

Cultural Evolution in Wikipedia: A Case Study in the Evolution of Social Epistemology

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In the presentation, some features of the development of social epistemology in the context of modern Western encyclopedia tradition will be examined, focusing on Wikipedia as an important part of the epistemological infrastructure of our society. Nearly as long as modern science itself has been one of the fundamental traditions shaping our society, being one of its main epistemological means, encyclopedias of our modern Western tradition have been a relevant part of the ecosystem of science, providing epistemological tools for the society at large, filtering scientific knowledge into formats more accessible for the general population. With the rise of technologies for decentralized real-time communication brought along by the Internet, traditional encyclopedia model has gone through a rebirth into new, more dynamic and competitive model of online encyclopedias created and developed by grassroots initiative, as epitomized by Wikipedia.

Along with the case study, covering some of the encyclopedia articles concerning cultural evolution, certain mechanisms will be explained that induce and facilitate the competition, merging, and diversification of different perspectives, cultural traditions, and paradigms on Wikipedia, creating a rich system of knowledge ecology. Through its powerful dynamism, this knowledge ecology has brought to the foreground the processes of evolutionary development of human knowledge that, for most cases at least, were already present in the traditional encyclopedia model yet were less noticeable due to their slower rate and the according lower competitive pressure.

Finally, some trends will be discussed that have revealed itself during the development of Wikipedia in last decades and might allow us some insight in the potential futures of our social epistemology. The factors influencing those include different epistemological approaches both within and contrasting to Western scientific tradition (cf. different interpretations of *indigenous knowledge*), as well as current social developments (partly summarized by keywords like *post-truth* and *postcolonialism*), predictable technological advances (from augmented reality to censorship machines), and the inner trends of the global Wikimedia community.