

THE PATHOS OF A FIRST MEETING: PARTICULARITY AND SINGULARITY IN THE CRITIQUE OF TECHNOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION

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In this essay, I will outline the positive content of George Grant's conception of "particularity" and clarify it by comparing it to Reiner Schürmann's similar concept of "singularity" as a starting point for an engagement with the positive good to which it refers. In conclusion, a five-step existential logic will be presented, which, I will suggest, can resolve the important aspects of the difference between them.

George Grant was a critic of technological civilization. As such, his search for "intimations of deprivation" overshadowed an articulation of the positive good that was threatened or destroyed by technological civilization¹—so much so that he has been taken as a negative theologian, one whose task was exclusively to point to what is missing in contemporary experience and thought, in order that what is whole and good might become manifest in a voiceless intuition incapable of philosophical expression. Positive expression of the endangered good is necessarily difficult in the era of its eclipse, but it nonetheless plays a central role in Grant's work in motivating the critique of technological civilization. This positive good was referred to as "particularity" or "one's own," throughout his work² and in one later formulation as "the good of heterogeneity,

¹ Grant first used this phrase in "A Platitude," in *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), 139, and reprised it later in "Faith and the Multiversity," in *Technology and Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1986), 33, 43. The persistence of this phrase over nearly twenty years of mature thinking indicates that it can stand as a short indication of the purpose of Grant's critiques of technological civilization.

² Grant's use of the term "one's own" may well be an English rendering of Heidegger's "*Eigentlich*," which is usually translated as "authenticity." The interchangeability of this term with "particularity" in Grant's usage may account for some nuances in meaning, as well as its Heideggerian resonances. One might even speculate that it is the resonances of "one's own" that explain Grant's tenacious use of "particularity." On this terminology, see Ian Angus, *A Border*

which in its most profound past form was an expression of autochthony.”³ The positive good of particularity, which implies heterogeneity, grounds Grant’s fundamental philosophical assertion that “love is consent to the fact that there is authentic otherness” and that “we love otherness, not because it is other, but because it is beautiful.”⁴ Technological civilization denies this truth because “anything apprehended as resource cannot be apprehended as beautiful.”⁵ His philosophical work was therefore oriented to a retrieval and contemporary vindication of the lost belief that “justice is something in which we participate as we come to understand the nature of things through love and knowledge.”⁶ Such intertwining of love and knowledge stems from the influences of Athens and Jerusalem in Grant’s thought, which he attempted to synthesize into a Christian Platonism.⁷ To the extent to which it can be brought to knowledge, the concept of particularity forms the groundwork of a philosophical critique of technological civilization. In this essay, I will outline the positive content of Grant’s conception of “particularity” and clarify it by comparing it to Reiner Schürmann’s similar concept of “singularity” as a starting point for an engagement with the positive good to which it refers. In conclusion, a five-step existential logic will be presented, which, I will suggest, can resolve the important aspects of the difference between them.

Within: National Identity, Cultural Plurality and Wilderness (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1997), 77–81.

³ George Grant, “Thinking about Technology,” in [previous title mentioned in notes is Angus’s *A Border Within*, so *Ibid.* is wrong here. I think Angus means *Technology and Justice*. Please confirm.] *Technology and Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1986), 24.

⁴ George Grant, “Faith and the Multiversity,” 38, 39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷ For a critique of the relation between Athens and Jerusalem in Grant’s thought, see Ian Angus, “Athens and Jerusalem? A Critique of the Relation between Philosophy and Religion in George Grant’s Thought,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2 (Spring 2005).

1. The Location and Exigency of George Grant's Retrieval of Particularity

In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant addressed the larger context of Canada's loss of independence. Political and economic integration with the United States had taken place because the American empire represented the most advanced force of modernity. The universal and homogeneous state organized to dominate nature necessarily uproots traditions and loyalties tied to specific places. The term "particularity" was introduced in opposition to universalism. "The belief in Canada's continued existence has always appealed against universalism. It appealed to particularity against the wider loyalty to the continent. If universalism is the most 'valid modern trend,' then is it not right for Canadians to welcome our integration into the empire?"⁸ While this might be, if left unqualified, a simply parochial defence, there was an immediate implication that the universality of the universal state left something to be desired. "Only those who reject that goal and claim that the universal state will be a tyranny, that is, a society destructive of human excellence, can assert consistently that parochial nationalisms are to be fought for."⁹ If the universal state must be a tyranny, this must be either because universality necessarily implies tyranny as its political form or because the universal state is, in a sense to be determined, a specific sort of universality that is deficient in a respect that implies tyranny as its political expression. Grant's commitment to the universality of Christian Platonism assured that it is the latter course which he followed—though we will encounter the former subsequently through the concept of singularity.

The last paragraph of the book states that "[m]y lament is not based on philosophy but on tradition,"¹⁰ which I understand to mean that his attachment to this particular tradition, not the articulation of what is deficient in that universality itself, motivated his rejection of universality. The deficiency is pointed to by the observation that it yields tyranny in its political instantiation, but it is not proven to be a deficiency thereby. The rejection of tyranny, even the judgement that it is tyranny,

⁸ George Grant, *Lament for a Nation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), 85.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

is rooted in a tradition. The reference to philosophy implies that a philosophical account of the deficiency of this sort of universal would itself be a universal account, not a rejection of universality, though such a universal account would have to involve a different sort of universality without the deficiency indicated by imperial tyranny. It might *justify* what is valid in a particular tradition, but the grounds for this justification would themselves have to be independent of any particular tradition. The defence of particularity in *Lament for a Nation* does not extend to such a philosophical account—which implies a critique of deficient universality and reliance upon, ultimately, an account of genuine universality. It is this implication that led Grant's work on. He was not satisfied with a defence of particularity that could not be made philosophically, that is to say universally, defensible.

