

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Challenges & Lessons

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The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy organizes scholars from around the world in philosophy and related disciplines to create and maintain an up-to-date reference work.

Principal Editor: Edward N. Zalta

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- **Abhidharma** (Noa Ronkin)
- **abilities** (John Maier)
- **Abner of Burgos** (Shalom Sadik)
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- **abstract objects** (Gideon Rosen)



What's New

Updates for the Last Three Months Listed in Reverse Chronological Order

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[Note: All dates are given in UTC]

- **The Free Rider Problem** (Russell Hardin and Garrett Cullity) [REVISED: *October 13, 2020*]
Changes to: Main text, Bibliography
- **Russell's Paradox** (Andrew David Irvine and Harry Deutsch) [REVISED: *October 12, 2020*]
Changes to: Main text, Bibliography
- **Ibn Sina's Natural Philosophy** (Jon McGinnis) [REVISED: *October 12, 2020*]
Changes to: Main text, Bibliography, notes.html
- **Aristotle's Psychology** (Christopher Shields) [REVISED: *October 12, 2020*]
Changes to: Bibliography, method.html
- **Decision Theory** (Katie Steele and H. Orri Stefánsson) [REVISED: *October 9, 2020*]

Search



1–10 of 325 documents found

Democracy

democratic authority. 1. **Democracy** Defined 2. The Justification of **Democracy** 2.1

Instrumentalism...Related Entries 1. **Democracy** Defined To fix ideas, the term “**democracy**,” as I will use it in this... with this definition of **democracy** that it is not desirable to have **democracy** in some particular context...

Tom Christiano

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/democracy/>

Global Democracy

research on global **democracy**. 1. **Democracy** and the Global System 1.1 **Democracy**,

Globalization, Globalization, Democracy 2.2 World Government 2.4 Deliberative Democracy

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Voting Methods

First published Wed Aug 3, 2011; substantive revision Mon Jun 24, 2019

A fundamental problem faced by any group of people is how to arrive at a good group decision when there is disagreement among its members. The difficulties are most evident when there is a large number of people with diverse opinions, such as, when electing leaders in a national election. But it is often not any easier with smaller groups, such as, when a committee must select a candidate to hire, or when a group of friends must decide where to go for dinner.

Mathematicians, philosophers, political scientists and economists have devised various voting methods that select a winner (or winners) from a set of alternatives taking into account everyone's opinion. It is not hard to find examples in which different voting methods select different winners given the same inputs from the members of the group. What criteria should be used to compare and contrast different voting methods? Not only is this an interesting and difficult theoretical question, but it also has important practical ramifications. Given the tumultuous 2016 election cycle, many people (both researchers and politicians) have suggested that the US should use a

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP)

- Currently
 - Over 2300 people (including >160 subject editors)
 - Over 1700 entries (> 25 million words)
- Started online in September 1995
 - A few people
 - 2 entries (about 5,000 words in total)
- Worldwide **collaborative project** based at Stanford

- **Purpose & Mission**
- Community
- Publishing Model
- Funding Model
- Challenges & Lessons
- Conclusions

Purpose of the SEP

- To **organize a community** of professional scholars in philosophy and related disciplines around the world to create and maintain an up-to-date, open access reference work for themselves, colleagues, students, and the general public.

(This is the main point!)

Mission of each entry

- To introduce **advanced undergraduates** (or grad students and colleagues), who may have no special knowledge of the topic, to the main issues and most important pieces of primary and secondary literature on the topic, so as to bring them to a state where they can read that literature with insight and understanding.

(Tertiary literature)

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International Community

- SEP authors and editors are based in:
 - Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, Belgium, Brazil, China, Columbia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Poland, Singapore, Spain, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK, US, etc.
- Individual entries have been translated into:
 - Chinese, Farsi, French, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, etc...
- Mirror sites in Australia and the Netherlands

Community Roles (Stanford)

- **Advisory Board: Stanford Philosophy Department**
 - Approves appointments to the Editorial Board
 - Includes a Faculty Sponsor
- **2 Administrative Editors**
 - Principal Editor & Senior Editor
 - Duties: final editorial decisions, scholarly communications, planning, budgeting, managing part-time staff, technical infrastructure implementation, maintenance, and research
- **5 Assistant Editors (part-time)**

Community Roles (Volunteer)

- 1 Associate Editor
- 160+ Subject Editors on Editorial Board
 - Organized by subspecialty
 - Suggest topics, review entries
- 2200+ Authors (ongoing relationship)
- Occasional External Referees
- Readers: an extra layer of quality control!

