

SINGULARITY AND SUBSTANCE: ATTEMPTS AT A METAPHYSICS OF FINITUDE

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Abstract: The present text is centered primarily in the context of continental philosophical thought. It aims to provide a systematic account of notions such as ‘singularity’, ‘plurality’, ‘event’, ‘finitude’, ‘infinity’, ‘uniqueness’, ‘substance’, ‘multiplicity of worlds’. This account represents my long-term interest in the possibility of metaphysics within the realms of continental philosophy. It is influenced especially by the Deleuzian critique of representation and Speculative Realism’s critique of metaphysics of subjectivity¹, as well as New Realism’s appeal to ontological pluralism². Nevertheless, I aim at elaborating an original and thorough account which does not take as given neither the notions which I have enumerated above nor any already existing interpretative schema. Thus, although the present text refers to the philosophical tradition while also claiming the autonomy of its own speculative method.

I begin by outlining the methodological approach of the present text. Then I present a critical overview of the traditional ontological interpretations of identity and difference and argue that the tradition does not successfully show how the two notions are related together. Thereafter, I develop my own account of singularity as a model competitive to and more elaborate than the traditional ones. I conclude the text with a few remarks on the nature of metaphysics as a general theory of reality and outline the main consequences of taking singularity as the starting point of such a theory.

Keywords: singularity, plurality, uniqueness, ontology, metaphysics, substance, being, continental, philosophy

What could be preliminarily said is that the notions of singularity and plurality form a systematic unit together. But the reader should not draw the conclusion that the ‘trick’ of this text is to show how one could

1 For a thorough introduction to Speculative Realism and its most basic tenets and directions see: Peter Gratton *Speculative Realism. Problems and Prospects* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

2 See: Markus Gabriel, *Fields of Sense. A New Realist Ontology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015). Alexander Kanev, *The realist turn and the Nature of Philosophical Development*, In: *Method – Analytic Perspectives*, Vol. 4, №5, 2015

sublate in a Hegelian manner different notions as integral moments of one singular Notion. As Deleuze would argue, in such a case there is no such a thing as a singular notion or rather a notion of the singular³. Each time we would try to comprehend a singularity it would merely vanish as some sort of an apparition within the totalitarian all-embracing Notion. We should not confuse unity and singularity. Such a Notion has nothing to do with anything singular. In reality it represents nothing but a unity fueled by the aggressive annihilation of singularity – the latter functioning merely as the negative. The systematic unity of such a Notion is the vanishing point of real singularity. It functions as the ultimate common ground under which everything exists, and is known to exist, and under which even nothingness itself would fall.

Nevertheless, the following text is an attempt to subvert the totalitarian logic of the Hegelian absolute Notion and think the notion of singularity anew⁴. This, of course, is not something new. Many thinkers have stood on the side of singularity trying again and again to subvert the Hegelian system. Their own escape routes have influenced uncertain paths of thought which, nevertheless, I will not thoroughly adhere. My point of departure, my philosophical presupposition, begins by inverting the grounding relation between singularity and unity. No more is the hegemony of unity over singularity but rather unity is grounded by and in singularity. But what is grounding, and what is singularity, especially since we have

3 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), pp. 1-28.

4 My interpretation of Hegel is based not only on Deleuze's critical account but also on Hegel's *Encyclopedia*. I use the following translation of the "*Encyclopedia*": G.F.W. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. Klaus Brinkmann, Daniel O. Dahlstrom (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); For an overview of Hegel's system as metaphysics see: Martin Heidegger, *Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik (1956/7)* In: *Gesamtausgabe. I. Abteilung: Veröffentlichte Schriften (1910-1976). Band 11. Identität und Differenz* (Frankfurt am Mein: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006); Also see: Alper Türken, *Hegel's Concept of the True Infinite and the Idea of a Post-Critical Metaphysics* In *Hegel and Metaphysics. On Logic and Ontology in the System*, ed. Allegra de Laurentiis (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016); Glenn Alexander Magee, *Hegel as a Metaphysician* In: *Hegel and Metaphysics. On Logic and Ontology in the System*, ed. Allegra de Laurentiis (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016).

already clarified unity? In what sense does the following text represent a systematic unity, especially since it aims at overturning and transforming the Hegelian understanding of systematic unity?

Instead of searching for something that would eventually break the system from the outside, we would rather break it from within. But is such a move possible? Where does a system of thought break? Some claim that this occurs when something concealed becomes unconcealed, such as when the un-thought thought lying hidden within the mechanism of the system is finally unveiled⁵. Here, I will take a different direction.