A few short years later, again addressing the fate of Canada within American imperialism, Grant wrote his clearest and most-quoted defence of particularity:

In human life there must always be place for love of the good and love of one's own. Love of the good is man's highest end, but it is of the nature of things that we come to know and to love what is good by first meeting it in that which is our own—this particular body, this family, these friends, this woman, this part of the world, this set of traditions, this civilization. At the simplest level of one's own body, it is clear that one has to love it yet pass beyond concentration on it.¹¹

This formulation begins with a statement expressed in pure universality, love of the good, and then goes on to assert the necessity that this universal be instantiated in a particular good. Such particular goods are one's *access to* the universal. Without them, the universal good cannot become known to particular humans. Nevertheless, to become obsessed with one's own particulars, to fail to pass beyond them, is to be cut off from universality and, thus, from complete humanity. Note that in this formulation the first move is from pure universality to its necessary particular

¹¹ George Grant, "Canadian Fate and Imperialism," in *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), 73.

instantiation, and the second move is from particularity toward the universal.

To this familiar Platonic formulation of participation in universals through levels of approximation, Grant adds the pathos of the “first meeting” in what may be his most characteristic philosophical contribution: for if there is no first meeting, a human life is deprived not only of the particulars which might express its meaning, but of reference to the universals from which meaning is derived, and thus of humanity itself. It should, perhaps, be added that it would be more exact to call this a Neo-Platonic formulation, insofar as the beginning statement is that of pure universality, which, therefore, assumes an accomplished universality, whereas in Plato’s work itself, the emphasis is always on the accomplishment of universality, a moving-upward rather than a moving-downward. The primacy of the latter suggests a theological, rather than a philosophical, discourse insofar as the predicative existence of the highest is taken as given.

Grant goes on to speak of an “open conflict” between particular and universal:

Canada could only continue to be if we could hold some alternative social vision to that of the great republic. Yet such an alternative would have to come out of the same stream—western culture. Indeed our failure to find such an alternative is bound up with the very homogenizing path of western history.¹²

An alternative vision of the good would require access to universality devoid of deficiency that could reveal the source of deficiency in an imperial universal and would take a less hostile approach to particular traditions. Therefore,

what lies behind the small practical question of Canadian nationalism is the larger context of the fate of western civilization. By that fate I mean not merely the relations of our massive empire to the rest of the world, but even more the kind of existence

¹² *Ibid.*, 73, 74.

which is becoming universal in advanced technological societies.¹³

This defence of particularity attains a philosophical dimension by being put into relation with universality and implying, if not articulating fully, that a distinction needs to be made between two sorts of universals—deficient versus genuine, as we have said, but this could be only a first approximation. It still needs to be shown in exactly what way they differ, though it is already evident that it is the relation to particularity that defines the difference, a relation that is manifested in the pathos of a first meeting.

Grant's formulations thus rework the relationship between particularity and universality through the pathos of a first meeting in which particularity is discounted. Philosophical elaboration of this relationship requires a distinction between deficient and genuine universals through the capacity of the latter to embody a non-tyrannical, non-imperial relation to particulars. The critical thrust of the pathos of the first meeting points to the relevant deficiency: It is demanded of the individual in technological civilization to treat his/her particular attachments as "merely particular," that is to say, irrelevant to the universal, rather than as "necessary" in the sense of a necessary route to the universal. Of course, it is essentially necessary that there be more than one route toward the universal. To be a universal, a universal must apply to a set of particulars. To be perceived as a universal, only one member of this set need serve as a route even though there is a corresponding set of routes toward the universal beginning from each particular in the set. The necessity in question is thus the necessity of *a* route, one of a plurality of available routes, not that any one route might itself be necessary. The pathos of the first meeting may thus be described as that which prevents a passage from a given particular toward the universal, and therefore cuts off the one whose particularity is so discounted from access to the universal. This critical thrust depends upon the possibility of a passage from particular to universal that is not thus prevented, toward a universal that is therefore not deficient, and that might be experienced in joy and affirmation instead of in pathos. Such joy is expressed in the classical ideal of beauty, in which the passage toward universality is affirmed. A parallel,

¹³ *Ibid.*, 78.

more contemporary, role of art may be here discerned which would point to the pathos of cancellation, of the loss and alienation experienced when no such route is available.

To follow Grant in his reworking of the relation between particularity and universality implies a logic of distinction between deficient and genuine universals containing an account both of a genuine universal itself and of the cancellation process whereby other universals are registered as deficient. Grant's critical work focussed on this latter task in order to skewer the homogenisation by which technological civilization cancelled passage from some particular roots, namely, the Canadian tradition, toward the universal. While he was well aware that an account of the passage toward a genuine universal was required by his critiques, I cannot find any expression of this passage in a philosophically adequate form. Most often, he here took refuge in art, referring to Mozart, for example, as "the lute of God," to express a beautiful embodiment of the universal, an embodiment which itself provides the passage in question.¹⁴

2. The Object of Art as a Universalisation Embedded in Particulars

One should not overlook the possibility that a recourse to art at this point is not at all arbitrary or an indication of failure, especially because, since Kant, art has been understood as the realm of a universalisation that cannot be made independently of its particular embodiment. Kant distinguished between a "determinate judgment" in which a particular is subsumed under an existent universal law, and a "reflective judgment" in which the universal is not pre-given, but must be given in the judgement

