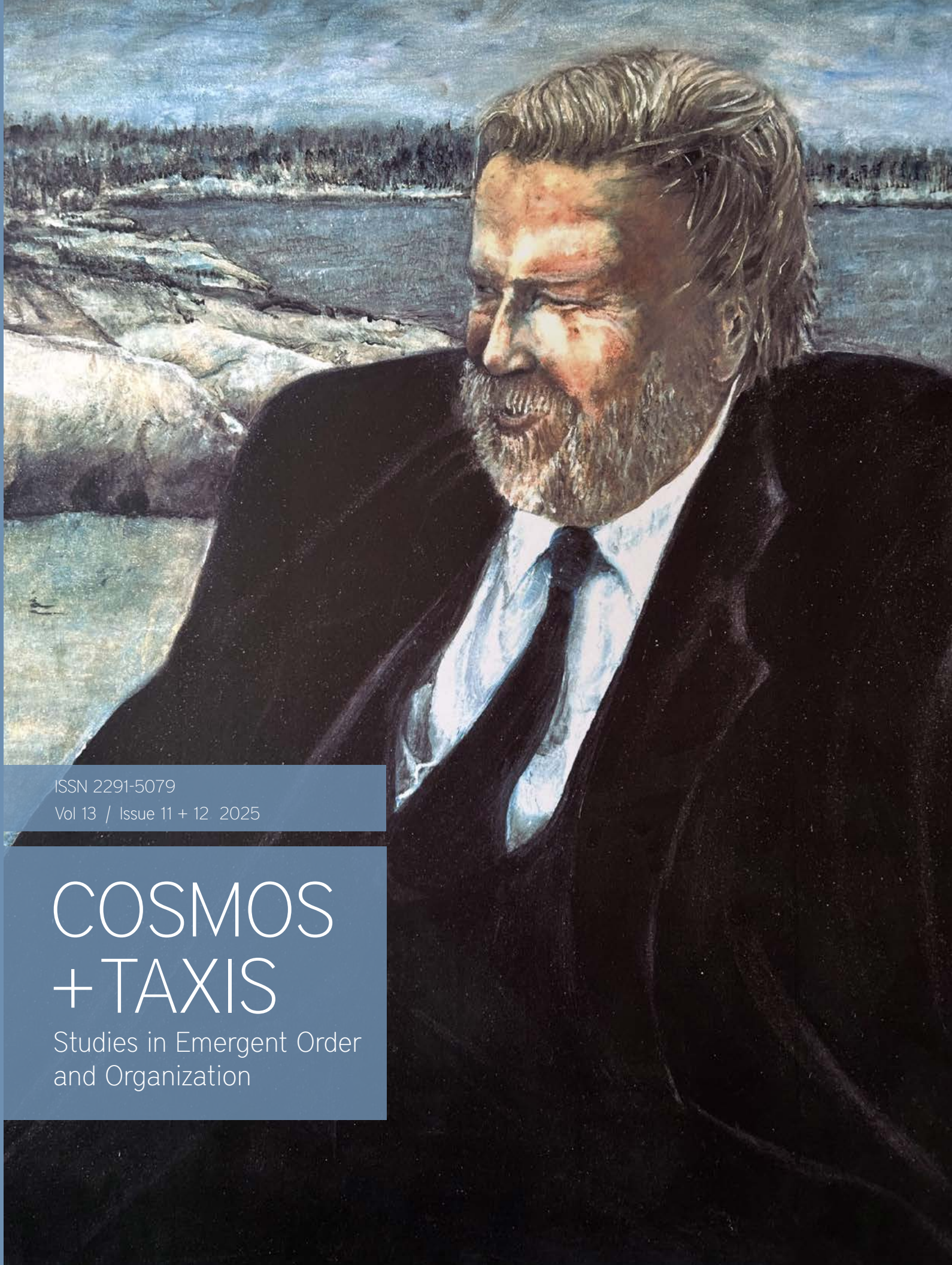

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IN THIS ISSUE

EDITORIAL BOARDS

Editorial Introduction: The Enduring Relevance of *Lament for a Nation*

TYLER CHAMBERLAIN
Trinity Western University

On February 5, 1963, John Diefenbaker's Progressive Conservative government was defeated in the Canadian House of Commons. The New Democratic Party voted with the Liberal Party to trigger an election over the issue of American nuclear-armed Bomarc missiles on Canadian soil. The Liberal Party would go on to win a plurality of seats in the election, ultimately giving Lester B. Pearson a minority government, and the missiles a home in Canada.

In 1965, George Grant published *Lament for a Nation*, an attack on the political, media, and corporate elite that conspired to defeat Diefenbaker. This attack, moreover, was undergirded by a philosophical critique of modernity and the power of its universalizing and homogenising impulses to destroy particular cultures. "The confused strivings of politicians, businessmen, and civil servants cannot alone account for Canada's collapse. This stems from the very character of the modern era" (Grant 2005/1965, p. 52).