In order not to drown into the banalities of every system of thought, i.e., the presupposed hidden meaning/s at which every interpretation more or less is striving, and which have an essentially grounding function in regard to the architectonics of the system, the present text aims rather at investigating what was thought instead of speculating about the un-thought. This is how philosophical speculation would remain grounded in reason and would not succumb to a dubious awaiting of a messianic event.

Every philosophical system of thought has its principles as well as a set of different interconnected rational a priori assumptions. For example, we could argue that the essential grounding thought of the Heideggerian schema is that Being is ultimately an event of (un)concealment in which gods, humans, earth, and world are intertwined and inseparable from each other⁶. Let us imagine for a moment what would happen if Being is never

5 For example, in his famous text on the ontotheological constitution of metaphysics Heidegger breaks down the essential aspects of Hegel's speculative system revealing its embeddedness within the ontotheological framework of Western metaphysics. He does so by pointing out as its main weakness the fact that it reduces Being to merely what is thinkable. Since Being is not a being, Being would remain concealed and thereby un-thought. What subverts the Hegelian system is not the thought about Being: the entire system turns out to take as its starting point an implicit thought of Being, namely of Being as presence. Heidegger's strategy is, instead, to think Being in regard to the fact of its forgetfulness. Such a strategy would allow him to think Being beyond metaphysics. For an in-depth elucidation of Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics as ontotheology see: Iain Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1-78.

6 Taking Heidegger's philosophy as an example here is not arbitrary. His interpretation of the entire history of Western philosophy and metaphysics is crucial for the further development of Continental thought. See: Santiago Zabala, *The Remains of*

disclosed to us or that there was an alternative history of Western philosophy which has nothing to do with the disclosedness of Being towards Dasein. What would Heidegger say when asked about the possibility of such scenarios? Probably nothing, because the way his thought is structured does not allow the transgression of an implicit but yet not un-thought set of rational aprioristic assumptions safeguarding the main essential ground or principle of the entire Heideggerian schema, i.e., that Being (un)conceals itself and thus determines the entire history not merely of metaphysics but also of the entire Western civilization. Therefore, namely by questioning such assumptions which are thought within a certain system of thought, we could break and transform the system from within rather than succumbing to its inherent monotony or awaiting a ‘last god’ to save us.

I have thus far outlined the method of the present text. Its starting point is singularity by means of which I aim at the transformation of the inherited notions of speculation, dialectics, and system. I also aim thus at the formation of a systematic unity of different notions grounded in the notion of singularity. In this sense it is noteworthy that totality is conceptually separated from unity which means that systematic unity will no longer have a totalitarian structure. In other words, I aim at metaphysics that provide us with a thorough insight of the structure/s of reality which nevertheless affirms the incompleteness of reality, itself and thus abstains from the claim to give absolute truth. I propose a metaphysics of finitude but not merely of anthropological finitude. The speculative metaphysics of the following text claims that reality is finite and that its finitude signifies that reality is plural⁷. But in what sense is reality plural? I do not claim that

Being. Hermeneutic ontology after metaphysics (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). My account of Heidegger’s philosophy is based on the following collection of essays: Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge/New York/ Melbourne: The Cambridge University Press, 1998). I also owe a lot to Alexander Kanev’s interpretation of Heidegger’s main concepts and insights. Unfortunately, Kanev’s work on Heidegger remains untranslated in English. See: Alexander Kanev, *Heidegger and the Philosophical Tradition [in Bulgarian]*, (Sofia: East-West Publishing House, 2011).

7 The main ideas of the present text were influenced and inspired by Graham Harman’s Object-Oriented Ontology and Markus Gabriel’s New Realism. I am also intellectually indebted to Levi Bryant’s branch of Object-Oriented Ontology, to prof. Alexander Kanev for our lengthy discussions on the future of metaphysics

reality is something whole which is manifested or appears as a manifold. I neither claim that reality is only plural as far as it is also whole and consistent. In both scenarios I would reaffirm the totalitarian logic which I am trying to subvert. On one hand, I want to keep dialectics as the speculative method par excellence and to begin from an absolute starting point which does not rely on any presuppositions. On the other hand, I want to keep singularity and plurality. Thus, we find ourselves already always amidst the inescapable conflict between infinity and finitude.

