

Intro and Hypothesis

The world wide web contains a network of web pages that are interconnected in many different ways. Wikipedia itself is its own network of a vast collection of different topics, ideas, and other entries. Our goal was to find an interesting hypothesis to analyze that dealt with this network of pages within Wikipedia. An initial path of thought was that almost all Wikipedia pages are connected in some way. This means that if each Wikipedia page was a node on a graph, almost the graph would be connected if the edges between nodes were links from one Wikipedia page to another. An even more specific idea was that all pages on Wikipedia formed a connected graph if one just uses edges only for the first accessible in-text link on each Wikipedia page.

After some further searching, we discovered a hypothesis centered around the idea that the Philosophy page is reachable by almost any given starting Wikipedia page by only traversing through pages by clicking the first in-text link on each page. It seems intuitive that the Philosophy page could potentially be reached by almost any starting page from any link on the page, but only accessing the first link to do the same does not seem as easily possible. When researching this further we came up with the following hypothesis: In Wikipedia it is theoretically possible to reach the Philosophy page by just clicking on the first link on every page from **97%** of all Wikipedia pages. We also found estimates suggesting that it takes a **median of 23 clicks** to get from a starting page to the Philosophy page. We decided to test this hypothesis by going through a representative sample of the (approximately) 29 million English Wikipedia pages and storing their paths to Philosophy in graph form. We then wanted to check the median path size after starting at a random selection of pages. We also wanted to look at what we have

designated as “funnels”, which are nodes that more than one inward edge passing through them towards Philosophy.

We decided to further develop this project in the implementation side by building a basic UI that would allow users to choose any exit node (Philosophy in our study) and then find paths from any source node to this exit node as well as path lengths. The UI would also let users find funnels after running multiple paths and also generate a graph (with visuals) of all paths generated. A final feature of the UI would be the ability for a user to generate a random graph in a similar way to the analysis we were performing for this project.

Implementation

In order to run the analysis, we first developed a “Graph” class which uses nodes from a “Node” class to represent a graph of nodes in an adjacency list form. We then built a “Scraper” class which would go through each Wikipedia page starting from a source node. At each page the scraper finds the first link to another Wikipedia page that is in the text body on the page (not the sidebar information). The scraper then accesses the next page through that link and adds it to the graph as a new node. This process continues until reaching the Philosophy page and the graph is populated with all the nodes found along the path from the source node to Philosophy. We also incorporated checks to stop when cycles are found if a source does not lead to Philosophy. We also wanted to be able to see the graphs produced by our analysis, so we implemented a graph visualization tool using a Java library called GraphStream. A feature was also included that would allow us to output the adjacency list representation of the graph, as well as the list of funnels, as a text file. Another thing we wanted to implement was a way to find

distances between any node and philosophy, not just source nodes from created paths. To achieve this we implemented a BFS algorithm that would work with our graph.

For the UI implementation we first created a window where users could specify the end node by providing a link to a Wikipedia page. Then, the user is able to submit queries of source Wikipedia page links. When running the tool, the user UI will display all previous queries as well as the length of their respective paths to the end node. During each query, the entire path is displayed until the next query is run. We also implemented a way for the user to find the “funnels” after running as many queries as desired by opening a new window that displays the funnels and the number of inward edges each funnel has. The graph display feature was also added that will display a visual of the graph containing the paths from all queries to the exit node. The random graph button on the UI was implemented to mimic our analysis that we conducted by generating a random graph from a random selection of Wikipedia pages. This was achieved by accessing the built in Wikipedia link on the website that redirects to a random page.

Analysis Setup

We ran some early trial runs with the code we implemented to make sure everything was working the way we wanted. Initially, we found that every page was following the same path to Philosophy with each path length around 28-29 nodes traversed. After further investigation we realized that every page was getting directed through a path that contained a language of origin such as Greek, Latin, or French. This was not ideal for our analysis as each source node ended up having essentially the same path through a page like “Greek” or “Ancient Greek Language”. This problem made sense because we were using only pages that contained English words, and

most words from the English language have an origin in languages like Greek or Latin. This problem was further emphasized by the Wikipedia page structure in which any pages with terms that were not proper nouns had the language of origin for the word or terms in parentheses at the beginning of the text body. Due to the prominence of this issue and how it made the analysis uninteresting, we decided to ignore these links for languages of origin and they were removed from our scraper. This meant the scraper would instead go to the next link outside of the initial parentheses containing language of origin in each Wikipedia page.

