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Technology and Human Dignity: The Contemporary Relevance of George Grant's Views

By

Éamon Brennan

A Major Research Paper

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
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2020

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Technology and Human Dignity: The Contemporary Relevance of George Grant's Views

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Abstract

George Grant argues that modern innovations in technology are delineated by what he terms 'the co-penetration of art and science', which disposes their rational methods towards the satisfaction of while in a purported 'spirit of creativity'. Though such a spirit has provided many benefits, a natural worry arises as to what may be justified, morally, within the parameters of such creativity. For Grant, such skepticism is well-founded as the gradual expansion of technology is co-measure with 'demythologization', that is, the loss of any sense of objective, transcendent purpose. Noting how this worrying trend invites a dangerous premise of making human life subordinate to such creative drives, Grant asserts that the highly individualistic nature of modern technological thinking ultimately challenges the idea of human dignity itself. However, in his *Thinking Like a Mall*, Steven Vogel argues for the non-existence of nature by attempting to demonstrate that the entire world is simply the result of Man's artifice. Labelling such projects as technological, Vogel goes on to say that each technology's 'wildness' prevents it from being absorbed into projects of mastery, negating concerns that technology will attempt to master human nature. Yet in presenting Grant's historical examination of the idea of technology, particularly as it relates to the ideas of 'progress' and Nietzsche's critique of the same, I will argue that Vogel's view of technology is ultimately inadequate as it does not satisfactorily what Grant identifies as the novelty of current technological thinking, which relates to the profound lack of a 'myth' to contextualize our moral decision making in modern technological thinking. Rather, Vogel's account is rather static inasmuch as it equivocates technology with artifacts and does not pay adequate attention to how the idea of technology has developed, particularly in recent history. As such, Vogel's moral program fails to address the issues that Grant raises, and thus reinscribes the most harmful aspects of technological thinking.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to all those who have aided in my pursuit of the truth. My mother and father for their ceaseless love, support, and insurmountable patience. My friends and colleagues, for letting me know when I am quite wrong. My advisor Dr. Philip Rose for his guidance, and Dr. Jeff Noonan for agreeing to be my internal reader. Finally, and most importantly, to the Holy Trinity, the Truth whose brilliance illuminates all others. If I have accomplished anything within these pages, let all praise go to those listed.

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Introduction: A Brief Outline of the Problem of Dignity-Technology

This paper will take as its primary focus George Grant's concept of technology, and his accompanying concern that technological thinking may obscure human nature in ethical situations where discussions on human nature are relevant. As understood by Grant, the sort of technological thinking present in contemporary society asserts, at its base, the subjugation of all things to the individual's will and promotes the creative development of rational methods and artifacts that allow for the individual to make the world valuable to himself. Involving today what Grant calls a 'co-penetration of the arts and sciences', summarized as subjecting human powers of making to nothing aside from the creative will, Grant charges that technology now knows no moral limitation aside from this striving for creativity. Citing the widespread dispersion of technologies that increasingly seek a mastery over the affairs of life and death, such as the tolerance of abortion as a form of birth control, the claimed 'right to die' advocated by proponents of euthanasia, and the growing interest in genetic editing and cybernetics, Grant alleges that the acceptance of these procedures as ethical highlights a sense in which life itself is being immorally forced into compliance with the creative potential of technology. Thus the simultaneous abandonment of the language surrounding 'dignity' as attached to life should give us worry, insofar as the assumption of Man as the object of technological progress questions the nature of the relationship between technology and human dignity.

The relevancy of this question receives context from previously existing paradigms of knowledge as they emerge historically, that is, proceeding from the previous paradigm. Indeed, Grant presents the case that the movement of history and

paradigms can be observed as originating in the overcoming of the religiously transcribed rituals that colored ancient Athenian society. Accomplished through the realization that one ought pursue conduct befitting living within a divinely arranged order, Grant observes that Plato was the first philosopher to assert a concrete meaning to human life (contemplation), which in turn was successively translated into: the Christian paradigm of living in accordance with God's law in the hope of Armageddon, to Man establishing his own freedom in Luther, and to the overcoming of chance and necessity in Marx. Yet as Grant suggests elsewhere, what persists through these developments are three general principles: first, that of the meta-historical suggestion of purpose to human life, which broadly considered is "living together well with others and thinking". Following the introduction of Christianity, second, the idea of history, that is, of time and the world as intrinsically meaningful and moving forth towards a particular end that will be achieved within it. Third, that Man is and ought to be free, and that it is through an exercise of this freedom that he is able to employ rational methods towards effectively realizing the centralized ideal of human purpose contained within that age.

In our current epoch, the centralized ideal seems to be technological innovation, and the betterment of Man through it. We are constantly creating, improving existing artifacts, and modifying our surroundings. In light of this apparent fact, Steven Vogel has sought to demonstrate the non-existence of nature by critiquing the perception that nature exists as something independent of human artifice, arguing that human artifice has shaped the world such that any sense of nature as something independent of said artifice is non-existent. In Vogel's account, human beings invariably engage in socially generated practices that change their environment, rendering the environment

constructed and dependent on them. But because of what Vogel terms as the 'gap' between human intention in artifact production and its actual creation, usage, and consequences, it can be concluded that artifacts have a stamp of 'wildness' which prevents the complete absorption of technology into projects of mastery. As a result of Vogel's critique then, it would appear that there is no distinction between technology and nature, as both would exist on a continuous stream¹ with each other. Thus, if Vogel is correct in saying that everything is both technological and "wild", then there would be sufficient reason to reject Grant's moral worries as being permeated by an unfounded fear as to technology's aims.

Yet despite Vogel's arguments, there is still room to suggest that technology's relation to human nature and dignity may be problematic in the way that Grant describes. This is because the relation of the aforementioned meta-historical principles of technology, for Grant, is in how the presupposition of 'myth' (i.e. the particular proposition as to the significance and meaning of human life) proposes a vision of freedom within a society and thereby 'determines' the practical application of those rational methods (technique) through which freedom is articulated. But as distinct from technique, which seeks some inherent goal that exists in some sense 'beyond' it and us, Grant notes the activity of technology as "the endeavor which summons forth everything (both human and non-human) to give its reason, and through the summoning forth of those reasons turns the world into potential raw material, at the disposal of our 'creative' wills".² Tracing the origins of this identification of technology with creative willing to its historical roots, Grant points towards Nietzsche's doctrine of the will and critiques of

¹ Steven Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 2015), 115

² George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (South Bend IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 82

progress as completely altering what is given in myth. Drawing inspiration from the natural history of Darwin, Nietzsche revealed the meaninglessness of time and the desire to escape suffering, both of which he argued could be overcome by a select few individuals who move beyond Man and learn to dynamically will, thereby making the world instrumentally valuable through striving for creativity in the technologies they employ; it is here that Grant's worry emerges: if it is understood that technological thinking emerges from a particular presupposition of myth, then it follows that the current Nietzschean 'myth' of absolute individualism and instrumentality of the world in relation to the dynamic will shall dictate the manner in which further development of the arts and sciences occur.

Thus, the recent undertaking of the human subject as the object of creative mastery ushers in a type of uncertainty with respect to what the practical moral applications of future developments of a completely demythologized technology might look like. Because of this uncertainty, and because of the disintegration of moral terms like 'value', there is sufficient reason to believe that Vogel's account of human artifice is inadequate; in identifying technology as related strictly to artifacts and thereby paying insufficient attention to innovations in the idea of technology, Vogel does not appear to grasp the novelty of this age's technological thinking. Indeed, Grant would observe that it is only on account of the loss of transcendent purpose to technology that Vogel's own articulation of a materialist, artifactual idea of technology is possibly expressed. Following from these comments on the historical development of the idea of technology, it will be revealed that Vogel's ethical and political points, which depend on Man interjecting value into the world, are insufficient to handle the ethical problems that

Grant raises, inasmuch as Vogel's "collectivized action" do not stop the root cause of the potential for abuse of human dignity presented by the kind of instrumental reasoning present in modern technological thinking. In this way, Vogel's system embraces the technological age in the worst sort of way by proposing moral and political solutions that in actuality reinscribe the most harmful aspects of technological thinking. In conclusion, the system proposed by Grant highlights human dignity as a human good and, if heeded, a means by which to both understand and respond to the relationship between technology and human dignity.

Chapter I: George Grant

In order to understand Grant's points on technology, it is first necessary to observe that Grant's treatment of these words is divided along historical lines, that is, in accordance with what Grant identifies as a particular age's 'paradigm of knowledge', defined as "the relation between an aspiration of human thought and the effective conditions for its realization".³ Thus, the first step towards understanding what is meant by 'technology' is a demonstration of how our current, unique definitions of these terms are encompassed by our paradigm of knowledge. However, to understand a paradigm of knowledge, Grant maintains that one must be aware that Man is an innovative animal. The connection between these points is revealed in how the aspirations of a paradigm are set via the socially and/or religiously given ideas of human purpose.⁴ Here, Grant begins his discussion on the historical paradigms of knowledge by stating "How we act depends on what we consider life to be about, what we think is going on in human history in general, and in our own lives in particular. We do what we ultimately think is worth doing because of our vision of human existence".⁵ Though seemingly self-evident, this quote draws attention to the manner in which previously existing societies can be understood, with their 'actions' most tellingly revealing what they understood to be the defining and most important aspects of human life. In this way, it can be said that the relation central to an age's paradigm of knowledge always contains reference to what an age considers life to be about, and that the understanding of purpose is formative of the particular period's aspirations of human thought. Having understood

³ George Grant, 'Knowing and Making' Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Series IV, xii (1975): 59-67. Contained within *George Grant Reader* (Toronto ON, University of Toronto Press, 1998) 409

⁴ George Grant *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (Toronto ON, Copp-Clark Publishing, 1966). 11

⁵ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 11

this, Grant begins his discussion of the ancient paradigm of knowledge by stating rather plainly “It can be said that this ancient worldview has its most luminous justification in the work of Plato, in which time is considered as the moving image of an unmoving eternity”.⁶ As symbolized in how Socrates calmly approaches death knowing that his soul was moving into the realm of truth and the divine⁷ Grant argues that this blaisé attitude towards death can be appreciated as the result of a certain view of the world wherein the world and its temporally conditioned contents only have existence through being anchored to the divine. In another work, Grant explains this thought more clearly, observing that the Divine is both that which is the highest desire of human life and also “the very cause of knowing, that is, that which makes the world intelligible”.⁸

From this comes the understanding of meaning in the world as connected to that which is participatory in the divine that is, involvement in religious rituals. Distinguishing between those individual, “profane” events and those repetitive and universal religious acts, Grant notes the relative ‘unreality’ of the former in comparison to the latter actions.⁹ This is because the origins of repetitive and universal acts were alleged to precede recorded history and therefore they would not be subject to being part of the “moving image”.¹⁰ They were conceptualized as part of a divine ordering and served as the means by which Man participated in the divine. Every act which was designated as integral to civilization shares in a common holiness because of their connection to the

⁶ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 20

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ George Grant, ‘Introduction to Plato’ (1973): Contained within *George Grant Reader* (Toronto ON, University of Toronto Press, 1998) 208

⁹ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 17

¹⁰ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 18

divine,¹¹ the importance and ‘eternality’ of which reveals the alleged cyclical nature of time; having understood time’s unimportance, the ancients would not have viewed time as progressing to an end. Indeed, insofar as time is simply the measure of the ‘unreal’, it has no proper metaphysical significance. Of the ancients, Grant explains for them “historical time was not really that important. Instead, they saw it as a vehicle through which necessity and the good played out their relation over and over again”.¹² As such, the most effective means of summarizing this ancient paradigm of knowledge would be to note that the relation between the awareness and desiring of the divine as purpose-giving, and the realization of this thought through participation in divine ritual.

Clearly, however, this is not the paradigm we operate under today, and this fact is a sufficient demonstration of what Grant calls the overcoming of this paradigm of knowledge, that is, of a fundamental change to it. As for the source of this change, Grant points to Plato’s emphasis on the ideal of Man as free, as seen most excellently in the doctrines of the soul and of knowledge,¹³ presents a vision of Man which ultimately transcends the archaic form of religious practice, because freedom does not afford blind obedience to historically transcribed rituals; if Man is free, then both the cyclical nature of time as well as the meaninglessness of it is called into serious question. In turn, Grant observes that when Man is understood as free and reasoning, the ancient ideal of blind participation in the mythic is translated into the necessity of the will to act in accordance with the order in the universe, accessed by human reason.¹⁴ As distinct from simply being a shadow of the divine, this present and discoverable order

¹¹ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 17

¹² Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 22

¹³ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 21

¹⁴ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 29

grants meaning to this world, and engagement in the world as itself meaningful. This divine ordering, along with the accompanying demand to attune one's will to it, forms the basis of what Grant refers to as 'natural law'. As part of a divine ordering which is both accessible and orders all things in a particular fashion resultant from its immanent presence in the world, the discussion on nature here takes a noticeable turn inasmuch as nature is understood as operating as law, actively determining what the universe is, and dictating the manner in which things are to participate in it, necessitating the realization of immanent meaning.¹⁵ But as Man is fundamentally free under Plato's view, this participation must be accomplished via the attempt "to actualize the eternal law in one's own life",¹⁶ which "for Man includes within it the perfection of his rational nature",¹⁷ here meaning that the realization of Man's immanent meaning is intimately tied to reason, with "reason leading him to know what is right".¹⁸ The way in which this gets translated into concrete action is through the will, joined with the proper exercise of reason. Now, the moral demands on humanity are based in his participation in the whole of nature.

