

A book of prefaces

Author: Terence Rajivan Edward

Abstract. In this paper, I present a little puzzle to do with a book of prefaces.

Draft version: Version 1 (23rd August 2022).

“What’s coming is an almighty race

And this child is but a preface.”

The other day I imagined reading a book entitled *A Book of Prefaces*. Then I devised three propositions:

- (i) The preface to a book should ideally be dispensable. The book can function without the preface.
- (ii) *A Book of Prefaces* has a preface.
- (iii) The book cannot function without this preface.

That it cannot function without this preface seems a good thing for such a book, but that is a problem for accepting (i).

But what is the argument for (iii)? I suppose it could be that the aim is to collect the best prefaces ever and this preface is definitely one of the best. (Anyway, is the combination above enough to dispute the title of “The paradox of the preface”?)

Reference

Makinson, D.C. 1965. The paradox of the preface. *Analysis* 25 (6): 205-207.