How is this contradiction to be resolved without reaffirming totalitarian monism once again? From Hegel we know that dialectics is not merely the infinite necessary movement of the Notion or the Idea which sublates every contingency. Finitude, as it was said, above refers to the merely negative. Yet, the negative is something positive since dialectics is only a moment of the whole speculative movement of thought. Therefore, the negative in the end turns out to be the positive, the moving power, the “Macht”⁸ of thought. Nevertheless, in the Hegelian schema, negation is the core of every positive determination. Each determination is reaffirmed through its negation, through itself as the negative moment of the speculative movement of determinations. Thus, the finite which is the negative remains nothing more than a moment in the movement of the whole. The whole, i.e., the systematic unity of the Notion, is nothing more than this infinite negation of the finite. Finitude appears to be subordinated to infinity. Thinking finitude as the negative which has become positive after its own negation is a mere reaffirmation of the infinite. Infinity and finitude are co-dependent, but infinity has the higher value.

In my attempt I shall invert this codependency. Instead of posing the indeterminate infinite first and then tracing its own movement through the annihilation of its endless finite determinations, I shall begin with the restlessness of singularity and try to follow how infinity emerges as its determination. In the following text I will deploy strange dialectics – dialectics which indicate an attempt to construct metaphysics of finitude.

and realism, and also to prof. Georgi Kapriev’s efforts to elucidate the key concepts of Byzantine philosophy and metaphysics in his works which remain, unfortunately, untranslated in English.

8 ‘Macht’ from German means ‘power’, ‘driving force’.

I shall now begin by tracing the dialectic movement of the singular, but in order to this, it must be precisely determined what the singular is. If it is one, then we are having at sight something which possesses unity as its sole and most basic ontological determination. Still, we must clarify in what sense it is said that it possesses unity. It is identical to itself, and it possesses self-identity which constitutes it as a subsisting unit. Thus, the logical principle “ $a=a$ ” taken as an ontological one indicates the self-sufficient existence of something which is nothing else than itself. Nevertheless, the plurality and multifariousness of existent things indicate that things, although self-sufficient, have their existence always in regard to something other. Since they are not this “something other” but are rather already always themselves as self-sufficiently existent units, it follows that difference is the discriminating relation between something and some other things. Difference, therefore, indicates the limit, the negating determination of things as self-identical.

But difference always seems to appear along with identity: it always already inscribes a twofoldness in things. They are always simultaneously identical to themselves and different regarding other things but in such a way that on the level of their basic determinations they are both what they are, i.e., self-identical or the same, and other than themselves since in relation to other things they necessarily appear as something other to the other. This twofoldness in things turns out to be leading to an aporetic contradiction between identity and difference. Now, I shall briefly trace the most common solutions given in the history of philosophy.

One of the standard solutions in the philosophical tradition is simply to think of the otherness of things which appears as difference as something inessential to the things themselves. Accordingly, difference is brought forth only when some outer relations between things are concerned. What remains essential is that things never stop to subsist in themselves, i.e., as self-identical units. Therefore, the essential self-identity or self-referentiality of things is and remains a necessary constraint on their existence whereas difference and otherness remain merely outer and inessential relations, i.e., contingent or merely accidental. Things appear as other but subsist in themselves and if we want to access things themselves then we should accede to the essential knowledge of their sub-stance.

Self-identity thus becomes the hidden substance of things which appear.

The other solution of this conflict between identity and difference is to think of otherness and difference as essential. Here we find two different ways to elaborate on this philosophical decision. One-way claims that mere self-identity is inessential for it only gives us the “abstract” unity of a self-sufficient thing as its only essential determination and thus precludes us from the possibility of having richer understanding of the existence of things by precluding us from the possibility to think any other richer determinations in things themselves than mere self-identity. But according to such a view we must also not succumb to the temptation of privileging difference and otherness for we would also in such a case remain within the contradiction. In order to resolve it we should find a point from within the contradiction itself which would eventually indicate its own resolution. This way of dealing with the contradiction would claim that a thing could be one only because it is two, or three etc., i.e., different and other, and vice versa – it could be different and other only because it is one. Thus, the contradiction is resolved merely when it appears as illusionary, i.e., when we stop taking sides in the conflict and see that the two opposed sides are intertwined and interconnected to the extent that one cannot do without the other. As an implication of this way of solving the problem it follows that we should not investigate things only in regard to their determination as self-identical units – such ontological knowledge would be merely abstract whereas existence turns out to be always concrete, i.e., relational.

The first way of the second solution, nevertheless, does not give up identity. On the contrary, the determinations of identity and oneness are elevated. From identity and oneness stems unity which embraces both abstract identity and abstract difference. Difference and otherness would be essential as far as they are functioning as the negative which subverts the determination of abstract identity only to bring it to a higher level. The negative, as was already said, is something that must perish – it is essential only as a step in the whole movement. Thus, in itself difference and otherness remain inessential.

