-reference practice of different philosophical authors yields a varied spectrum of ideal types. In this light we could encounter:

• The Loner

This is the author who pretends to a spurious self-sufficiency mentioning neither predecessors whose cognate ideas should be acknowledged nor opponents whose views are being opposed. (In the extreme there is also The Solipsist who cites no-one but himself.)

• The Cultural Chauvinist

This author will mention only fellow countrymen or cultural congeners, seeing no need to take account of the views of national or ideological foreigners. (A special case of this is The Rewarder who only mentions others when giving a pat on the back to those whose views are approved of.)
• The Complainer

Such an author only mentions the people who, as he sees it, get it all wrong. Only opponents are ever taken into account.

• The Olympian

He dwells among the acknowledge giants. Only the great—and in general only the late great dead—are ever mentioned: the lesser mortals who deal with the issues under consideration are never taken into account.

• The Bibliophile

This is the author who aims at bibliographic completeness. Virtually anyone who has said anything on the subject at issue—be its importance and relevance great or small—will receive mention. (This sort of thing is pretty much par for the course with German habilitation theses.)

• The Classicist

Such an author deems only the greats of classical antiquity to be worthy of mention.

• The Avant Gardist

Such and author is fixated on le dernier cri, and will mention only the latest contributors whose works are hot off the press.

• The Necromancer

This is the author who deems only the dead as worthy of mention. Living contemporaries are strictly off limits.

To be sure, one and the same author can use different reference strategies in different contexts. In the logical works, where he sees himself treading virgin ground, Aristotle cites no predecessors but begins with
definitions and classifications: while in the *Physics*, where much earlier work exists, he begins by making a survey of it.

To be sure, author-citations are not created equal—and certainly not so in the case of philosophy. But of course it lies in the nature of statistics to blur differences, and in the present case as in so many others statistical information can—despite real shortages—nevertheless prove to be informative, in providing instructive insights into the modus operandi of different philosophical expositors.

The ensuing appendix looks at a handful of important philosophical books in the light of referential analysis. Fortunately, none of these conform rigidly and altogether to any one of these various extreme types.

**APPENDIX**

The following statistical parameters will serve to provide a basis.

\[
P = \text{the total number of pages of the text at issue.}^1
\]

\[
N = \text{the total number of authors referenced in the text. These authors constituted part of the writer’s overall authorial horizon. The AUTHORIAL RANGE of a work is accordingly larger or smaller in line with the magnitude of } N.
\]

\[
n = \text{the total number of author-referencings (some authors will of course be mentioned more than once).}
\]

The attached tabulation sets out these several statistics for some baker’s dozen of philosophical classics.

The size of its citation universe (N) reflects the scholarly aspirations of a book. Here Gadamer carries off the prize (at 358) with Leibniz a close second (at 316) with Rawls as a distant third (at 280). At the rear of the line come Goodman (with 13) and Wittgenstein (with 10). One would be tempted to make a division between the technical and the scholarly, were it not for Leibniz. And if the number of authors cited per page (N/P) is an index of scholarly depth, then Schopenhauer wins out, with Leibniz again a distant second (and Whitehead and Kant tied for losers).

The REFERENCE RATE of a work can be measured either by the average number of author-references per page (N/P) or by the average number of referrings per page (n/P). The number of author citations (n/P) could be
called the name-dropping quartet, and here Dewey, Goodman, and Kant are the only author with less than one-third.

As the data given below indicates, some writers (e.g. Cassirer, Gadamer, Schopenhauer, Whitehead) do not let a page get past them without a reference, while others (Goodman, Dewey) are happy to go along for three or four pages before referring to some philosopher or other. Other things equal, the ratio N/P will gives an indication of the depth of a philosophical writer’s scholarship. (Observe that Schopenhauer and Leibniz top our list in this respect while Kant stands at the bottom, illustrating his own contempt for those who commit the error of mistaking the history of philosophy for philosophy as such.)

The ratio N/n reflects the REFERENTIAL DIFFUSION of a philosopher over his authorial range.

With any numerical parameter that measures some feature of the members of a “population” there will be three descriptive ranges; the norm within which the majority (say two thirds) of the population falls, and the two extreme of shortfall and excess that characterize the rest. The three components of the overall range may be characterized as ~, +, and -, respectively.

Thus with referential diffusion at issue with N/n for example we have it that the norm is defined by 50 % with overall range generally running from .35 to .65 Here the shortfall range includes Gadamer, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, and by contrast, the excess range includes Kant, Dewey, and Whitehead. The latter group has a more concentrated focus on its discussants, concentrating more heavily on a few; the latter group derives the opposite.