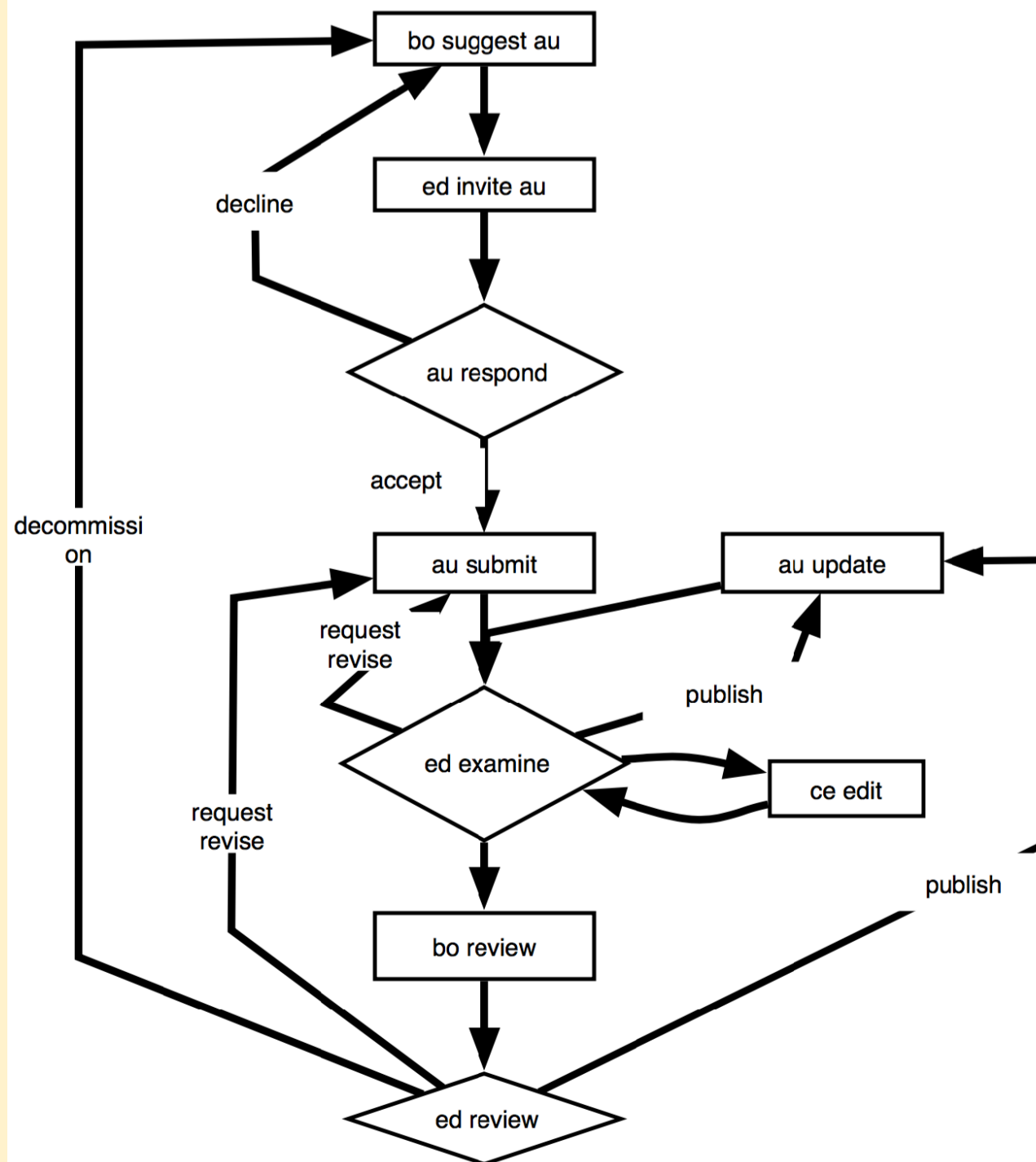
- Purpose & Mission
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Publishing Model: Entry Workflow

- Each entry cycles through a sequence of states
 - For each state someone owes work
 - There is a deadline
- Subject editors suggest/approve author to invite
- Author submits draft
- Entry goes through multiple rounds of vetting
- **If accepted**, entry is queued for production, converted to HTML, and PDF page proofs are generated

Publishing Model: Entry Workflow

- Author proofreads and submits final corrections
- Editors publish & set ~4-year deadline for author to update
 - May be longer for less actively researched or slower moving topics
 - May be shorter with agreement for further changes by author
- Proviso: authors should also update in a timely way when significant new work is published or valid criticism is raised
- All updates are vetted
- If author says no update needed, existing entry is re-vetted



Entry Workflow Key

- bo: Board
- ed: Admin Editors
- au: Author
- ce: Copyeditor

Publishing Model: Quarterly Archives

- SEP is a serial publication with an ISSN number
- Snapshot of current entries is saved and archived 4 times/yr
- Archive Editions are available in perpetuity from our site
- Quarterly Archive Editions go back to Fall 1997