The other development stemming from Plato's contribution is the now meaningful nature of time. With the divine now imminently present in the physical world, it could no longer be argued that the created world is somehow inconsequential or irrelevant. Indeed, it is both intrinsically meaningful because it is a measure of things striving for their final end. Yet, though this idea of meaningful time receives its origin in Plato, Grant argues that it receives its full flourishing in Christian thought. Stating that the Christian

¹⁵ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 30

¹⁶ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 34

¹⁷ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 33

¹⁸ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 37

religion was unique through its emphasis on the Incarnation of Christ in actual historical time, this pivotal moment taken in conjunction with the definite end of history at the Second Coming suggests a model wherein “history is the divinely ordained process”,¹⁹ with time itself now having a final cause in relation to the efforts of God to save humanity. The bringing of time to a delineated end has the effect of suggesting not only that time is meaningful, but that it is the measure of a linear progression in which certain events are unique and not-repeatable. That is to say, the Christian religion suggests the idea of *history*. The divine has truly entered time, and as a unique expression of the divine will of God, the loving act of Man’s salvation reveals time as having immanent meaning through it being God’s vehicle for the overcoming of sin and evil. Moreover, the centralization of God’s presence in history also reveals the manner in which history is understood as a *process* inasmuch as the linear progression of time post-Christ is understood as a divinely guided process pointed towards an end that will be achieved within it. Indeed, what is ‘coming-to-be’ now is this process, the final redemption of the world, which necessitates both individual and societal moral obedience to both the natural and revealed law of God through the cultivation of virtue, and the crafting of good laws, offering a paradigm of aspiring towards living in unity with God, effectively realized through good moral conduct and the building of the Kingdom of God.

The synthesis of these views of history and morality means that in a very literal sense then, humanity is tasked with realizing the historical moment as participating in a continuity which is oriented towards the future. As such, the ancient ideal of harmonious participation within the whole is retained, and the permeating presence of the divine

¹⁹ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 45

within history contextualizes the ordering of social hierarchies which Charles Taylor observes as supplying the social categories through which recognition was bestowed insofar as one participated, via his socially prescribed position, within a particular society.²⁰ Indeed, insofar as the noble acceptance and performance of one's given role in society contributes to harmony, the social supplement of particular earthly purpose within the context of the divine movement of history to an end is something that would be integral to the "divinely ordained process of salvation".²¹ There is even room here for the development and progression of modern science, in that it would be a worthwhile pursuit to investigate the causes and operations of a world which is viewed as both good and meaningful. The view of human destiny and nature offered by this paradigm is thus very comprehensive indeed, as it seemingly provides an overarching framework in which morality, social hierarchy, human nature, time, and purpose all exist in a unity.

As already seen, one of the innovations in the Christian conception of history was its 'process' view of time as moving toward an end. As an irreversible unique moment then, the responsibility for and construction of history was shaped by men towards the ends delineated by God, building both a system of good governance to direct Man to his proper end and a heavenly kingdom of repentant sinners. But in saying this, it is also acknowledged that the choice to live in accordance with the imminent divine order is a choice freely made by the will. Yet Grant also points out that this freedom ultimately led to a desire for detachment from the natural world.²² No doubt influenced by what he perceived as the theologically scandalous union between the hierarchy of the Church

²⁰ Charles Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2003) 48

²¹ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 49

²² Ibid.

and of the State, Luther's criticism that "no Man should find his proper rest in natural images"²³ is his attempt to combat the rampant abuse found in the Church at that time; the articulation of the need for distance from earthly affairs is unmistakable, a criticism of the Church and State that led to the theological scandalizing of many laity. Thus, the freedom to choose to align one's will with the divine order was something that, when taken in the negative, made it necessary to counteract.

Luther's solution to the collusion of Church and State was reform through the de-emphasis of the political and ecclesiastical communities, and established social practice. To accomplish this, reformative efforts took on the expression of needing to "assert the emphasis on Man's freedom, which must be regulative of any future theory of practice"²⁴ as only through an emphasis on one's freedom apart from a strict adherence to and dependence on hierarchy can one hope to avoid the disastrous state of affairs contemporary to Luther.²⁵ Yet within the call to reform there is still a sense of profound optimism in the hope of the eventual triumph of evil even when this leads to the establishment of a new Church. As Grant observes, the common theme here, taken under the label of 'reform' through a greater articulation of freedom, is *progress*, of moving beyond evil and towards goodness.²⁶ But as distinct from reliance on the divine order as process (which encourages a more passive stance to such developments), the emphasis on Man's freedom so as to separate him from the potentially damning effects of association, replaces the idea of divine providence in the world with Man's activity²⁷

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 50

²⁵ This theological freedom would take on a more explicitly individualist focus in the thought of Calvin

²⁶ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 44

²⁷ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 51

archetypically found in Luther's attempt at reform. This then unites the idea of freedom with progress, here distinguished from the 'process' view in that 'progress' is understood as proceeding from human efforts.

Given the power and necessity of this new understanding of freedom, it is unsurprising that there would be political ramifications as well. As Grant notes, "Indeed [the Reformation] asserts this freedom only within the religious sphere, but once it has been so asserted, it cannot be confined to that sphere";²⁸ those same suspicions as to the machinations of the Church hierarchy invariably leads us to doubt our political superiors. The collapsing of the old 'horizon of meaning' as guaranteed by the presence of providence in history calls into question the prescribed social order which Man had previously found noble to participate in. Hence the need for a new kind of politics which appreciates this freedom and does not interfere in the same manner that the Church had previously done. Yet the proceeding political philosophers did not completely abandon the premise of politics. Instead, they also stress the need of reform, again prompted by the idea that evil will be overcome in time through the process of development.

As for *how* policy of governance changed, the idea of Man as free and removed from the natural order necessitates a political approach that does not attempt to subject him to powers which exist strictly beyond him, whether proceeding from God or claimed as an intrinsic part of the structure of governance. Man's activity has become central in the world, and thus the practice of law making receives its validity not from a divine order, but from Man. Here, Taylor describes those philosophers who have historically

²⁸ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 50

taken a negative approach to describing freedom, as something which allows for Man to shape history in a way devoid of arbitrary influence,²⁹ that is, of a kind of self-determining freedom.³⁰ On the level of the individual, Taylor notes how post-Rousseau this idea of freedom takes on the form of “being able to do what I want without the interference of others because that is compatible with my being shaped by society and its laws of conformity”.³¹ At the societal level, it takes political form “in the nature of a social contract state founded on a general will, which precisely because it is the form of our common freedom, can brook no opposition in the name of freedom”.³² Here, both of the major tenets of the Reformation can be seen: the aversion of extrinsic control that caused Luther's scorn toward the Church, and the centralization of Man's activity towards freedom. What therefore becomes of progress is commensurate with the developments of the society understood as free and moving gradually towards being more rational and just, that is, from a position of subservience to God towards one of Man's freedom, which he everywhere achieves through individual and political activity. The movement of society towards gradually increasing freedom, it will be correctly noted, is inversely related to the hold that Christianity holds over the society. As Grant notes “As belief in God was driven from men's minds... It was replaced... by belief in progress. Time is still oriented to the future, but it is a future which will be dominated by Man's activity.”³³ Following Luther, the notion of intrinsic hierarchy had to be criticized on account of the “disappearance” of a divine order which was thought to direct the

²⁹ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 49

³⁰ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 27

³¹ Ibid.

³² Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 28

³³ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 51

world. Yet, because the manifest order was revealed as bad and faulty, the optimism surrounding the “overcoming of evil” is permitted to remain, as the triumph over banal superstition in all areas of life was affirmed as wholly necessary, *good*, and only just beginning. Each step by which politics was de-mythologized and faith shown as resting on significant (perceived) contradictions was simply the advent of reason attaining its full flourishing out of its previous suppression, allowing for a newfound “freedom of the mind”.³⁴ So applied, this freedom can be summarized as being interdependent with the idea of progress; as Man gradually overcomes the superstitions which had previously held him in place, he is better able to self-define, construct a better society through laws which genuinely respect his freedom, and come back to gradually overcome more superstitions. Thus, the paradigm of knowledge is as follows: the aspiration of human thought is in the construction of a better society, and this is accomplished through self-defining freedom and the de-mythologizing of society.

Yet aside from the developments of freedom, it is also *history* that progresses. As distinct from the other two pieces of the idea of progress, this third sense of the term encompasses both with its nebulous command to overcome evil within time through the efforts of human activity. Through our efforts to overcome evil, history progresses towards the realized Kingdom of Man. But insofar as such an overcoming is articulated in the interests of challenging unjustified exercises of power, Grant notes that “If the word power is to mean anything, the social and ideological structure of that power must be analyzed”.³⁵ And indeed, because the origins and exercises of control are revealed as not exclusively resultant from religious influence, this means that the movement of

³⁴ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 50

³⁵ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 55

progress must extend beyond a critique of these influences. Thus, Grant places Marx as the summation of “modern” philosophy because it is Marx who both draws attention to the “indubitable fact of evil” produced by social structures and furthermore insists on the idea of progression beyond these problems; Looking towards the development of material relations in history, Marx argues that the recognition of scarcity in the world can be appreciated as the beginning of the machinations of the class based society, with successive emergence of more expansive dominant classes, alongside greater developments in industry (technologies), making possible greater freedom for a greater number of people.³⁶ But insofar as the problems listed above continue in an age where capitalism contradictorily contains “the conditions for overcoming class dominance and inequality” while “chaining the mass of men to uncreative labor”, Marx argues that this necessitates the overthrow of such a system inasmuch as it is the *height* of an arbitrary exercise of power, needlessly preventing an authentic articulation of freedom. For Grant’s purposes, the way forward in Marx’s work is through a practical approach which seeks both to make use of political forces already present within the capitalist framework, as well as stressing the importance of natural science. Though the investigation of the natural world already had an immense importance both for the early moderns as well as being meaningful in the Christian paradigm,³⁷ its role in Marx’s thought is crucial, becoming “essentially an ethical, indeed a redemptive activity, the means by which men were to be freed from the evils of pain and work”. Grant goes on to say that “Marx showed [scientists] the role of the scientific function within an optimistic and worldly philosophy of history, which had place for the universal interests

³⁶ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 61

³⁷ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 62

of humanity”.³⁸ For Marx, the central role of science throughout history has been essentially ethical in character, assisting in Man’s domination of the world so that he could live more freely. Within the movement towards the revolution, the role of science will be in the further development and use of “the everyday world of technology and mass industry”³⁹ so as to completely end Man’s problems. In summation then, the same optimism found in the previous paradigm of knowledge still exists in Marx’s hope of overcoming evil through social-political revolution and further development of sciences, albeit changed into a strictly secular and more economic doctrine.

Yet in taking up the point of technology’s development leading to greater degrees of freedom and demythologization, Grant’s view of technology is that it has developed historically, with greater and more complex artifacts being used to assist in the overcoming of evil. Here, Grant’s use of ‘technology’ denotes something novel, and emphasizes the *idea* of technology in relation to ideas of purpose and meaning, developing historically from previous paradigms of knowledge. More plainly, this means that an analysis of what is meant by technology cannot be content in analyzing artifacts. It must also take into account how the emergence of technology is distinct from simply the development of artifacts as found in other ages. To do this, it is necessary to also analyze how said developments are connected to their age’s paradigm, recognizing that technology, while tied to the idea of purpose critical to a paradigm, is unable to fully and manifestly express that purpose. A practical demonstration of this can be seen in Marx, where the development of science and artifacts serves the hopeful function of leading toward the overcoming of evil via ‘transcendence’, here meaning the movement beyond

³⁸ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 66

³⁹ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 67

social-politically inscribed evils, through the revolution. However, to say that science of the development of artifacts fully encapsulates the Revolution would be incorrect.

For Grant, this connection between a sense of ‘transcendence’ and the development of artifacts and science is a near-constant reality of human development. Assigning the senses of transcendent purpose the name “myth”, Grant observes that “Myths are the way that systems of meaning are given to most human beings, and it is from systems of meaning that we make judgments about what is valuable”.⁴⁰ What is therefore contained within a given paradigm of knowledge, insofar as it suggests purpose, is a centralized myth which also determines *how* a thing is known and the conditions *by which* Man realizes that myth, that is, how Man acts within the world. This manner in which the world is known, and subsequent prescription of action is in Grant's work assigned the name ‘technique’ and is more fully described as “the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity”. Grant goes on to say that “technique is not limited to particular examples” like machines, but that it is also “the sum of all rational methods used in any society e.g. the police, propaganda, modern education, etc.”⁴¹ Observing this, by “the totality of methods rationally arrived at”, Grant seems to mean those practices, or “means of making” that both produce something physical as *well* as those that are organizational and theoretical, which when taken in conjunction with the historical qualifier “for a given stage of development” seems to suggest that the

⁴⁰ George Grant ‘Value and Technology’ in Conference Proceedings: ‘Welfare Services in a Changing Technology’ (Ottawa: Canadian Conference on Social Welfare 1964), 21-9 Contained within *George Grant Reader* (Toronto ON, University of Toronto Press, 1998) 388

⁴¹ George Grant, ‘Review of Jacques Ellul’s *The Technological Society* (New York: Knopf 1964), *Canadian Dimension*, vol. 3, nos. 3, 4. (March-April, May-June 1966), 59-60. Contained within *George Grant Reader* (Toronto ON, University of Toronto Press, 1998) 395

development of technique proceeds in accordance with a particular age, which must mean in accordance with the centralized myth. Finally, the focus on “in every field of human activity” highlights that, when applied to a particular historical age, technique is meant as a sole entity, incorporating all of the methods informed by a particular kind of myth. Returning then to the initial description of the principle of a paradigm of knowledge, it would seem that on account of there only being one paradigm of knowledge for any one civilization at any one time, such a paradigm can be summarized as “the relation between the purpose suggested by myth and the realization of this purpose through technique”.

This distinction between the ‘known’ myth and its realization through artifact production finds its origin in the ancient paradigm. Summarizing such a view, Grant says “the uniqueness of the present co-penetration of the arts and sciences can be seen by comparison with how they were once conceived... Our word ‘art’ comes from the Latin ‘ars’ which the Romans took as their equivalent for *techne*” or “leading forth”.⁴² As distinct from theoretical knowledge, ‘*theoretikeepisteme*’, the leading forth refers to a certain kind of activity which requires the work of human beings. In Grant’s view, though the Greeks thought that art was a kind of knowledge,⁴³ they nevertheless also observed a gulf between *techne* and the knowledge contained in *theoretikeepisteme*, inasmuch as *techne* was concerned with the production of some kind of artifact, while *theoretikeepisteme* details more theoretical knowledge. As Grant goes on to say “They were above all distinguished because they were concerned with different entities. Art was concerned with what might or might not be...with entities that were accidentally.