¹⁴ George Grant, "Faith and the Multiversity," 132–33n.4, where he attributes the phrase to Heidegger. It comes originally from fragment 366 of "The Cherubic Wanderer" by Angelus Silesius, where it is said that "A heart that is calm in its ground. God-still, as he will, / Would gladly be touched by him: it is his lute-play." Heidegger quotes this passage and applies it to Mozart; see Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, (tr.) Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). This is likely the Heidegger reference that Grant had in mind since he was strongly influenced by this text, which he read in French prior to 1972 (as I recall from remarks he made in his graduate course on technology at McMaster University in Fall 1972), and was passionate about the music of Mozart.

itself.¹⁵ Such a judgement is not accomplished through subsumption but is a judgement of an individual that implies a not-yet-given universal.

A representation which, as individual and apart from comparison with others, yet has an agreement with the conditions of universality which it is the business of the understanding to apply, brings the cognitive faculties into that proportionate accord which we require for all cognition, and so regard as holding for everyone who is determined to judge by means of understanding and sense in combination (i.e., for every man).¹⁶

Aesthetic judgement involves a “free play of the imagination and the understanding” in which the particularity necessary or passage toward the universal is sensuously present such that “the feeling in the judgment of taste comes to be imputed to everyone, so to speak, as a duty.”¹⁷ Art might well be the realm in which the affirmation or cancellation of the passage to universality is most evident due precisely to the necessary embeddedness of universalisations in sensuous experience.

A sensuous universalisation, though it is *imputed* universally, cannot *demand* the actual agreement of others, but can merely ask for or woo it.¹⁸ This is because it is rationalising in the sense that it “proclaims

¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, (tr.) J. H. Bernard (New York: Macmillan, 1951), introduction, section IV.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52, 138.

¹⁸ “Ask” is the translation by J.H. Bernard in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, 74. “Woo” is the more evocative translation by Hannah Arendt in her groundbreaking application of Kant’s concept of aesthetic judgement to political judgement. See Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis in Culture,” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking, 1961), 222. The German word in question here is “wirbt,” from the verb *werben* (“recruit” or “enlist”), whose meaning, when followed by “um,” is “to court, to woo, to make love to, to sue for, to ask for (a girl’s hand in marriage).” (*Schöffler/Weiss Deutsch-Englisch Wörterbuch*) Thus, Arendt’s translation is not only more telling but also more accurate. The complete sentence in question is: “*Man wirbt um jedes anderen Beistimmung, weil man dazu einen Grund hat, der allen gemein ist; auf welche Beistimmung man auch rechnen könnte, wenn man nur immer sicher wäre, dass der Fall unter jenem Grunde als*

itself as universal, for as such it can serve as the major premise of a syllogism.”¹⁹ In contrast, a straightforwardly rational and universal judgement is the conclusion to a syllogism. One thus reasons *from* a universalising, rationalising judgement, whereas one reasons *toward* a universal and rational one. It is thus necessary that a sensuous embodiment perceptible by all stand as the starting point from which such rationalising can proceed and which will have no definitive termination. For Kant, this was the artwork, though it seems clear that other such recognised exemplars can function identically under certain determinate conditions.²⁰ Reason, in the sense of a universalising and rationalising judgement, requires both an exemplary sensuous embodiment and a claim to universal acknowledgement even though such a claim is always underway and in principle can be rationally contested.

I do not want to suggest by this reference to Kant that aesthetic judgement so understood simply resolves the problem of deficient and genuine universals central to Grant’s logic or, even less, to suggest that this formulation influenced him. My point is rather, in a narrow optic, that Grant’s references to art, and especially Mozart, play a significant role in his critique of technological civilization. In a larger optic, such a reference to art, even directly to Kant’s aesthetics, has been the dominant locus within which this problem has been addressed in contemporary philosophy. For example, Max Horkheimer and Hannah Arendt each independently regarded Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* as a fundamental starting point for rethinking the relation between particular and universal required by the formalism of scientific-technological reason.²¹ Moreover, Hans-Georg Gadamer has emphasised that the German tradition stem-

Regel des Beifalls richtig subsumiert ware.” Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1963), 79.

¹⁹ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 182n.1.

²⁰ The term “exemplar” is from W. B. Gallie’s important and influential article “Essentially Contested Concepts,” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. LVI [is there an editor for this?] (London: Harrison and Sons, 1956), which, though without reference to Kant, seems to aim at fixing the universal conditions of universalising judgement precisely in Kant’s sense.

²¹ Max Horkheimer, *Kants kritik der urteilskraft als bindeglied zwischen theoretischer und praktischer philosophie* (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1925), and Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind, Vol. 1, Willing* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978), appendix, “Judging.”

ming from Kant eviscerated the social and political content of English moral philosophy and the French use of “*le bon sens*” in favour of a purely theoretical faculty of judgement.²² In this sense, one can interpret the twentieth-century uses of Kant to uncover the relation between sensuous embodiment and universalisation as returning to a central problem of reason in humanistic philosophy rather than a radical departure.