As stated above, we utilized the Wikipedia feature of a random page redirect link to find random pages to use as source nodes. We decided to run 10 tests of 50 pages each that would create a new graph each time. This gave us 500 randomized source node samples and also made sure the program would not take too long to run or send too many requests in a short period of time to Wikipedia, also ensuring that Wikipedia would not block our computers from accessing the website.

Analysis

After running the analysis as specified above, the data was put into an excel file (see attached “analysis data” excel file). First, we took a look at all the distances from the source node to Philosophy and found that some had distances of zero. These Wikipedia links were checked to verify that these zeros were not due to errors. Nodes with distances of less than 5 were also checked at their respective Wikipedia links and verified, changed to zero, or removed. After cleaning the distance data, only 2 source pages were removed, resulting in a total of 498 samples. The funnel data is recorded in a different tab in the same excel sheet. Each of the 10 graphs

produced a list of funnels as well as their number of inward edges towards Philosophy. The 10 graphs from the analysis trials are included at the end of the report.

The final analysis results had a mean distance of about 17 nodes, **median distance of 17 nodes**, a max distance of 41, standard deviation of around 6.2, and a resulting **97.8%** of source nodes having a successful path to Philosophy.

Discussion

When looking at the pages with zero distances, it was interesting to note that they usually fell into two categories: surnames or some type of list. Both of these types of pages are represented on Wikipedia in such a way that the initial paragraph of text that we counted for the first link either does not really exist or does not have any links contained in it. The other pages that followed this result for a zero distance usually were names of people that had short pages with little to no text in the initial paragraph. One of the more interesting sources with a zero distance was the page of Billie Jean King's career statistics (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billie_Jean_King_career_statistics) which ended up producing a cycle given our method of taking the first link. The reason this happens is that Billie Jean King's page leads to the world number one women's tennis rankings page, leading to the Women's Tennis Association page. Coincidentally enough, Billie Jean King happens to be the founder of the Women's Tennis Association where the first link on the page redirects back to Billie Jean King, creating the cycle. This was the only cycle we found in our data, indicating that these such cycles are rare (estimated at about 1/500 or around 0.2% given our data).

The next point of interest are the funnels found in each graph. The trend in the funnels are usually general words of subject such as Science, Mathematics, Physics, Knowledge, etc. This makes sense because pages that would have common paths would have a higher chance of being similar if they had similar general underlying concepts, such as Basketball leading to Game Theory, Probability or Math, and something like Financial Markets also leading to Probability or Math. There are a few more specific funnels that appeared, such as Sport, Association Football, Rock Music, and Canada, but these are not as important as they are due to the random page search producing two very similar pages in the same category. These funnels also tend to exist much farther apart from the rest of the funnels and also farther from Philosophy when looking at the graphs. What is most significant is that Physics, Science, Psychology, Language, Linguistics, and Knowledge are in almost every graph as a funnel. The explanation behind this is intuitive, as eventual any source page will get to some sort of topic that boils down to a these general topics that are pillars of subject matter. These funnels are also more concentrated together in each graph and tend to appear closer to Philosophy, indicating that they are more significant than the other funnels.

Something that is noticeable in almost every graph is that there is a path through Philosophy that doesn't usually contain any paths branching away. On every graph, Philosophy appears to partition the graph into two distinct parts if it were removed. A further look reveals that one of the parts is consistently much larger than the other. If you path is traversed outward from Philosophy towards the larger part, you always end up at the Knowledge funnel. This means that Knowledge could also be used as an exit node in an analysis and would most likely produce similar results to using Philosophy as the exit node, although it may be slightly less

successful if the source nodes cut off from removing Philosophy would not have a path to Knowledge. Knowledge being an important node/funnel also is plausible in this graph given that the subjects of Knowledge and Philosophy are both closely related.