⁴² George Grant, ‘Knowing and Making’ Contained within *George Grant Reader*, 410

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Science was concerned with what must be...with entities that were necessarily".⁴⁴ More plainly, this is to say that the ancient Greek paradigm views the type of knowledge contained in *techne* to be of a lower sort than that contained in *theoretike episteme* (science), as science dealt primarily with the knowledge of the underlying principles which would inform any kind of particular practice. Being of a higher sort of knowledge then, science was seen as necessary for *techne* to flourish and in some sense more "real" than *techne* or the physical world as at any time these latter two were part of the moving image of an unmoving eternity. The establishment of reflection and contemplation as the highest form of life can thus be seen as a direct result of the ancient aspiration of seeking to participate in the divine; indeed, contemplation of the forms amounts to the most immediate way in which this can be done, as it has the divine as its object and involves the desire for it. Therefore, we can say that the technique of contemplation found in science is what allows us to make proper sense of the arts.

In comparison, the understanding and utilization of science in the Christian paradigm is closer to our modern understanding inasmuch as it is within this paradigm that the application of technique first serves the historical role of bringing about the end of evil.⁴⁵ As previously expressed, part of the novelty of Christian thought is the introduction of linear, meaningful time insofar as it is connected to the mission of Christ. This central myth confirms both time and the world's goodness, and results in a procedural view of the nature of things with everything cohering such that the process of

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ George Grant, 'Review of Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society*' Contained within *George Grant Reader*, 398

technique, aimed at investigating natural causes, is affirmed as good insofar as it reveals something of the divine order within the world. In contrast, the transition from 'process' to 'progress' in Luther's theology plays itself out in technique by emphasizing Man's freedom, as well as a certain skepticism regarding the goodness of the natural world. However, this introduces an instrumentality to science not previously present. Science is now acknowledged as good for some human-set, achievable goal. That is, emergent from Luther's fear of the possibility of scandal, previous forms of thought which promoted a passivity to the natural hierarchy of the Church and world are to be challenged. Thus, the investigation of the world accomplished through science must be done in light of the fact that the natural order is filled with wickedness, and science must accord with Man's freedom, ideally proposed as a detachment from the world. "Freedom of the human spirit from any determination"⁴⁶ is the ultimate call of the Reformation, which is accomplished through proactive investigations of the world.

Divorced from its previous role of uncovering the order contained within God's creation, science is now seen as a 'true' investigation into the causes of the world, and in rejecting the idea of God's Providence in history, develops as antagonistic to revealed religious faith. Summarizing the remarks of one Professor Anderson, Grant observes that this line of reasoning reaches its height in the works of Francis Bacon, who "separated completely truth which is humanely discoverable from the dogmas of revealed theology", revealing "truths of religion as not rational but arbitrary".⁴⁷ The de-establishment of religion's connection to truth along with the simultaneous insistence on

⁴⁶ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 50

⁴⁷ George Grant's 'Review of F.H. Anderson's *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1949), *Dalhousie Review*, vol. 28 (1948-9). Contained within *George Grant Reader* (Toronto ON, University of Toronto Press, 1998), 322.

the march of progress towards the conquering of evil is thus revelatory of the further instrumentalization of science and its related artifact production; now aligned with humanistic 'progress', its goal becomes the gradual Improvement of humanity's lot in the face of necessity and chance. Indeed, what else could more profoundly determine Man? For Grant, as much is revealed in the work of Rousseau, who argued that "what we are is not given to us by what in the ancient language was called nature but is the result of what human beings were forced to do to overcome chance or change nature".⁴⁸The instrumentalization of science and the arts is therefore complete, in that technique becomes wholly concerned with separating Man from the natural world through the overcoming of the determinacy which restricts his freedom. Indeed, in passing from a teleological understanding of Man to one that absorbs the process of historical development while negating the teleological, nature emerges as itself historically conditioned via processes that are conquered in an attempt to move beyond strict dependence on them. In turn, this command to conquer 'evil' is taken and joined to the Revolution in Marx, with the resultant view of technology as being allied to its progression.

⁴⁸ George Grant 'Why Read Rousseau' (1981) Contained within *George Grant Reader* (Toronto ON, University of Toronto Press, 1998), 314.

Chapter II: Grant on Nietzsche

Thus the “myth of progress” and its accompanying technique of a free rational science has had a profound effect on Western thought, with the modern view of technology still seemingly serving this hopeful function of creating a better demythologized tomorrow even if it is admitted that there are profound problems with our current rational methods. However, throughout the development of these historical myths and techniques, it is curious to note the retention of a more generalized “purpose”: that of “living together well in communities, and thinking”.⁴⁹ As much can easily be seen in the ancient emphasis on the necessity of science in the ordering of Man’s life towards harmony with the divine order, and also in the Christian paradigm inasmuch as it emphasized rational contemplation of God’s laws so as to likewise direct Man towards his purpose of living in unity with God. Indeed, even in the “atomized” view of humanity as detailed in the “myth of progress” proper, there is still a sense in which Man must live together and think, if only so as to articulate our freedom and be aware of those insidious snares which would hamper it.

The Marxist idea of progress thereafter translates the idea of technique into the strict overcoming of chance and necessity; Aligned with the spirit of progress, science and artifact production aim towards an end that will still be achieved within history which is the fulfillment of science’s goal of promoting justice and freedom in the world, now directed towards the Revolution and culminating in an absolute version of Luther’s “detachment from the world”. In this sense, there is still contained within this

⁴⁹ George Grant, ‘Comments on the Great Society at the 35th Annual Couchiching Conference, in *Great Societies and Quiet Revolutions*, ed. John Irwin (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 1967), 71-7 Contained within *George Grant Reader* (Toronto ON, University of Toronto Press, 1998), 98.

progression a central recognition of a 'good' of humanity; This is contained within the language of freedom as the vehicle by which the Kingdom of Man was to be achieved, itself an expression of Man's triumph over superstition and evil, that is, freedom from the natural order. The overcoming of evil, which Marxism combines with a critical historical method, correlates human development with the emergence of new sciences and classes and is thereby 'progressive'. Man is free, and history follows after him in response to his greater articulations of freedom. Yet this myth, and the description of history as tracing Man's gradual overcoming of evil through technology and towards freedom is called into question by Darwin's evolutionary model. Darwin, Grant says, brings determinacy to bear on the human subject because in the evolutionary model it places Man as produced by chance and necessity like any other animal. As Grant observes "Obviously [Darwin] is right, modification is the central issue. And obviously also, modification in this sense is just a synonym for history".⁵⁰ Here, the open-ended nature of such modification poses a serious challenge to the 'progression' of history; ourselves conditioned by the same physical and chemical laws which gave rise to other species, it is thereby understood that history extends far before us, and will continue far beyond us. We are simply the efficiently realized product of that 'endless' history, and so cannot describe history as process or progress.

The relative acceptance of the Darwinian process of modification introduces for Grant a "civilizational contradiction", formulated as that clash between Man's place within natural history and the establishment of freedom within the myth of progress. As Grant states "The new co-penetration of logos and techne affirmed at its heart that in

⁵⁰ George Grant 'Why Read Rousseau' Contained within *George Grant Reader*, 314.

understanding anything we know it as ruled by necessity and chance. This affirmation entailed the elimination of the ancient notion of good from the understanding of anything” inviting contradiction insofar as “at the same time, our day-to-day organization was...directed by a conception of justice formulated in relation to the ancient science, in which the notion of good was essential”.⁵¹ Yet the secular account of justice contained in early modern ideas of government nevertheless drew from Christian ideas of establishing equality.⁵² But, as Grant notes, following the rise of Darwin, this idea of justice is up for debate: “To put the matter simply: if species is a historical concept and we are a species whose origin and existence can be explained in terms of mechanical necessity and chance...what requires us to live together according to the principles of equal justice?”.⁵³ In Grant's view, this contradiction could not be resolved with Marx, as “Marx is essentially a philosopher of history...one who believes he knows the meaning of the historical process as a whole and derives his view of right action therefrom”.⁵⁴ More plainly, Grant seems to be expressing that because Marx did not grasp the entirety of the movement of natural history, he still professed that history has some meaning insofar as the development of society will eventually arrive at the destruction of the capitalist form of production. Given the demonstrable proof of the evolutionary process, Marx seems at odds with the philosophical consequences of Darwin's theory for the overall meaning of history; Indeed, with no true point of culmination or end, it cannot be supposed that history has intrinsic meaning.

⁵¹ Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, 73.

⁵² Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, 76.

⁵³ Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, 73.

⁵⁴ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 56.

The contradiction between this determinacy and the idea of Man's freedom through justice finds articulation in the work of Nietzsche; as Grant writes "This public contradiction was first...exposed in the writings of Nietzsche...what is given about the whole in technological science cannot be thought together with what is given us concerning justice and truth, reverence and beauty, from our tradition".⁵⁵ The point here can be made in relation to the 'meta-historical' suggestion of purpose "of living together and thinking" and the accompanying call to cultivate those virtues which lead to those ends. To begin, it is worth noting that the command of "living well together" has historically taken the form of the promotion of those values which encourage docility towards all including the weaker and more feeble members of society. Given explicit form in the Christian aphorism "What you have done for the least of these, so have you done for me", it also finds articulation in the talk of 'rights' for the sake of promoting human freedom. However, Nietzsche argues that rather than being a *guarantor* of freedom, the insistence on meekness in any form is actually a hindrance to true freedom insofar as the propagation of what he designates as a 'slave morality' has historically suppressed those stronger individuals from acting upon their stronger nature. The connection between the establishment of slave morality and the State can be seen comparatively between two passages in Zarathustra. In "the Priests", Nietzsche describes those titular figures who live as animated dead because they have taken on a life of refusal, of living ashamedly because they have been told that they must be "good" in order to move to a better life.⁵⁶ In light of this command, they become docile and so

⁵⁵ Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, 77.

⁵⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, (trans. Clancy Martin, Barnes and Noble Books, New York, 2005), 80.

live their lives in a kind of self-hatred. Such a view in Nietzsche's account is problematic as that in them which would be conducive and life-giving is sapped away through sordid pity; pity both for their own great suffering and pity for the so-called less fortunate; Indeed, "It was suffering and impotence-that created all afterworld...a poor ignorant weariness, unwilling even to will any longer: that created all gods and afterworlds".⁵⁷ Yet the challenge of God's death is precisely that there is no longer *any* meaning for this suffering, nor justification for any kind of traditional moral thinking, even secular reinterpretations of it in the form of the State. Here, Nietzsche says "For the superfluous the state was invented" as "having grown weary of fighting [the old God] and now your weariness serves the new idol!".⁵⁸ In Nietzsche's view, reliance upon the state to establish equality and protection is simply a re-inscribed appeal to pity, the same desire to escape suffering that the priests take up in their appeals to God. Thus much like Man himself, the State must also be overcome, as its actions block "the rainbow and the bridges of the übermensch".⁵⁹

The desire to move beyond Christian ideas of State and morality has radical implications for the content of justice, with Darwin's natural selection sufficiently providing an anti-teleological, materialist basis for the emergence of the various forms of life and firmly grounded Man as a product of chance and mechanical necessity. Thus, the critiques of transcendence found in the anthropological account of Marx and the moral critiques of Nietzsche seemingly dispel any residual trust in any form of the Christian system, perhaps aside from the idea of a final overcoming of an evil resultant

⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 30.

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 45.

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 46.

from the Revolution. Nevertheless, the collapse of the Marxist vision of utopia⁶⁰ highlights the final failure of progress. In contrast, Nietzsche properly understood the historicity of Man and as such “The historical sense is more precise than a general recognition of the change in and between civilizations which make up that bridge. It is the apprehension that in the shortest moment we are never the same, nor are we ever in the presence of the same. Put negatively, in the historical sense we admit the absence of any permanence in terms of which change can be measured or limited or defined”.⁶¹ As borrowed from the secularized Christian view, the idea of progress was used to explain the further emergence of reason within the world, greater societies being built in relation to greater articulations of freedom and reason. Yet just as science had been able to explain the origin of non-human species through a process without a final purpose, Grant notes “Nietzsche sees that...so also are there no reasons to justify belief in the goodness of rationality as our given purpose”.⁶² The attempt to inject value into history via the prizing of that which-will-be falls flat because it is suggestive of a false transcendent purpose. So it is also with the idea of progress to history, which assigns even in its most minimalist form an eventual fullness to being within time through the attaining of freedom. Both are the assertion of some inarticulate hope which is not to be found within time; As Nietzsche draws attention to, such a prioritization of good serves to make weak those who would otherwise be resolute in the face of the constant evil Man finds himself surrounded by. To embrace life is to embrace it in all its sufferings, to be firm in the face of the constant presence of pain. Those who are unable

⁶⁰ Augusto Del Noce details this collapse excellently in his essay “Technological Civilization and Christianity”

⁶¹ George Grant, *Time as History* (Toronto ON, University of Toronto Press, 1995), 37.

⁶² Grant, *Time as History*, 38.

to bear such pain, like the priests and worshippers of the State, turn towards the creation of horizons by which they can orient themselves in a world where time has no purpose.⁶³ Therefore, there can be no illusions as to the idea of progress; the traditional idea of progress presupposes a definite end in the sense that the thing in question is moving towards some 'perfect' state, but Nietzsche reveals that there is no definite end to anything, including time itself. In what may be described as a return to the ancient view, time is rendered meaningless. But more bleakly, Nietzsche shows time as both containing suffering and having no illusions as to the divine within it.

The challenge to the Christian paradigm, and its secular version, is thus more comprehensive in Nietzsche than in Marx, because Nietzsche challenges the very idea of an intrinsic purpose to existence. In demonstration of this point, Grant cites a passage from *Zarathustra* which details the discovery of the identical and of the eternal return towards "the number of possible combinations of what exists is finite, yet time is infinite".⁶⁴ As such, nothing 'progresses' in a universe where infinite time repeats the same patterns in different orders time and again. Everything is always 'coming-to-be' with no event or thing being meaningful in and of itself, as it is fated to recur again, with moment of suffering happening infinitely across time. The will can find no 'final goal', no achievement within the world through the seeking of particular objects or things. For the majority, such a thought is unbearable, which is why Grant observes that upon the realized death of God there will be three kinds of people: The first group, whether secular or Christian, presume that there is some point to existence, that they have in

⁶³ Grant, *Time as History*, 41.

