

# What is the Connection Between the Tree of Life and Logic?

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## ABSTRACT

In this essay, I explore the relationship between the kabbalistic Tree of Life and that of Logic. I begin defining my terms, then analyze the question posed through that of science; philosophy; art and the concept of knowledge in general. I conclude that while a unified and complete account of knowledge cannot be gained, one can get a semblance of this knowledge. This I call a tending towards infinity or more precisely – a calculus of infinity. I conjecture that this may lead to world-bettering, a wise kind of knowledge if you like that is neither of the Tree of Life nor that of the Tree of Knowledge as such, but the light itself which remains unnamable, that is to say beyond the realm of human knowledge.

**Keywords:** Art, Knowledge, Logic, Philosophy, Peace, Science, Tree of Life.

**Published Online:** May 23, 2023

**ISSN:** 2736-5514

**DOI:** 10.24018/ejtheology.2023.3.3.113

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## I. INTRODUCTION

An outline of the argument set forth in the foregoing in answering the question posed in the title of this paper may be divided in three phases or stages. Accenting to the soundness of such an argument, I conclude that although we cannot gain the Tree of Knowledge in its entirety (a fate which would be to our detriment if taken in its entirety anyhow), yet the pursuit of knowledge is a kind of tending toward it (i.e., the entirety), a calculus of infinity. In such terms, we begin to grasp the Tree of Life. The result is a better world.

### A. Definitions

*The Tree of Life* refers to the kabbalistic concept of a basic template or archetype that pre-exists material reality yet finds expression within such a reality. It is the soul of things, the light that animates it to different degrees and kinds. These are the basic concepts of the sefirot – powers or rather vessels of the Light, attenuated so as to produce specific qualities as it devolves from the rarefied abstract to denser, more physical, material manifestations. The Tree of Life also refers to Torah itself. Its ways are ways of peace. A third reference is to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Edin and here we mean to say that it is the one that should be “picked” from over the lure of the Tree of Knowledge in the same Edin.

*Logic* refers to a certain systematic way of thinking that follows some basic axioms from which definitions, theorems and proofs might be established as it takes the form of mathematics. Yet the word “logic” itself was only known to be in use in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. While I do not endorse the post-modern view that the addition of this word conceals itself as fictional play as language operates through us, much as electricity surges through machines, rather I think logic is written into nature of which humans may so divine, compounded of that very logic. Hence, logic is axiomatic, an essence which the Neanderthal applied to the good of their survival. Logic is the transparent system of thought through which reason operates. This faculty has given rise to the plethora of sciences and its corresponding progress and success in creating civilization. It is also part of culture in general and so finds expression not only in the exact sciences but extends to include the humanities and social discourse in the great variety of societies that exist and have existed – that is to say, culture embodies its own logic. Thus, the absolute status of logic is not absolute, but relative (one might say each “time period” is dominated by a “logical” [self-enclosed] paradigm).

### B. Contradictions

Such definitions of our key terms would appear to produce contradictions in determining their connection or relationship:

- a) On the one hand, the Tree of Life concerns a template whose origin is the Great Unknown, the ungraspable deity or Creator, while on the other hand, logic divides, categorizes and grasps in finite bits;
- b) The Tree of life is said to correspond to the Torah and peaceful co-existence, while logic denies faith and may be applied in the forging of war, rather than peace;

- c) The tree in the garden of which one should not pick – that of Knowledge – is such as the application of logic is problematic precisely because it expands the ego and creates greed, competitiveness, and violence, while that of the Tree of Life defies death, ignorance, strive and hatred.

### C. Resolution

- a) Such a strict binary is only partially true. In fact, the Tree of Life is precisely the understanding that the unquantifiable Light can be divided and categorized into discrete bits (that is the sefirotic vessels), much as logic and reason applied in understanding and predicting the natural world and developing tools to do so, is a process of attenuating the light into finite units – divided and categorized. In this sense one could speak of the logic of kabbalah.
- b) Logic itself is axiomatic. For example, the law of the excluded middle or that of identity. In other words, it may be that different laws (logics) obtain. For instance, it is conceivable that a person could stand in the air or that after a certain age, one has a new identity. In the same way, it is possible that in our world, the sun may not rise tomorrow. Hence, logic is not so much sacred as it is convenient, yet to believe in its eternity, is an article of faith and belief, not reason. With such an awareness, one can choose to use logic in order to carry out evil designs. It is the consciousness of one's will or intent that is important – a Torah that precedes the application of logic. Then logic indeed can be used for peace and knowledge itself becomes rectified, not simply a matter of power struggles, fictions, and myths in our own self-importance. Torah itself should also be studied with peaceful intent rather than self-glorification and conquest. The conquest of knowledge and Torah is to bring about a better world.
- c) Following from b), there is no strict polarity at work here. Knowledge may defy death eventually, while the Torah without peace is not the Torah and may be negative. Hence, it is precisely the connection, the interdisciplinary as such, that will give a more holistic account, compounded of wonder and awe, rather than greed and pride and abuse.