The second way is more radical. It abhors essentiality and would aspire not to resolve but to radically subvert the contradiction in order to liberate difference and otherness. Accordingly, everything essential would be a mere appearance in a fearsome chaos of infinite differentiations, di-

versions, meanderings and infinite series of incalculable transverse movements and accelerations⁹. This chaos of aggressive endless becoming has two main weaknesses. The first one is that it presents becoming as constancy. It is noteworthy here to point out that namely substance was characterized as possessing constancy, i.e., persistence. Accordingly, such a view does not do anything other than offering us with a transformed concept of substance: substance is comprehended not as statically persisting as something static but as the persistence of an unstoppable and yet constant chaos of endless production and destruction.

The other problem with this view is that it takes as its starting point infinity. According to such a view classical philosophy advocates a model always taking as its starting point something with fixed determinations which functions as some sort of an ultimate final cause that is infinite but nevertheless possessing a finite set of ontological properties. Therefore, in order to escape the teleology of this “vertical” model such a view would rather think “horizontally” by thinking of some sort of a pure a-teleological immanence characterized by its frenzy and infinite acceleration. This immanence becomes the infinite a-teleological and a-theological absolute opposed to a world of finite beings (and an ultimate finite being) possessing only fixate determinations. Thus, finite existence turns out to be dependent on the absolute rendering finitude as inessential in regard to the infinite. But if in such a view substantiality, essentiality and infinity implicitly remain then it subverts nothing.

The first solution could be ascribed to Plato and Platonism, whereas the first way and the second way of the second solution could be ascribed accordingly to Hegel and the Hegelians, and to Heraclitus, Nietzsche and Deleuze. What brings together the solutions of these different thinkers is not merely that they try to coherently respond to the problematic conflict between identity and difference. I traced this conflict to appear in regard

9 For a thorough account of Deleuze’s metaphysics of difference see: Levi Bryant, *Difference and Givennes. Deleuze’s Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2008); Joe Hughes, *Deleuze and the Genesis of Representation* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008).

with the question about self-identity. But self-identity appeared as a problematic notion only after we asked the question about the relationship between singularity and oneness, namely, whether the singular is something that is one. What is common between all these thinkers is that in thinking of identity and difference, unity and plurality, they always already think of oneness and take the singular to be one. But we have seen that following this route has led us to aporias that neither of them solved. What would then happen if we rethought the relationship between singularity and oneness, i.e. if we try to think singularity otherwise? What new possibilities and even worlds would come to being?

Let us now ask once again what is the singular? We could say that the singular is always something unique; but then we would have to determine in what sense it is unique. Uniqueness belongs to that which is irreplaceable, that which stands out as something incalculable. Thus, uniqueness characterizes something which has its being as an event. Such a thing is not merely a manifestation or appearance of something else that lies hidden and concealed only to reappear later: in the case of the singular, it is the singular which itself is its own event. The singular does not represent anything, nor could it be reduced to anything else. Uniqueness means irreducibility. It can neither be reduced to anything substantial and hidden, nor to anything ephemeral and relational. For now, we do not know ‘what’ the singular is but rather we know that it is – we know that it is an event¹⁰.

The singular is finite. Still, it remains unclear in what sense. Would it not be reductionist to say that the singular is finite since finitude is always related to the notion of infinity? That the singular is irreducible does not mean that it does not bear any determinations. The irreducibility of the singular indicates its incompleteness and inexhaustibility: the singular as such is inexhaustible and un-totalizable. It could be objected that this inexhaustibility rather indicates that the singular is infinite. In order to answer this objection, let me briefly clarify the notion of ‘reduction’ deployed in the present text.

10 For a thorough account of the connection between singularity, finitude and the event see: C. Romano, *There Is: The Event and the Finitude of Appearing*, tr. M. B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016)

Reduction comes to use in order to prevent ‘bad’ infinity. Reducing things to a common ground could allow us to grasp them in some sort of unity. Through this unity we could eventually determine the way how things hang together by acceding to their ultimate ground. In the order determined by the ground, things have no other value than that of being grounded. Every possibility within this order is pre-determined by the ultimate ground, meaning that any transgression beyond the pre-given multitude of ontological possibilities is both impossible and unthinkable. Reduction thus shows that within this reductionist order each individual thing is exhausted and complete by the set of determinate characteristics which describe and encompass it. Every existing thing could be replaced as long as that which replaces it is in accordance with the determinations which were deduced from the ultimate ground.