The culture of technological civilization has been diagnosed by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno as one in which “the whole and the parts are alike; there is no antithesis and no connection,” so that what Grant calls the “particular” shows, in their terms, “the non-specificity of the example.”²³ The consequence for particularity of the problem of *subsumption* was defined by Adorno as the philosophy of identity, in which “the concept of the particular is always its negation at the same time; it cuts short what the particular is and what nonetheless cannot be directly named, and it replaces this with identity.”²⁴ This suggestion that the particular as a concept is itself deficient because it implies a cancelling of the particularity of the particular in favour of a subsuming universal may well be seen as a confirming reverse image of Grant’s defence of particularity—though it differs in implying that universals are always subsuming in this sense and, therefore, that the problem lies in conceptual universality itself (as we will also see in the case of “singularity” below). Tellingly, Adorno looked to aesthetics for “reciprocal relations between universal and particular where the universal is not imposed on the particular from outside but emerges from the dynamic of particularities themselves.”²⁵ The larger optic of twentieth-century philosophy demands a non-cancelled particular and a non-deficient universal to address the insufficiency of technological civilization as expressed in its formal-technical conception of reason. In his critique of formal logic, Edmund Husserl asked whether “the analytico-formal theory must be supplemented by a *material* theory,” a transcendental aesthetics of greater

²² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1975), 25–38.

²³ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (tr.) John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 126, 10.

²⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, (tr.) E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 173; on subsumption, see *ibid.*, 11.

²⁵ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (tr.) C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), appendix III, 481.

scope than the Kantian because it referred to “any possible world as a world given in pure experience,” whose task is “the genetical tracing of predicative evidences back to the non-predicative evidence called experience.”²⁶ Such a material phenomenology would account for the experiential encounter with particulars as not only the foundation of formal logic and the practice of logical subsumption, but as the locus of reason in the lived world, that is to say, a non-deficient and embodied universality.

Examples and citations of rethinking and expansion of the Kantian problem of embodied universalisation could be multiplied. The point here is to notice the larger optic within which the problem of passage from particular to universal that Grant diagnosed is shared in its general form by many other contemporary philosophers, and that it is the specific manner in which their philosophies address this problem defines their distinctive approaches. One important difference here is that the tradition of German Idealism, up to and including Adorno, locates the issue of a particular embodied universalisation paradigmatically in the sphere of the aesthetic, whereas the phenomenological tradition attempts a retrieval of the particular through experience and thought, which consequently has implications without restriction within technological civilization. This is because the issue of the particular is discovered through a critique of technology and universal-formal reason in phenomenology, whereas Adorno follows German Idealism in posing the opposition between art and technology from within the utopia of the aesthetic.²⁷ Grant would have to be on the phenomenological side of this difference, since a solely aesthetic retrieval of the particular would eviscerate his opposition to Canada’s integration into the universal and homogeneous empire of technology. Whatever the role of art in articulating the particular embodied universal for Grant, its significance extends without restriction to the whole experienced world.

²⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, (tr.) Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 149, 292, 209 (italics and scare quotation marks removed).

²⁷ See, on this point, Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, (tr.) Christine-Marie Gros (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 368–69n.47.

3. Particularity and Singularity

The retrieval of particularity in Grant's work thus converges with an identical theme of the oppressive inadequacy of formal-technical reason in the tradition of Kantian aesthetics, including its recent influence on Adorno and Horkheimer, and that of phenomenology. Important as Grant's references to art are, his critique of technology agrees with that of phenomenology in refusing to locate the retrieval of particularity within aesthetics, even paradigmatically so, and thus strives to express it in thought. Thus, I want to reconsider and clarify Grant's retrieval of particularity by comparing it with the related concept of "singularity" that Reiner Schürmann, in following the implications of the Heideggerian critique of technology, argues is the destiny of particularity.

Philosophical use of the term "singularity" originated with Duns Scotus's argument against the proposition that God cannot be known through a concept common to himself and other creatures since "Socrates, in so far as he is Socrates, is singular" because "the singularity of a thing is no impediment to the abstraction of a common concept."²⁸ In this sense, a singularity is a thing insofar as it is that thing and not another. A singularity may be a particular in the sense that Socrates is, like many others, a man, or a human being or an animal. A particular may be subsumed under many universals of different types, but when a particular is considered not as an instance of a kind but rather as the one that it is itself, then it is a singular. A singular is thus differentiated from a particular in that a particular is an instance of a relevant concept, whereas a singular can be considered as several particulars depending on the universal in question. This is one reason Grant's use of the term "particularity" to designate a reversal from a tyrannical universal may be considered theoretically inadequate: a particular can be defined as a particular only in relation to a relevant universal, whereas reference to the thing in its concrete being must include its possibility of being subsumed under more than one universal. In this sense, a singular may be considered the totality of such particulars determined by universals. Nonetheless, this is a secondary concept because a singular is not in the first place derived

²⁸ Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings*, (ed. and tr.) Allan Wolter (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1963), 32–33.

from a plurality of particulars, but is, rather, the thing itself prior to the abstraction of a type—in phenomenological terms, we may say “the experienced thing” or “the thing in its living presence,” to refer to a fulfilled intuition.

Contemporary use of the concept of singularity in general derives from Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, in which, in Samuel Weber’s account, the “singularity of the object [which] resists all attempts to subsume it under general concepts also precludes the establishment of a discipline of literary studies or of literary criticism” and leads to the concept of iterability as used by Jacques Derrida, in which “[t]he iterability of a literary—or a psychoanalytic—interpretation, for instance, entails alteration as much as it does recurrence.”²⁹ For Weber, the “unravelling of form” in Kant’s Third Critique is coincident with Heidegger’s account of the truth of the work of art.³⁰ This characteristic assumption of the identity of a phenomenological and Kantian account of singularity is one of the assumptions that this essay seeks to question, however much it may describe accurately the use of the concept of singularity in current French philosophy to combine the Kantian influence with the Heideggerian one to describe an emergence in which the distinction between particular and universal, of case/example versus concept/type, does not emerge as such.³¹

²⁹ Samuel Weber, “Ambivalence: The Humanities and the Study of Literature,” in *Institution and Interpretation: Expanded Edition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 141, 142.

