

Reviews

Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online 2.0

Edward Craig, General Editor

London: Routledge, 2003. <http://www.rep.routledge.com/>

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Recently upgraded and expanded, the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online 2.0 (hereafter, REP) is a welcome enhancement to a valuable resource for students. My review shall consist of two primary sections, one on the content of REP, and one on the interface provided by the online version. I shall close with a brief discussion of pricing, subscriptions and similar matters.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online 2.0 homepage. The browser's address bar shows the URL <http://www.rep.routledge.com/?authstatascode=202#top>. The website features a search bar at the top, navigation links for HOME, SUBJECT GUIDES, ADVANCED SEARCH, BROWSE, LOGOUT, and HELP. On the left sidebar, there are links for About REP, What's new, Reviews, Subscribe, Signpost Articles, Preview Article, Contact, Feedback, and License Agreement. The main content area includes a welcome message for Version 2.0, a list of most requested articles (including Kant, Immanuel (1724-1804) by Paul Guyer, Descartes, René (1596-1650) by Daniel Garber, and Free will by Galen Strawson), and a current topical article about consciousness studies.

The content of REP is quite complete, containing entries for all time periods (e.g., ancient, medieval, renaissance, modern, contemporary), as well as many entries reflecting world interest in philosophy (east Asian, Indian/Tibetan, African, etc.). Further entries detail connections to world religions and many topics in mathematics, science and technology where of appropriate philosophical concern.

It also covers large numbers of traditional philosophical themes: aesthetics, metaphysics, epistemology, science, logic and mathematics, mind

and psychology, ethics, politics, social science, language, law, religion, moral philosophy and applied ethics. It is in the latter category where some weakness is found; there is no separate entry for “abortion” or “euthanasia”—both of these refer the reader to the “Life and Death” article. “Crime and punishment,” however, merits its own article, as does “nursing ethics.” Despite the categorization above (taken from the REP’s “sign posts” page) there are many articles on “continental” topics. For example, student favorites such as “phenomenology, epistemic issues in” and “existentialism” both appear as articles.

There are many articles on philosophical topics difficult to research elsewhere. “Language, ancient philosophy of” and “Kropotkin, Pëtr Alekseevich” are two that I stumbled upon by accident. Many articles are divided into sections, each often article-length in their own right. This does lead to more integrated discussions of topics than in some encyclopedias, as generally an article’s subsections are all written by one author. (It is not clear in the case of co-written articles which parts were written by which author.) This unity of presentation makes understanding easier, though limits the points of view presented to students. This latter point is not terribly important as REP has a huge number of articles.

As expected, many articles are on famous philosophers, some of whom only get mentioned in terms of appropriate regions. The latter consideration shows very clearly the value of an online encyclopedia with full-text search; searching for one’s favorite obscure philosopher by hand in a paper encyclopedia is a tedious chore obviated by an online version.

Each article I have reviewed has been detailed, clearly (or as clearly as subjects will allow) written and well-referenced, giving a vivid picture of philosophy to the curious or motivated student. “Intellectual history” content is also remarkably rich in detail, containing brief discussions of many issues left out of other encyclopedias and references. For example: Heidegger’s Nazism and Descartes’s concern over the publication of *Le Monde* are both mentioned.

A fair number of articles are written by “big names” in their field, and so students will get the blessing (and the curse) of this. Some include: Galen Strawson, Jaegwon Kim and Philip Kitcher. Also, the sheer scope of REP allows for many different authors to be represented, so students get to approach materials from varying perspectives (which, in this reviewer’s opinion, makes for a better learning experience).

A nice feature is how each article is divided clearly into Article/Bibliography/Related Articles/Links. Bibliographies are often annotated. Students also gain tremendously from having REP remember their search. Suppose “Leibniz” and “Descartes” appear in that order in a search result. Hence there will be a link bar at the top of the Leibniz article for the “next in search”—in this case, Descartes.

