

LogiLogi: Combining Openness and Quality of Content

Wybo Wiersma

University of Groningen
wybo@logilogi.org

Miguel Lezama

Universit Joseph Fourier
miguel@overbits.com

Abstract

LogiLogi is a hypertext platform for philosophical discussions featuring a rating-system that tries to combine the virtues of good conversations and papers. It is intended for all those ideas that you're unable to turn into a full sized journal paper, but that you deem too interesting to leave to the winds. It's central values are openness and quality of content, and to combine these values it models peer review and other valuable social processes surrounding academic writing (in line with Bruno Latour). Contrary to early web-systems it does not make use of forum-threads (avoiding their many problems), but of tags and links that can also be added to articles by others than the original author. Regardless of our project, the web is still a very young medium, and bound to make a change for philosophy in the long run.

1 Introduction

The growth of the web has been rather invisible for philosophy so far, and while quite some philosophizing has been done about what the web could mean for the human condition, not much yet has been said about what it could mean for philosophy itself ([ifb](#); [Nel93](#); [Lev97](#), mainly). An exception is some early enthusiasm for newsgroups and forums in the nineties, but that quickly died out when it became apparent that those were not suitable at all for in-depth philosophical conversations. The web as a medium however is more than these two examples of early web-systems, and in the meantime it has further matured with what some call Web 2.0, or social software (sites like MySpace, Del.icio.us and Wikipedia). Time for a second look...

LogiLogi Manta ([Log](#)), the new version of LogiLogi, is a webplatform that hopes to — be

it informally and experimentally — allow philosophers and people who are interested in philosophy to use the possibilities that the internet has in stock for them too. It was started with a very small grant from the department of Philosophy of the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. It is Free Software, 15.000 lines of code, has been under development for almost 2 years by at max 10 people at the same time, and is currently live as public beta.

In the following paragraphs we will explain what LogiLogi is. First (section 2) a general overview of LogiLogi is given, then (section 3) we explain how it intends to combine openness and quality, and in section 4 we go into more detail regarding formulas we use for the rating and ranking in peergroups. In section 5 LogiLogi and the web as a new medium are embedded in the philosophical tradition. Optionally sections 2, 3 and 4 can be read only after you have become interested by reading 5.

2 A Webplatform for Philosophers

LogiLogi is an easy to use hypertext platform, also featuring a rating- and review-system which is a bit comparable to that found in journals. It tries to find the middle-road between the written word and a good conversation, and it's central values are openness and quality of content.

It makes commenting on texts, and more generally the linking of texts very easy. Most notably it also allows other people than the original author of a logi to add outgoing links behind words, but it does not allow them to change the text itself, so the author's intellectual responsibility is guarded. Also important is that all conversations on the platform run via links (comparable to footnotes), not via forum-threads, avoiding their associated problems like fragmentation and shallowing of the discussion.

To maximize the advantages of hypertext, texts are kept short within LogiLogi, at maximum one to a few pages. These texts, called logi's, can be

informal and experimental and they can be improved later on, in either of two ways: The text of the original document can be changed (earlier versions are then archived). Or secondly, links can be added inside the text, possibly only when some terms or concepts appear to be ambiguous, when questions arise, or when the logi appears to arouse enough interest to make it worth of further elaboration.

Links in LogiLogi can refer to logis, to versions, and — by default — to tags (words that function as categories or concepts). Logis can be tagged with one or more of these tags. Multiple logis can have the same tag, and when a link is made to a tag or to a collection of tags, multiple logis can be in the set referred to. From this set the logi with the highest rating is shown to the user.

The ratings in LogiLogi are essentially grades, given by visitors and other authors. The average of these grades forms the rating of the logi. Moreover these averages are weighted averages. Voting-powers can vary. If an authors contributions are rated well, he receives more voting-power.

Authors can thus gain 'status' and 'influence' through their work. This makes LogiLogi a peer-reviewed meritocracy, quite comparable to what we, according to Bruno Latours philosophy of science, encounter in the various structures surrounding journals (Lat87).

But the comparison to journals goes further, and in a similar fashion to how new peergroups can emerge around new journals, in LogiLogi too new peergroups can be created by duplicating the just described rating-system. Contributions can be rated from the viewpoints of different peergroups, logis can have multiple ratings, authors won't have the same voting-power within each peergroup, and visitors can pick which peergroup to use as their filter.

Thus except meritocratic, LogiLogi is also open to a diversity of schools and paradigms in the sense of early Thomas Kuhn (Kuh96), especially as here creating new peergroups — unlike for journals — does not bring startup-costs.