³⁰ Samuel Weber, “The Unraveling of Form,” in *Mass Mediauras* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 15–30.

³¹ In this vein of combining phenomenological and Kantian conceptions, Jean-Luc Nancy describes singularity in this way: “What is a singularity, if not each time its ‘own’ clearing, its ‘own’ Should this be immanence? Please check original] imminence, the [immanence?] imminence of a ‘propriety’ or propriety itself as [immanence?] imminence, always touched upon, always lightly touched: revealing itself *beside*, always beside.” Jean-Luc Nancy, “Of Being Singular Plural,” in *Being Singular Plural*, (tr.) Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 7. It remains possible, of course, that Nancy has not simply combined these, but forged a synthesis that reconciles and drives beyond these sources. I will not investigate this possibility in this essay.

In Reiner Schürmann's usage, singularisation is an anticipatory name for that which is manifested at the end of metaphysics, for the occurrence in leaping whereby a subsumed particularity becomes a singularity, for the negativity that attends the finitude of an event, which is the undoing of technological civilization. It is thus a key concept that adds to Heideggerian terminology and determines his interpretation of Heidegger. Three aspects of singularity can be distinguished here under the headings of ontological difference, singularity and negativity.

The ontological difference between beings and Being allowed Heidegger to initiate thinking on the epoch of metaphysics in which Being receded to an abstract category behind the disclosure of beings. The ontological difference thus "operates like a corrosive and disjoins the jointings by which entities have been colligated into being as particulars are into a universal or as the transcended is into the transcendental."³² Through the phenomenology of the ontological difference, particular-universal relationships are prised apart to reveal what Schürmann calls a "jointing." The sense of "prising" that Schürmann proposes as a component of phenomenology can be understood through Heidegger's description of the dependence of thought on manifestation: "But if things had already ever shown themselves *qua* things in their thingness, then the thing's thingness would have become manifest and would have laid claim to thought."³³ Jointings seal particular-universal relations within a metaphysical frame and can become unsealed through the direction of phenomenological inquiry toward the constitution of thing and world. This inquiry suggests a singularisation toward "heeding this pitcher, this bridge, for its own sake as its world comes to pass in it."³⁴ Such inquiry emerges from a leap out of metaphysics, which is the existential trajectory that, in Heidegger's words, "brings thinking into a play with that wherein being *qua* being finds its repose."³⁵ "Singularity" in this sense is an anticipatory name for that which thinking leaps toward.

³² Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, 214.

³³ Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, (tr.) Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 170.

³⁴ Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, 214.

³⁵ Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, (tr.) Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 111.

Singularity emerges from particularity insofar as the epoch that confines particularity to a case of a universal recedes as the jointings come unsealed. Beginning from what I called above a “cancelled particular,” a particular which remains a particular but whose relation to a universal is cancelled, one may begin to capture a particularity on the way to becoming a singular. Thinking the particular as particular in this manner “allows one to think of things not according to their unchangeable essence, but in their singularity, unheard of since the Greeks.”³⁶ One may note at this point a difference between Schürmann’s formulation and that which I ventured above in following the implications of George Grant’s thought. For Schürmann, the epochal stamp of metaphysics operates as a jointing of particulars to universals. The leap initiates a dislocating of particulars, such that thinking the particular as particular leaps toward singularity. For Grant, it is the cancelled particular, the particular denied a relation to universality, that provokes an embracing of that particularity. In the first case, it is the *subsumption* of particulars, whereas in the second case it is the *cancellation* of them, not through subsuming them but by, so to speak, failing to subsume or include them, that makes possible the leap. A related difference is that it may appear that in the first case it is subsumption of particulars universally that opens toward a leap, whereas for Grant it is one’s attachment to a specific cancelled particular that is crucial. (Given that subsumption is also the key element for Adorno’s critique, it contains a kindred relation to the Heideggerian leap to singularity despite the difference that, unlike in Heidegger, it is articulated from an aesthetic conception—such that philosophy becomes the construction of “constellations” on an aesthetic model. “What the philosophical concept will not abandon is the yearning that animates the non-conceptual side of art, and whose fulfilment shuns the immediate side of art as mere appearance. The concept—the organon of thinking, and yet the wall between thinking and the thought—negates that yearning.”³⁷) Similarly, whereas Grant’s retrieval of particularity involves the desire for a new, more adequate universal that would no longer cancel some particulars, Schürmann’s leap toward singularity involves a de-hegemonizing of universality as such that would liberate the particular from its relation to universality through its transformation into singu-

³⁶ Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, 213.

³⁷ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 15.

larity. Attachment to a particular appears crucial to preparing a leap in either case. Nonetheless, there remains a difference between the two accounts: Grant turns “back” toward the cancelled particular in a manner that motivates thinking on given deficient universals and new universalisations. In contrast, singularisation occurs in that leaping in which a particularity strains away from its subsumption to universality and toward becoming a singularity.