## II. THE TREE OF LIFE AND LOGIC

Given that the Tree of Life and Logic can be related, the offshoots of such a convergence and overlap is knowledge used for the purposes of elevating material reality (and perhaps eventually consciousness itself). However, the interplay between The Tree of Life and Logic, mediated by knowledge, is complex and reveals a struggle of some kind as I will indicate some manifestations of such an intertwining:

### A. Science and Mathematics

Logic is the basis of mathematics. Mathematics may be applied to the sciences. The sciences are a combination of logical analysis and empirical verification. The result is robust technology; infrastructure; theoretical models; perceiving regularity via the operation of laws behind the movements of the material world.

The scientific method consists of a hypothesis; an experimental method; a collection and analysis of results (and here mathematics may be vital) and possible confirmation of a hypothesis with possible implications and even contribution to the already established body of knowledge. It may result in further technologies or theoretical models that approximate a true description of nature. The hard sciences and to a lesser degree, the soft sciences create communities of scientists' intent on producing more accurate information, what are called facts.

The curious thing however is that its language, namely mathematics or the science of numbers and symbols is an abstraction, not truly existing in nature and yet miraculously, it works. Quantitative research is supremely useful in understanding nature and various systems, yet for all that it is simply a process of logic, of inference and deduction, which itself rests on the logical processes of the mind. Hence, we find in Kant an early formulation of the categories of mind. Today we inspect the brain itself as a mechanism that may produce sense or not. Certainly, however, one can say knowledge is gained, yet is this process not a-moral and thence not connected with the Tree of Life, with harmony and beauty?

One could argue that science and mathematics are beautiful strategies of computation that reflect harmony. Yet one can create an atom bomb with same reverence. One must maintain that it elevates humankind from the dross of ignorance. Guided by the Tree of Life, knowledge is the very means to a world redeemed. Again, I deny the post-modern degradation of knowledge perceived as politicized or discriminatory or chauvinistic and so on. Thus, knowledge applied correctly, that is to say - morally - dances with the Tree of Life.

### B. Philosophy

Philosophy is an interesting case. It is certainly not in vogue these days, hardly seen as useful (education) or as even counting as knowledge and few would consider the erecting of metaphysical edifices of

explanation as sensible. While philosophy extricated itself from religious dogma, it is still seen as a sort of general speculation preceding the real work and methods of the sciences. The lure of the Tree of Knowledge of course is that the philosophers' quest, the holy grail of truth, is offered. The great satisfaction in understanding this complex universe. But the Tree of Life offers something else. In relation to philosophy, the Tree of Life is closer to the Eastern concept of balance, patience, forbearance, holding paradox, of relationship, rather than solution-driven, a final discursive truth, a singular explanation. Rather we are enjoined to just accept the ebb and flow, the play of light and dark and yet recognize the unnamable "behind" that chimera.

Yet such abstractions are precisely what contemporary culture abhors – and hence the easy dismissal of philosophy itself. Yet philosophy redeemed is that it functions as a bridge "between" (inter) and beyond (supra) all other disciplines. For philosophy is the application of reason (that is to say, Logic) to questions that are often broad in scope and often in detailed analysis. Philosophy is a creative discipline which precedes and evolves other disciplines, while itself being a discipline. It is a means to perceive what unifies the regularity that science may ingeniously describe and understand.

The original meaning of philosophy is a reference to the "love of wisdom", and a new paradigm which accepts that there such a "thing" as "wisdom" and that it is attainable. While the Torah is not a work of philosophy, the very opening words of the creator as the progenitor of all that there is, is the single-most important sentence and defines philosophy from the outset. Wisdom is the recognition of the Creator. Now, while many philosophies, such as Existentialism, post-modernism (in a subtle sense); Marxism; politics (having severed its tie with religion) deny the existence or necessity of the Creator, one might maintain that these philosophies cannot be entirely true. Religion then would appear to embody the highest philosophy. This too is an error, for religion is not knowledge as such, but the passing of tradition founded on faith and belief.

The Tree of Life is not religion as such, nor is it philosophical musings. It is a philosophy that cultivates awe and love for the Creator. One way in which to express such reverence is through the application of knowledge – the sciences, the humanities. In such an equation, it is philosophy that connects the various branches of the Tree of Knowledge. Thus philosophy – the "love of wisdom" - has the potential to partake of the Tree of Life and thence spreading that to that of the Tree of Knowledge. Spiritual intent manifests materially as abundance, effulgence, and health. Yet neither knowledge nor the Tree of life have conquered death. It is inevitable. Only a philosophy of the soul, of eternity and the Creator is a postulate that sees life continuing after death, though in a completely different "world" or realm. Philosophy thus speculates on questions that are beyond the province of science, at least at this stage of its development and while the arts and perhaps culture in general does encounter the problem of death, it is simple another "category", and we understand just as much as did our primitive forebears.