3 Openness and Quality

Most notably quality control, and especially some sort of peer review, were missing from earlier web-systems. For example in forums, newsgroups and wiki's there is no good way of differentiating between quality contributions and problematic

or even worthless ones. Many of these are completely open 'anarchies', where people with too much time on their hands (or worse, nutballs) determine or even pollute the conversations. While other forums and wiki's take the opposite extreme and are partially fenced off or sometimes completely closed and/or have unchecked admins as arbiters.

Wiki's have the additional problem that only one page with the same name can exist, causing problems when there are disagreements over what the contents of a page should be. This can either only be resolved by a decision in favor of one of the viewpoints, or the page has to be made longer and less clear cut by incorporating both views.

Forums and newsgroups rather have a contrary problem. On them, because of threads, older posts and discussions quickly fade from view, and are time after time — with intervals of some months, or less — repeated all over again. Here posts are replaced too quickly, and either there are no social rewards, or they are too small to attract and keep many, if not any, serious contributors.

LogiLogi bridges the seeming contradiction between openness and quality by having small texts that compete with eachother in a meritocratic democracy. The rating with differences in voting-power, coupled with simple filtering, maintains quality. And in as far as openness is not secured by allowing all authors a vote, it — and especially plurality — is by the fact that new peergroups can be created by anyone on LogiLogi, so there is room for a diversity of refreshing views and approaches.

Of course drawing users and authors to newly created peergroups will be hard, but that's only natural, as time and attention are scarce. In a sense peergroups within LogiLogi function like a market, in that individual actions (like writing and voting) lead to a better usage and distribution of attention — the scarce resource — on a collective scale. And just like the market, it limits opportunities for corruption and favouritism by aggregating over the small decisions of many different individuals.

Lastly, LogiLogi brings not just attention to ideas and to texts, but also to good authors. Especially as more people start using it, being highly ranked in a peergroup is hard and well earned: it really means something, not just in terms of quantity, but certainly also in terms of a proven quality of work. This — in addition to the interaction

with other users — will make writing for LogiLogi more socially rewarding.

4 The Rating and Ranking Formulas

The formula for awarding the extra voting-powers is currently quite simple. In each vote a score can be given on a scale of -2 to 5 in LogiLogi. Besides these scores, votes also carry weights in the average rating of a logi; these are what can differ between users. Anonymous users and people with accounts have 0.1 resp 1.0 voting power in the General Peergroup. All users start without any voting-power in other peergroups.

When a logi of a registered user is positively rated from a peergroup that he is not yet a member of, he receives a membership with 1.0 voting power in that peergroup. In addition to this basic power, he receives extra voting-power for the logi, and for all later positively rated logis by this peergroup. It is calculated as follows:

$$rating^2 * 0.05$$

So 0.05 percent of the square of the rating (0.05, 0.2, 0.45, 0.8, 1.25 for scores 1 to 5). This power is given in realtime, for the rating that is standing. So when the score gets lower again the difference is subtracted, also in realtime.

As the ratings of logis are a weighted average of all votes on them, the weights of additional votes are added to the previous total weight (a new vote of 5, with weight 1 added to a current rating of 1 with weight 3, results in a new rating of 2, with weight 4). Now of course over time this would lead to the entrenchment of ratings, in that they would become ever harder to change.

To fix this problem, and to give new votes a chance, the total weight of each rating is decreased each night with a fraction in such a way as to result in a half-life of 1 week. So the weights of all ratings are half as big as they were at the beginning of the week. If no new votes come in the current score remains as it is (it's weight just drops), but if they do come in, they can influence the score more easily because of it's lessened weight.

The voting-power of authors is not touched by this half-life. Their voting-power remains and does not change as long as their logis are not rated differently. Authors are ranked within peergroups by their voting-power, and receive a percentile to show their rank relative to other authors in the same peergroup.

These formulas are quite simple and it is likely that we will improve them over time, but we will never move to a hidden and obscuring algorithm — like for example Google's PageRank — because LogiLogi values transparency, next to openness and quality.

5 Plato, Free Software and Postmodernism

The web is a relatively new medium, and new media are usually interpreted wrongly — in terms of old media. This has been called the *horseless carriage syndrome* (McL01); according to which a car is a carriage without a horse, film records theater-plays, and — most recently — the web enables the downloading of journals. Even Plato was not exempt of this. In *Phaedrus* he stated that true philosophy is only possible verbally, and that writing was just an aid to memory. Regardless of this ironically enough his 'memory aid' unleashed a long philosophical tradition (dM05). New media take their time. And we should not forget that the web is still very young (1991). Also the web is especially relevant for philosophy in that it combines conversation and writing; the two classical media of philosophy.