On the contrary, what is unique opposes the infinite game of repetition. Repetition is the monotonous hegemony of the ultimate ground within the boundaries of the order which it constitutes. What is it that repeats? It is the common ground for which every individual thing must testify. Thus, repetition is reduction, and reduction is repetition. By reducing something to something else we merely abnegate the former by repeating, i.e., re-affirming, the latter. The ultimate ground must be reaffirmed at every instance of existence, since if something escapes it then this ultimate ground would not be truly an ultimate ground. Thus, the guarantee for an ultimate ground to subsist is to monotonously repeat itself and violently to reduce all that is not itself. It should infinitely repeat itself since if at some point repetition fails then the ultimate ground ceases to be what it is. Therefore, reduction only merely prevents ‘bad’ infinity – it only redirects us to the ‘bad’ infinity of an ultimate ground which ceaselessly repeats itself¹¹.

Only the unique would be truly finite as far as nothing finite within the order of the ultimate ground is truly finite. In the second case finitude merely vanishes within the infinite. Finitude also bears the sign of exhaus-

11 Quite insightful on the topic of ontotheology as ‘onto-tauto-logy’ is Miguel de Beistegui’s account of the Aristotelian heritage and its reworking within Hegel’s system. See: Miguel de Beistegui *Truth and Genesis. Philosophy as Differential Ontology* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 1-109.

tion – it is infinitely comprehended and pre-determined by the ultimate ground. Thus, authentic finitude is that which cannot be fully grasped by any absolute ground – it escapes both the full reduction to the ground and the repetition of the ground as the common.

Traditionally we would think only the ultimate ground as inexhaustible and thus the inexhaustible as the infinite; the absolute. But it appears that such a ground is entrapped in its own exhaustiveness. The ultimate ground cannot be anything else than what it is. It cannot do anything else than repeating itself: it cannot escape itself. Within itself infinity turns out to be inescapable and this inescapability shows that infinity or the ultimate ground has already always exhausted itself. Infinity renders itself devoid of meaning and values. Uniqueness rather manifests the value of something which is valuable not regarding anything else be it an ultimate ground or else, but in regard to itself only as such. This is the value of something being irreplaceable and irreducible, and, as it was already pointed out, the irreplaceability and irreducibility of something define it as unique. But namely uniqueness was the most basic characteristic of the singular. Now, we have fully determined uniqueness.

The unique reveals itself to be finite because of its inexhaustibility whereas the infinite turned out to be exhaustive of itself, and, since we have determined only that which is unique to be inexhaustible, we concluded that only the unique could be finite. On the other hand, we maintain that inexhaustibility is a characteristic of the finite singular which renders the singular absolute. What would it mean to be absolute? The infinite appears to be limited to itself but is limited also in regard to that which it comprehends for it always reproduces itself. As an ultimate ground it is also, nevertheless, dependent on what is grounded. It has its value as a ground from what it determines as grounded. Therefore, no ultimate ground could be absolute insofar as absolute is understood to be that which has its value for the sake of its own being. But it was already demonstrated that only the unique singular is such. Thus, I could conclude that the singular is both finite and absolute and that these determinations do not stand in any contradiction.

The strange persistence of the singular toward the reduction to an ultimate ground appears bedazzling. It is as if by claiming its irreducibility the singular behaves as the one, i.e., persists in its self-identity as an irre-

ducible unit. On the other side, for persistence to be, it has to be ceaseless, infinite. But then, does this render the speculative logic of the present text pointless since singularity affirms itself only as something both substantial and infinite? There is no contradiction in this case since my aim was not to evade substantiality at any cost but to subvert it, to find the real conditions of possibility of the infinite. Infinity and substantiality thus appear to be inner determinations of that which is neither an absolute ground, nor substance, nor a mere appearance or a relation of a substance. In the meantime, it is substantial and infinite, the latter determinations of the singular being only secondary in regard to its uniqueness and inexhaustibility.

We have found the common within the singular, yet the singular as unique tries to escape the monotony of substantiality. The possibility of this escape is grounded in the substantial self-referentiality of the singular difference which is opposed. Difference appears at first as the opposition between substantiality and uniqueness within the singular. Therefore, it is an inner difference. The singular is always already torn between repetition and its denial. Nevertheless, with the conflict between identity and difference within the singular, appears also the conflict between inner and outer. At first, we have difference as something that occurs within the singular, but this occurrence is not enough. The singular as unique desires its own escape route from within in order to escape substantiality and infinity. Therefore, difference turns out to be not merely inner but equally outer.