⁶⁴ Grant, *Time as History*, 35.

some way “joined their efforts to participating in its goodness”⁶⁵ by arguing for equality, even if such a point is not evident. Yet others will see the same meaninglessness and turn out to be utterly destructive; the nihilists will simply exert their will over the population because they have understood the meaninglessness of time and of the world, but have not been able to affirm life and so will “nothing”.⁶⁶ The last category, those strong men, achieve not only an awareness of the meaninglessness of the world, but are able to apply their wills in such a way that produces joy.⁶⁷ Indeed, with both destruction and apathy off the proverbial table, the only thing left is creation. They are able to overcome the evils of the world through their will.⁶⁸

Yet this bleak discovery of the eternal return encourages those who are strong to move towards the creation of novelty;⁶⁹ Though any temporal arrangement of things is fated to happen again, this does not perturb the strong, as it gives them license to create those things which affirm life and make the world *instrumentally* valuable to them. Such creation has happened before and will happen again, so joy will take the form of a dynamic making because the universe is, in essence, a dynamic making that is always becoming without an end goal. We are fated to live in a world of complete dynamism, and so the only real option for a select few is to extend their will in a necessarily individualized and life-affirming way; in recognition of this perpetual “finality of becoming”, the only choice to be made is willing. Thus we find in Nietzsche a complete rejection of the Western paradigm as there is no chance to gravitate towards some

⁶⁵ Grant, *Time as History*, 58.

⁶⁶ Grant, *Time as History*, 45.

⁶⁷ Grant, *Time as History*, 47.

⁶⁸ This is not to reinscribe a Marxist vision on Nietzsche’s view of time, as only the strong-man will be able to focus his will on making the world valuable despite his suffering.

⁶⁹ Grant, *Time as History*, 56.

meaning which is outside of the world. As Grant explains “For Nietzsche, the achievement of amor fati outside is any such involvement. It must be willed in a world where there is no possibility of either infinite or finite transcendence of becoming or willing”.⁷⁰

In saying this however, it must be noted that this radically changes the content of justice; for if the highest aspiration of human thought is dynamic, creative willing by a select few, then the Christian and secularized maxim of “Do unto others as you would have done to you” is no longer applicable; Indeed, “Man is something to be overcome” and this overcoming means the abandonment of certain positions which attributes worth to Man intrinsically. The fact that there are some people who are indeed superior⁷¹ means that we cannot morally treat all people the same. As such, Nietzsche contests any account of justice which places at its heart the extension of some kind of worth to all mankind; Man only has value in as much as his overcoming contributes to the rise of the übermensch. Indeed, the übermensch directs his energies towards creative willing based on his realization of the eternal return, and of the production of all things in the world through necessity and chance. He will not recognize a transcendent sense of worth to all humanity that extends beyond that which is admitted by his eternally recurring, mechanically produced composition. Though this by no means permits outright cruelty as Nietzsche would classify such cruel “preachers of death” as nihilists,⁷² it *does* mean that “when men know themselves beyond good and evil, the

⁷⁰ Grant, *Time as History*, 54.

⁷¹ In that they are able to move beyond both the meaninglessness of existence and participate in dynamic willing

⁷² Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 41.

strong are moved to the violence of an undirected willing of novelty".⁷³ As Grant notes, there are some in Nietzsche's account to whom nothing is owed.⁷⁴ Put simply, this means that in the dynamism of creative willing by the übermensch, should it be the case that some of the otherwise protected 'weak' people receive the proverbial "short end of the stick", then that is of no consequence to the übermensch as *nothing of value was lost*. Man only has instrumental usefulness in relation to the übermensch's coming. He is therefore at the *best* of times only a tool, and beyond the coming of the übermensch, expendable in relation to creative willing.

This concluding emphasis on value and instrumentality draws us both towards Nietzsche's vision of justice as well as what Grant means by technology: on the first matter, Grant quotes Nietzsche: "Justice as function of a power with an all encircling vision, which sees beyond the little perspectives of good and evil...having the aim of maintaining something *which is more than this or that person*;⁷⁵" "Justice as the building, rejecting, annihilating and way of thought which precedes from the appraisalment of value: highest representative of life itself".⁷⁶ The move being made here is the fullness of Nietzsche's rebuke against both priests and the false idol of the state; as emphasizing the building and rejecting which precedes from the value of that highest representative of life itself, the übermensch, it makes 'justice' and 'the creative willing of the übermensch' synonymous. The 'making valuable' of the world by the übermensch is a possibility afforded to him not because of some inherent worth, but because he is able

⁷³ Grant, *Time as History*, 56.

⁷⁴ George Grant, 'Nietzsche and the Ancients' Contained within *Technology and Justice*, (Toronto ON, Anansi Press, 1986), 94.

⁷⁵ This emphasis is my own.

⁷⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Unpublished Fragments' Cited in 'Nietzsche and the Ancients' *Technology and Justice*, 93.

to will the dynamic coming-to-be which pains so many others. In this way, he overcomes the spirit of revenge joyously.⁷⁷ Further, his creative efforts are justified: despite the effort to contextualize suffering via the myths summarized, the fact remains that suffering is *meaningless*. If therefore a person is content to be subject to the meaninglessness of life without trying to assert their will, then any joy which would have been reached by following Nietzsche's program is denied them and so their materially based existence is revealed as just as expendable as any other physical object. The claiming of both the human and non-human world as part of the übermensch's creative domain is therefore just, as such a claim is made by a "superior" being who creates a quality of life. Insofar as the übermensch wills to create, and finds joy in this task, his creative willing is the distinct act of one who has overcome both the need for transcendence and desire for revenge.⁷⁸

The difficulty in describing Nietzsche's thought in the familiar language of a paradigm of knowledge is that it subverts both of the meta-historical purposes to human life. In its individualistic project, it shuns "living together". In articulating the unimportance of truth-seeking for survival, it shuns thinking.⁷⁹ Indeed, it is anti-mythic in that it does not suggest *any* kind of universal purpose. Nevertheless, we can still say here that the aspiration of human thought would be making the world valuable, and the effective conditions of this would be the act of creative willing. But as this aspiration seeks to negate all forms of transcendence, its accompanying technique must

⁷⁷ Grant, *Time as History*, 54.

⁷⁸ The emphasis on this final clause is placed as a stipulation to what is meant by "dynamic willing". Following Nietzsche's line of thought that all things have value only in relation to the übermensch, the willing of that person who still believes in superstitions and/or has not accepted "amor fati" and the eternal return is categorically *not* creative and thus not dynamic.

⁷⁹ Insofar as thought traditionally aimed at truth.

necessarily take the form of “The human creating of quality of life beyond the little perspectives of good and evil... of making the human race greater than it has been,⁸⁰ that is to say, the act of creation no longer aims at some ‘good’, but is instead turned inwards towards itself, with dynamic creative willing providing context to the art of artifact production. Moreover, as there is no corresponding myth that so directs the progression of creativity, what is “known” in this technique is simply that scientific factual information which is aligned to the craft. This interdependence of knowing and making is what Grant means by the word technology. For its full articulation, ‘technology’ requires the critiques of Nietzsche. The novelty of the idea of technology can be seen through its historical developments in the historical paradigms of knowledge. More than simply the production of more or less complex artifacts, technology is the rational methods that correspond to the now present co-penetration of arts and sciences resultant from the loss of transcendent purpose.⁸¹ It is a form of the meta-historical technique, but one where the frontiers of what is morally permissible to make have been eliminated in light of the critiques against any possibly articulated “myth”; But as artifact production and the direction of knowledge move towards the creative overcoming of the laws of chance and necessity govern all that is, they are limitless in their potential practical application. Put another way, the application of the now morally unrestrained creative will central to technology allows for technology to objectify anything which is governed by chance and necessity. As Grant writes, the position of technology is such that “everything is an

⁸⁰ George Grant, ‘Nietzsche and the Ancients’ *Technology and Justice*, 94.

⁸¹ George Grant ‘Justice and Technology’ in *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis*, ed. Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote (Lanham, Md: University Press of America 1984), 237-46, Contained within *George Grant Reader*, 435.

object and our relation to it is to summon it before us to give us its reasons".⁸² The irony of such a demand should not be lost on us as it is impossible in the described position for *any* object to "give us its reasons" because each object exists without given purpose. Therefore in the process of using technique to conquer the chances of an indifferent world, the failure of anything to give us its reasons allows for a certain kind of instrumentality in our reasoning; the will represents to itself the entire world as object, each thing existing as a receptacle for the creative process as act of dynamic willing.

Yet in producing 'quality of life', the utilization of technology's rational methods increasingly takes the form of representing that which it produces as "morally neutral". Again, the surpassing of good and evil allows the world to be treated as subject to the creative willing, with all objects neither being good or bad, but simply existent. In explaining this point, Grant deconstructs the aphorism "The computer does not impose on us the ways it should be used". What is contained in the statement is that because of the instrumentality of objects in relation to the creative will "They are neutral instruments in the sense that the morality of the goals for which they are used is determined outside them".⁸³ What is important for the espouser of such a maxim is that the capacities of the computer are contained within it, but their use is dependent on the intentions of the computer's user. Yet uttering this maxim ignores that the capacity is contained within the computer or the result of events which have led to the existence of said computer. Aside from the obvious reliance on mathematics, physics, materials, and so forth, the creation of the computer is particular to the paradigm of knowledge we know post-

⁸² David Cayley George Grant in Conversation (Toronto: Anansi 1995), 'Interview on Martin Heidegger' Contained within *George Grant Reader*, 301

⁸³ George Grant, 'Thinking about Technology', *Technology and Justice*, 20.

Nietzsche. As Grant explains “The very force of the computer as neutral raises up in the statement, in opposition to that neutrality, an account of human freedom which is just as novel as our new instruments”.⁸⁴ Affirmation of this fact is concealed but present within the initial statement; the fact that the computer presents itself as free from any *given* purpose presupposes the complex coming-to-be of an account of human freedom that permits us to utilize the computer according to one's will. In this way, the generation of computers represents the “paradigm of knowledge central to our civilizational destiny” and is representative of “all the fundamental presuppositions that the majority of human beings inherit...which are so taken for granted as the way things are that they are given an almost absolute status”.⁸⁵ Yet within these fundamental presuppositions of freedom and value, the initial aphorism is rendered false, for these assumptions of freedom and creativity are what motivate the development of contemporary science and the construction of the computer. Thus, the ‘neutrality’ of the computer actually reinforces the paradigm.

Though the modern generation of artifacts in effect reinforces the paradigm, artifacts do not capture all that is meant by such a paradigm. This is because in Grant's view, beyond the historical development of the idea of technology and the artifactual, technology also forms an ontology. As already discussed, the representation of the world as ruled by chance and necessity allows for the things of the world to be regarded as pure objects of the will. What develops from this is that the will stands as the arbiter of goodness, that is, it makes the world valuable by its creative activity. As Grant

⁸⁴ George Grant ‘The Computer Does Not Impose on Us the Ways It Should Be Used’ in *Beyond Industrial Growth*, ed. Abraham Rotstein (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1976), 117-31, Contained within *George Grant Reader*, 423.

⁸⁵ George Grant, ‘Thinking about Technology’, *Technology and Justice*, 22

observes, such a relation between the will and the world has a curious consequence of divorcing Man from the world in some way; saying “Technological society is presented to us as a set of neutral means, something outside ourselves, and human beings are presented as in touch with some constant... But obviously all that is given us in the technological sciences denies that constancy, that eternity. What happens is that constancy is appeal to impractical life and denied in intellectual life”,⁸⁶ Grant is here trying to express that the act of the creative will, while good and life-affirming in Nietzsche's account, produces things which themselves are neutral. From their creation onwards, they are distinct from the will, and so in some sense are outside what is meant by ‘human’. They are rational methods, and exist as entities ready to be utilized. Yet in promoting a further adherence to technological principles of creation and value through the production of so-called ‘neutral’ artifacts, the process of technology becomes somewhat autonomous from human activity per se;⁸⁷ though the application of the term only retains insofar as humans continue to utilize these principles and produce artifacts, the existence of technology is beyond both the artifact itself and the particular creative willing of a person. This cycle of ‘artifact production-reinscription’ thereby suggests a particular way of being in the world: by promoting certain principles of freedom and value, their adoption by the mass of society promotes an ontology of will-object that dominates contemporary understandings of science and artifact production.

⁸⁶ George Grant ‘The Computer Does Not Impose on Us the Ways It Should Be Used’ Contained within *George Grant Reader*, 430.

⁸⁷ To use Grant’s terminology, insofar as this Nietzschean view has become our paradigm of knowledge, it has become our “civilizational destiny” which will bring forth from its principle (read: myth) everything which is implied in that principle (417).

Thus, Grant's worry about the "bringing forth" of all that is contained within this principle is in how it will affect the way we conduct ourselves morally. On account of his own ideal of justice as "an unchanging measure of all our times and places" as connected to our "desiring need of an unchanging good which caused us to pay its price",⁸⁸ Grant sees the seeking of novelty through creative mastery as particularly troubling. This is because, as previously detailed, technology knows no moral limit in the act of making. Rather, it sees the entirety of the world as potential for creative willing. This preoccupation with making the world instrumentally valuable takes on the term "quality of life", which as Grant considers at, involves the assertion of the primacy of the will in all things. Indeed, the necessity of exerting the will is paramount for as the world is devoid of meaning, the only available option is to pursue a kind of quality of life through the expression of the will. But aside from the obvious subjugating of all things in the world to continual change⁸⁹ through perpetual modification in pursuit of greater and greater quality of life, the triumph of the creative will also promotes an ethical decision making system where the entire world stands in relation to the will as fundamentally empty of value; because the exertion of the will is made synonymous with creativity, Grant notes that this renders impossible any traditional account of justice because the process of dynamic willing always excludes any reference to a central idea beyond that which has been declared instrumentally useful to the particular individual. Thus when contrasted with the demands of justice, the problem emerges that the understanding of Man as strictly materially contingent will necessitate a prioritization of the individual, with social relations only existing so as to allow Man to articulate his creativity. The horrifying

⁸⁸ George Grant 'Justice and Technology' *George Grant Reader*, 439.

