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# The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Standard in the Making?

Tom Gilson

*College of Charleston*, [gilsont@cofc.edu](mailto:gilsont@cofc.edu)

James Williams

*College of Charleston*

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# The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Standard in the Making?

by Tom Gilson and James Williams (College of Charleston) <gilsont@cofc.edu>  
<williamsj@cofc.edu>

Is it our just our imagination, or is reference publishing approaching a high watermark? In last year's reference issue we featured a review of Grove's landmark reference, the 34-volume *Dictionary of Art*. Despite some problems with the index, the *Dictionary of Art* stands as a remarkable publishing achievement

which will be valued for years to come. While it is very rare to find a subject encyclopedia matching the scale of the *Dictionary of Art*, other significant sets are being published. Some of these will immediately become the de facto standard in their field. The *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* fits within this category and deserves in-depth examination and comment.

## The Basics

For thirty years, reference librarians have relied on Macmillan's eight-volume *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* edited by Paul Edwards. It has been a trusted standby (and with its 1996 supplement is still considered helpful). However, there was an obvious need for an entirely new set. Mindful of Paul Edwards' contribution, but aware of this need, Routledge began planning a new *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and after seven years of effort, it has just been published. The results were well worth the wait. This is an essential reference source that is a major addition to the reference literature.

First, let's get the "nuts and bolts" out of the way. Routledge has published this reference in both a ten-volume print set (0-415-07310-3) as well as a networkable CD-ROM for up to ten simultaneous users (0-415-16916-X). Both the print and CD are priced individually at \$2495 until Oct. 1998, then the price jumps to \$2995. A print/CD package (0-415-16917-8) is also being offered at \$2995 until Oct. 1998, and then it will be priced at \$3495.

The scholarly care taken in the production of this set is obvious. General editor, Edward Craig realizing the scope of his endeavor, wisely reached out to other scholars with relevant areas of specialization and assembled a group of thirty subject editors to help coordinate the project. Arthur Fine (Philosophy of science), Kwame Anthony Appiah (African philosophy), Michael Detlefsen (Philosophy of mathematics), Norman Kretzmann (Medieval philosophy) and Onora O'Neill (Ethics) are among the names of subject editors that other scholars will immediately recognize.

## The Print Version

### Content

However, the content is what makes this set so impressive. Routledge's *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* consists of over 2,000 articles on an impressively broad range of philosophical topics authored by an international group of 1300 contributors, many of whom are well known in their respective

fields. Naturally the major Western canon is heavily represented. As you would expect, thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Russell, and Sartre are given thorough treatment. However, there are some 400 entries devoted to what editor, Edward Craig terms "World Philosophy." Articles on African, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Latin American, Indian and Tibetan as well as other philosophies are included. This worldwide perspective is also reflected in the coverage of what might be termed mainstream topics. For example, there are articles like: Epistemology, Indian Schools of; Russian Liberalism; Existentialist Thought in Latin America; Ethical Systems, African; and Aesthetics, Japanese. In addition, there are also articles on various aspects of Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and Jewish Philosophy.

Of course, Philosophy has changed over the last thirty years and these changes are well documented in this encyclopedia. The birth and growth of feminist philosophy is covered in at least eleven separate articles while the impact of cognitive science, language studies and computer science show in articles on Computability Theory, Language and Gender, and Cognitive Architecture. The contributions of leading modern thinkers like Richard Rorty, Thomas Nagel, Saul Aaron Krippe and John Rawls are also fully recognized. There are even some unanticipated articles on things like Time Travel, Miracles, and the Philosophy of Geology. In short, the content of this set is strikingly diverse. After examining this encyclopedia, one is left with a fuller appreciation of the universal scope of philosophy and the depths of its concerns.

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### Layout

The presentation and layout of the articles, at least in the print version, assist the reader in getting a sense of what each contains. As noted earlier, each entry starts with a brief abstract which describes the essential content of the article. This is followed by a table-of-contents of the specific topics treated and then, the text of the article. "See" and "See also" references linking to related articles are included at the end of each entry. As one would expect, each article has a selective bibliography. In the case of the articles on individual philosophers, the bibliographies contain both original works and secondary sources. A brief description of each item cited is also included, lending a sense of relevance and importance. This last feature is somewhat unique in an encyclopedia and again shows the scholarly care which has gone into the set.

The last volume has a full list of contributors and contains the index to the entire set. The index is thorough and useful, guiding readers to specific volumes and page numbers.