Finally, the hypothesis. Based on the results of our analysis the hypothesis is supported. We found a slightly higher percentage than the hypothesis for the amount of pages that would have a successful path. The median is also actually lower, which is actually better than the hypothesis, so it is safe to say the median from the hypothesis is at least supported in the worst case. While we only ran this with 500 samples, we would expect running our analysis on more pages would also support the hypothesis.

Conclusion

We conclude that our original hypothesis of 97% of Wikipedia pages having a path to Philosophy by clicking the first link, with a median path length of 23 clicks, is supported (actually better in the case of median clicks equal to 17). It is interesting that nearly all pages have some path to Philosophy in Wikipedia following these rules, and that there are similar pages that could produce the same effect, like Knowledge. We also built a simplified UI that will allow users to run our analysis on random Wikipedia pages, as well as test this concept out on any page they choose, even for different exit nodes.

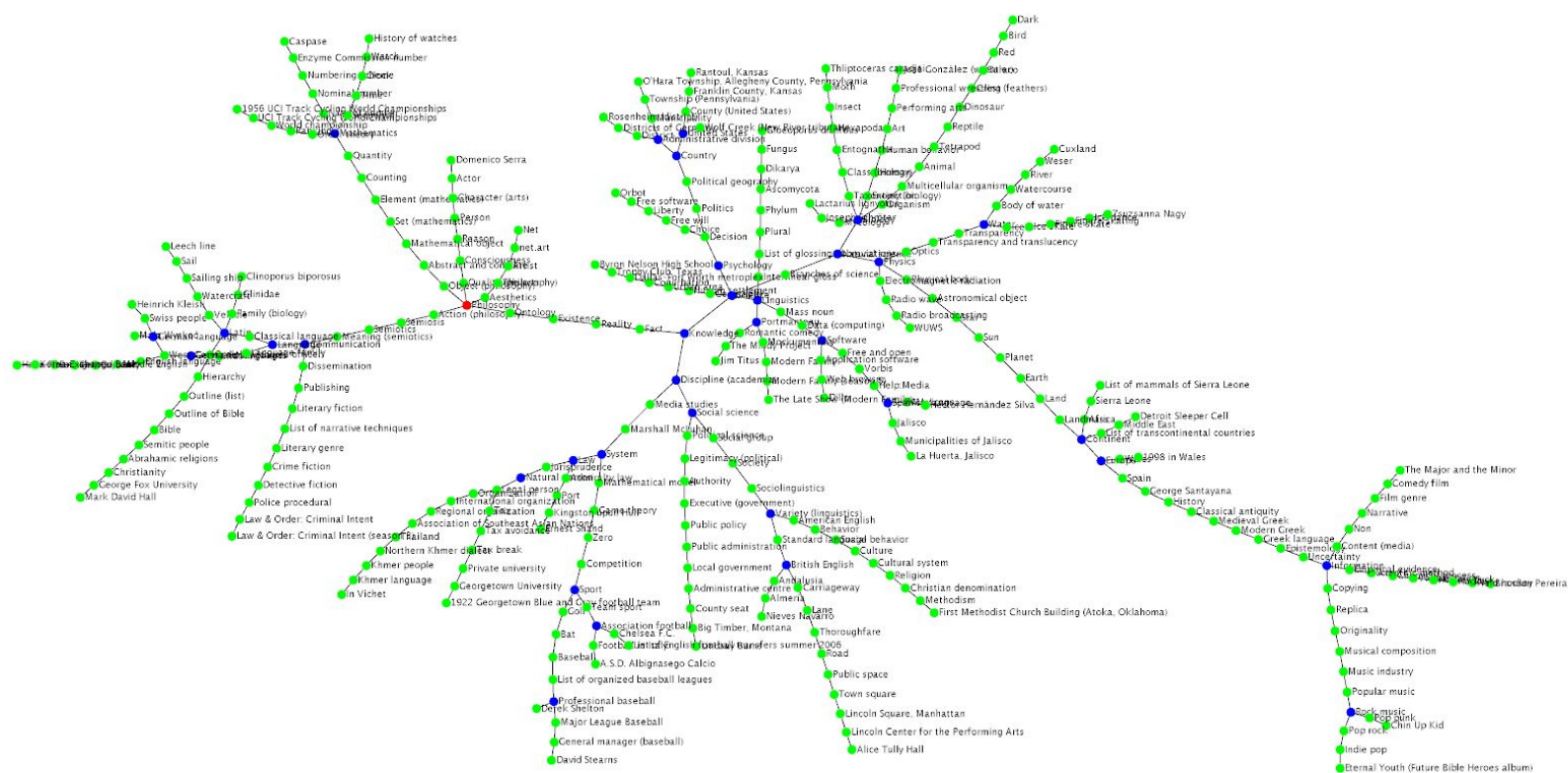
(Red Node is Philosophy, Blue Nodes are Funnels)



