

Concepts As Logics: Ways of Thinking, Being, & Doing

Logic is, though few of us ever seem to reflect on it, *a way of thinking*. This is common to anyone who studies introductory logic, since logical thinking is particularly considered as *valid thinking*. That said, the term *logic* is itself more expansive than classical or modern formal logic(s). Logic *is a way of thinking*; thus, a way of thinking is a logic. It is in this sense of logic that Hegel's *Science of Logic* takes itself to be about something fundamentally logical, yet it is for this very same reason that, to the formal logician, it may appear as something alien to logic as they know it. What the *Logic* deals with is not a spelling out of how we should think, but rather what thinking does when forced into an absolute straitjacket—thus what an *absolute thinking is*.

What does logic, a way of thinking, have to do with Being, a metaphysical concept?

Concepts As Fundamental

Concepts in Hegelianism are what we normally would call *fundamental* conceptions of the world and objects in it. To say that they are fundamental may seem to make this immediately leave no room for speaking of anything common—anything mundane and more immediately graspable by our less sophisticated notions. However, this is not the case. By fundamental here, what is meant is the fundamental conception of something—*any thing*. In Hegel's method, when we have the fundamental concept of things, we have a concept which does not *underlie* them; rather, we have the concept of the thing as itself, e.g. the concept of the chicken *as chicken*, animal as animal, object as object, etc. When speaking of the *concept* of things, we are in truth always considering the object in its fundamentality—its essential character as what it is—and not as what underlies it in a transcendental or transcendent sense. What is meant here is simple: when we speak of the fundamental concept of the *chicken*, we are not speaking of the chicken *as matter, energy, information, etc.*, but are interested in the chicken as what it is: as a chicken. In this sense, we may say that concepts here refer to the 'nature' of things.

Concepts are not specific to individual objects, but function just as what the word normally implies: a universal which subsumes individual instances. Concepts of a purely rational character, such as Being or Essence, are *metaphysical* concepts due to their universal application to all objects of existence in some manner. We can, however, have concepts of existent everyday things. How can logic be connected to such concepts and objects? Let's see some examples.

Concepts As Ways Of Thinking, Being, & Doing

In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel begins with **Being** and considers the content to be thought in it, notices there is no content to think, and terms this absence of thought **Nothing**. Again, we must ask: what in the world does this have to do with logic? It has a lot to do with it; in fact, I would say it is the most logical thing to do with logic.

The concept of Being **is a way of thinking just as much as it is something to think**. Logics necessarily have objects to think, and logics likewise necessarily generate objects to think. Being is itself a logic—the logic of absolute immediacy. Those who *think in the form of Being* suffer its exact problem: they have nothing to think. Whether we start with the thought or the thinking, the structure and result is the same no matter what. Empty thinking is Nothing, but Nothing *is*; Being *is*, but it is an empty thought with nothing to think—therefore, Being is Nothing. Parmenides claimed only Being *is*, and that Nothing *is not*. In his philosophy, however, Parmenides could say no more. In all the manifest ways Being *is*, he could never say anything about Being itself. The world is what it is; it is as it is—*nothing more*.

All philosophies of absolute immediacy as true Being suffer this same incapacity to think anything in them. The śūnyatā (emptiness) of Buddhism has no more to say of it than that it is the Truth. In the mere **cognition** that things *are*, we have nothing to think, and insofar as we *think* in this pure immediacy, we are engaged in the *logic of Being*. Remember when you were a child and sometimes when pushed to explain something you fell back on ‘*It’s just because*’? It is the appeal to the mere *being* of something as the explanation, the reason. It is nothing special to note the lack of actual explanation in such phrases, but it is quite interesting to note that they are a standard case of the logic of Being. They show the same privileging of immediacy and the same emptiness of content. If we follow through on the meaning of this ‘Just because’, we cannot help but acknowledge that there is no discernible meaning to it despite our intending it to operate as a surrogate meaning. When we *validly* think with the logic of Being, we are led to acknowledge our incapacity to think or mean anything by it.

Besides this thinking which is ours, however, is Being itself as an object. If we consider Being as such—as a metaphysical structure—it is incapable of being anything but Nothing. A world of Being and Being alone is in truth a world of Nothing, for Being is undifferentiated and incapable of being outside or within itself. Our world, more than just simply having something more to think than mere Being, has being which is beyond mere Being—it has many ways of *being*: it can exist, it can be a possibility, an actuality, a reality, a negation, a thought, a material object, et al. The world, then, is more than pure Being, just as absolute thinking thinks more than pure Being. Being, as we can tell from its thinking and hypothetical absolute being as pure Being, is a structure of the world both physical and mental—*metaphysical* indeed.