Another nice feature about the articles from the student perspective is that each article includes a sample citation. For instance, a student reading Frank Döring's article on "Counterfactual conditionals" is reminded at the end of each section that one way to cite the article is to use something like the following:

DORING, FRANK (1998). Counterfactual conditionals. In E. Craig (Ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge. Retrieved June 05, 2003, from <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/X008SECT2>

Note the helpful inclusion of the retrieval date. This can be productively used towards educating students about stale data. For those of us who wish to teach about information literacy in our courses as a by-product of teaching philosophy, this "jumping off point" is welcome. This leads me to interface considerations.

In this section I shall concentrate on REP's user interface and technical attributes. For the most part, the interface is clean and elegant, with no jarring colors or overly awkward navigation items. The red and blue colors are sufficiently different for color blind users to see a pretty pattern. Lynx users have no problem viewing many articles in text only, though they are warned that certain features are disabled. Unsubscribed users may browse a few articles but are unobtrusively asked for a username and password if they stray beyond the free area. The REP offers authentication by IP address so users at a university (say) can use the service without the hassles of web proxies or libraries giving out usernames and passwords. It also has a separate "Glossary of Logical and Mathematical Symbols" which is no doubt a holdover from the print edition. I see no direct merit of alerting the user that some items are in this glossary, though it does not make much of a difference in content or user-interface.

These considerations aside, there are a few areas where the REP is rough around the edges from the UI perspective. The first of these is an "arrow" which repositions itself at the bottom right of every visible part of a window every time the window is scrolled or resized. This behavior is incredibly annoying from the perspective of the user. It functions to bring the user back to the top of a particular page. But this is an action more web-browser oriented than content oriented and as such does not merit distracting the user with a "moving button."

Also, REP has some issues with different browsers. They have a list of supported browsers under their "Help:Recommended Platforms and Browsers" item, but some key browsers are simply not mentioned (E.g., Internet Explorer 5.1.x on Mac OS X). Nor does the REP application warn you of any difficulties at login. These nevertheless occur: searching for contributors is completely broken, as well as the general search produce problems. The latter results in the search (without the quotes) "dax" being different from the search "dax " (note the space). Problems with some Unicode characters also arise on Internet Explorer 5.1.x on Mac OS X. These limitations

and “gotchas” do not occur on other browsers, e.g., Internet Explorer 5.5 on Windows XP.

As I have noted, REP is for the most part an excellent product from the content and user interface perspectives. However, this excellence comes only to those students who are fortunate enough to be affiliated with institutions who can afford the price: a three-year US subscription for 20 concurrent university library users is \$9270 (cheaper in the rest of the world). While other online philosophy encyclopedias, e.g., the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://plato.stanford.edu>), Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/>) are substantially less complete article-wise, they do have the substantial advantage of being free for all. That said, REP does have some articles available for free to the public and significant educational discounts are available based upon the number of full-time undergraduates. Individual university libraries will have to decide the merits of this pricing; the content is remarkably complete and students at their institutions would benefit greatly from subscriptions.

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Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology, 4th Edition

Louis P. Pojman, ed.

Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 2003, x + 582 pp., \$64 pbk. 0-534-54364-2

JASON A. BEYER

Louis Pojman has built a reputation as a producer of high quality philosophy textbooks and anthologies, and the latest edition of *Philosophy of Religion* is no exception. Pojman’s original edition of this anthology deserved inclusion into any scholarly library and was well worthy of course adoption. Unlike many philosophy of religion anthologies, it was strongly balanced between both historical and contemporary writings as well as between theistic believers and non-theists. Pojman’s anthology also offered a comprehensive treatment of issues within philosophy of religion. These strengths have been repeated in all of the later editions of this anthology, including the latest, fourth, edition. In addition, the later editions of *Philosophy of Religion* have been responsive to the changing focuses and continued work of researchers in the field.

When reviewing an updated edition of an anthology, two questions are foremost. First, how does this anthology fare considered entirely on its own merits? Second, how do the changes affect its quality vis-à-vis the earlier edition(s)? I am happy to say that the latest edition of Pojman’s *Philosophy of Religion* merits approval on both counts.

Philosophy of Religion is divided into ten parts, each of which corresponds to a general topic area in philosophy of religion. Part 1 addresses arguments for