- Reason: provide *stable, permanent* citation paths

- Purpose & Mission
- Community
- Publishing Model
- **Funding Model**
- Challenges & Lessons
- Conclusions

Funding Model

- Open access: no income from sale of content
- Previously:
 - No funding for first 3 years
 - Funded by NEH & NSF grants for 7+ years
 - Private grants to aid fundraising + NEH Challenge Grant
- Now funded by:
 - Stanford University General Fund
 - 3 Endowment funds: SEPIA Fund, Large Private Donation Fund, Small Private Donation Fund
 - Friends of the SEP Society income + other misc income

Funding Model

- SEPIA: Academic Libraries and Consortia (ICOLC, SPARC, JISC, etc.) pay one-time membership dues
 - Contractual promise: if SEP is terminated money in fund is returned
 - Other perks: branding, acknowledgment, one-click download of archives
- Friends of the SEP Society
 - Access to nicely formatted PDF-versions of entries
 - Nominal annual membership dues (\$5/year student; \$10/year associate; \$25/year professional)
 - Income is about 10% - 15% of our budget

- Purpose & Mission
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Core Challenge: Sustainability

- *Sustainability*: “the ability to generate or gain access to the resources – financial or otherwise – needed to protect and increase the value of the content or service for those who use it.” (Maron, Smith, & Loy, 2009, *Sustaining Digital Resources*)
- SEP project is an ongoing community organizing effort
 - Sustainability means working to protect/increase value of SEP
 - Not a sprint, not even a marathon

Key Lessons

- Focus on the community, our purpose & mission
 - Quality over quantity!
- Organic and opportunistic growth and development
- Keep limited resources in mind
- When we hit constraints, keep going but slow down
- Work within our resources to extend our resources

- Look at three areas: Administrative, Editorial, Technological

Sustainability: Administrative

- Automate everything we can
 - Automatic reminder messages based on entry status
 - Generating PDF versions for Friends of the SEP Society (+ used for proofs)
 - Creation of quarterly Archive Editions
- Tighten standards slowly and organically
 - New entries must meet new standards
 - Older entries are brought up to current standards as they are revised

Sustainability: Administrative (continued)

- Quarterly archiving process:
 - Not every version of every entry is saved – manageable history of versions
 - Allows authors to make final checks/edits on just-published entries before citable version becomes permanent
- Aim for fewer, longer entries (average 11,500+ words)
 - Cover some concepts as subtopics within larger entry
 - Less overhead: easier to organize, maintain, and administrate
 - Benefit: authors get more academic credit for writing more substantial pieces

Sustainability: Editorial

- **We have criteria for commissioning an entry:**
 - Active, coherent body of primary/secondary literature
 - Is the topic too broad (e.g., “philosophy”)
 - Is the topic too narrow: should it be a new subtopic of an existing entry?
 - Is it already sufficiently covered in other entries?
- **We allow the SEP to grow organically: gaps in coverage are**
 - Identified by members of the profession (esp. but not only SEP editors)
 - Prioritized by the editors
 - Filled to the extent admitted by our resources (sometimes opportunistically)
 - As we are successful, our resources grow to include more editors and authors

Sustainability: Editorial (continued)

- When no longer being updated by current author(s):
 - Author(s) or editors may find new co-author(s) to join
 - Editors may find new author to write replacement entry
 - Entry may be “retired” to the archives
- Allow entries to change organically; they can be:
 - Subsumed by another entry – e.g., “Brains in a Vat” → “Skepticism and External Content”
 - Splits into 2+ entries – e.g., “Heredity and Heritability” → “Heritability” and “Inheritance Systems”
 - Re-titled and/or re-scoped – e.g., “Evolution” → “Evolution to 1872” → ...

Sustainability: Technological

- Keep technology as simple as possible
- Say no unless there's a good reason to pursue it
 - Don't chase new features (e.g., comments on entry pages)
 - Don't chase new sub-projects (e.g., blog, apps)
- Technology has to serve the project
 - Don't let it distract from focus on community & purpose

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Consequences of our model

- **Academic credit and control for authors**
 - Although entries are neutral, authorial style and insight is preserved, professional expertise is demonstrated
 - Can help authors to advance their careers
 - We have an “Academic Credit Letter” our authors can download
- **Our contributors are stakeholders in the success of the SEP**
 - Authors may lend expertise as occasional referees or become editors
 - Authors become known more widely as experts on their topics
 - Editors sometimes write entries
 - Many spoke with institutional librarians in support of our funding model

In conclusion...

- No master design with everything planned in advance
 - Coverage always has gaps and skew; reflects what we have managed so far
- Balance planning, responsiveness, and resources
- We organize scholars who are willing and able to join the project to build and maintain a reference that serves the needs and reflects the interests of the community
- Limited resources lead us to focus on
 - **Quality** / maintaining the highest academic standards
 - **Needs of active researchers**

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