

Fibs in the Wikipedia

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These are details of research conducted in November and December 2007. They are meant as a supplement to formal publication. I have not attempted here to provide any analysis of the results.

Methodology

- Changes were made to Wikipedia anonymously, three at a time, from various IP addresses.
- Each change consisted of a one or two sentence fib inserted into Wikipedia entry on a notable, deceased philosopher. The fibs were about biographical or factual matters, rather than philosophical content or interpretive questions.
- Fibs did not include any hyperlinks.
- Although some of the fibs mention ‘sources’, no citations were provided.
- Changes were given default edit summaries.
- Changes were only made on entries that were reasonably well-tended. Changes were not made on pages that were already marked as not meeting quality standards.
- Since changes were anonymous, no fibs were inserted in articles with ‘semi-protected’ status.

Raw data

- For each fib, REVERTED indicates that it was removed or undone within 48 hours. The number is the time before the fib was removed (in hours and minutes).
- FLAGGED indicates that the fib was marked as ‘citation needed’ within 48 hours. The number is the time before the fib was removed (in hours and minutes).

- NOT FIXED indicates that the fib remained part of the entry for a full 48 hours.
 - The URL provided for each fib is the entry as it appeared immediately after the fib was inserted.
 - Entries marked with a star (★) were Featured Wikipedia articles at the time of the change.
1. **Bertrand Russell:** In the same year, Russell published a volume of poetry under the pseudonym Christian Bellows. The poems primarily addressed humanistic concerns that he later revisited in works such as “Why I am not a Christian.”
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bertrand_Russell&oldid=170007083
 2. **René Descartes:** While there, Descartes first encountered hermetic mysticism. Although he was briefly a Free Mason, he later abandoned mysticism in favor of reasoned inquiry.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ren%C3%A9_Descartes&oldid=170007590
 3. **Corpus Aristotelicum:** There are no surviving editions of Aristotles’ *Theophrastian ethics*, which considered issues in the ethics of animal care. Records indicate that a copy existed as late as the tenth century, in the city of Cordoba.
FLAGGED: 01:30
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Corpus_Aristotelicum&oldid=170010444
 4. **Ludwig Wittgenstein ★:** He was twice forced to pay fines for misuse of strychnine, which he used to control squirrels around the garden.
REVERTED: 02:36
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ludwig_Wittgenstein&oldid=170386199
 5. **David Hume:** Hume had begun wrestling with local sportsmen in Bristol, and continued the activity in France until a shoulder injury forced him to stop.
NOT FIXED
51:58 after the fib was inserted, an anonymous vandal changed a few sentences into sexually explicit nonsense. This was undone immediately, and the user who undid it flagged the fib ‘citation needed’ two minutes later.
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Hume&oldid=170386859
 6. **Baruch Spinoza:** He supplemented his income by selling stolen jewelry that had been smuggled into Holland from France.
FLAGGED: 08:32
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Baruch_Spinoza&oldid=170387404
 7. **Friedrich Nietzsche:** In a letter to Victoria Regina, Nietzsche even entertained the possibility of burning the remaining copies to collect on insurance.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Friedrich_Nietzsche&oldid=170408036

8. **Gilbert Ryle:** After retiring, Ryle bought a small farm. He tinkered with automated processes to care for livestock, although they never proved to be commercially viable.

NOT FIXED

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Gilbert_Ryle&oldid=170408734

9. **Michel Foucault*:** Foucault participated in art therapy, producing paintings of subjects such as his mother and the Eiffel Tower. Several of these paintings were discovered after his death and sold at auction in 1992.

REVERTED: 00:03

The user who undid the change sent a scripted 'User talk' message to the IP address used, warning against "adding content without citing a reliable source."

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Michel_Foucault&oldid=170409053

10. **John Stuart Mill:** Following the death of his wife, Mill had a series of mistresses who helped him prepare manuscripts as well as sharing his bed.

REVERTED: 00:09

The user who undid this change undid the following two as well, starting with the Kierkegaard entry. The undoings were accompanied by an escalating series of 'User talk' messages to the IP used.

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Stuart_Mill&oldid=170587587

In order to probe diligence of the user, I waited about an hour and a half and then inserted a different fib into the Mill entry:

While staying with the Benthams, Mill had an affair with a chambermaid.

REVERTED: 02:03

This was undone by the same user, who sent a 'final warning' to the talk page for the IP address used.

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Stuart_Mill&oldid=170605015

11. **Soren Kierkegaard*:** As a young boy Kierkegaard was mauled by a wild dog. Although he recovered, some have suggested that the episode prefigures later themes of anxiety and dread.

REVERTED: 00:02

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=S%C3%B8ren_Kierkegaard&oldid=170588369

12. **Heraclitus:** According to some ancient sources, Heraclitus was mildly hydrophobic and refused to travel by boat. This is connected with the probably apocryphal story that he died by drowning.

REVERTED: 00:05

<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Heraclitus&oldid=170588839>

13. **Karl Popper:** While there, he lived on a cooperative farm. He later claimed that nothing prepares the mind for philosophy like milking a cow.