And where previous mass-media like TV and radio were not suitable for philosophy, this was because they were *one to many*, and thus favored the *factory model of culture* (Ado91). The web on the other hand is *many to many*, and thereby enables something called *peer to peer* production (Ben06). An early example of this is Free Software: without much coordination ten-thousands of volunteers have created software of the highest quality, like Linux and Firefox. Eric Raymond (Ray99) described this as a move from the *cathedral-* to the *bazaar-*model of software-development. The *cathedral-*model has a single architect who is responsible for the grand design, while in the *bazaar-*model it evolves from collective contributions.

This *bazaar-*model is not unique for the web. It shares much with the academic tradition. The move from the book to the journal can be compared with a move in the direction of a *bazaar-*model. Other similarities are decentralized operation and peer-review. The only new thing of the Free Software example was it's use of the web which — through it's shorter turnaround times — is very suitable for *peer to peer* production.

Another development that LogiLogi follows closely is one within philosophy itself: Jean-Francois Lyotard in his *La Condition Postmoderne* proclaimed the end of great stories (Lyo79). Instead he saw a diversity of small stories, each competing with others in their own domains. Also Derrida spoke of the materiality of texts, where texts and intertextuality gave meaning instead of 'pure' ideas (Ber79; Nor87). The web in this sense is a radicalisation of postmodernism, allowing for even more and easier intertextuality.

And instead of trying to undo the proliferation of paradigms, as some logic-advocates tried, and still try, we think the *breakdown of language* — as in further segmentation — is here to stay, and even a good thing, because it reduces complexity in the sense of Niklas Luhmann (Blo97). Take human intelligence as fixed and you see that specialized (or 'curved' as in space curved around our cognitive limits) language allows for a more precise analysis. LogiLogi thus is explicitly modeled to allow for fine-grained specialization, and for a careful definition and discussion of terms *in context*.

6 Conclusion

To reiterate; LogiLogi will offer an easy to use hypertext-environment that combines the informal, incremental and interactive qualities of good conversations, with conservation over time and space, as we traditionally know from papers. Thanks to it's transparent rating system a combination of quality and openness will be achieved: everyone can contribute, and even start new peer-groups, but within peergroups quality is the determining factor. LogiLogi is still in beta and very experimental.

Nevertheless what we can be sure about is that the web, as a medium that has proven to be very suitable for *peer to peer* production and that promises increased inter-textuality and differentiation of language, is bound to make a change for philosophy in the long run; with or without LogiLogi.

References

- [Ado91] Theodor Adorno. Culture industry reconsidered. In Theodor Adorno, editor, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, pages 98–106. Routledge, London, 1991.
- [Ben06] Yochai Benkler. *The Wealth of Networks*. Yale University Press, London, 2006.
- [Ber79] Egide Berns. *Denken in Parijs: taal en Lacan, Foucault, Althusser, Derrida*. Samsom, Alpen aan den Rijn, 1979.
- [Blo97] Christiaan Blom. *Complexiteit en Contingentie: een kritische inleiding tot de sociologie van Niklas Luhmann*. Kok Agora, Kampen, 1997.
- [dM05] Jos de Mul. *Cyberspace Odyssee*. Klement, Kampen, 2005.
- [ifb] <http://www.futureofthebook.org>. The Institute for the Future of the Book, MacArthur Foundation, University of Southern California.
- [Kuh96] Thomas Kuhn. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996.
- [Lat87] Bruno Latour. *Science in Action*. Open University Press, Cambridge, 1987.
- [Lev97] Pierre Levy. *Collective Intelligence: Mankinds Emerging World in Cyberspace*. Plenum Press, New York, 1997.
- [Log] <http://foundation.logilogi.org>, <http://www.logilogi.org>. LogiLogi & The LogiLogi Foundation.
- [Lyo79] Jean-Francois Lyotard. *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*. Les ditions de Minuit, Paris, 1979.
- [McL01] Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Routledge, London, 2001.
- [Nel93] Ted Nelson. *Literary Machines: The report on, and of, Project Xanadu concerning word processing, electronic publishing, hypertext, thinkertoys, tomorrow's intellectual... including knowledge, education and freedom*. Mindful Press, Sausalito, California, 1993.
- [Nor87] Christopher Norris. *Derrida*. Fontana Press, London, 1987.
- [Ray99] Eric S. Raymond. *The cathedral & the bazaar: musings on Linux and open source by an accidental revolutionary*. O'Reilly, Beijing, 1999.