In **Becoming**, we find a way of thinking which can merely think of the transition of one

term or thing to another—an immediate transition with no explanation. B came to be from A, and B will cease to be in the coming to be of C. Becoming is a way of thinking which allows us to think of what is in its movement. Enough abstract metaphysical considerations, though; let us get into more mundane things.

‘Concrete’ Logic: Everydayness

Logic, as a way of thinking, rightly comes to apply to *all that we think*. Even mundane common objects have a *logic* to them—a way that they must be thought to capture their real structure and movement in the way we intelligibly know them. This thought, however, captures something more than just our necessary thinking of these objects, but also a necessary relating and doing of these objects insofar as they have any relating or doing. How can *thinking* capture *action*, that is, doing? That’s easy: thinking is itself a doing in its being; thus, it can capture beings in their dynamicity. Not all objects are genuine objects, e.g. a clump of dirt has no fundamental conception *as a clump of dirt*, but rather is just a contingent object; if there is anything essential to it as object, it can merely be the dirt itself and its chemical structures.

Let’s investigate some everyday things and see their *logic*.

Logic of Commodities

Commodities are everywhere around us—nothing alien to us.

‘But, A.W., how does it make sense to say a commodity is a logic? Isn’t it just a thing?’

Why, yes, dear reader, commodities are things—very peculiar things. A commodity, you see, in order to *be* a commodity, actually has to *be and do* quite a bit. First, a commodity must be something *useful for someone else* for consumption or later exchange, and it must be *useful to me* only as exchangeable. To be a commodity is to be a useful thing for someone else—something that someone else will exchange me something else for—and *that* something else is necessarily a commodity too. Commodities *are* by being related to another commodity and in enacting exchange for one another. Here we see that logics, as we are concerned with here, are movements of things as what they are.

It is, however, *not enough* to intend to exchange something in some hypothetical future. If I am in the middle of nowhere sitting on a mountain of accumulated objects, they are no more commodities than the grimy water frothing in my backyard is black gold in the 1600s. I may believe what I hold is valuable and a commodity, but the truth of that judgment is not up to me; it’s up to someone else to come by and finally exchange something for what I have. A commodity, then, is not fully what it is until the moment of exchange which finally confers the stamp of truth upon it. In exchange, I certify that, yes, I *really did have a commodity*, and the proof is that it has exchanged

for another.

The logic of the commodity is what it *does* in simply *being itself* and how it *must do this*. The relation of a hypothetically exchangeable object is not enough; the object must really exchange. A commodity that never exchanges is not a commodity, and a world in which objects are made for the purpose of exchanging, yet where no exchange ever happens, is not a world where commodities exist—not a world where the *logic of commodities* has any reality or effect. Note the structural similarity: the logic of Being is a *thinking and relating*, and the logic of commodities is an activity, a *doing and relating*. Commodities *do* something in being commodities, and in this doing, there is a necessary structure of relating.

Logic of Right

Taking a bit from Winfield's interpretation of the *Philosophy of Right*,

For the will to be free, it must will its relation to other free wills as part of its own self-determination. Furthermore, the free will must do so such that the relations it enters into with others are voluntarily willed by them as well. Otherwise, they would stand in a predicament where the particulars of their agency are not self-determined. In that case, they would not figure as free wills themselves and fail to provide the contrast term the first agent needs to give its autonomy a boundary entirely determined through freedom. For this reason, the free will can will its relation to other free wills only if they concomitantly will that same relation to one another as their own self-determination. (Reason and Justice, §8.1.1)

This first piece is quoted for one reason: the structure of *Right* (think of rights in our common notion) is one of *free will*. This is not too strange, but Winfield takes Hegel to develop free will in a peculiar fashion. Hegel sees freedom as self-determination, and free will in particular is the *self-determination of the will*—so far so good. The meaning of the self-determination of the will, however, is a relation of will to will, particularly of the *same kind of will*; this is why the relation of our own conscious will to our 'natural will' of desires is not itself an instance of *free will proper*. Free will proper is a relation like [self-consciousness](#), meaning, two of the same are required—two free wills interacting and mutually constituting each other as expressions of the universal whole of self-determining will. The will is *free* only insofar as within this relation it abides only by what it has set for itself with agreement of its other self.

The interaction of freedom involves mutual respect for the concomitant self-determinations contained within it. That mutual respect renders each self-determination **an exercise of right**, obliged for its own being to concord with the autonomy of others whose own self-determination rests on carrying out the duty of corroborating the former's freedom. **Accordingly, freedom is irreducibly a**

relation of right, whose very exercise of self-determination is necessarily accompanied by the recognition affording it an honored reality. (§8.1.1)