Schürmann clarifies his thinking on this point through a reflection on the work of Marcel Duchamp, specifically his bicycle wheel mounted on a stool for exhibit in a museum.³⁸ Schürmann’s leap is prepared by a particular that resists subsumption in the way that the bicycle mounted on a stool resists universalisation through either the mobility of the bicycle or the stationary character of the stool. This double and irreconcilable pull exemplifies the doubly nomic law, the double bind that defines tragedy for Schürmann and which is denied in the hegemonic fantasm of metaphysics. Thus, the *differend*, “in its place of emergence, expresses a conflict between a thesis of the same and a non-thetic other, the conflict of ultimates.”³⁹ The *singular* is the “belonging to no genus”⁴⁰ whose emergence is pointed to by an inscription of a double-and-conflicting-with-no-escape differend such as Duchamp’s. The singularisation of which Schürmann speaks doesn’t turn back toward the particular in the manner of Grant so much as press outward from a differend. Grant’s critique expresses itself through critiques of cancellation from universality, whereas Schürmann’s expresses itself through an anticipation of singularity.⁴¹

³⁸ Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, (tr.) Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 618.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 619.

⁴¹ Peyman Vahabzadeh has interpreted “the emergence of particularities as we witness in the new social movements,” which are described in contemporary sociology, as anticipations of singularity in Schürmann’s sense. “Such articulations of experiences [in new social movements] are *genuine*...in their *singularity*, and not subsumed or subsumable, by force, under a universal. In short, it is *genuine* in the sense that it is *nonhegemonic*.” See his *Articulated Experiences: Toward a Radical Phenomenology of New Social Movements* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 156, 179. The comparison with Grant that I suggest here would [strongly recommend not repeating “suggest”

One may well suspect that a specific particular is crucial to preparing the leap, in the sense that Duchamp's object does in this example, especially since the notion of particulars preparing the leap universally seems self-contradictory, not only in a logical sense but, more importantly, in an existential one. It is the crucial role of the differend as a particular motivating the leap that distinguishes Schürmann's account at this point from Heidegger's, and allows him to introduce the concept of singularity cognate to French Heideggerianism through an appreciation of double binds within technological civilization. Despite Schürmann's comprehensive interpretation of Heidegger, the influence of Nietzsche is in certain crucial contexts more telling. One can contrast Nietzsche's phrase "God is dead," for example, with Heidegger's famous remark in the *Spiegel* interview that "only a god can save us. The only possibility available to us is that by thinking and poeticizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god, or for the absence of a god in [our] decline insofar as in view of the absent god, we are in a state of decline."⁴² Insofar as "god" stands here for the hegemonic ordering principle, the difference implied is that for Nietzsche no new principle is possible whereas for Heidegger the possibility is at least left open. As Michel Harr has shown, Schürmann's interpretation of Heidegger takes his position to be equivalent to Nietzsche's, thus closing down the possibility of a new epoch of Being that, at least at some points in Heidegger's work, remains open. This difference means that "Schürmann takes Nietzsche's side against Heidegger in showing that for Nietzsche the original chaotic essence of forces is only provisionally hidden by the fiction of schemes, unities, and forms, whereas for Heidegger, tragedy is reduced to the merely principal conflict of the ontological doubleness (presence/absence) of *aletheia*. In Schürmann's last thinking, the task of philosophy is to dismantle the hegemonic economies of the past in showing

here (used three words earlier)] suggest thinking together *cancellation* with *differend* in social movements. It would seem that some existential encounter with cancellation would be necessary to bring the Duchamp-like encounter with double binds into the social realm.

⁴² Martin Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us," (tr.) William J. Richardson, in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, (ed.) Thomas Sheehan (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1981), 57.

that they are the consequence of the oblivion not of *aletheia*, but of our tragic and mortal condition.”⁴³

The third aspect of singularity in Schürmann’s account refers to the finitude of a constellation of world and things as it comes to pass in an event. Such coming to pass involves also its losing sway through its inherent negativity. “It brings into focus, not the present particular, but a particular presencing as particular, that is, as permeated with its unique negativity.”⁴⁴ Such negativity, understood in a Heideggerian way, is an absencing or withdrawing co-constituted in a manifestation or an appearing as it appears.

While “unconcealment”...indicates general constellations of presence endowed with a certain duration, its anticipatory incidence, the “event,” scatters the general, disregards even the particular thing, and fragments any thought-content other than this or that presencing singularized by its distinct absencing. Such plurification is impossible to transcend and thinkable only as a movement of “rising” or “clearing.”⁴⁵

Absencing, or negativity, attends singularity in its appearance in an event. Singularity in this sense is the finitude through which a thing withdraws into a concealment coincident with its manifestation. Such absencing is the specific negativity of the singularity corresponding to its unique singularity.

There are, then, three related differences in the accounts: One, Grant’s retrieval of particularity turns “backward” to what has been cancelled by a universality, whereas Schürmann’s “singularity” is constituted through a leap “forward” out of metaphysics. Two, the retrieval of particularity anticipates a new, genuine universal which would not cancel any relevant particulars, whereas the leap toward singularity anticipates a new non-hegemonic realm without subsumption, that is to say, without universals, without genus and, therefore, also without particularities. It

⁴³ Michel Harr, “The Place of Nietzsche in Reiner Schürmann’s Thought and in His Reading of Heidegger,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, vol. 19, no. 2–vol. 20, no. 1 (YEAR), 244.

⁴⁴ Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, 219.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

thus implies, unlike Grant's account, that the critique of technological civilization requires a critique of universality as such rather than a critique of deficient universals. Three, while both accounts are stimulated non-universally, that is to say, by specific examples, in one case it is a "cancelled particular," while in the other it is the differend, the "doubly nomic," the tragic double bind. The latter opens up a role for avant-garde art that is lacking in Grant's conception.

