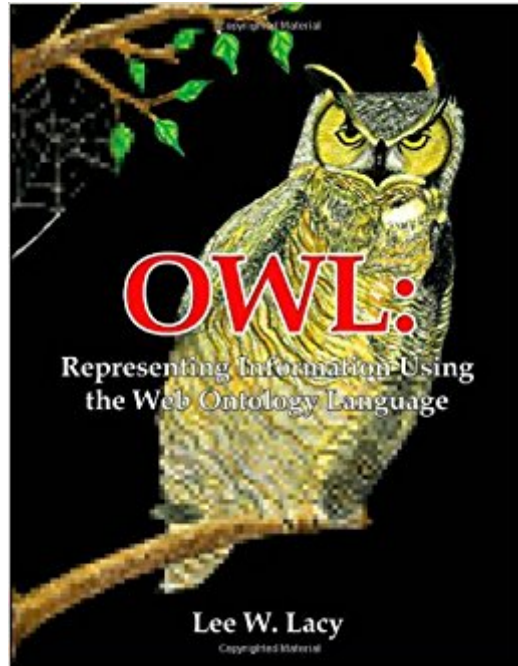


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Owl: Representing Information Using The Web Ontology Language



Synopsis

Book by Lacy, Lee W.

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Customer Reviews

You would learn more from the Protege OWL pizza tutorials. The book has no discussion on inferencing or how to actually make an ontology with OWL. The one example is simply a representation of the hours that a business is open. It could be expressed in plain RDF(S) and does not provide any indication of the power of OWL. For example, it directly specifies the hours for each day. A better example could define hours in terms of the type of day (weekday, weekend, holiday, Thanksgiving) and then infer the hours for each day. The book uses unusual terminology holonymy, hyponymy, etc. (generalization and composition, respectively). OWL forms only half the book with the remainder covering URLs, XML, RDF, RDFS. Removing that material would have allowed OWL to be covered in appropriate detail. Only the XML/RDF serialization is described, which is only used for exchange between tools. There is no discussion of the abstract syntax, N3, Turtle, etc that all provide a more human readable serialization.

On a positive note, this book provided something I needed: a shallow overview of the various technologies comprising the semantic web, from which I can direct my own further in-depth study. After reading this book I will be less clueless in a water cooler conversation about OWL or RDF. For this reason I give it 3 stars and don't wish to trash it entirely. However, from an instructional

standpoint it largely fails to deliver. I had to skip over a great deal of unnecessarily pedantic "faux formal" prose which was useful mostly as sleeping aid. It is neither reference nor tutorial, and I will need further study before making even the simplest use of the technologies discussed. The examples are few, fragmented, and too simplistic to be of much help. The publisher's note on the inside cover says "This book was published on demand in cooperation with Trafford Publishing." I'm not sure what _on demand_ publishing is all about, but it seems that the book was written and typeset in a word processor's outline mode. I like the idea of grassroots publishing, and I assume that this was a cost effective way for the author to quickly deliver material that is very much needed in the market. However, if you're used to finely crafted and entertaining O'Reilly books, then this one is a bit of a shock. I think the attention of a professional publisher would have produced a book that was easier and more entertaining to read, with a bit of narrative, and a great deal more substantial examples. Pretty text and effective illustrations wouldn't be such a bad thing either, although I mean no insult to whichever of the author's children drew the owl. On the whole, this is not a book that entices me to curl up in front of the fire after a long day to broaden my technical horizons.

OWL is a complicated language, no doubt about it. It uses layers upon layers upon layers to provide a way to describe "things" with all of the complexity that they have in "real life". Explaining a system this complicated can be difficult. I know; I do it for a living, myself. But Lee Lacy has managed to break OWL down into small enough pieces that you can begin to see how everything fits together. Kudos for a job well done!

Ontology -- roughly the "science of stuff" and how it is represented -- used to be a rather obscure branch of philosophy. It still is in some cases, but it is also an important and growing area of computer science and the web. Ontology in computer terms is concerned with meaning and the relationships between entities. In this sense the yellow pages in a phone book is an instantiation of an ontology. This is especially important in regards to the Web because it offers the hope of organizing the Web by meanings, not just by matching strings of characters. One of the main tools for this is OWL, an ontology computer language. This book introduces the subject of ontology, OWL, and shows how it can revolutionize the way we use computers.

This book provides an excellent overview on the technologies for building the semantic web. First, the author presents a brief history of the web and explains the concept of the "semantic web." In order to have computers understand web contents and do the corresponding processing of the

understood information, such contents cannot be within HTML or XML tags that are only human-understandable. Machines should be able to understand the meanings of those tags through referring to the ontologies behind. Such ontologies are machine-understandable definitions of the concepts and how those concepts are related in the relevant field(s). Then the author begins the technical explanation on the technologies used for building the semantic web. He starts from URIs and namespaces, then goes up to XML and XMLS Datatypes, RDF and RDF/XML, RDFS and Individuals, OWL, and lastly, applications that can be built to make use of all the layers underneath. When he finishes explaining one layer, he also includes the reasons for the inadequacy of that layer for the semantic web, so as to provide a link to the explanation on the next higher layer. As for learning the different dialects of OWL, this book is the most detailed with OWL Lite. OWL Lite provides the foundation of OWL DL and OWL Full. The chapters for teaching the OWL language serve as a good introduction before one reads the official OWL manual and OWL language guide. The writing style of the author is clear and diagrams are provided to give overviews of the different groups of concepts introduced. The complete example about restaurant operating hours at the end is good for enhancing understanding. There are a few typos within some tags in the examples, such as the one on page 167 and there is another one on page 170.

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