⁸⁹ George Grant, 'Comments on the Great Society', *George Grant Reader*, 102.

conclusion for Grant is in how this will challenge ideas like human dignity. To demonstrate, let us here consider the following question: aware that life is entirely materially contingent and that there exists the possibility of a person having a debilitating injury or chronic condition that somehow impedes their quality of life or otherwise makes life irreparably burdensome, what would morally prevent such a life from being declared unenviable and therefore worthy of extermination? The absolute individualism present in Nietzsche's critique forces the conclusion that some life simply is not worth living. Furthermore his critique denies any sense of moral obligation which charges that all men are owed a certain level of respect simply because they exist.⁹⁰The final disappearance of both following the critiques of Nietzsche asserts that life is at its base meaningless and so Man must do the only thing he can and creatively will. If therefore a person is unable to creatively will because of some deficiency, such as being in a vegetative state/being otherwise radically dependent on others, then it would seem that their life is not owed any respect.

Now granting this conclusion, it may be responded that it is still not automatically true that we owe such people death or detriment either. And while this is true insofar as Nietzsche's critique does not allow for the establishment of any universally prescriptive moral commands, the point should be taken that its *neutrality* leaves the debate open for the individual as to how best to proceed. Yet in any case, the treatment of these individuals under the Nietzschean paradigm is contingent upon the personal dispositions of those strong men. And indeed, given what Nietzsche says about pity,⁹¹

⁹⁰ What would traditionally be owed to these sorts of people is a level of respect and honor which is either bestowed by God or on account of rights and human goodness in the secularized Christian paradigm.

⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 78. "For in seeing the sufferer suffer, I was ashamed on account of his shame; and in helping him, I sorely wounded his pride"

there is reason to suggest that said dispositions will not be inclined towards charity. But there is even more room for worry given that the “frontiers of making” present in science are ever directed both at the pursuit of novelty and the affirmation of the private person. I do not mean this comment to suggest that science and technology are somehow private pursuits of the individual. What I mean is that the aims of science, as a result of the co-penetration of the arts and sciences, now aim at the overcoming of chance and necessity purely for the sake of enhancing the life of *an* individual. There are no “frontiers” of making anymore, as everything is permitted. Indeed, on account of the loss of community and teleological direction in science, as well as the contingency of life upon physical matter which is determined by chance and necessity, there are no absolute moral limits as to what can be made or unmade.⁹² And as the spread of technological thinking gradually displaces the moral restraints of an ever-waning Christian ethic, there can be little doubt that our quest for the overcoming of chance and necessity and making men ‘better’ through dynamic willing inevitably will take the form of trying to control aspects of life which were previously conceptualized as either being an essential expression of Man's freedom or declared as part of the intrinsic goodness of life bestowed by God. What then does making society better look like? Grant's answer is quite grim: “To sum up: the overcoming of chance to which we are committed builds institutions which more and more negate the freedom and equality for the sake of which the whole experiment against chance was undertaken”.⁹³ As the will is power,⁹⁴

⁹² George Grant, ‘Knowing and Making’ Contained within *George Grant Reader*, 415.

⁹³ George Grant, ‘Comments on the Great Society at the 35th Annual Couchiching Conference’, *George Grant Reader*, 100.

⁹⁴ George Grant ‘The Triumph of the Will’ in ‘The Issue is Life: A Christian Response to Abortion in Canada’, ed. Denyse O’Leary (Burlington ONT: Welsh Publishing, 1988). Contained within *George Grant Reader*, 142.

technology finds its expression in the assertion of power (the will) over necessity and chance, and as all men are ruled by the same physical laws of necessity and chance as the existence of anything else empirically verifiable, the Will comes to be asserted over people in general. Towards the generation of an overall better “quality of life”, we therefore cannot be surprised when a life is deemed to be of no quality, that such a life is cast aside, brutalized, or extinguished. These lives have no value, as any value which would have been contained in the act of creative willing is unable to be expressed, and so they have value only in relation to the private pursuits of other individuals. Yet so considered, the question may still be asked as to who or what determines the direction of the political and moral applications of value within technology. Indeed, given the seemingly democratic and social nature of our practices, we may doubt Grant’s account.

Chapter III: Vogel's Rejection of Nature

Having detailed this historically based context, it would seem that our current myth and technique is aligned with the Nietzschean model, insofar as the demythologized development of technologies aims at the overcoming of chance and necessity through the constant improvement of artifacts and sciences without a centralized sense of transcendent purpose. Yet this lack of purpose is not to say it is directionless. Rather, Grant alleges that post-Nietzsche, this co-penetration advocates a spirit of creativity that allows for a greater proliferation of scientific and artifactual developments. Indeed, it follows that as moral restraints are loosened, previously prohibited areas of science and technological innovation are re-assessed as permissible, thereby expanding both the fields themselves and increasing the number of artifacts that said fields produce. The moral problem, therefore, is seemingly related to the centralized radical individualism which subjects all things to itself. But as Steven Vogel makes clear in his *Thinking Like A Mall*, there is reason to doubt Grant's description of an individualistic technology which opposes 'nature'. This doubt proceeds in two ways: First, that such an expansion would seemingly suggest that the world we inhabit is more built than natural and thus we may reject the idea of nature. Second, as Vogel makes clear, the expansion of these artifactual developments in a globalized and thereby *social* manner would seemingly suggest the prescription of value via the collective. Regarding the first, and following the comments of environmentalist Bill McKibben, who argued that Man's complete changing of the planet's environment makes impossible any discussion of nature as distinct from human activity, Vogel alleges that modern environmental efforts have relied on a strict dualism which treats

the terms “nature” and “human activity” as mutually exclusive categories. This distinction centers on the purported division between what is considered ‘natural’ and what is ‘human made’.⁹⁵ The relevant distinction is found in how they came to exist. Something human made is clearly designed, constructed to fit our needs. Conversely, something natural observes no human tinkering and is thus alleged to have meaning *independently and intrinsically*; By virtue of Nature’s existence as somehow outside the realm of human affairs, it is conceptualized as possessing an intrinsic meaning not present in the intention or construction of an artifact, a meaning which it retains as long as they continue to exist beyond the bounds of any human interference.⁹⁶

Thus as a defining feature of McKibben’s view, nature’s existence depends on its independence, but is fragile in that its conversion into something unnatural is a process accomplished with the greatest of ease. Yet it is precisely this fragility and necessity of nature’s independence that generates so many problems within the environmental movement. The first is that it produces within environmental philosophy a crisis of ends. Indeed, insofar as the goal of the prevailing model of environmental philosophy seeks the conservation of this form of nature, it is left relatively meaningless with its inherent goal never possibly being achieved. There is no nature to protect, and as such, no point to engage in environmental conservation practices. Moreover, this insistence on the total independence of nature puts the quasi-moral necessity of defending such an area at odds with the practical application of how this would be done through human action. Indeed, conservation efforts invariably necessitate human intervention in the ‘setting-aside’ of land for preservation and appreciation, thereby making the project self-

⁹⁵ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 9

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

defeating. Likewise, attempts to restore a particular piece of land to its former natural state would involve a human effort with said beginning as unnaturally modified and remaining so as it flourishes according to human design. Thus, on both a practical and theoretical level, the aim of the environmental project is at odds with the means by which to accomplish its own objective.

The inability of this conception of nature to address the practical concerns of environmental issues in turn raises another more serious criticism: in insisting on an idea of nature that arguably has never existed, we are doing a disservice to the environment by paying insufficient attention to and not changing those practices which are (somewhat) under our control. Tacit awareness of this fact is even acknowledged in the conservationist's effort mentioned above, as she sees it as her duty to protect nature's naturalness from human activity. As Vogel notes "McKibben's concern with nature is really a concern with human beings...The value he finds in nature is really a value in negation-in humans not doing things, not changing things, not acting".⁹⁷ But to meet the demands of the current environmental crisis is to respond to the ability of human beings to create, and respond to that which we created. The problems of the environment lay with us, not with what may be said about an unhelpful extrinsic conception of nature.

This point on the human ability to create aligns well with the second view of nature, as encompassing all physical processes and things. As distinct from the view of nature's meaning as independence, the second view of nature ascribes 'naturalness' to everything within the physical world. Of course, this would by definition include those

⁹⁷ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 11

efforts of Man to change and shape his environment. The collapsing of the previously existing dualism between Man and nature is by recourse of the previously neglected truth that Man and his practices are indeed as natural as anything else that exists. Previously, Man was thought of as distinct from nature because of some ill-defined conception that Man possessed some quality which set it as both distinct from and superior to the rest of the world. Yet, as Vogel makes his readers aware through a passing comment, Darwin managed to illustrate that mankind has emerged not from a pre-ordained order to the world, but from the same physical processes which give rise to all species.⁹⁸ Thus, assuming that mankind has passed beyond the appeal to suggestions as to ultimate purpose, Darwin highlights that our place among the animals offers us no recourse to believing that we are ontologically superior. As such, our behaviors such as building houses and tending to agriculture are fundamentally no different than the survival based strategies of other creatures.⁹⁹ Rather, they are just as natural as anything else, albeit perhaps more complex. What the first definition of nature lacks in its rather fragile and “absolute” conception, this second version of nature contradicts and improves upon with its inclusiveness.

However, this second version of nature is also unable to be practically applied towards solving the environmental crisis; As Vogel puts it, we need “an environmental theory [which] is supposed to tell us something normative about our relationship to nature”.¹⁰⁰ Yet if we accept this second version of nature, a judgement cannot even be made as to what is natural as the definition of ‘nature’ as “all physical and biological

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid. Here, Vogel cites the building of dams by beavers as an example

¹⁰⁰ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 12-13

processes” encompasses *all* actions. Therefore, to speak of human actions which ‘do’ anything to nature is to confuse the point; such actions change nothing ontologically, as nature already encompasses them. The definition of nature in this second case, then, would also seem to falter on the same principle of being unable to comprehensively incorporate human action. Following from this, if nature is so vast as to include all physical and biological processes, then our destructive actions are just as ‘natural’ as any actions which may be called beneficial; Thus, a distinction as to those actions which ‘hurt’ or ‘help’ nature would be nonsensical, as they all would be equally natural, with ‘nature’ unable to be harmed by actions which are themselves natural. Conceptualized in this way, nature would thus offer no standard by which to judge actions. As such, it is antithetical to the general environmental movement, which is compelled in its project by such judgements.

Vogel on Nature

To use Vogel’s language, both normative definitions of ‘nature’ encounter the issue of the environment’s “builtness”, that is, they fail to take in account that human beings do not passively live in an environment, but actively construct it. As alluded to previously, Vogel’s solution to this problem is to abandon the idea of nature¹⁰¹ entirely and focus on those social practices which shape and determine the world. Citing the view of nature as a social category as advanced by Lukács, Vogel introduces the significance of mutability within nature, that is to say, what is included in a view of nature is “varied from society to society and from historical period to historical

¹⁰¹ Within *Thinking Like a Mall*, Vogel does spend more time addressing the idea of nature and various conceptions of it. Ultimately, however, he rejects these because, as he sees it, they collapse into one of the two mentioned in this paper.

period...reflecting facts about the social order in which they occur".¹⁰² Indeed, as much should be obvious from a historical view; it is a matter of fact that the meaning of nature within philosophy has varied in accordance with historical and geographical parameters.¹⁰³ But the social aspect of nature has a deeper meaning for Vogel than simply social construction of the *idea* of nature within society; Vogel instead presents the argument that nature itself is socially constituted, with the physical world being determined by these same social-physical practices. Expanding on the observation of Man's ability to shape his environment, Vogel rightly points out how this ability is something which has always been present for Man; Invariably, Man is actively engaged in the world, coming into contact with other human beings, and using common powers of making for survival, at all times engaged in concrete physical practices which at once change the world and change Man's understanding of the world.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, if it is given that "the environment" is simply that which surrounds us,¹⁰⁵ then the ontological claim of the environment as constituted can be demonstrated as proceeding from the observable fact that our practices do indeed change that which surrounds us, resulting in new identities of the land.

The change in identity, emerging from a qualitative change in material substance, is accordingly reflected in knowledge claims. Proceeding from the aforementioned qualitative changes in identity, it follows that in the epistemological act of "knowing", the known object is at any point contingent upon those practices which humans have performed. This in turn unites the historical determinacy of the idea of nature with the

¹⁰² Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 33

¹⁰³ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 57

¹⁰⁴ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 54

¹⁰⁵ As opposed to McKibben's view of nature as something which is independent of us

manner in which the environment is physically determined; the conception of nature would in turn be formed by those practices at any point historically employed. Yet Vogel does not leave the matter of this physical determinacy of nature to rest in a kind of socially determined idealism, wherein the environment simply exists for the employment of human mastery over it. Rather, Vogel's view is qualified by the social and active role of those practices, as well as the admission that "matter is always practical".¹⁰⁶

As stated above, the practices employed in shaping the world are not limited to the creative output of the individual, but instead are a direct result of socialization. Vogel notes that it was Hegel who first placed the genesis of knowledge within a historical, inter-subjectively reached process.¹⁰⁷ As part of the historical fabric, the actions of men proceed socially, which for Hegel means that these practices find their origin in the Spirit, towards which the collective practices of Man contribute. Thus in a very real sense, Hegel attributes the constitution of the world¹⁰⁸ to those socially given practices, as it is through these that the world can be known. The world and the practices that construct it, are thereby socially and historically constituted.

But even the demonstration of the social characteristic of practice is insufficient as these practices must be physical, real processes. Vogel explains this necessity succinctly by noting that Hegel still suffers from the mistaken Cartesian belief that knowing is somehow done solely with the mind,¹⁰⁹ allowing the knower to stand outside the world as knower/constitutor, as somehow still distinct from that which is known. The

¹⁰⁶ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 62

¹⁰⁷ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 51

¹⁰⁸ Vogel uses the word "world" here, but its usage seems to resemble how Vogel has used "environment".