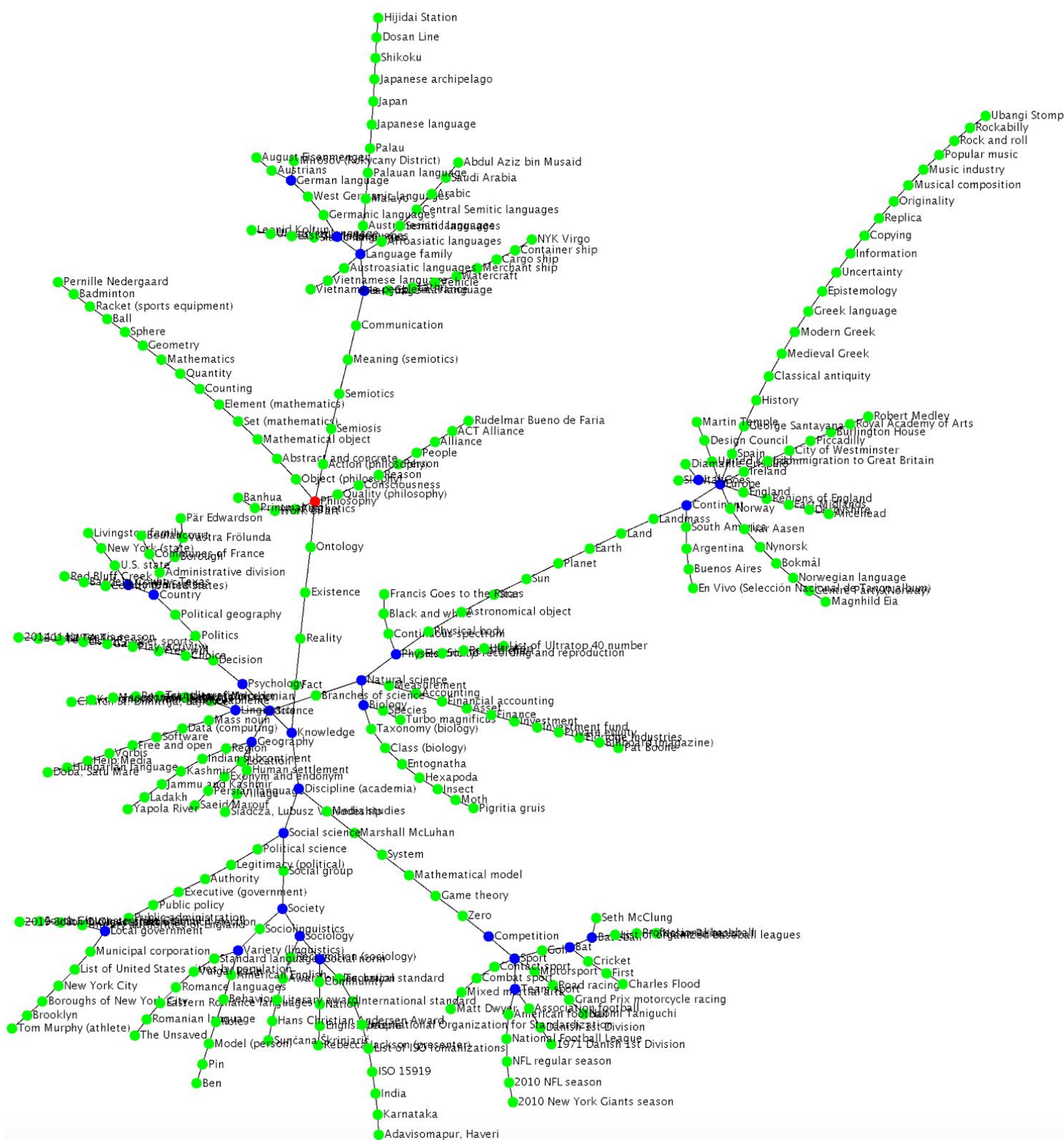
Graph 1



Graph 3