NOT FIXED

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Karl_Popper&oldid=170663476

14. **Immanuel Kant:** Kant's poetry was much admired, and handwritten manuscripts circulated among his friends and associates.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Immanuel_Kant&oldid=170664219
15. **Nicolas Malebranche:** Malenbranche's tutor, Pierre Gassendi, was himself a notable philosopher, but there is no indication that philosophy was part of the curriculum.
FLAGGED: 45:27
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Nicolas_Malebranche&oldid=170664758
16. **Jeremy Bentham:** As a child, he wrote a series of imaginative dialogues between an unnamed boy and wisdom incarnate in the form of a tiger. These were never published, but reflected the author's early interest in writing and philosophy.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Jeremy_Bentham&oldid=170676418
17. **George Berkeley:** The *Principles* consisted of three parts, elaborating consequences for metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics respectively. Of these, only the first was ever published, and Berkeley's drafts of the second and third parts have not survived.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=George_Berkeley&oldid=170676604
18. **Thomas Reid:** Reid and Hume met once when both were in London, and the former indicated a fireplace poker as an example of a material object which certainly exists.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Thomas_Reid&oldid=170676815
19. **Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel:** Hegel found the work isolating and drank heavily when not working. While drunk, Hegel ran naked through the foyer of the house while chanting the Lord's Prayer in Latin.
REVERTED: 07:45
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Georg_Wilhelm_Friedrich_Hegel&oldid=170982634
20. **Martin Heidegger:** Some of the faculty at Freiburg called him 'Edmund II', a monicker that Heidegger found demeaning.
REVERTED: 05:30
In the edit summary, the user removing the fib called it "undue weight to trivial assertion."
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Martin_Heidegger&oldid=170982778
21. **Rudolf Carnap:** The Vienna Circle was also a tightly-knit social group. They regularly met to play cards, including a bridge-like game of their own devising called *Whistenschaft*.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Rudolf_Carnap&oldid=170984696

- 22. G.E. Moore:** His influence outside philosophy includes a reference to him in the signature line of the musical *Oliver*.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=George_Edward_Moore&oldid=173305598
- 23. Gottfried Leibniz:** Many of his manuscripts are written in a shorthand of his own invention which uses binary numbers to encode sequences of characters.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Gottfried_Leibniz&oldid=173305867
- 24. Alan Turing:** Turing suffered from gout, and would often prop his gammy leg on the workbench while assembling circuits.
REVERTED: 01:24
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Alan_Turing&oldid=173306117
- 25. George Santayana:** He was an avid cyclist and, in 1923, he went on a cycling tour of Italy with the novelist Taylor Caldwell.
REVERTED: 05:02
The user who undid this change undid the following two as well, starting with this one. No justification was given for the undoing, either in the edit summary or in the ‘User talk’ page.
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=George_Santayana&oldid=173686386
- 26. Norman Malcolm:** He built a greenhouse at his home in Ithaca. He raised orchids, producing several new hybrids including one that bears his name.
REVERTED: 05:05
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Norman_Malcolm&oldid=173687199
- 27. Thomas Hill Green:** Green’s correspondence, published in 1912, also gives insight into his philosophy. In a letter to Victoria Regina, he suggests that moral perfectibility will allow humans to transcend their limitations within the next century.
REVERTED: 05:01
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Thomas_Hill_Green&oldid=173687770
- 28. Salomon Maimon:** In 1799, Maimon was challenged to a duel over an unsettled financial matter. Maimon defended his honor but was shot in the duel and succumbed to his injury early the next year.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Salomon_Maimon&oldid=173759584
- 29. J.M.E. McTaggart:** Among McTaggart’s many interests was antique collecting. His collection boasted the sword that removed Tycho Brahe’s nose.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=J._M._E._McTaggart&oldid=173759899

- 30. F.H. Bradley:** In 1900, Bradley was nearly blinded in a sporting accident. He continued to be philosophically active, but his subsequent works were dictated to an assistant.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=F._H._Bradley&oldid=173760233
- 31. A.N. Prior:** While at Oxford, Prior wrote a draft of a book on the formal structure of interpersonal awareness. Although he showed parts of the draft to various colleagues, it appears to have been lost.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Arthur_Prior&oldid=175528965
- 32. Norwood Russell Hanson:** Hanson was skilled at sleight-of-hand, and would often entertain dinner party guests with card tricks and other feats of legerdemain.
NOT FIXED
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Norwood_Russell_Hanson&oldid=175529530
- 33. Boethius:** It is known that he lost two fingers on his left hand in a childhood accident, although there is no record of how exactly it occurred.
REVERTED: 21:09
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Anicius_Manlius_Severinus_Boethius&oldid=175529922
- 34. Carl Gustav Hempel:** Hempel was reknowned for whittling at departmental colloquia. If he liked the talk, he would give the resulting figure to the guest speaker.
REVERTED: 00:44
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Carl_Gustav_Hempel&oldid=175599204
The user who fixed this (Mlouns) also fixed the following two, in the order they were entered. Mlouns' User page indicates that he has contributed to Wikipedia since 2005, and that he "mostly just do[es] vandal patrol and minor edits."
- 35. Michel de Montaigne:** Montaigne had been an avid duellist at Guyenne. During this period of isolation, he carried a rapier with him and would challenge anyone who disrupted his work.
REVERTED: 00:43
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Michel_de_Montaigne&oldid=175599463
- 36. Thomas Aquinas:** In order to highlight the contrast between Christian living and pre-Christian Greek thought, Aquinas encouraged the eating of beans.
REVERTED: 00:43
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Thomas_Aquinas&oldid=175599700