The ADVISOR Reviews...

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

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Product Title

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

URL

http://plato.stanford.edu/

Reviewer

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Scores

Composite: 4.000 ★★★★

Content: 4.50	★★★★★	Entries are very high quality. If the encyclopedia were complete, it would likely rate a 5.
Searchability: 3.50	★★★★	The Webglimpse 2 software and lack of user help leave something to be desired. The fact that articles can be found with an internet search engine is very interesting.
Price: N/A		Freely available at present, with efforts underway to fund ongoing open access.
Contract: 4.00	★★★★	Would like to see more opportunity for active library participation in the project, particularly if the library community's fund-raising efforts are successful, as well as "green" open access or author self-archiving.

Pricing Options

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy is Open Access––freely available to anyone, anywhere over the world wide Web. Several partners, the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC),1 the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), and Stanford University, are conducting an innovative experiment to fund ongoing Open Access to the SEP,

through the establishment of an endowment fund. Because the SEP is a volunteer effort and fully Open Access, there are cost savings as compared to a commercial encyclopedia where contributors would expect to be paid and authentication mechanisms would need to be developed and supported. The ICOLC plan calls for three one-year contributions by libraries at universities with philosophy departments. Suggested contributions are roughly comparable with pricing for subscription-based access to a resource of this type. The differences are that the payments allow for Open Access to everyone, and that, after the third payment, there are no more payments for perpetual access to a reference work that continues to be updated. This is like a dream acquisition; one-time purchase to a work that constantly transforms itself with no further payment.

If the endowment approach does not succeed, there are other possible funding scenarios to be explored. One option is Open Access funded by smaller, but ongoing contributions by libraries; another is revenue generation through advertising.

Product Description

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) is a Web-based, dynamic reference work, designed to be responsive to new research. The SEP is not yet complete, but so far includes over 600 substantial, in-depth entries with bibliographies. Entries are written and updated by experts or groups of experts, normally solicited by invitation by a member of the distinguished Board of Editors. All entries and updates undergo rigorous review.

New and revised entries are added as soon as they are reviewed; as of early November 2004, about 43 new and 32 revised articles had been added in the previous three months. A fixed edition is produced quarterly, which facilitates citing of articles as well as archiving.

Search options include a Table of Contents, full-text searching using the Webglimpse 2 search engine, links to other internet resources and related entries. Because they form part of an openly accessible, Web-based encyclopedia, SEP articles can be found using Web search engines.

Critical Evaluation

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy is very much a work in progress. It has many good features and very high quality content. However, SEP is limited by gaps in its coverage and inconsistencies in its search engine.

On arrival at http://plato.stanford.edu the searcher has to select an SEP site. Stanford is the principle site, and several mirror sites are available from the entry page should the Stanford site be unavailable. Over the course of writing this review, the Stanford site was used exclusively and found to be available and stable on every occasion. Ideally, the user would go directly to the SEP site, skipping this step (Figure 1).

Figure 1

After selecting a site the searcher arrives at the SEP's main search page. There are several ways of searching SEP from here including the basic search box, advanced search, alphabetical navigation panel and the list of published entries. The basic search box, using Webglimpse 2 search software, works very well in some situations. A single name search with Nietzsche places the SEP's main entries on Nietzsche first on the list of results, followed by the many other entries where the name appears. A basic Boolean search reveals a problem in the search software. Searching Frege and language returns 0 matches, although there is a section in the Frege entry on his Philosophy of Language.

Switching to advanced search offers more Webglimpse 2 searching and a Google SEP search (Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Frege and language search returns 0 results in Webglimpse 2, while Google returns the Frege entry containing the section on language. There is no search help linked from the main SEP page. Some search tips for Webglimpse 2 are listed in advanced search. The inconsistent results and lack of help in SEP will pose a problem for searchers who give up when their first attempt fails.

In terms of the SEP entries, the quality is very high. All entries and updates are refereed by the SEP's Editorial Board before they are made public. The authors in many cases achieve a fine balance, providing entries that will be useful to a range of readers from laypeople to academics. It should be noted that there are a number of gaps in the SEP's coverage. For example, there are no entries on Philosophy of Mind or Philosophy of Language, both major subjects within the field. The SEP is a dynamic, growing resource. Hopefully these gaps will be filled in the future as it continues to grow.

Since the SEP is a freely available, Open Access resource, articles can also be found using internet search engines such as Google, Yahoo, etc. As an example, either a Google or a Yahoo search for "disjunction" will bring up the article in SEP by SFU's Ray Jennings first. This illustrates one of the advantages of the SEP for authors, that is, the enhanced impact that comes with Open Access publishing––an article that is openly accessible is more likely to be read and cited.2 The reader who searches using the internet is more likely to encounter quality information, at least in the area of philosophy, although in the authors' opinion information literacy skills would be needed for the reader to appropriately evaluate the source of the article.

Contract Provisions

Because SEP is Open Access, articles are available to anyone, subject only to fair use. Clicking on the copyright notice at the bottom of the article leads to legal language. This is a good idea, but the authors would suggest that for the ease of the user and to maximize protection for the author, a simple statement preceding the detailed copyright information would be helpful, for example the following:

Copyight belongs to the author. Any use of any part of the Encyclopedia other than fair use requires the explicit permission of the copyright holder.

Interestingly enough, this Open Access encyclopedia does not at present allow for the self-archiving version of Open Access. According to editor Ed Zalta, this is due to the need to fund-raise to keep the SEP Open Access; if the project succeeds, then author self-archiving will be allowed.

There are a couple of interesting provisions in the Call for ICOLC Initiated Global Community Action. Libraries are entitled to retain copies of the fixed quarterly editions for archival purposes; these copies could be used to provide access to the Encyclopedia in the event of failure of all mirror sites or if the project were ever dropped. Participating libraries are guaranteed return of their funds should the fund-raising effort not succeed.

One suggestion for improvement would be to find a means to allow for library participation in promoting use of the SEP, possibly through using libraries as mirror sites and/or working towards library Web sites as the entry points for SEP.

Authentication

One of the best things about Open Access––no authentication is required. For library staff, this also means no troubleshooting when authentication methods do not work.

Author Selected References

The Open Citation Project. Reference Linking and Citation Analysis for Open Archives. The effect of open access and downloads ("hits") on citation impact: a bibliography of studies., http://opcit.eprints.org/oacitation-biblio.html>.

Sanville, Tom . **Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) A Call for ICOLC Initiated Global Community Action. Link from .**, Link from http://plato.stanford.edu/fundraising/..

Advisor Additional References

No additional references provided.

Contact Information

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