### C. Art

The relics of a culture of the past are embodied in the arts and cultural artifacts. The visible manifestation of an age are the very objects of that age. Art is considered a pinnacle or at least accurate description of that age. For its apparent power however, art is not considered central to education in many modern societies. Moreover, post pop art, art is no longer serious, spiritually motivated, or even didactic these days, rather succumbing to a market that abhors the philosophical and the metaphysical.

The introduction of the aesthetic did not change matters. It only introduced another factor in art which may be applied to all aspects of life itself and thus art is downed in the constant chatter, clutter, digitalization, and automation, foretold by Warhol, the Pop Artist.

However, art has value. It is a project akin to science in its innovation in the direction of abstraction. Here, the surface is perceived as a mere structural overlay of deeper dimensions, of elementals such as the point, the line, the circle, the triangle and the square while color is reduced to its musical association rather than a literal description. Furthermore, distortion; perspective; the influences between cultures; the expansion of the Fine Arts (to include new media; installation, photography; performance art, conceptual art...) are all creative paradigm shifts that suggest art expands the vision of man. The mimetic account is just one method among many in art, each embodying an idea; a philosophy – or is art mere craft, play, institutional garbage; commercialization, non-discursive; economic, even political, and so on?

To the extent art can be redeemed and with it, beauty, then art can be used for world-bettering, a utopia, the original power of art to create, control, visualize thought. This may be seen in cave paintings the world over, just as it can be seen in religious paintings, sculpture, and architecture (the plastic arts) in the West and East, so in the depth of Abstract Expressionism and the superficiality of Pop Art.

The idea of art is that it is a kind of inspiration. While the philosopher's task is generally a laborious process of reasoning that appeals to the ear, the artists awaken the eye. He offers a vision. It is a mere immediate glimpse not yet formed as conscious thought or as a process of reasoning. It is emphatic, an epiphany, a miracle. Of course, such Romantic ideas are no longer tolerated in an exclusive liberalism (note the irony).

While I have argued in the past following my doctoral dissertation that art influences all aspects of the everyday, and in particular sport, I would like to retract that somewhat and claim that art is also a self-enclosed discipline, one in which education and mastery of that discipline in theory and practice is not without meaning and while not objective in the sense that the exact sciences are, it offers, via the imagination, the power of metaphor. This single trait means art is well appointed as an education in empathy, compassion, visual literacy, and critical thinking. Of course, as with science, artists and Institutions can get enamored with their own power and prestige and thus science and art suffer the fate of producing a “Civilization” built on immoral principles. In fact, contemporary culture is repelled that art and science should even engender a moral perspective; that would be part of a dogma of the dark ages and oppose a free, democratic society. This, however, is misguided for Rome did indeed fall as it became more decadent. Artists, often poor and struggling, have seen that fate in their own time. Or have simply propelled that society forward collusive with political players, religious institutions, and commercial interests.

#### *D. Knowledge*

In accordance with the Kabbalah, knowledge is a quasi-sefirah; it represents Apollo or conscious awareness, a description of fact, a knowing something. However, since it is a quasi sefirah, it does not exist in an absolute sense, rather it is relative and incomplete. Further up the tree, the first emanation, which is Keter that is complete and a unity, the unconscious will expressed further in tiferet (beauty), as emet (truth), as connection (yesod) all materialized in malchut (kingship). Now kingship is the flowering of life where the male principle impregnates the female principle. Yet, whereas keter cannot be grasped (that is, will or desire), it can settle partially understood through knowledge or da’at. However, there are ten and not eleven sefirah, so knowledge is an imaginative construction, a fiction and does not in truth exist.

Perhaps that is why the ultimate grand theory has always been elusive and surely if one were to be found it may itself be eclipsed ad infinitum. Just as when we peer into matter, it divides, deepens and complexifies as one delves further (“in” – as in quantum physics and particle physics and “out” – as in cosmology).

If one then claims that da’at is a fiction, then logic itself is on shaky foundations. Hence Gödel’s incompleteness theorem. Indeterminism. Although Einstein was said to believe in a deterministic universe. I believe in both. The universe is predictable (deterministic) within limits, that is, a finite stretch of time-space and no more. By analogy, in chess perhaps a grandmaster can see ten moves deep, but no grandmaster or even super computer can predict a game say from move one to the end or in smaller, yet expansive (beyond say ten moves) parts of the unfolding of a game of chess. In the latter sense, the universe – coming back to our subject – is also indeterministic.

