

What's so Special about Philosophy?

Unraveling Wikipedia's First Link Network

Abstract

Apples, oranges, and the most obscure Dylan song too—is everything a few clicks from Philosophy? Within Wikipedia, the surprising answer is yes: nearly all paths lead to Philosophy. Wikipedia is the largest, most meticulously indexed collection of human knowledge ever amassed. More than information about a topic though, Wikipedia is a marvelous web of naturally emerging relationships. By following the First Link in an article, we connect entries to form a directed network within Wikipedia: Wikipedia's First Link Network. Here we study the English edition of Wikipedia's First Link Network for insight into how we relate topics, ideas, people, objects, and events.

We algorithmically parse all 4.7 million articles to construct a map of Wikipedia's First Link Network. In a novel approach to uncover structure, we traverse every possible path through the network, measuring the accumulation of First Links, path lengths, basins, cycles, and even particular articles funneling links into the cycles. We discover many scale-free distributions, find Philosophy at a salient center, and uncover a flow from specific to general with basins around fundamental notions such as Community, State, and Science. Curiously, we also observe a gravitation towards topical articles including Health Care and Fossil Fuel. These findings enrich our view of how we connect and structure an ever growing load of information.