All the interaction of freedom requires is that some individuals choose to act in such a way that they relate to one another through reciprocal recognition, establishing a mode of autonomy that operates in and only in the relationship it comprises. General as this situation may appear, it leaves the minimal reality of freedom with a most definite, unequivocal structure. . . . Freedom without any further qualification consists in an interaction of agents where each gives its will a particular objective determination whose limits accord with those that others give their own wills as participants in the same relation. . . . However, since **the recognition in question is not just theoretical, but realized in action**, an objectively respected self-determination is only possible if the other participants simultaneously engage in establishing specific recognizable objectifications of their own wills that do not conflict with the reality the former agent has chosen. (§8.1.3)
[Bolded emphasis added]

Right, according to Winfield, is a *way of relating and acting between social rational beings to establish guaranteed positive freedoms and their conditions of possibility*. If Right is the reciprocal recognition of individual will relating to individual will, then we may say that what is Right is only that which can be enacted by both actors in principle, even if it isn't actualized at the same moment, and must also be something which can be objectively established as an existing relation. This relation may be property (mine and yours), the relation of free speech (I get my say in public and you get yours), the relationship of family (I can enter into private exclusive relationships with whomever I want; you can too), or what have you. If only *I* or *you* have a right, then in fact we have no Right in this sense—we have privileges, and that's it. To merely have a declaration of Right, to pay lip service, yet not *actualize* a Right is to have no Right at all, i.e. rights that are not enforced or which an individual has no means to actualize do not exist. To have Rights is to have a way of *actual* social life and to have a way of conceiving this social life.

Logic of Capitalism

Capitalism, as the name suggests, *is a social way of life dominated by the **logic** of capital*, i.e., **the expansion of value as money and commodities**. Capital is a structure—a way of relating—in society; it is also a way of *living*, a way of *conceiving the world*, a way of *comprehending* the world, and a way of treating the world. I shall expand this into a blog of its own at some future point, but for now, this hopefully suffices to make the example.

Its structures/relations, or ways of *being*, are the following:

- Private property right.
- Diremption of means of production and the masses producers due to concentration of capital.
- Diremption of direct social claims on means of life (absolute necessity of money to engage in production and consumption).
- Production for profit.
- Chaotic social production at whims of mass desires and money holding.

Its ways of *living* or doing are the following:

- Work is an absolute requirement as money is an absolute requirement, whether individuals desire money itself or not. If one does not engage work or get money, someone else that provides for them (charity) *must* engage work.
- Those with money alone command what is produced, and only those with labor desired by those with money alone join the economy at all. Individuals and groups can be excluded from the means of life by this rejection.
- Social power is, if private property relations are absolutely protected, naturally tilted towards capitalists who accumulate money and can weather problems longer than their workers can.
- Anti-social behavior is legitimized as natural (selfish). Ruthlessness and cheating is seen as an inevitable and necessary component of success; only the corrupt can prosper against the corrupt.
- The only value is money; all ethics take a back seat to the reality of money's pure social power. Money as necessity and universal possibility can buy almost anyone's will and show their everyday morals as nothing to capital itself.
- Consumption for the sake of consumption. All whims that can be satisfied are satisfied. All want becomes *need*.

Its way of conceiving:

- Money as an object of desire itself: accumulation of value for its own sake as social power becomes a natural result of the accumulation process to encourage it. Honor and greatness are tied to money. Abstract value/labor stand in for personal achievement.
- Commodification of the world: all that can be sold is sold; the market must expand everywhere it can to maximize capital.
- All the world is seen in light of capital: time is money; hobbies, personal relationships, conservation of nature, and even fun are *investments*; all things are *valuable* only insofar as there is money to be gained.
- Accumulation is tied to self-interest, and self-interest is made the metaphysical nature of the world. Nature itself *is capital and its market competition*: matter accumulates via gravity, life consumes and grows, and existence is a war of competition for the very fact of being. As all are selfish as the ultimate principle,

accumulation and social suspicion is necessary to endure in the world.

*When capital becomes **the logic** of social life, it necessarily manifests as the subsuming value towards which all of life points.* We see this everywhere in modern life, and it strangely manifests in absolute individuality as much as absolute universality as group. In more communal society, capital is identified with community and society, and the individual is subsumed under capital's directive to aid the whole. Those who best aid the whole—who generate the most profits—are raised to the top on the merit of their use to the group. In individualist society, the individual sees all as selfish and accepts their misery as but a step towards their own future greatness: one day, the poor worker shall be the capitalist—the master—and have his day in the sun. Those who do not aspire to more do not deserve more; capital is manifest as the will to power and the victory of the fittest over the (physically and mentally) weak. However, this *absolute individual will* exists as the slave of capital who must serve social desire and the mass market. The supreme individuality of capital is nothing but the most universal slave to value. The ideal capitalist does not engage in the expansion of value only via their own labor, and not even through the same type of labor, but through many kinds of labor by many individuals in many places and over different spans of time. How? For the industrialist, it is their investment in and expansion of production, for the financier it is their loans to many persons for many projects, and for the renter it is through their various properties, their maintenance, modifications, and expansions.