¹⁰⁹ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 51

problem with such a division is one and the same as the problem contained within a pronounced focus on the *idea* of nature; it allows for a proverbial “escape hatch” by which one can ignore the problems that accompany our actual, materially based practices.

Thus, Vogel draws particular attention to how Marx centralizes the importance of labor as the primary vehicle of practice. As Vogel states “To say that we can come to know the world only insofar as we constitute it...is to say that we know it because we build it, through the actual processes of labor, of physical acting and making, that are fundamental to who we are”.¹¹⁰ From Hegel’s emphasis on the importance of social practice comes the epistemological claim that the world is only known through our constitution, a claim which Marx turns toward labor through the observation that acts of physical construction are essential to human beings. Thus, insofar as human beings actively shape the world through their practices, what is *known* is different. Yet there is an important distinction to be made here in that the grounding of such a change is made not in isolation, or rarely in accordance with the private aims of the individual, but by and through the already present practices in the world. What this means for the individual subject, quotes Vogel from Heidegger, is a sense in which a person “is always already in the world”.¹¹¹ Following Marx’s identification of practices as physical processes, and Hegel’s observation that such processes are both social and follow in succession to each other in generating knowledge, it becomes impossible for Man to stand outside the natural order as a disembodied mind which finds itself passively engaged in the

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 52-53

world.¹¹² Rather, because Man exists as an animal which must engage in these world-changing material processes,¹¹³ Man's engagement in the world is prior to any knowledge which he may possess¹¹⁴ itself arising and expressed within these practices. Practices, as physical engagement, thus constitute the world and reveal knowledge to be linked to active and concerned involvement.¹¹⁵

As the historical development and determinacy of practice shows, every age deals with practice in a manner particular to it, applying them to the challenges faced contemporaneously. This being the aim of practice more generally, the question of their origin is shown as irrelevant on two fronts; first, such a question is entirely beside the point, at least when it concerns how to handle environmental issues. The problems associated with the environment today are specifically the challenge of our contemporary applications of practice, and so attempting to trace the origin of these practices to some unknown past would be impractical for such concerns. More importantly, if we truly understand that Man is in the world and cannot help but change it through his physical practices, then to question the origin of practice or physicality is to suggest a problematic dualism between practice and matter. For Vogel, such a position is untenable; practice and matter are interdependent. This then culminates in Vogel's point that matter is always practical.¹¹⁶ Indeed, much like how practice requires material (per Marx), Man's involvement in the world means that, due to the extensive history of

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 56

¹¹⁴ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 54

¹¹⁵ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 53

¹¹⁶ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 62

Man modifying and shaping the environment, it becomes fruitless to speak of “matter” as unqualified by human practice.

The truth of these observations having been granted, however, this is still to say nothing about the actual “products” of our material practices, our artifacts. Vogel repudiates what he considers to be an idealism about artifacts, wherein artifacts exist purely as extensions of human intention, being demonstrative of the material world’s status as receptacle for creative output. Contrarily, Vogel notes that artifacts “always have more to [them] than [their] producers intended...” every artifact “having a nature that exceeds human intention”.¹¹⁷ What this means is that artifacts exist beyond the strict intentions of their designers, with the process of ‘making real’ the artifact necessarily involving a passing from the intention of the designer (completely ideal) and into the world of practice, of material reality. Practice, as materially situated, does not always permit what is contained within the thought of a particular designer because the process of realization always involves consequences or purposes not contained within the designer’s vision. In demonstration of this, Vogel cites the existence of Columbus’ City Center Mall. Aside from its designed purpose of generating profit and increasing the overall wealth of the area, the mall also served for use as an occasional resting place for birds, as an exercise regimen by mall-walkers, as a charter school, or as turf for gangs to fight over.¹¹⁸ The mall certainly had a human intention, several in fact, but the realization of the artifact involved far more consequences and purpose than these.

This point as to the existence of unforeseen consequences and purpose associated with artifact production is further seen in Vogel’s observation of the very real

¹¹⁷ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 104

¹¹⁸ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 141

possibility of resistance within our practices. Returning briefly to the discussion of ideal versus practice, it is recognized that an ideal remains distinct from the embodied work and labor involved in the construction of the environment, as the ideal does not involve these consequences and additional purposes. By the same token then, the ideal does not involve a tendency towards resistance. But as any engineer would agree, practice does. Though not so much an inherent problem with practice as opposed to simply being a characteristic of it, Vogel notes that it is the encountering of resistance, of this possibility of failure that distinguishes practice from theory.¹¹⁹ Indeed, there are hard limits on what our powers of making can produce, and even in making the artifact, we encounter great difficulty. The relevance of these comments for an understanding of Vogel's use of the term artifact is that this realization of "resistance" in our practices points towards what Vogel refers to as the 'wildness' of artifacts.

Recalling the transformative effect that human practice has upon the environment, Vogel's use of the term wildness in relation to artifacts can be better appreciated when one considers current environmental restoration efforts. Though the common definition of restoration as 'repatriating' nature has been shown to be problematic per Vogel's critiques, the concept of correcting the damage done before allowing the affected land to return to operating relatively under its own powers still usefully illustrates the presence of forces which operate independently of human intervention.¹²⁰ When restoration efforts are undertaken, the emphasis is placed on approximating what the land was like before, and after striving for this goal, allowing

¹¹⁹ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 106

¹²⁰ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 106

'nature' to return. But while naturalness cannot return,¹²¹ what does are those biological and ecological processes which thereafter need relatively little human intervention to continue. Though some of these processes are in a sense put into motion through the human act (planting a seed and allowing it to germinate, for example), they ultimately operate beyond both the ability of Man to completely understand, or control, and are indeed involved in the creation of every artifact. Even in something as mundane as hammering a nail into a wall, there are forces (gravitational, metabolic) which are at once presupposed, depended on, not completely known, and necessary.¹²² This sense of "wildness" is also seen as partly composing the artifact, as those processes which proceed from it are not strictly captured by the intentions of the designer. Again, we could here refer to the example of the mall to illustrate: while certainly it was the intention of the owning company to attract customers to the store, the development of how shoppers moved throughout the mall, how they conducted themselves within the built environment¹²³ is movement, a force, which developed organically from the existence of the mall itself. Indeed the artifact, because it really exists in the material world, always escapes the strict intention of the designer.¹²⁴

It can therefore be observed that the principle behind the wildness of an artifact is the autonomy involved. While this may seem like a regression to the first definition of nature, it should be noted that this recognition of autonomy is tempered both by the emphasis on human practice constituting the world and setting the material processes

¹²¹ Because it has never existed, as seen through Vogel's critique

¹²² Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 112.

¹²³ Ex. Not visiting a particular store because of the bad decor, or avoiding a particular elevator because of the worrisome noises it would make.

¹²⁴ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 140

into motion, as well as the placing of independence within those processes which exist beyond the human. That the artifact has received some level of human intervention does not infringe upon this wildness, nor does human intention reduce the identity of the artifact solely to human intention.¹²⁵ In this way, it would seem that in the same way we can talk of what is good or harmful to said 'natural' items, we can likewise talk of what is good or harmful for the artifact. That is to say, because an artifact exists as independent of human intention, possessing its own autonomy and being wild, its purpose is not strictly connected to human intention inasmuch as human intention is not (indeed, it is not capable of) always informing it. Purpose(s) may have been involved in its creation, yet its status as non-contingent upon human purpose necessitates recognizing the artifact's interests as its own. In the case of the mall, there can be no mistake that the purpose of the mall was unique to it and that there were things which were good or bad for its existence.¹²⁶ As Vogel details, the mall grew, responded to changes in the environment, underwent transformations, and maintained homeostasis before eventually 'dying'. And indeed, much like any other teleologically oriented structure in possession of its own purpose, the mall had interests that were aligned with trying to achieve its purpose: the promotion of sales, of new stores and styles arriving, and so forth. Similarly, there were things which were contrary to the achievement of its purpose, like stores falling into disrepair and new malls being opened across town.

In turn, this leads to the more important consideration that the recognition of an artifact's autonomy and good necessitates a moral basis for how we should regard artifacts. This fact can be better appreciated in light of the erroneous environmentalist

¹²⁵ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 139

¹²⁶ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 150

prioritization of nature's independence; Under such a view, Vogel alleges, there is a profound sense of inattention paid to artifacts, stating that "We treat them as morally insignificant, and...as ontologically insignificant-less important not only than living things but also than 'natural' abiotic things...".¹²⁷ In contrast, Vogel seeks to demonstrate the error of not recognizing the moral significance of artifacts. But if it is the case that moral significance derives from things possessing an inward purpose which are properly their own, then aside from an unfounded preference for biological organisms,¹²⁸ there should be no reason to exclude artifacts from having moral significance; Indeed, insofar as they have goods of their own and are autonomous to some respect, artifacts can be said to have complexity and teleological ordering, and thereby seemingly have moral worth. Indeed, so strong is the need to respect the intrinsic value of artifacts that Vogel goes so far as to suggest that the moral respect which is extended to babies should be at least analogous to the respect given to artifacts¹²⁹ as both are fundamentally artifacts created by human beings. As such, it can be argued that artifacts should be given proper moral consideration, meaning that we must recognize that artifacts are part of the constructed environment and that, on account of their complexity and intrinsic purpose (and thereby, value) ought to be preserved.¹³⁰

The practical consequence of giving moral consideration to artifacts under Vogel's view is the requirement of taking responsibility for our creations, by definition including the environment in which we live;¹³¹ As Vogel writes "we are responsible for

¹²⁷ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 163

¹²⁸ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 155

¹²⁹ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 106

¹³⁰ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 162

¹³¹ As that which environs us is the result of our artifice

the artifacts that surround us in that we made them...they are part of a world that we have worked through our labor to bring into existence¹³². We have created the world, and so must recognize that if the world appears as ugly, unsustainable, or harmful to the majority of beings on this planet, then it was through our actions that this came to be.¹³³ Having understood this, the moral predicament faced within the environmental movement is revealed as concerning the premise of creation; while we may find ourselves compelled to admit that artifacts may possess intrinsic value due to the possibility of such a statement being made in Vogel's account¹³⁴ the creation and existence of these artifacts poses a moral problem inasmuch as their unintended consequences may be environmentally harmful. We therefore cannot take the route which attempts to shirk this obligation, or shy away from the necessity of creation through inaction. Nor, knowing that artifacts might have intrinsic value, can we suggest that there should be some kind of a radical deconstruction of artifacts, or a complete abandonment of our current practices.

Thus the importance of *evaluating* practices. Taken in conjunction with the inability of human transformation of the world to ever achieve the exact intended result, this phrase signifies a necessity to carefully evaluate the quality of artifacts and practices to the best of our ability. Part of this process is the identification and revision of harmful practices, but the more important feature is the creation of practices that are actually beneficial for the environment, bearing in mind the gravity of some practices in terms of how they constitute the environment. Here Vogel notes how, had people

¹³² Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 164

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 164

acknowledged their responsibility towards the City Center Mall, then the construction of it may have been more ecologically sound.¹³⁵ That is to say, because the mall was constructed in such a way as to see within its existence no intrinsic value,¹³⁶ or understanding that the mall adds to the environment, it was treated as morally insignificant to the detriment of said environment. The imperative to consider, deliberate, and choose practices in a normatively responsible manner is more pressing given what Vogel terms to be the silence of nature, that is, the lack of any clear communication from what has traditionally been called nature as to how best to treat non-human entities. Though they may possess intrinsic worth, it remains the task of humanity to articulate and consider such worth through the dialogical ethics of language, which for Vogel can only be accomplished through the process of democratic engagement.

The necessity of the democratic process for proper deliberation and argumentation in the process of analyzing and adopting practices has already been hinted at from what has been detailed about the nature of practice in general; as the environment is produced socially, there can be no debate that everyone should have some voice in terms of how it is constructed. Yet as Vogel explains, the necessity for democracy in these issues goes even further as democratic engagement is constitutive of the very process of moral decision-making in general. This is because of the alluded to dialogical process of language. As Vogel explains through the example of two pedologists who seek to communicate with each other “They talk. And the way language is used between them does, in my view, introduce a new element. They speak

¹³⁵ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 165

¹³⁶ As opposed to economic, social, or any other extrinsically determined value

with each other, *about* the sample. Indeed, they argue...”,¹³⁷ with the act of communication involving use of language in discourse and the presence of another so as to establish truth. For Vogel, this process of argumentation in the building up of knowledge, through advancing claims and establishing truth about the particular subject of our study, introduces both normativity and intersubjectivity,¹³⁸ themselves dependent on there being a relationship between the interlocutors;¹³⁹ In using dialogical language to establish truth, a person finds themselves connected with and dependent on the person with whom they are engaged. But moreover, this dependency necessitates that the dialogical process takes the form of each side trying to *justify* their particular claim. For truth to be reached, it is of course necessary for the scientists to state why they propose what they do, in accordance with their experience of the world. What fundamentally distinguishes language then is the use of words with another person so as to come to a more comprehensive understanding of the world, that is, of what is right and wrong.

From the attempt to establish the truth of a particular proposition through language, it is a very short step to seeing how crucial language is for addressing moral claims. But moreover, what is contained within the intersubjectivity of language is dialogue, which fundamentally involves reciprocity. As Vogel explains “[Conversation] is an ethics of reciprocity, based on the fundamental symmetry of dialogue, as interlocutors constantly alternate between... speaker and hearer”.¹⁴⁰ This recognition that the discussion is between two individuals of equal moral standing who are both

¹³⁷ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 179

¹³⁸ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 180

¹³⁹ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 183

¹⁴⁰ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 186

seeking to establish the truth of a particular claim, plays into the essentially ethical-democratic dimension of language in general; If we operate under the recognition that the relevant parties are equal participants and change their roles repeatedly in order to participate in the discussion, then the process of dialogue contained within language is essentially democratic and ethics-regulated inasmuch as dialogue encourages the democratic ideals of collaborative deliberation and asserts the equal standing of the participants.