### Concerns

Our one reservation regarding the content of the encyclopedia is that some of the entries may be too scholarly for the novice reader. After examining the articles on aesthetics, a Philosophy professor who teaches an introductory class on the topic was impressed. But he also remarked that the articles were as involved as some of the outside readings he had planned. The point is that those using the encyclopedia may need some background to take full advantage of its content. While the abstracts that begin each article may provide a helpful outline to the beginner, the actual articles are not for late night, pleasure reading. They represent serious scholarship on often complex topics.

George Steiner in his review of this encyclopedia in the July 5<sup>th</sup> *New York Times Book Review* mentioned the need for a chronology to help lend historic context. He has a good point. We were trying to get a quick sense of how much Philosophy had changed over the last thirty years and a chronology would have been a great help. But even more helpful would be a topical or thematic index. While "see" and "see also" references are necessary to link related articles, a topical index gives the researcher all the related articles at a glance. Providing an index of articles by topic also gives the reader a better idea of scope and coverage, very helpful for a discipline like Philosophy which is both broad and complex. The editors evidently recognize this because the CD-ROM version has a feature called the "subject guide," which offers access to broad categories as well as specific time periods. It would be nice to have the same information available in print.

### The CD-ROM Version

For those who like the conveniences of the high-tech world, the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is also available on CD-ROM. Regarding content, all of the praise we have heaped on the print version also goes for the CD-ROM. It appears to be a direct duplication.

Naturally, there are a number of slick features which only a computer can provide. The CD search engine allows one to search the text for specific words and the user can click a button to go forward to the next occurrences of the word or back to previous occurrences, a task that would be impossible to achieve in the printed

text. The CD also makes excellent use of hypertext links to instantly connect the user to related background, biographical and theoretic, information without having to constantly consult an index. The CD contains a useful feature called a subject guide (not a subject index) that divides the content up broadly by philosophical themes, world philosophies, world religions and time periods. There is a wonderful glossary at the user's disposal and an annotation function for individually organizing and managing the vast amount of information that this product contains. The user can either bookmark a particular sentence in the text that she wishes to go to or create a hypertext link to and from personally highlighted text as well as insert notes. With this link, the user can jump from the beginning of the highlighted text, to the end and vice-versa as well as view any notes that she made while creating the link.

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Understandably, however, due to the complexity of the material and the possible push to produce the product on time, there are a few problems with the CD. Routledge gives the user an option of performing a minimum or full installation. While the instructions inform the user that the minimum installation requires 9 megabytes, it does not inform the user that the full installation, which gives much faster access to information, takes up a whopping 325 megabytes of hard drive space and 20 minutes to install! We found out the hard way. And, while it is possible to search the database using the minimum install, some of the boolean searches we tried took 2-3 minutes to complete.

The software divides the screen up into three frames that are busy and confusing even on a seventeen-inch monitor. One has to "find the rhythm" of when to look from one frame to the other as well as remembering what information is being presented in each frame. The user is unable to search the index by keyword. Routledge has admitted that a search of the electronic index could not be limited to the main index entry headword. For example, a search for Kant does not lead you to the main entry in the index for Kant. Instead it takes you to the first time the name Kant appears in the index, which is in one of the subcategories for the entry "a priori." Routledge hopes to fix this problem, possibly by version 2.0.

In short, patience is essential when using this search engine. It is not intuitive enough to be easily used by the novice searcher, and accurate searching, without first consulting the help screens, can be frustrating. Searchers who become familiar with the idiosyncrasies of the search engine may find it useful but there appears to be a longer than necessary learning curve associated with comfortably navigating this CD. Of course, if these search feature issues are addressed and fixed in a future release, the CD product would have an obvious advantage over the paper copy in speed and pinpointing specifics. However, as it stands now, use of the paper copy is much easier and quicker to master.

### Concluding Remarks

Overall, the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* remains an impressive scholarly undertaking. Readers with an interest and background in Philosophy will certainly find this encyclopedia a huge help. But undergraduates majoring in philosophy, graduate students and faculty will find it essential. Routledge's *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is a major addition to the reference literature. Admittedly, it is a substantial investment for any library, but academic and most large public libraries will want to make it. 

When publisher Charles Scribner, Jr., published Gerald Green's *The Last Angry Man* in 1959, he sent an advance copy to his mother. When she got to that part of the story where the Jewish doctor from Brooklyn has a heart attack, she phoned her son and warned, "If anything happens to that doctor, I'll never speak to you again."