



Best of the Web: Internet Resources for Philosophy and TRS

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Start page: 11

End page: 17

[Return to vol. 6 no. 2 index page](#)

The web offers a wealth of material to both educational professionals and their students. However, tutors and lecturers often have legitimate concerns about allowing or encouraging their students to use websites as sources for essays and assignments. One of the web's greatest strengths - the sheer quantity of information freely available to anyone with access to a computer with an Internet connection - can also prove a substantial drawback: without the quality controls that apply to printed books and journal articles, there is a significant risk that students will fail to discriminate between good material and bad, and that more of the dross than the quality will find its way into their work. Nevertheless, the Internet has too much to offer to be ignored, or sidelined, as a tool for learning and research, and in practice, students will frequently consult the web anyway, regardless of what their tutors say: as a rapid way of gaining information on a topic (without the need for a trek to the library), it is too attractive to be resisted. The emphasis therefore needs to be on shepherding students towards trustworthy material of a sufficient quality.

One possible solution is for teachers to include carefully chosen online resources on reading lists alongside traditional printed material, or to circulate separate lists of approved websites. While effective, producing such lists can be time

consuming. Another option is steering students towards a reputable subject gateway. Gateways are guides to online resources, sometimes annotated with notes or comments, and usually compiled by those with an interest in a particular field - either professionals or enthusiastic amateurs. They vary widely in scope and quality, but the best provide a straightforward route to a range of preappraised web resources. When choosing a gateway, the most important considerations are how selective the site is (look for a statement of criteria websites must meet to be listed, or a rating system), the credentials of the compiler or compilers, and how regularly the site is updated - in addition to missing new resources, gateways which are not well maintained often include a significant proportion of broken links.

For philosophers, one of the best known and respected gateways is the EpistemeLinks site, <http://www.epistemelinks.com/>, which features over 19,000 categorised links. Two key sites for theology and religious studies are the Virtual Religion Index, <http://virtualreligion.net/vri/>, and the Wabash Center Internet Guide to Religion, http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/guide_headings.aspx.

In addition to providing a way of guiding students to suitable sites, these gateways list a range of resources useful to those involved in teaching. Those seeking inspiration when planning courses may appreciate the considerable number of links to syllabuses which both Episteme and the Wabash Center Guide include. On a similar note, the Teaching and Learning Resources section of the American Academy of Religion's website, <http://www.aarweb.org/teaching/>, includes the AAR's syllabus project, a collection of course outlines contributed by academics. The American Philosophical Association Committee on the Teaching of Philosophy's Online Resource Center, <http://www.apa.udel.edu/apa/governance/committees/teaching/orc/>, also includes a small collection of syllabuses. (See also <http://www.apa.udel.edu/apa/governance/committees/diversitysyllabiproject/>.)

The Wabash Center also offers a separate Teaching and Learning Resources gateway, http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resource_s/teach_web.aspx. Most of the material listed here is non-subject specific, so will be of use to teachers of philosophy and theology alike.

More selective still is Intute: Arts and Humanities, <http://www.intute.ac.uk/artsandhumanities/>. Funded by the JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/>, and the AHRC, <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/>, Intute employs a network of subject specialists to locate and describe online resources suitable for use in higher and further education. Instead of the brief annotations that gateways typically provide, each Intute record offers a full review (typically one to two hundred words long) of the website, plus further information including the resource creator, the type of resource, and the audience at which it is aimed. This both facilitates effective searching and enables users to see if a particular site will meet their purposes. One of four subject groups that make up the Intute service, the Arts and Humanities division offers a database of over 18,000 records, with substantial sections devoted to religion and theology, philosophy, and history and philosophy of science.

Additional features offered by Intute include Limelight articles, <http://www.intute.ac.uk/artsandhumanities/limelight/>, which bring together information about a selection of online resources related to a particular topic. A number of recent titles relate to religious studies and philosophy, including 'Sixty years of the Dead Sea Scrolls', and 'Dawn of the Dead', about the philosophical concept of zombies. The MyIntute service, <http://www.intute.ac.uk/myintute/index.php>, allows you to save searches and receive email notification when new resources are added in a particular area, and provides an easy way of creating and exporting lists of links to your own website.

Even when sites are chosen via a gateway or database, discrimination is still necessary: not all sites will be suitable for all purposes (for example, a site giving an insider's perspective of a particular religious tradition may not be an ideal source for an objective overview of the faith). To help students develop the necessary critical skills, Intute offers a range of other resources to help maximise good use of the web, such as Internet Detective, <http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/detective/>, an interactive tutorial designed to encourage careful evaluation of online resources. Aimed at FE students and undergraduates, the tutorial also includes a section on plagiarism - what it is

and how to avoid it.

Internet Detective is part of the Intute Virtual Training Suite, <http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/>, a collection of over sixty free online tutorials intended to help students (and others) improve their web research skills. The bulk of the suite is made up of tutorials covering Internet resources for specific disciplines, including Religious Studies, <http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/he/tutorial/religion>, Philosophy, <http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/he/tutorial/philosophy>, and History and Philosophy of Science, <http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/tutorial/hps>. Each provides a tour of key online resources in that field, plus advice on finding and evaluating further websites. The Religious Studies and Philosophy tutorials also include a section for teachers, suggesting how the tutorials might be used in a classroom setting.