It is important to notice that identity and difference, inner and outer do not presuppose the singular being one. Thus, dialectics deployed in the present paper do not relapse back into the Hegelian schema. The determinations of the singular which I have elaborated thus far are not determinations which are to be sublated in something else which is the one and absolute ground of everything. Rather, these determinations are tendencies within the singular itself which characterize its unique existence. Moreover, it turns out that the existence of the singular as such is always already ecstatic. Difference also appears to be infinite as long as it represents the unceasing tension within the singular to escape its own substantial monotony. Thus, the singular will always affirm itself not merely as an infinite substance but rather as an infinite ecstatic difference and it is only within this resistance of the ecstatic difference; that substantiality is grounded and rendered meaningful. It is through this ecstatic movement

that the singular remains persistent and also capable of outer relations.

The ecstatic movement of the singular also has some modal implications. There is a twofold necessity stemming from the singular. On one hand, that in every outer relation the singular persists as the same is necessary. On the other hand, it turns out that in regard to the outer relations in which the singular could partake there is no substantial restriction. In other words, the contingency of the singular is necessary. This necessity should not be understood in the sense of some sort of a pre-determination but rather as the absolute fact of the necessity of contingency.¹²

Through difference, substantiality appears as an inner relation of the singular towards itself. This inner relation neither precludes nor dictates in what other relations the singular could partake. It is within itself that the singular is infinite whereas in outer relations it is always given as finite. But we should not conclude that the finite is somehow merely a manifestation of the infinite, but rather that in our dialectic it is the infinite which is a manifestation of the finite: it is the finite which is dialectically elevated to a higher level. To be inexhaustible would also enable a proliferation of different real possibilities for the singular to occur as an event. Thus, the singular is never fully a substance. As such it represents a unity the content of which are different interconnected oppositions or tendencies which nevertheless never resolve into a substance or something that is One. These oppositions, as it was shown, stem not from infinity but from finitude. This is the reason why we could not determine the event of the singular since every event is infinite finite. The singular forms a unity which is never totalizable since its possibilities of existing, i.e., being an event, are infinitely many and equally real. Still, it remains unclear in what sense the singular forms unity?

The singular projects its proper possibilities/differences while simultaneously manifesting itself as something persisting. But towards what does the singular ecstatically project its event-like existential possibili-

12 The main difference between this view and the principle of contingency of Quentin Meillassoux is that unlike Meillassoux I do not dismiss substantiality neither by not dismissing it I relapse back into ontotheology. For Meillassoux's conception of the absolute necessity of real contingency as undermining both ontotheology and 'correlationism' see: Quentin Meillassoux, *Time without Becoming*, ed. Anna Longo (Mimesis International, 2014).

ties? If the singular is simultaneously both substantial and relational, and if substantiality is an inner relation, then what is the object of difference as an outer relation? We must also notice that what holds good for difference holds equally good for substantiality too. This means that we described a twofold tension within the ecstatic difference itself: it appeared both as inner difference and as an outer difference. In this sense substantiality would not merely be inner but outer. In the latter sense it would function as a minimal condition that in all its contingent relations the singular remains intact. Now we should point out in relation to what the singular persists

It is here where I will change our vocabulary. Instead of “the singular” I will rather speak of “singularity”. But what is the difference? Singularity and the singular are not two different things; and the former is not a common concept under which everything singular falls. Rather, it is singularity as a common concept which stems from the singular. We could be even more radical by saying that singularity is the event of singulars. Thus, singularity is nothing but plurality and to be singular is to be in the meantime plural. Every singular is simultaneously many without losing its persistence and self-referentiality. Every manifold is thus simultaneously a singularity. Therefore I shall deploy the notion of a “plural-singular”¹³.

Every plural-singular infinitely proliferates itself by inexhaustively partaking into relations with other plural-singulars. We observe the prolif-

13 This term differs from a similar term used by Jean-Luc Nancy. It is also noteworthy that although there are some striking resemblances between his conception and the one which I am outlining here, there are some substantial differences. Nancy does not aim at developing metaphysics at all. His project’s goal is to rework the Heideggerian notion of ‘Mit-sein’ (‘Being-with’). The notion of a ‘singular plural’ discloses and is disclosed by Being which for Nancy is already always ‘Being-with’. On the other side, my account takes as its starting point speculative dialectics and depicts rather a more ‘metaphysical’ approach towards interpreting singularity and plurality. I also attempt at integrating the notion of ‘substance’ within the account I am offering, whereas Nancy adheres to a thoroughly anti-substantialist relationst insights on the nature of singular-plurality. See: Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson, Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 1-145; Elsewhere it is suggested that Nancy’s project could be characterized as a ‘hermeneutic ontology’. See also: Gert-Jan van der Heiden *Ontology after Ontotheology. Plurality, Event, and Contingency in Contemporary philosophy* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2014), pp. 69-101, 275-280.