4. A Five-Step Existential-Temporal Logic

Grant's Canadian nationalism in the context of his Christian Platonism is what is specific to his diagnosis of the blocking of the passage in the pathos of a first meeting, but it leaves insufficiently addressed the distinction between deficient and genuine universals. The predominant direction of such a search for a genuine, non-deficient universal has often been routed into art but, while it may learn from this route, it needs to pertain to the entirety of practical action within technological civilization. Grant's work, insofar as it turns back from formal universals toward embodied universalisation as the locus of philosophical reflection, contains a polemical interest in, at least, reassessing and, at most, justifying particular attachments as expressed in local traditions and forms of inhabitation. It is the logic of this central thread in Grant's work that I have followed here beyond his own formulations. In previous work, I have called this "an embracing of particularity," which is an existential decision to value particularity that occurs in the situation of its endangerment, and which, I have argued, was not recognised by Grant as an operative factor in the conceptual basis of the critique of deficient universals.⁴⁶ The motivation of this decision is rooted in the cancellation of a specific particularity but extends to a philosophical questioning about particularity as such. A decision is possible, even *within* technological

⁴⁶ This observation was first made in my article, "Crossing the Border," *The Massachusetts Review*, special issue on Canada, vol. XXXI, no. 1–2 (Spring-Summer 1990), 42. Its use in clarifying the relation between particularity in Grant's sense and Heidegger's conception of a "step back" (*schritt zurück*) was developed further in my *A Border Within*, 132, 160–61 and 201–02, and was used to define multiculturalism philosophically as "the universalization of a right to particularity within a pluri-cultural, unilingual framework." See Angus, *A Border Within*, 146.

civilization, but that is not *of* it, to take such attachments seriously, to live one's life in a struggle to discover what of universals can be found through these particulars. It contains the risk of being cut off from those universals deriving from the tradition that perhaps cannot be discovered in one's own particular attachments. This is an existential-temporal logic, based in a decision, that might ground a new, genuine universal—and also might fail to find assent—and thus is currently suspended at the moment of universalisation.⁴⁷

I want to parse this existential-temporal logic into five steps that address the passage from a cancelled particular toward a new universalisation. It should be recalled that the situation of this logic is a prior awareness, articulating into a judgement, that the dominant formal-technical universality is deficient in its relation to particulars. These steps introduce two intermediate concepts—specifically, border and localisation—that do not figure in the work of Grant, nor that of Schürmann.⁴⁸ The first step is an embracing of one's own particularity, a decision to value and explore it, which does not *deny* universality but also does not yet thematise the relations of this particularity to a non-deficient possibility of universalisation, remaining with the exploration of the value of a specific particularity in its specificity. This occurs through a *reversal* of the dominant particular-universal relations and implies a marginalisation from hegemonic conceptions.

The second step occurs when the investigation of a particularity as particularity is experienced as lacking in universality of address such

⁴⁷ This existential decision thus initiates what Heidegger calls the leap out of metaphysics where “[t]he leap leaps through the realm between beings and being.” Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, 78 and passim.

⁴⁸ [Are all refs listed in this note by Angus?] The existential logic that I propose here is a formalisation of my investigations following up this problematic, which appear in several different contexts. The texts in question here are *A Border Within*, 126–28, 137–38 and 155–62, and *(Dis)figurations: Discourse/Critique/Ethics* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 77–87. These initial formulations were pursued in a phenomenology of locality in *Identity and Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 26–31, which was grounded on an unfulfilled teleology in Heidegger's late thought, published as “Place and Locality in Heidegger's Late Thought,” *Symposium: Journal of the Canadian Society for Hermeneutics and Postmodern Thought*, vol. V, no. 1 (Spring 2001).

that the necessity to include other particularities as particularities emerges within the existential logic. This is a *step back* from the constituted relations between particularity and universality so that the relation of universality to the embracing of a *plurality* of particularities is thematically posed.⁴⁹ At this point, where a plurality of particularities referring to a plurality of relevant universals appears, use of the term “particularity” must refer back toward the origin of questioning about subsumption, and the term “singularity” must be introduced to refer teleologically toward what the particular may become should it be able to shake free of deficient universalisation. The idea of a non-deficient universalisation thus appears even though it as yet lacks all content.

The third step consists in the discovery of a difference, or division, between particularity and universality that establishes their opposition through their *border*. This poses thematically the issue of what passes through the border to become formulated in universal terms and what is limited to particularity as such. For example, I may belong on the rain-drenched West Coast of Canada, but belonging in a place may be a universal condition of humans. It is but a short step to *localisation*, or the putting of particularity into relations with other particularities such that particularity is not simply opposed to universality but recognised as a route toward the universal—a route whose cancellation has now been un-

⁴⁹ I am using here Heidegger’s term “step back” (*schritt zurück*), which can also be called a *Destruktion* or a *deconstruction* (Derrida) in the sense that these derive from Husserl’s *Rückgang* and *Abbau* (unbuilding). A going-backward, noted by Husserl, can only take a spiral form of expression: going back and coming forward while retreating back to the “instituted” site under investigation. Husserl’s concept of institution (*Urstiftung*) is the basis for this methodological move. See Ian Angus, “Phenomenology as Critique of Institutions: Movements, Authentic Sociality and Nothingness,” *PhaenEx*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2006). Available at <http://137.207.120.196/ojs/leddy/index.php/phaenex>. Defence of one’s own is a “step back from the relation between contingency and universality to the *conditions under which* a specific being might apprehend a universal good.” See Angus, *A Border Within*, 132. The step back was not taken by Grant because of his commitment to Christian Platonism; this is a phenomenological move which requires a certain distance from the metaphysical tradition, which is not to say (against Heidegger) from philosophy. See Ian Angus, “Socrates and the Critique of Metaphysics,” *The European Legacy*, vol. 10, no. 4 (2005).

cancelled. This double negation in localisation is an attunement to universalisation. It is the ontic ground of ontology, the existential openness that allows manifestation of non-deficient universals. While the border is that which is passed, or traversed, localisation is the passage itself, the passing onward from particularity toward universalisation.