The list of rather large books (P > 400) includes those of Gadamer, Heidegger, Leibniz, Rawls, Russell, and Whitehead. The list of those extensive referential contact range (n > 500) includes Gadamer, Leibniz, Rawls, and Whitehead. So only Heidegger seems out of step here. The books whose name-dropping index (n/P) is greater than one include those of Cassier, Gadamer, Leibniz, Rawls, Schopenhauer, Whitehead, and Wittgenstein.

Let us designate as an α-referent (read: “alpha-referent”) those authors who constitute the core of the philosopher’s authorial reference focus by way of receiving over twice the average number of mentions. We then adopt the definition:
Nicholas Rescher

\[ A = \text{the number of the writer's } \alpha \text{-authors, that is, the number of authors who received twice the average number of mentions (that is, more than } 2n/N \text{ references).} \]

Accordingly, a rather comparably informative parameter is a text’s \text{INDEBTEDNESS QUOTIENT (A/N)}, which is defined as follows:

\[ \frac{A}{N} = \text{the percentage of the authors referenced that account for half of all referrings (that is, for a total on } n/2 \text{ referrings).} \]

Mostly the parameter \( A/N \) stands at around 15 percent. Seeing that for none of our books is it less than 9 % and only in three cases is it as much as 20 (Cassierer, Dewey, Wittgenstein). In only one case (Gadamer) was it (significantly) less—indicating an eagerness to touch all the bases. But in general, no matter how many people get cited, the discussion centers around a few.

Since that \( A/N \) generally lies in the range from 10 to 20 % we have it that as a rule

\[ A = .15 N \pm .05N \]

On this basis, we would expect that \( N \) ordinarily stands at around seven times \( A \) so that: \( N \equiv 7A \). The clearest exceptions to this rule are the big-\( N \) authors: Gadamer, Leibniz, and Rawls. (And in this context Cassierer is in an exception-class by himself.)

However, some philosophers are eager to situate themselves in a tradition and accordingly go out of their way to cite its representatives. (In this vein, writers with comparatively small \( A/N \)-values (less than 10 %) include Gadamer, Leibniz, Rawls, and Schopenhauer.) Other philosophers try to be widely encompassing and touch many bases. Thus how a philosopher conceives of the nature of his project and how he chooses to pursue its execution will clearly exert a great deal of influence upon the constitution of his referential horizon. They who see themselves as radical innovators may well proceed in the manner of the Loner (e.g. Wittgenstein), while those who see themselves as standard-bearers of a vast tradition (e.g. Gadamer) are likely to incline to being something of a Bibliographer.

It seems worth observing that the following philosophers make the appearance on the \( \alpha \)-lists of at least three of our sixteen philosophers: Aristotle (11), Carnap (3), Descartes (6), Goethe (3), Hegel (6), Hume (7), Kant
(11), Leibniz (4), Locke (5), Newton (3), Plato (10), Russell (3), Spinoza (5). It is clear that Aristotle and Kant are tied for the title of \(\alpha\)-list champion with Plato close behind. It is particularly noteworthy that Kant figures on the \(\alpha\)-list of every one of the philosophers after his own day save for two, namely Goodman and James.

In these statistics individual citations have been counted indiscriminately, irrespective of whether they invoke a favorable or an unfavorable invocation. Admittedly, it would be revealing to make a discrimination here. For example, while Aristotle receives six mentions in Russell’s Human Knowledge, in each case his name is associated with what Russell condemns as an erroneous belief.

A pretty clear lesson for academic instruction in philosophy is inherent in these referential statistics. After all, in coming to understand a philosopher it cannot but help to have some knowledge of the works that impel this thinker to approbation or refutation. In this light it would appear that a basic program in the history of philosophy would consist minimally of five courses:

1. Ancient philosophy: Plato-Aristotle
2. Combined Rationalism: Descartes-Leibniz-Spinoza
3. British Empiricism: Locke-Hume
4. Kant
5. 19\textsuperscript{th} century—and especially Hegel
6. 20\textsuperscript{th} century—and especially Carnap and Russell

The principal surprise here is that our statistics indicate that perhaps Goethe should be on the required list of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century philosophers.
# SOME REFERENTIAL STATISTICS

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α’s: Aristotle (35), Augustine, Dilthey, Hegel, Husserl, Kant, Plato, Scheler

α’s: FSC Schiller (7), Bradley, Papini, Royce

α’s: Epicurus (5), Hume, Spinoza (5)

α’s: Aquinas, Aristotle, Arnauld, St. Augustine (20), Calvin, Cicero, Descartes, Epicurus, Grotius, Hobbes, Jacquelot, Jurien, Lactantius, LeClerc, Locke, Luther, Malebranche, Molina, Nicole, Plato, Pliny, Duns Scotus, Strato, Vergil, Wyclif