This realization returns us to the relative “silence” of nature; Those things which constitute the environment do not engage in dialogue, do not propose the way(s) in which they should be treated in our practices.¹⁴¹ This point is obvious, and so is the need to reject those ‘ventriloquists’ who claim to speak for ‘nature’ in an authoritative capacity. As has been shown, not only is it the case that all people have a ‘connection’ to the environment inasmuch as they participate in practices that constitute it, but it is also true that the environment *cannot* speak. As Vogel writes “The silence of nature, then, simply means this: that there’s no way to avoid or short-circuit the necessity of discourse and the giving of reasons to decide what our ethical duties are, and that the apparent inability of nonhuman entities to take part in that discussion entails that our duties to such entities...must themselves be a subject matter of that discussion”.¹⁴² This does not give us license to do whatever we want to the environment, but rather it means that because humans *can* speak and deliberate that we *must* do so. Indeed, the presence of that unique ability to engage in reciprocal dialogue and supply reasons for our positions, taken in conjunction with our ability to shape the environment, means that

¹⁴¹ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 187

¹⁴² Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 196

we are *solely* morally responsible for the environment. Far from allowing us to do whatever we want, this recognition of our moral responsibility tied to our speech is in fact rather humbling and compels us to act.¹⁴³

Curiously however, this responsibility for constructing a good environment is not typically denied; many people profess that it is the duty of humanity to promote those practices which help the environment, or at the very least not recklessly engage in practices which they consciously acknowledge as harmful.¹⁴⁴ Given the best of intentions then, it is strange that environmental problems only seem to be getting worse. This contradiction is due to a form of alienation. Recalling what has already been said about that popular error which treats mankind as distinct from and superior to the world, Vogel's comment that we are alienated from the environment because of our current market practices can be more easily appreciated; in much the same way that McKibben's sort of environmentalism stems from the central error of prioritizing Man, the current environmental problems can be understood as proceeding from a feeling of alienation as a result of the current economic circumstances which force each person to act as individuals.¹⁴⁵ As previously stated, solving the moral issues associated with the environment, like solving any moral issue, is dependent on the process of dialogue. If therefore communication is effectively stopped, then the progress made towards a more sustainable environment will be infinitesimal, as it would simply be an individual's private effort as contrasted against global problems. As Vogel sees the matter, this breakdown

¹⁴³ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 232

¹⁴⁴ A point of clarity: it is known that there are many who engage in activities which are in fact objectively detrimental to the environment. However, these practices persist in large order because of a lack of belief in ecological problems, or are promoted out of practical necessity.

¹⁴⁵ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 202

of communication is precisely what has happened; Modern capitalism forces each person to think in terms of their private ends. But because it encourages this, the unification of an individual's productive efforts with another via economic circumstance will always appear as originating from, and producing, something unnatural which "appears...as something that takes place beyond them ('naturally'), and therefore as something over which they have little control".¹⁴⁶ What this means is that the sort of helplessness experienced by the individual in trying to be environmentally conscious is very real in that the person's efforts are rendered ineffective by capitalism's insistence that each person think only as an individual who acts solely through the market. Without a guarantee that other users of the commons will commit to the same environmentalist project, there is no reason to prioritize making a functionally meaningless personal sacrifice when personal gain could be achieved instead.¹⁴⁷ As it were, each person is only acting according to their own rational self-interest. But regardless of whether the person chooses what is in their self-interest or not, it remains true that the environmentalist "[has] no way to achieve [their goals] through individual action".¹⁴⁸

Vogel's counter to such individualism is the establishment of new moral and political communities which emphasize "finding a way to restore the discursive connection to others".¹⁴⁹ Through a renewed emphasis on the importance of collective action. Alone, individuals are powerless to change a practice which has been produced socially, let alone one that has escaped our control and so now perpetuates the very conditions which sustains it. Yet if moral responsibility is recognized as originating in the

¹⁴⁶ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 200-201

¹⁴⁷ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 203

¹⁴⁸ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 206

¹⁴⁹ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 213

collective, then we are better able to describe a path forward.¹⁵⁰ For Vogel, the practical application of such a recognition means that, in contradistinction to the individualism of late-stage capitalism, we must focus on organizing and developing communities which mitigate against climate change by “an attempt to promote an effective collective agreement that will coordinate reductions in commons use and therefore avert the aggregate harms”.¹⁵¹ But as distinct from simply being a collection of individuals who have all individually committed themselves to the environmental project, the effective agreement necessarily involves the *conscious* act of self-organization, that is, the social structures of that community are arranged via the community itself through a dialogical process.¹⁵² Here, dialogue is essential, as it not only helps individuals to realize that they are part of a social group which determines practices, but it also allows for a degree of adaptability; Because the dialogical process is concerned with establishing truth while being simultaneously committed to re-evaluation and analysis, it is better able to respond to the always contemporaneously generated environment. Moreover, the emphasis on dialogue allows for there to be a systematic approach to environmental issues; through participating in public discussion and argumentation, the community is best able to weigh the importance of artifacts and practices which construct their environment, with the strongest argument(s) ideally reigning supreme. Because the interactions of the community are mediated by dialogue and depend on the ‘democratic’ process of the selection of a method, the central problem of individualism is solved

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 214

¹⁵² Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 220

through the introduction of trust and dependence on others as co-moral decision-makers, and as part of the society which creates social practices.

Chapter IV: Some Thoughts on Technology from Vogel

Finally, let us consider what Vogel has to say on technology. When taken in conjunction with how practice has been described by Vogel as physical processes which create the environment, there is a temptation to equate technology with these social-physical practices in general. Yet as early as his initial descriptions of construction as a physical process, Vogel states that he wishes to avoid such an equivocation, arguing “The first thing to notice is that such processes are much older and much broader in scope than the technological ones which have constructed the particular modern urbanized environments most people live in today”.¹⁵³ Later, in detailing the problem of relativism, Vogel notes degrees of technologization,¹⁵⁴ while nevertheless insisting on the social construction of the environment. What therefore can be extrapolated from these remarks is the distinction between the process of social construction and of technology, the second of which emerges from a particular historical circumstance and admits of degrees.

Turning to Vogel’s most extensive treatment of technology, it would seem that the relevant historical condition which so determines the degree of technologization is industry, with Vogel explicitly noting that the history of technology is the history of industry.¹⁵⁵ The development of technology proceeds in accordance with the development of industry, a term which Vogel cites Marx as explaining as the actual historical relationship of ‘nature’ to Man.¹⁵⁶ Yet as this relationship between Man and

¹⁵³ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 43

¹⁵⁴ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 96

¹⁵⁵ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 74

¹⁵⁶ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 73. Vogel assures his reader that Marx’s use of ‘nature’ here is synonymous with his definition of the environment as built by social practices. The use of nature in the proceeding sentence after this footnote also observes this usage of the term.

'nature' rests on the latter determining the former through practices, the historical and active development of industry is at every moment determined by the same practices. Yet as for the character of these industrial practices in comparison with practices in general, Vogel's seems to posit that the world as urbanized through the reach of technology is the hallmark of modernity. As such, our world would be constructed by technology and is irreversibly technological. Yet this does not solve the problem, as we remain with the observation that technology is equal to industry, but no means of comparison between technology/industry and social-physical practices in general, aside from Vogel's remark that the two terms are *not* equivocal, and the possibility that technological practices are a subset of social-physical practices.¹⁵⁷ Yet insofar as these practices seemingly build the world geometrically¹⁵⁸ and form the environment by which one engages with and knows the world, to speak of 'technology' as a historically conditioned, equivocal term of industry while remaining distinct from "social practices" *in general* must be to speak of the *active* developments of this relationship, that is, the peculiar innovations of social practices contemporary to a particular age. This reading would be in keeping with the criteria set by Vogel as to what delineates technology, as it both draws attention to the contemporaneously situated condition of technologies and shows how technology is connected to industry, that is, the historical and active relation of Man to his environment.

Marx's need for an active technology is not a point lost on Vogel. Indeed, Vogel's repeated referral to technologies as a concrete noun, as well as an overall emphasis on

¹⁵⁷ An alternate reading of Vogel's remark on page 43 may suggest a distinction between physical and technological processes. However, this account will be shown to fail in a forthcoming remark.

¹⁵⁸ That is, as technological practices gradually increase in complexity, and concurrently, so too does the built environment increase in complexity.

the necessarily physical nature of practice, suggests that he wants to focus on the physical determinacy of technology, that is, on technology as something produced and physically determined. As such, Vogel notes that technologies are often susceptible to failure, and the act of their creation must be met with some degree of humility as to what tasks can actually be accomplished by our powers of making.¹⁵⁹ Similar to what has been previously discussed regarding the wildness of social practices and of artifacts, the appropriateness of this word in describing technology cannot be overlooked. As technology shares in this necessity of resistance as a result of its physicality, it can likewise be described as wild.

This idea of technology as a historically grounded descriptor of the application of social practices receives further support in Vogel's observation that "even those who wish to criticize those practices...make the same mistake, too easily believing that some practices, technological ones, somehow really do escape...the gap, really do domesticate the wild. [But] Fully to pay attention to the nature of artifacts...would lead us to rather acknowledge the unavoidable limitations in our abilities, and in our technologies...".¹⁶⁰ This passage is rather telling in two ways; First, Vogel's usage of the plural in presentation of his own view seems to suggest the application of this term to several things, rather than one particular. Second, for its apparent rejection of technology as completely distinct from social practices; here, Vogel is criticizing those who think that technological practices somehow escape the gap of wildness between

¹⁵⁹ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 119

¹⁶⁰ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 121

intention and creation; his point is that *all* practices observe this gap, including those producing technologies.¹⁶¹

In consideration of these points, it would seem that when Vogel speaks of technology, he is in fact speaking of those particular artifacts which are contemporary manifestations of social practices. As physical practices invariably produce artifacts which in turn expand the scope of industry, the equivocation of technology with industry, instead of with social practices in general, necessitates a view that emphasizes the products of such innovations, as it would only be through measuring these that the modern age can be understood as somehow different in the way Vogel seems to desire. This also accords with Vogel's comment on degrees of technologization inasmuch as said degrees would pertain to the proliferation of artifacts, certainly increasing in our modern age. That is to say, knowing that the distinction between the ideal and practice is that the latter generates something *real* within the world, the only way to simultaneously hold fast to the active construction of the world, and belief in technology as not equivocal to physical practices, would be to propose that the object of the definition of technology is the artifact itself.

Though this conclusion would seemingly suggest a tension with Vogel's observation that "technological" practices are newer than social practices in general, the alternate view wherein technology simply refers to only a specific kind of physical practice creates an ontological problem; in insisting on technological practices as somehow distinct from social practices in general and only emerged in the relatively

¹⁶¹ Vogel does not here say that technological practices are ontologically a category unto themselves. Rather, given the previous fact of technology being newer than social practice in general, this passage would seem to indicate that technological practices are of the same kind as these social and physical practices.

recent past, the question would persist as to *how* they are distinct. Both generate artifacts and involve practices that are social-physical. As such, the only possible means of distinguishing them would seemingly be to note the relative complexity of modern practices and artifacts in technology. But commitment to such a position would be demonstrably foolish; for example, there can be no doubt that the production of some pieces of ancient architecture admit of a great deal of complexity. Moreover, what standard qualifies practices as 'complex'? This question becomes murkier when it is qualified by a demand for the historical age in which 'technological' practices emerged. Indeed, insofar as Vogel seemingly operates from within Marx's understanding of industry as the historical relation of Man to his environment, which he engages in through physical-social practices and is always already in, there would be no room for technology to emerge as something ontologically distinct from social-physical practice.

In turn, this brings us to the more important point that a difference in degree of complexity does not distinguish one thing from another *ontologically*; Indeed, if complexity distinguishes technologies from social-physical practice in general, it does not follow that there is a *real* distinction between the two, only growth of the former into the latter without a qualitative change in identity. While the terms would not be completely synonymous, they also would not be distinguishable enough to warrant positing an actually existent ontological difference, as their difference is reducible down to being one of quantitative measures of the same process(es). Under this reading, there would only be more or less advanced social-physical practices, not a separate category that could be labelled "technology". As such, the most fair reading would

seemingly be to attribute the term “technology” and “technologies” as relating to artifacts produced by social-physical practices, rather than a form of them.

A Summation

As Vogel shows, presumptions of a dualism between nature and human practice are untenable because they either fail to address that human beings are ever-engaged with actively constructing their environment or because they are so broad as to negate any distinction as to what is good or bad for the environment. Instead, the environment itself is a direct product of physical processes of human artifice that are determined by, and invariably bound to, matter. But because we come to know about the world through these practices, it is only through them that we understand matter at all. Matter is thus always practical, and it is this point, taken in union with the need for practice to be based in matter, that shows the interdependence of these two terms; Indeed, as physical practice changes the world through a shift in how human beings act, so too does what is known and how it is known qualitatively change.

This joining together of matter and practice contains the additional premise of interdependence of matter and the manifestation of that practice, which is the technological/artifactual. That is to say, all material things are technological insofar as humans have imposed some level of change on them; inversely, all things technological are in some sense ‘natural’ because they do not simply aim at mastery on account of wildness. The ‘wildness’ of artifacts is demonstrative of this relation, with technologies (artifacts) never able to achieve mastery on account of practice’s tendency to break down or not accord in the way we desire. The result is a view wherein technology and matter exist in a continuous stream with each other.

Cognizant of these views, as well as Vogel's political and ethical solutions, the most straightforward path for the person who wishes to support the distinction between technology and nature would be to demonstrate that Vogel's account of technology does not accurately capture what is signified by the term. And indeed, Grant's presentation of the historical development of technology reveals it to be more dynamic than the picture offered by Vogel inasmuch as the idea of technology is not limited to the artifactual and also develops historically. Following from this, Vogel's account of technology appears as relatively static and ultimately unable to appreciate the novelty in technological thinking as the co-penetration of the arts and sciences. Thus there is sufficient reason to be concerned as to how such technological thinking will develop in relation to human dignity, particularly as Grant identifies such modern thinking on technology as influenced by the Nietzschean ideal of creativity.