The final step is universalisation itself, a statement of ontology, an arguable attempt to court agreement without the assurance of finalisation. This existential logic thus ends with a certain *polemos* that is not the *polemos* of one-against-another, or particular against particular, but of universalisation-against-universalisation, which is both potentially more inclusive and simultaneously potentially more destructive.⁵⁰ Its destructive potential can only be kept under rein through the patient return to particularity, and particularities, and a questioning re-stepping through the existential logic.

The five-step existential-temporal logic of reversal, step back, border, localisation and universalisation takes its departure from the cancellation of a given specific particularity. As an undoing of this cancellation, it is a critique of the formal, homogeneous universality upon which depends the technological empire and an anticipation of a material universality to come.

4. Conclusion

The comparison between Grant and Schürmann was intended to highlight key issues in the critique of technological civilization through their different formulations and terminologies. The existential-temporal logic formalised above was developed by following through the logic of particularity beginning from Grant. It remains to investigate whether this logic can make a contribution to the critique of technological civilization, especially through the introduction of the two intermediate concepts of border and localisation.

⁵⁰ I have investigated this *polemos* in "In Praise of Fire: Responsibility, Manifestation, Polemos, Circumspection," *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, vol. 4 (2004). This account also contains a critique of the Heideggerian ontological difference in asserting the unsurpassability of ontic entanglements in ontology.

The critique of technological civilization may well begin with a singularity, such as Duchamp's bicycle-stool, but such a double bind that shakes hegemonic closure must be constructed, and thus relies on prior thought and intuition, as does avant-garde art. But the more generic beginning is described by Grant's notion of a cancelled particular, of being-left-out-of the prevailing epochal jointing. The cancelling of one's own particularity, a particularity that cannot be treated as just one among others but which is denied its role as a route to universality, is the point of departure for an existential-temporal logic in search of a new, genuine universalisation. This element of cancellation is absent from the concept of singularity. Politically, singularisation is a protest against being subsumed, whereas particularity is a protest against being "marginalized," against a powerful, alien other.

The border is the difference between particular and universal and is thus what initiates the unsettling of the particular from the universal in Schürmann's sense, and then the passage toward singularisation. The border is the impossibility of final hegemonic jointing.

The embracing of particularity, which entails the risk of being cut off from universality, prises apart the jointing of particular and universal to signify the border, or difference, between them and thus to pose the question of subsumption as the central issue of technological civilization. The possibility of both a plurality of relevant particulars and of several universals or types demands a *localisation* that poses anew the issue of universalisation. Localisation is the putting of one particular in relation to others. It is thus accomplished as singularisation in Schürmann's sense, with the important difference that locality does not rule out, in principle, all reference to universalisation.

Existential embracing of the cancelled particular thus draws it into singularisation in a manner that does not rule out the possibility of a future universalisation. One may say that it illustrates Grant's non-cancelled particular by maintaining the possibility of non-deficient universality. The concept of singularity, or singularisation, insofar as it is constituted in an anticipatory leap, puts at the forefront the non-genus, because it holds to the possibility that Grant rejected—that universality is necessarily tyranny. Singularisation in Schürmann's sense seeks the regime of non-regime (which can only be realised as philosophy) or, perhaps more accurately, is, in principle, in protest against any and all regimes (and can be realised as politics). In contrast, the existential-

temporal logic elaborated here situates the cancelling of particularity and its embrace as prior to the encounter with singularity, thus relocating it before a final risk of universalisation. Beyond protest, there is the necessity to say that Being has driven previous universals as well as the demand to articulate their deficiency. Universalisation is valid, not only as singularisation, nor only as already-existent universality, but as the demand to articulate universally the features of existential temporality, that is to say, as philosophy—which is essentially tied to universality.

What is the wager here? A new hegemony may fail to include all particularities sufficiently and, therefore, the de-jointing would have to begin again. But the necessity to begin de-jointing again cannot be known in advance. To claim, in principle, the impossibility of adequate universalisation is to assert protest as the ultimate stance, which is therefore to claim to know in advance the failure of future hegemonies. Such a claim to know the failure of all jointings into the future jumps over the existential-temporal logic of embracing particularity and posits a principle, albeit a principle of non-jointing, that would rule throughout all existential time. Such a positing could only be an assertion without experiential support, a metaphysics asserting the impossibility of metaphysics, insofar as metaphysics arises from jointing. If the philosopher is always potentially a traitor to any regime by virtue of the universalisation that exceeds it, it is nevertheless equally true that such treachery cannot be guaranteed in advance and must be earned by the new regime. There can be no regime of singularities.

It is here that politics, even the thinking of regimes, and philosophy part company. If philosophy is the heeding of singularities that cannot be joined within a regime, then politics always contains a closure that philosophy will want to open. But philosophy, no more than a wanderer returning home, can open a door before standing in front of it. For philosophy to be done, universality cannot necessarily be tyranny—even though all universalities may fail in their turn. This is given in the very experience of noticing a cancelled particularity as such.

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