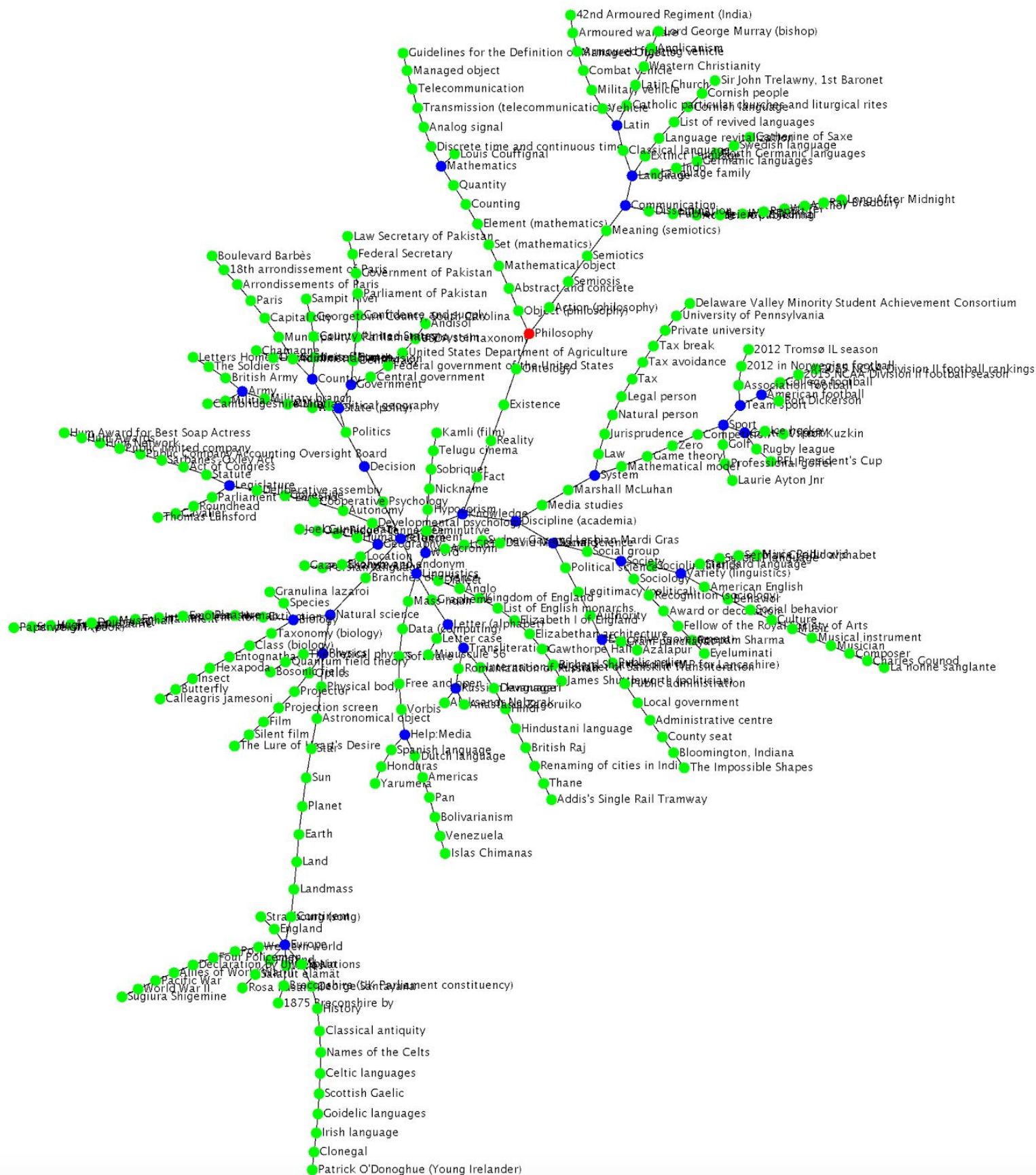