eration of infinity but yet of an infinity generated by finitude. Plural-singulars do not appear into the same relation infinitely many times. This would result in the substantial repetition of sameness which characterized the movement of the absolute ground towards the grounded. Each relation of a plural-singular, although maintaining its persistence as a minimal ontological constraint, is itself something unique, singular and inexhaustive by something else. Therefore, repetition is restricted. However, it turns out that plural-singulars form together other plural-singulars. Since repetition and reduction are restricted, it follows that the plural-singulars formed, being themselves unities of the plural-singulars which formed them, are non-totalizable unities. This means that as plural-singulars not only that they themselves are inexhaustible, but also that they neither exhaust or complete the plural-singulars which form or ground them nor exhaust or complete the plural-singulars which they themselves form.

It is in this sense that it becomes clear what we meant by claiming that reality is finite and incomplete. It is reality itself, the reality of the plural-singular which precludes every totalization, every all-encompassing description. The plural singulars form ontological complexes with thin layers. These complexes of intertwined plural singulars we would like to call worlds. Everything exists in a world but yet everything could be a world as far as everything is a plural-singular. The worlds that exist are infinitely many and radically contingent¹⁴. This does not mean that they have absolutely nothing in common. Now, before concluding the present text I would like to sketch out briefly some implications of the metaphysics of plural-singulars which I am developing here. These brief remarks pertain to metaphysics understood not as ‘ontotheology’ but as a general theory of reality.

We could differentiate between two types of commonality. There is general commonality after which philosophy strives and there is specific

14 For an intriguing interpretation of the ontology of worlds and contingent events see: C. Romano, *Event and World*, tr. Sh. Mackinlay (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), pp. 1-143; A. Badiou, *Infinite Thought. Truth and the Return of Philosophy*, transl. O. Feltham, J. Clemens (New York, London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 39-68; G.J., Van der Heiden, *Ontology after Ontotheology. Plurality, Event, and Contingency in Contemporary philosophy*, pp. 29-69, 263-271; See: Ch. Norris, Ch. Badiou’s *Being and Event. A Reader’s Guide* (Continuum, 2009)

commonality which is something quite often neglected by philosophers. The general commonality is a trait of the most basic principles of reality, whereas specific commonality always refers to a concrete ontological situation or context where along with the most basic principles many other local principles are at work. In our case, the speculative logic deployed in the following text allows us to formulate only the most basic, that is to say, common or general, principles or reality. They pertain to singularity and its determinations which we speculatively deduced. But the reader should notice that since reality as a whole is never a totality, insofar it is constituted only as a relation of non-totalizable finite plural-singulars, these principles are strongly restricted¹⁵. They are limited to the extent that they do not give us access to all the different ontological situations in which plural-singulars are involved, meaning that the specific commonality is not only local but also cannot be deduced from general commonality. We gain access to reality itself as it presents itself to thought but are deprived from the luxury of absolute knowledge which would resolve the dialectical opposition between the general and the specific. Instead, we should acknowledge that the impossibility for such a complete reconciliation is namely the incompleteness of reality itself.

In conclusion, I shall point out the main thesis of the present text and its most important implications. The goal of the present text is to offer an account of philosophical notions such as ‘singularity’, ‘plurality’, ‘event’, ‘finitude’, ‘infinity’, ‘uniqueness’, ‘substance’, ‘multiplicity of worlds’ etc. independent of the accounts previously given by G. F. W. Hegel and contemporary continental thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Alain Badiou. The main argument in defence of my account is that it could offer a systematic solution to a problem which the philosophical tradition did not succeed solving. In this sense my thesis is that by taking the notion of singularity as a speculative principle we could: 1) solve the age-old problem of the relation between identity and difference 2) devise a metaphysical system competitive to the traditional ones claimed by the

15 A. Kanev, *How is (Non-)Being possible?*, In: *New Realism. Problems and Perspectives*, ed. A. Kanev (Sofia, Bulgaria: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2019), pp. 31-37, 45-48

continental tradition as ‘ontotheological’.