α’s: Aristotle, K. J. Arrow, B. Barry, W. Baumol, Bentham, Brandt, Edgeworth, Foot, Hardie, Hart, Hume, Kant (23), Luce, Marx, Mill, Perry, Raiffa, Ross, Rousseau, Sen, Sidwick (23), Adam Smith, Urmson, B. Williams

α’s: Aristotle, Carnap, Descartes, Eddington, Einstein, Hegel, Hume, Kant, Keynes, Laplace, Leibniz (16), Newton, Plato, Reichenbach

α’s: Aristotle, Fichte, Goethe, Horace, Kant (20), Locke, Plato, Pythagoras, Schelling, Schiller, Seneca, Spinoza, Voltaire, Wolff

α’s: Aristotle, Descartes, Hume (126), Kant, Locke, Newton, Plato

α’s: Russell (28), Frege
A good deal of information can be obtained about the tendency and position of a philosophical publication simply by knowing this sort of thing about the authors discussed or cited.

Referential analysis can lead to interesting typological groupings. Some authors refer only to opponents, others only to congeners. Some writers refer solely to the great dead. (A. N. Whitehead would break this rule only for personal friends.) Others refer only to contemporaries, or sometimes only to countrymen. Even writers on justice often do not trouble to do justice to those of their fellow theorists to whom they are indebted.

The philosophical literature has unquestionably become too large in recent years to permit anything like a general survey of discussions relevant to most significant problems. But surely the author who simply makes no real effort in this direction is delinquent. In particular, if he avoids any mention of the sources of his inspiration, he is an ingrate (if not worse). And in general one becomes hung on the horns of a dilemma in neglecting "the literature". If one is simply unaware of relevant discussions, then one’s professional competence is called into question. If one deliberately omits mention of relevant discussions because they are not written by members of one’s own school or group, then one betrays pettiness and provincialism. All such failings betoken a regrettable betrayal of sound standards. In philosophy parochiolism is even less excusable than elsewhere.

Philosophy, too, has its nonpersons. The natural habitat of academic nonpersons is in the spaces between footnotes; they are prominent through their absence. Like the servants in an old-world mansion, they are part of the unnoticed background, victims to the pretense that they do not exist at all. We sense that they are there but do not hear from them. However useful their contribution, it is made in unnoticed silence.

Yet this sort of thing is literally irresponsible. Authors on scholarly subjects surely have a responsibility to inform their readers not just about their own views but also about the state of the art. Of course, we are free to criticize what we mention, or even to dismiss it with scorn. But simply to ignore a substantially relevant contribution is, however understandable,
nevertheless inexcusable. It is accordingly a salutary and illuminating ex-
ercise for philosophical authors who think a paper (or book) that they are
working on to be completed to take up the manuscript once more, and
carry out a referential analysis to see if what has in fact been done in this
regard reflects the actual intentions at work.
A philosopher’s silences can be pregnant with interest. They may, of
course, simply reflect conceptual inaccessibilities: Aristotle could obvi-
ously not discuss the philosophical ramifications of quantum theory. Then,
too, they may merely betoken a want of time or of information. But they
may also indicate something more weighty—an overt decision to ignore, a
judgment of unimportance, an explicit dismissal of concern.
What can excuse silence? For one thing, it could be a theory on which
there is nothing viable (true, appropriate) to be said on the topic at issue.
Examples are afforded by the view positivists take of metaphysics, or again
by the position of skeptics toward philosophical doctrines in general. But
from the true philosopher one would expect not mere silence but explana-
tion. Why should it be that an issue is unimportant; why should it be seen
as uninteresting; or why should it be deemed worthy of dismissal? The phi-
losopher as philosopher owes us an account. In philosophizing there can be
errors of omission as well as errors of commission; not only can a philoso-
pher’s claims be wrong but his silences can be inappropriate. Not only can
we disagree with what a philosopher says, but we can reproach him or her
for discreditable silences as well.
In this light, consider the situation of women in matters of philosophy.
Feminist historians of philosophy provide constant reminders of the extent
to which philosophers from Plato and Aristotle onward have cast asper-
sions on women. There are notable exceptions, although, prior to J. S. Mill,
they generally manifest themselves rather by silence than explicit argu-
mentation. An example is Leibniz, who on a personal plane held various
women in high esteem in point of intellectual capacity, and who was in any
case too astute a courtier to articulate views that would be offensive to the
several highnesses with whom he dealt on a daily basis. When such writers
discuss persons without bringing women explicitly into the discussion, it is
presumably not because they dismiss the gender en gros, but because they
see it as self-evident that their remarks about people in general pertain to
men and women indifferently.
NOTES

1 Of course there are large pages and small pages. For present purposes a page is normalized to 400 words.