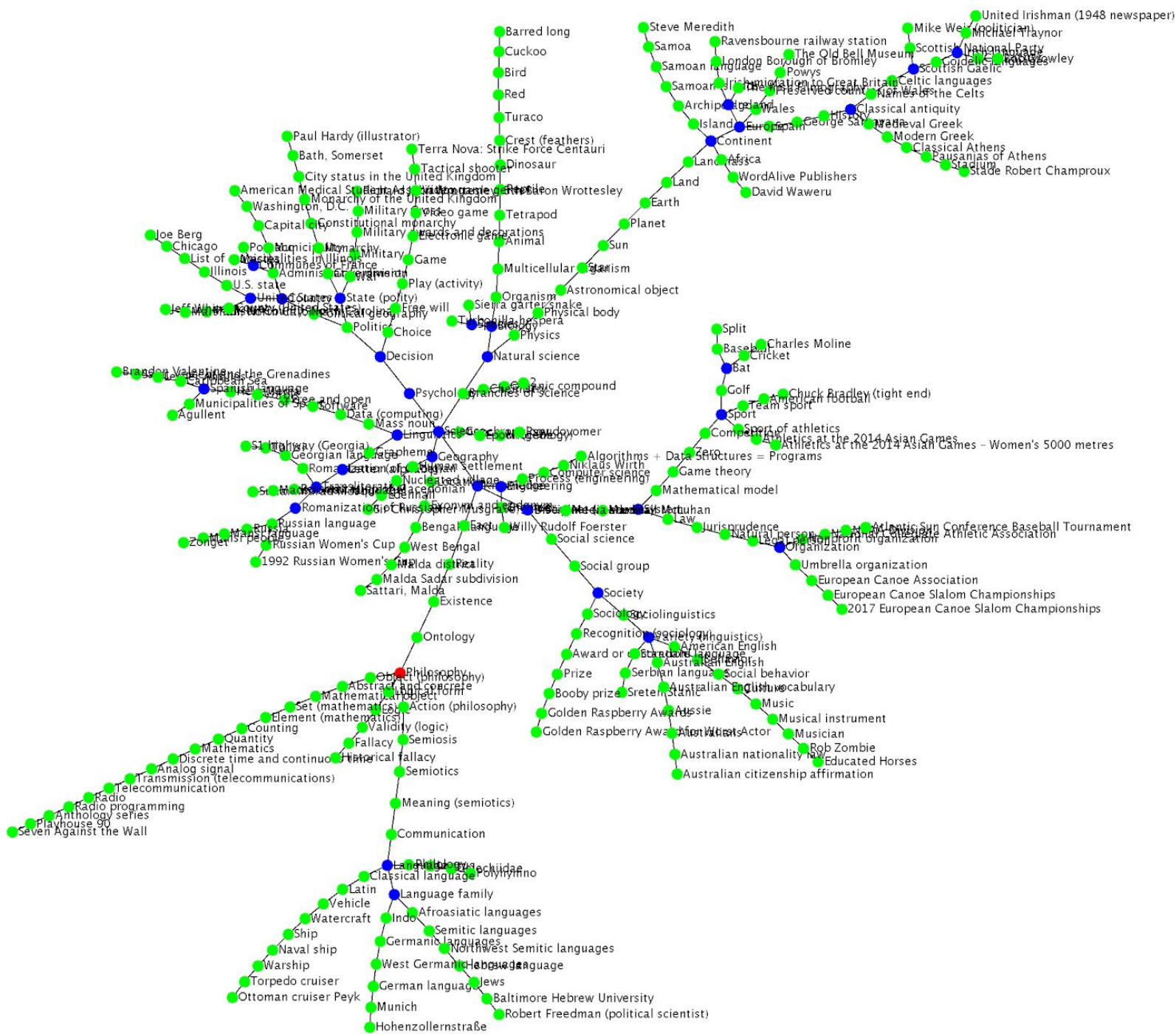
Graph 4











Graph 10