Regarding identity and difference I have sketched out some of the most popular solutions and argued why I think that they are problematic. The tradition either would privilege identity or difference thus adhering to an implicit tendency of foundationalism¹⁶. As I have pointed out, the most problematic aspect of this foundationalist tendency is the fact that it renders the solutions given by authors such as Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, and Deleuze exclusionary. For example, when we adhere to the substantialist view according to which only substances are identical with themselves whereas differences appear as mere contingencies we exclude the possibility for a more thorough substantialist account of difference, appearance, and contingency. On the other hand, if we privilege difference, appearance, and contingency we exclude the possibility of thinking substance without reducing it to a mere effect of spontaneous and chaotic relations of events. In the second case I pointed out that every account giving privilege to difference as opposed to identity and substance is at risk of implicitly keeping some traits of the substantialism thus being at its core contradictory.

An account which seems to ‘reconcile’ these two stances is present within the Hegelian speculative logic. I have argued that although Hegel appeals for a dialectical sublation of the contradiction between identity and difference his approach merely reaffirms the foundationalist tendency. Difference, appearance, and contingency have in his system the role of negation which enables the movement of the infinite Notion. In this sense, as I have pointed out, the philosophical tradition has produced only foundationalist solutions to the problem of identity and difference which seem to differ merely in the way they reaffirm the privilege of identity over difference. By my lights this tendency could be overcome if we think singularity anew. This would entail that we rethink the key presup-

16 For a thorough account of metaphysical foundationalism see: V. Vasilev, *The problem of the reconciliation between the foundationalist and antifoundationalist tendencies within the history of Western philosophy. An attempt for a contemporary solution*, In: *Философские контексты современности: принцип ratio и его пределы. ФИКОС 2020: сборник статей I Международной научно-практической конференции; Ижевск, 28-29 февраля 2020 г.*, сост. А. А. Шамшурин, (Ижевск: Изд. центр “Удмуртский университет”, 2020), pp. 254-261

position of the philosophical tradition from Plato to Deleuze: instead of understanding the singular as that which is identical with itself, I offer an account which takes identity and difference to be further moments in the speculative unfolding of the notion of singularity.

Here is noteworthy to mention that I follow and try to reconcile two opposing trains of thought. On the one hand, the theme of singularity, finitude, difference etc. is central to contemporary continental thought which by means of these notions ‘deconstructs’ both political and philosophical ‘totalitarianism’¹⁷. In this sense, the accounts given by thinkers such as Deleuze and Nancy appear to be incompatible with a systematic approach to philosophy practiced for example by thinkers such as Hegel. On the other hand, I try to elaborate an account which takes and transforms the Hegelian understanding of systematicity, dialectic and speculation. Thus, in the second part of the present text where I sketch out my metaphysics of singularity, I attempt to combine two substantially different philosophical approaches. I aim at elaborating a speculative system taking as its starting point singularity. I dialectically deduce the different determinations of the singular such as finitude, uniqueness, inexhaustibility, irreducibility etc. and point out the speculative genealogy and function of identity and difference within the systematic unity constituted by singularity.

By tracing the development of singularity, I concluded that it is inherently pluralistic. In this sense I offer as more precise the notion of the plural-singular and argue that we could think plural-singulars and their relations with each other as independent ontological contexts of existence or ‘realities’, which I named ‘worlds’¹⁸. This concludes in the demarcation between two types of commonality and generality characterizing the metaphysics which I develop in the present text. Tracing the different moments or levels of speculative development of the notion of singularity and the formation of their systematic unity has enabled me to outline the

17 Here it is noteworthy that continental authors such as T. Adorno, J. Derrida, E. Levinas, G. Deleuze, M. Foucault, G. Agamben etc. react against the crimes of Nazism. Their critique of totalitarianism expands beyond the realms of politics into the sphere of traditional philosophy and metaphysics often tracing the intimate and implicit connection between politics and philosophy.

18 In a previous footnote I commented on the difference between the proposed notion of plural-singular and Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of singular-plural.

positive sides of my account: it offers metaphysics which is open for further development, and which gives enough space for practical deployment since at its core it abnegates reductionism, foundationalism, and ontological determinism. In this sense it is noteworthy to mention that its core assumption which I hope to have properly defended in the present text is not something utterly new and unheard of: the proponents of Speculative and New Realism such as Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, and Markus Gabriel have developed their metaphysical projects around the idea that reality as such is non-totalizable¹⁹. This does not entail that, since there is no form of ultimate grounding which would complete reality, there is no possibility of knowing that and how things really are. Continental realism aspires to defend a non-foundationalist epistemological realism. In the present paper I cannot outline neither the motives nor the implications of the recent renewal of realism in contemporary Continental philosophy. Nevertheless, I consider my attempt at metaphysics of finitude or singularity as a follow up to the train of metaphysical thought recently deployed by Continental realism.

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19 A. Kanev, *How is (Non-)Being possible?*, pp. 37-45

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