

LogiLogi: A Webplatform for Philosophers

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Abstract

LogiLogi is a hypertext platform featuring a rating-system that tries to combine the virtues of good conversations and the written word. 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. Its 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 for in-depth philosophical conversations at all. 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 paragraph we will explain what LogiLogi is, and in section 3 LogiLogi and the web as a new medium are embedded in the philosophical tradition. Optionally section 2 can be read only after you have become interested by reading 3.

2 A Webplatform for Philosophers

LogiLogi is an easy to use hypertext platform featuring a rating- and review-system comparable to that of journals. It tries to find the middle-road between the written word and a good conversation, and its 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 document 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 shal- lowing of the discussion.

Also, to maximize the advantages of hypertext, texts are kept short within LogiLogi, at maximum around a thousand words. These texts, called logis, 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 thus 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 as well as being 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 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 its use of the web which — through its shorter turnaround times — is very suitable for *peer to peer* production.

Another development that LogiLogi follows closely is one within philosophy itself: Jean-Franois 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 and in-depth analysis. LogiLogi thus is explicitly modeled to allow for fine-grained specialization, and for a careful definition and discussion of terms *in context*.

4 Conclusion

To reiterate; LogiLogi will offer an easy to use hypertext-environment, and thanks to its rating system a combination of quality and openness will be achieved: everyone can contribute, and even start new peergroups, but within peergroups quality is the determining factor. LogiLogi thus combines the informal, incremental and interactive qualities of good conversations, with conservation over time and space, as we traditionally know from the written word. LogiLogi is still 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.

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