Intute also offers a subject booklet entitled *Internet Resources for Religion and Theology*. A PDF of this can be downloaded from the support section of the Intute: Arts and Humanities website, <http://www.intute.ac.uk/artsandhumanities/support.html>; details are also given there of how to request the printed version. While stocks last, you can ask for multiple copies for your students or for your library.

One of the most valuable things the Internet has to offer is an increasing number of electronic texts. Many key philosophical and theological works are long out of copyright, and hence can be made available free of charge. Digital libraries of interest to the theologian include the Internet Sacred Text Archive, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/>, and the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/>. Philosophers will find a number of useful texts at Columbia University's Institute for Learning Technologies Digital Text Projects page, <http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/publications/digitext.html>, which also provides a useful list of links to other collections of texts online. Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/>, the oldest producer of free ebooks on the web, is also well worth a look (although as the site is targeted at the general reader rather than the scholar many texts lack full bibliographical information about their source).

No guide to online resources for theology and philosophy would be complete without a mention of the ATLA Religion Database, http://www.atla.com/products/catalogs/catalogs_rdb.html, and the Philosopher's Index, <http://www.philinfo.org/>. Between them, these two catalogues index the contents of over a thousand scholarly journals, plus essays from multi-author anthologies. Both can be searched by author, title, and descriptor (keyword). These resources require an institutional subscription, but are an invaluable tool for researchers, university and college level teachers, and students alike. The interfaces used to access the databases vary from institution to institution, meaning it is impossible to give specific URLs via which the content is available, but librarians or ICT specialists will be able to provide further details of how to use the catalogues. Sales information can be obtained from ATLA and the Philosopher's Information Center.

Many of the journals indexed in these databases also now have an online presence. These frequently require subscription (though the Directory of Open Access Journals, <http://www.doaj.org/>, lists a good number which are freely accessible), but tables of contents, abstracts, and perhaps a sample issue will often be available to non-subscribers. Institutions may make use of an electronic journals management system such as TDNet, <http://www.tdnet.com/> - consult a librarian for more details. Some online collections of journals such as JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/>, or Taylor and Francis Journals, <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/>, are accessible to members of subscribing institutions via an Athens username and password; again, ask a librarian or ICT specialist how to obtain one. The Athens home page, <http://www.athensams.net/>, provides a full list of all resources controlled by the Athens Access Management System. This includes much besides journals: for example, some book publishers are starting to release new (and sometimes older) works in electronic format as well as in print. Oxford Scholarship Online, <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/>, is Oxford University Press's offering: a collection of over twelve hundred full length books, which includes over three hundred religion titles, and over four hundred and fifty in philosophy.

Some scholars have taken advantage of the Internet to make substantial selections of their own works available. Two examples include the home page of philosopher of mind David Chalmers, <http://consc.net/chalmers/>, (which also

includes an extensive annotated bibliography), and in the field of philosophical theology, the Virtual Office of William Lane Craig, <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/>.

A number of valuable reference works are available online. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://plato.stanford.edu/>, and the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online, <http://www.rep.routledge.com/>, are two excellent philosophy resources. The latter is more comprehensive than the former, but does require subscription, while the Stanford Encyclopedia is freely available. For theologians, the online edition of the 1913 Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>, is an enduring classic, whereas those with more esoteric interests may wish to consult the Encyclopedia Mythica, <http://www.pantheon.org/>. For statistical information about religions, <http://www.adherents.com/> is the place to go.

Finally, the academic blogosphere has much to offer both career academics and their students. First, it provides an easily-digestible way of reading and interacting with the work of contemporary thinkers - accessible for students, and a boon for the time-pressured academic wishing to keep abreast of current debate. Secondly, blogs boast a considerable advantage over traditional print mediaspeed of reaction. In the past, the publication of scholarly analyses of issues related to a particular news event - be it the ethics of adoption by gay couples or the claim to have discovered the tomb of Jesus near Jerusalem - might have taken months, by which time the subject would be old news. Today, any academic with a blog can share his or her thoughts with the world within hours.

Two of the longest-running and most venerable theological blogs are Mark Goodacre's NT Gateway Weblog, <http://www.ntgateway.com/weblog/>, which deals, like the gateway it is attached to, with material relevant to New Testament studies, and PaleoJudaica, <http://paleojudaica.blogspot.com/>, the work of James Davila, which focuses on ancient Judaism and its historical and literary context.

Philosophical gems include Garden of Forking Paths, <http://gfp.typepad.com/>, which covers agency theory, including freedom of the will and related topics, and Certain Doubts, http://fleet.wood.baylor.edu/certain_doubts/, devoted to matters epistemic. Both of these are group blogs, with a number of eminent philosophers among their contributors. For an extensive list of weblogs in these and other subject areas, see the Academic Blogs Wiki, <http://www.academicroblogs.org/>.

Online services are also using blogs to communicate with their users: for example, Intute: Arts and Humanities has a blog, <http://www.intute.ac.uk/artsandhumanities/blog/>, which is regularly updated with relevant news items.

The above is, of course, only a tiny sample of what's available on the web. For further information on online resources, and for detailed reviews of most of the sites mentioned in this article, see Intute: Arts and Humanities: <http://www.intute.ac.uk/artsandhumanities/>.

[Return to vol. 6 no. 2 index page](#)

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