Chapter V: The Moral Worries

Recalling that what lies at the core of technological thinking is the thought that one creates themselves in their freedom, and that through the exertion of the will, one “sees oneself as over against the world, dealing with it...as a series of objects which they move around as a means of proving to themselves that they are free,¹⁶² it is the case that ‘value’ is completely instrumental and wholly tied to the articulation of freedom. This desire for freedom, informing the completely demythologized Nietzschean paradigm is a *calculation* made as to whether something or someone supplies a net gain to freedom or if they are a detraction. Returning here to the co-penetration of technological thinking through our current rational methods, there can be no doubt that the proliferation of such methods, aided by an increasingly globalized capitalism, brings about an ever-growing homogenized picture of the world. In this way, the proliferation of these rational methods affects how people in general regard moral problems and solve them via technological means. As Grant observes, the general trend of such involvement has been towards extending Nietzschean value statements to the aforementioned weak and feeble members of society. In particular, Grant cites contemporary language surrounding both abortion and euthanasia; in both cases Grant observes the preoccupation of such movements with the appraisal of a particular life as worth living or not. In the case of euthanasia, a life is determined as not being worth living because of the prolonged difficulties that will be faced, with the exercise of appraising whether or not a life has value implying that some people have the right to

¹⁶² George Grant ‘Value and Technology’ Contained within *George Grant Reader*, 390

judge whether or not someone should exist.¹⁶³ But by assessing a particular life to not have quality, value, or inherent meaning, it cannot be concluded that such a person has a right to live. This is even more true if said person is a burden on society and requires intensive care; because someone will always need to care for them, they are in effect denying their caretaker freedom. Indeed, there is a requirement to kill such individuals, as in the interest of preserving dynamic willing, justice would demand an annihilation of those who have no value. They are deemed to not be able to have quality of life, so there are less moral qualms about killing them. Similarly, in the issue of abortion, Grant notes that it receives justification through “the language of the triumph of the will”¹⁶⁴ stressing the moral and significance of fetuses at certain stages of development because until a certain predetermined point, the fetus is a secondary concern to the freedom of the mother. Indeed, such thinking maps well with the terminology used to render the *Roe v. Wade* decision, wherein it was distinguished that fetuses, though alive biologically, were not properly ‘human beings’. The distinction, it appears, is that the fetus, up to a certain point, is not capable of being worthy of moral consideration because he/she is not potentially alive until the 6th or 7th month¹⁶⁵ which can only mean that the moral definition of life is to be taken as related to its quality.¹⁶⁶

Grant writes “the creative in their corporations have been told... that justice is only a convenience. In carrying out the dynamic convenience of technology, why should

¹⁶³ George Grant ‘The Language of Euthanasia’ Contained within *Technology and Justice* (Toronto ON, Anansi Press, 1986), 115.

¹⁶⁴ George Grant ‘The Triumph of the Will’ Contained within *George Grant Reader*, 146.

¹⁶⁵ George Grant ‘Abortion and Rights’, Contained within *Technology and Justice*, 115.

¹⁶⁶ The argument seems to go that until this point of viability, the mother is wholly responsible (morally as well as physically) for the development of the child. As such, any “quality of life” the child has is within her charge.

they not seek a “justice” which is congruent with those conveniences, and gradually sacrifice the principles of liberty and equality when they conflict with the greater conveniences?”¹⁶⁷ As seen through this example, the formalism of democracy works against the human dignity of these feebler people, as the morally unrestrained general will of the populace will inevitably lead to greater violations of freedom, as “justified” by society through an appeal to “quality of life”.

Though Grant specifically tackles the issues of abortion and euthanasia, the more generalized moral worry should be clear enough: the uncertainty regarding the term “quality of life” and the inability of any major social program to articulate a proper response to the Nietzschean influenced idea of technology leads to a bleak picture of what may become justified within the gradual development of technology in conquering chance and necessity for the promotion of individualism. Though it can be retorted that certain social institutions exist that advocate for some restrictions to these challenges, the problem becomes that there is no universally recognized standard which prevents the expansion of this Nietzschean vision of technology; in this sense, both the ‘morally conservative’ position of rights and the insistence on the idea of a collectivized ethics is doomed to fail as the internal principle of the creative principle plays itself out. As a distinct result of the historical development of the idea of technology, we now face a moral crisis which attacks any and all versions of human dignity, as value no longer refers to some sense of worthiness that transcends the conditions of life, but is now solely meant as expression of instrumental worth, of that “summoning forth of reasons” for a particular thing’s existence. Again, however, the irony of such a position is that

¹⁶⁷ George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, 83

objective reasons cannot be given, and instead they must always be expressed within the language of pursuit of private, creative ends.

If then the frontiers of technology are not given within technological thinking, they must be supplied from outside it. But while it may be said that the emphasis on sociality is somewhat important for determining the direction of technology, the fact that technology *does* exist beyond the artifactual necessitates an even greater moral and political response than what Vogel has presented. As Vogel has put the matter, the central issue of our inability to respond to environmental problems is the lack of communication between said individuals as a result of modern capitalism. Technology as such is not the problem, it's the capitalist encouragement of the private use of said socially produced technologies; because the community is unable to communicate and decide how best to handle environmental issues, everyone simply pursues their private ends. Yet as has been shown, the problem of individualism is much more profound and historically conditioned than Vogel's assessment would lead one to believe; It is not simply the case that economic realities force people into a self-interested individualism, but rather, that technology forms an ontology which has people engage in an instrumentalized reasoning about the world. Moreover, as history demonstrates, technology is not ontologically neutral. As Grant shows, the prioritization of individual freedom in order to pursue one's own good is historically born of certain tensions within Christian thought. Prior to the Reformation, what is now identified as individualism did not have an explicit articulation in politics or morality, and certainly not in ontology. Rather, each individual was thought of as participating in a divine order which made a cohesive whole out of both history and social relations. If therefore we want to look for

the historical cause of individualism, we must look back to Luther and not Smith.¹⁶⁸

But suppose we modified Vogel's claims and said that *modern* individualism is the result of capitalism? To my mind, Vogel's claim would still be incorrect. Even in its modern form, where the accumulation of wealth is increasingly in the hands of only a few individuals, the central tenets of capitalist thought have always been that Man must involve himself in the market so as to secure those worldly goods which will allow him to articulate his idea of freedom, freeing him greatly from the burdens of chance and necessity. Moreover, such an ideal of freedom is *theoretically* open to all. What is curious is that, through our actions which “depend on what we consider life to be about”,¹⁶⁹ there has certainly been a radical break from the pursuit of such an ideal of freedom; The emerging disposition that not all *necessarily* have a right to live shows that we have moved past the ideals of freedom and human goodness of capitalism, and more towards those conclusions on value, will, and technology detailed by Nietzsche.¹⁷⁰ If therefore we want to include the problems of modern capitalism within an appraisal of individualism which is central to environmental issues, capitalism must be regarded as a *symptom* and not the cause.

This focus on how our actions are informed by myth also brings us to the mistake of treating technology as artifactual and as ‘neutral’. Here, Vogel's suggestion of the biological process in fact works against him: in solving environmental issues, Vogel argues that we must engage in dialogue with each other, a process that if done correctly

¹⁶⁸ Even granting that there were theological and philosophical precursors to Luther's points, there can be no doubt that Luther's explicit theological and proactive emphasis on the freedom of the individual was the origin point of the politically active, free individual who so characterizes most of modern society.

¹⁶⁹ Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 14.

¹⁷⁰ While this gravitation towards Nietzsche may not have been so much intentional, it is nevertheless a result of the collapsing of the myth of progress.

will involve the giving of reasons for or against a particular practice and arguing until a conclusion is reached. Yet aside from the curious lack of any stipulation as to how large such a community should be,¹⁷¹ attention within Vogel's ethical approach is that the community is shown as deciding what good they wish to pursue, and then they take the appropriate steps to enact it. So considered, it would seem that this is a confirmation of Grant's position that action is prompted by some view of what human life is about, even if the moral community is only aligned for the practical purpose of solving environmental issues/constructing a good environment. Indeed, Vogel's prescription here seems to approach the Marxist vision of overcoming evil (even if in Vogel's view, such an overcoming is always active and constantly reassessing and improving practices). Having said this, I do not see how it would be possible to avoid the conclusion that the construction of artifacts is both historically and contemporaneously conditioned by a central myth. More plainly, we should ask: why should this relation between myth and artifact construction be posited as something which only occurs in the present, rather than be something which occurs historically as well?

In this way, artifact production proceeds not just socially and physically, but ideologically in relation to innovations in what is taken to be the purpose of life. The particular artifact is not simply an artifact, but rather, it is a product, and *suggestive of* the myth which contextualizes it. The artifact is not ontologically neutral, but rather is resultant and prescriptive, encouraging a particular understanding of the world. If such a view appears like idealism, it must instantly be stated that it is not; the artifact, though the result of and prescriptive of a certain conceptualization of purpose nevertheless

¹⁷¹ Indeed the ever-growing globalized picture of environmental issues would seem to necessitate we deliberate with the whole world.

does not *fully* capture what is contained within the myth. As much is evident from history, wherein what and how artifacts are produced changes because of tension contained within the myth, and so when the myth is overcome through exposing its fundamental contradictions, what is produced and how it is produced also changes. With artifacts now produced for the sake of quality of life, if it should appear that the production of artifacts proceed without a central myth and as simply artifactual, this is only because what now stands in the stead of given purpose is the negation of purpose and intrinsic meaning as seen most excellently in Nietzsche. As Grant writes “the simple characterization of the computer as neutral instrument makes it sound as if instruments are now what instruments have always been, and so hides from us what is completely novel about modern instrumentality”.¹⁷² As it were, Vogel has history backwards: myth does not flow from practice, but practice from myth. Thus, Vogel’s commitment to such a view is fundamentally flawed, as it ignores the development of technology as distinct from technique and anachronistically disperses its version of technology across history.

As a result of these misconceptions, Vogel is unable to appreciate the novelty of what is truly meant by the term. In such a view, the value of anything is calculated in relation to dynamic willing, and conceals an ontology which shapes what people are encouraged to know and do,¹⁷³ that is, how to *be* in the world. And such an account has been detailed: it is expressed in the thought of Nietzsche, with the accompanying moral concerns that follow. Here, we can see how this misconception about technology reveals two problems with Vogel's moral and political conclusions. The first is that the

¹⁷² George Grant ‘The Computer Does Not Impose on Us the Ways It Should Be Used’ *George Grant Reader*, 423.

¹⁷³ George Grant ‘The Computer Does Not Impose on Us the Ways It Should Be Used’ *George Grant Reader*, 422.

failure to appreciate technology as an ontology leads Vogel to underestimate how profound the problem of individualism is. Indeed, he attributed it to capitalism, and says that the emergence of a moral community resolves this individualism. This itself fails in two ways. The first is that, even if the community could be formed, the evaluation and implementation of new practices would continue to reinscribe the individualistic account that informs them. This is because the problem is not the material practice per se, but the *myth* that informs it. The correction of practice, in order to truly challenge the individualistic account must correct said account's fundamental ontological presumptions. As such, secondly, the insistence on a dialogical approach will almost certainly not work because of the difficulties in establishing a new myth which can prompt human action and approach a level of moral commitment that is non-transient. Vogel's emphasis on dialogue is well-intended, but the manner in which such communication is framed in Vogel's view, as simply coming to a conclusion through dialogue and argumentation, does not address the need for a new myth, that is, it does not sufficiently challenge the Nietzschean paradigm. Nor could it. This is because the entirety of Vogel's program is too ideologically close to Marx; though Vogel does not commit to the total Revolution which was charged in orthodox Marxism as leading towards a Utopia, he *does* seemingly believe in the "myth of progress" inasmuch as he states we must constantly be striving for the improvement of the environment and reevaluation of practices. Indeed, this is seemingly presented as a goal which society must realize and progress towards. However, as Nietzsche has demonstrated, we have moved beyond the idea of progress, or at least we should have if we are truly committed to a secular, materialist position. Therefore, bearing sufficient resemblance to the

previously dismissed myth of progress, we need to similarly deny Vogel's view should Nietzsche be correct. And again, given the current state of the technological society, it would seem he is.

The second way that Vogel's misconceptions about technology reveal his political and moral conclusions as inadequate is through the interjection of value into the world. More plainly, that value given through democratic dialogue does not provide society adequate reason to act on such value. To further elucidate, it is worth mentioning that on Vogel's account, artifacts seemingly have some intrinsic worth; they have "goods of their own" and are in some sense autonomous. However, Vogel notes that the process of democratic dialogue will necessarily involve choosing those artifacts and practices which are worth preserving and those that are not, with the intrinsic worth of artifacts ideally prompting us to more carefully consider what we make. In fact, so great is the need to respect the intrinsic worth of artifacts that Vogel charges they should be treated almost in the same manner as how one would treat a baby.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, what is curious to note is that there does not seem to be much room in Vogel's account to say that children are indeed morally superior to other kinds of artifacts. The consequences of these considerations mean two things with respect to values. First that it would be permissible to morally prioritize one type of artifact (say, a fridge) over another (such as a child), provided that such a choice is made through the process of argumentative dialogue. Second, that what is valuable is ever at the mercy of democratic engagement. While artifacts and practices may have intrinsic good, their relative value is still to be analyzed and judged by the moral community and is thereby

¹⁷⁴ Vogel, *Thinking Like a Mall*, 106.

subject to this dialogue based process. Given then the Nietzschean appraisal of things as existing meaninglessly, it is unclear how dialogue subverts the problem of individualism. Certainly some people in Nietzsche's account may be 'good' insofar as they dynamically will, but Nietzsche's challenge to religion includes a critique of the idea of inherent value, that is, that aside from the strong men, it is not good *per se* that a particular thing or person exists. Therefore, shifting the focus from the individual proper to a collection of individuals called "a community" without also correcting the problems inherent to the Nietzschean rejection of myth or the development of technology simply strengthens Nietzsche's argument: through the democratic process, value is still being determined according to instrumental usefulness. Indeed, the lack of a true centralized myth means that we cannot say that anything has a good which demands respect. We may dignify it with such because such an object is instrumentally useful for our dynamic willing, but without a proper critique of the Nietzschean program, we cannot say such things are inherently valuable, nor by extension can we say that any instrumental value to be found in them should be posited or proposed as valuable for all.

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