This apparent contradiction analogous to the wave-particle duality is rather a paradox, a complementary, just as there can only be a foreground if there is a background. It also means that a healthy attitude to knowledge and institutions of power is not simple reverence and awe as each age trumpets its modernity, but rather a healthy skepticism, a continuous stream of questions and a desire to explore new ways of perceiving and conceiving the universe. The Tree of Life is the effervescent presence and movement and vibration of matter and energy, while knowledge seeks to find the inner mechanism and processes of such teeming life. To know the Creator then it would be wise to praise His works.

#### *E. Unity*

The Tree of Life itself is divided into ten powers. Knowledge branches out into separate fields and sub-fields. The Tree of Life describes the invisible, while knowledge seeks to describe the visible, to make a semblance of sense verified empirically. How then can such notions be reconciled? First, their intrinsic division in themselves and secondly, their inability to overlap given their field of reference are opposed.

In the first instance, it is the concept of the tree that binds all its disparate parts instantiated in the word “tree” or more precisely its Hebrew translation. The abstract, immaterial concept and word draw all aspects of the tree together. This is not new and we already find it in Plato.

In the second instance, the visible is describe in say the sciences via models and equations that are only visible in terms of symbolic notation – it is precisely that which is not visible that gives rise to – or explains – the visible. Whereas the invisible describes the Infinite (Ein Sof), the kabbalah gives some form and visibility to that, that is, the sefirot – the Tree of Life itself.

In this sense, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, rather than being isolated and separate, exist on a continuum, just as there sefirot in sefirot, and just as the various branches of knowledge do overlap and form an interdisciplinary nexus or web.

Unity is possible simply because the essence of all things is the Creator, that force that energizes it to life. This force is the same force and thus all things are bound, just as in the beginning all was a singularity of infinite smallness, yet coming into existence. Infinity restricts itself in order for the finite to be. The finite conceals the infinite, just as the visible conceals the invisible. Yet it is simply a matter where it is two sides of the same coin: visibility-invisibility and finite-infinite, whose source transcends all binaries and manifests in the ebb and flow of these kinds of relationships, an ebb and flow where like the Yin-Yang

symbol, each is contained in the other. However, unity is not possible. For in the case of human knowledge, it always divides and splinters into the knower, the knowledge and the known and only a semblance of divine knowledge does not suffer from such a separation. Hence, while God is one and hence, He and His knowledge are not separate, in the case of human knowledge this is not the case. Seeing an atom is not seeing self, yet atoms within the self allow such seeing to be possible in the first place. Our knowledge is both objective and subjective and we are never wholly one with it, though glimpses, certain experiences hint at the idea and impression of such a unity.

### III. CONCLUSION

The quest for knowledge is noble even if impossible. Yet that is not to say a tending toward such a grasp cannot be accomplished. This “tending toward” can be envisaged as similar to calculus – the differential that allows one to calculate instantaneous change and that of integration which allows one to calculate the area under a graph as the y and x axis become smaller and smaller or multiplied indefinitely. It is an abstraction, an approximation but very useful.

Let’s take this metaphor further and make the following claims, reflecting now on science, philosophy, art, and knowledge in general:

- 1) Scientific methods produce knowledge in describing and manipulating the mechanism of nature. While there may be no “Theory of Everything”, its power tends toward completeness and unity, though each new fact brings in its wake further inquiries and branches to the great Tree of Knowledge.
- 2) Philosophy, notwithstanding its often technical and analytical tone, is still a useful discipline in asking the “why’s” of reality and while it perhaps falls short of knowledge as such, is at least an initial step in that direction and broadens one’s awareness in the process.
- 3) Art reflects beauty and harmony, yet it also may be a “dark art”, where the abject and the horrific are explored. The vestiges of culture certainly tell us much about a given society and so it would be wise to find a moral compass through art without power-mongering, but in the sheer desire for play and creativity.
- 4) Knowledge – the calculus of infinity – does not quite reach the absolute experience or the ultimate description of reality. The knower himself remains unknown. Yet such limitations may provoke a sense that it is only the Creator that harbors absolute existence and oneness, whether considered in material or spiritual terms.

With these reflections, we can partially answer the question: “What is the connection between the Tree of Life and Logic?” It is precisely the evolution of knowledge through the mechanism of logic that is the flowering of the Tree of Life. However, this is only the case when logic itself is directed with the attributes of recognizing that such “facts” are the relative expressions of the Infinite, the Creator. Then such knowledge will cultivate peace both individually and collectively. As such, the singular light, understood neither as simply passing through the Tree of Life or as a light hidden within the Tree of Knowledge, but as an unnamed cause and root of all things. The immanent fact of creation and its transcendent cause and power are thus somewhat grasped, a consummation of wisdom and understanding in the generation of knowledge.

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