On January 2, 1988, Canada and the United States signed the CUSFTA free trade agreement (later to become NAFTA with the addition of Mexico in 1993), further cementing what Grant had called Canada's status as a "branch plant of American capitalism" (Grant 2005/1965, p. 9). "Canada has ceased to be a nation," Grant wrote, "but its formal political existence will not end quickly. Our social and economic blending into the empire will continue apace, but political union will probably be delayed" (Grant 2005/1965, p. 85).

On January 7, 2025, US president-elect Donald Trump answered a reporter's question with the statement that he planned to use "economic force" to annex Canada (Stevis-Gridneff 2025).

On February 3, 2025, in a phone call with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, President Trump stated that he wanted to revisit the 1908 treaty that settled the border between the two sovereign states. Commenting on the phone call after the fact, Trudeau stated publicly that the official reason for the sudden tariffs on Canadian goods was "completely bogus." He continued: "What [Trump] wants is to see a total collapse of the Canadian economy, because that'll make it easier to annex us" (Stevis-Gridneff 2025).

As of June 29, 2025—approaching Canada Day—Donald Trump persists in claiming that Canada should be the 51st state.[1] The seemingly unprompted antagonism and threats of annexation from the Trump administration have continued for months, prompting the Canadian rallying cry "Elbows up" and driving voters back to a beleaguered Liberal Party that was on the brink of (arguably well-deserved) electoral collapse before and until Trump's inauguration.

In his introduction to the 40th anniversary edition of *Lament for a Nation*, Andrew Potter described it as Grant's "most enduring and important book" (Grant 2005/1965, p. ix). Readers may quibble with the "most important" designation (personally, I might give that designation to *English-Speaking Justice*), but few would deny the way in which it speaks to perennial Canadian concerns. A lot has changed since Grant published *Lament for a Nation* 60 years ago, but the uncertainty of Canada's survival as a nation remains. The social, cultural, and economic "blending into the empire" (Grant 2005/1965, p. 85) has continued as Grant foresaw, as do fears about the overt political annexation hinted at in *Lament*.[2]

Although most Canadians have expressed a strong aversion to becoming the 51st state, a non-trivial number *would* like to join the USA if guaranteed citizenship and full conversion of their assets into US dollars.[3] This may confirm two of Grant's suspicions about Canadian political life. First, as he wrote in *Lament for a Nation*, "nothing essential distinguishes Canadians from Americans" (Grant 2005/1965, p. 53). One notices how even many ardent defenders of Canadian sovereignty rely on the modern moral language of rights, values, and efficiency.[4] Grant argued that it was precisely this universalizing and homogenizing modern language that flattened difference and eliminated appeals to the transcendent, rendering a meaningfully distinct Canada all but impossible. Could it be that the 30% of Canadians who want formal political union with America are the most honest and intellectually consistent among us? Second, much of the support for continental political union comes from those who identify with right-wing political parties.[5] Grant, though a certain type of conservative, did not think that modern conservative parties of the "blue tory" mould would offer much resistance to absorption into the American empire. He was an outspoken opponent of the CUSFTA free trade agreement entered into by Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government in 1988 (Grant 2009/1988). Three months before his death in 1988, he referred to Mulroney's Progressive Conservative party as "the Republican Party North" (Grant 1996, p. 388). In *Lament for a Nation* itself, he wrote that "[t]he impossibility of conservatism in our epoch is seen in the fact that those who adopt that title can be no more than the defenders of whatever structure of power is at any moment necessary to technological change" (Grant 2005/1965, p. 66).

As a final consideration of *Lament for a Nation*'s relevance in 2025, I quote a footnote to the passage from which the preceding quote is taken:

> The next wave of American "conservatism" is not likely to base its appeal on such unsuccessful slogans as the Constitution and free enterprise. Its leader will not be a gentleman who truly cares about his country's past. It will concentrate directly on such questions as "order in the streets" which are likely to become crucial in the years ahead. The battle will be between democratic tyrants and the authoritarians of the right (Grant 2005/1965, p. 66n23).

One must be careful when making political predictions—or in this case, treating the above statement as a prediction of our current political moment—but this cannot be taken as anything but the analysis of a discerning critic of the political outworkings of our technological ontology. Written even before the Reagan-Thatcher neoliberal revolution that would change the political programmes of both the centre-left and centre-right, Grant worried that the growing technological imperative would eventually compel even so-called conservative movements to embrace a law-and-order authoritarianism. Only those most blinded by partisan commitments will not see something like that in today's populist right.

The prescience of Grant's political analysis was a function of his perception of the fate towards which our metaphysical assumptions impel us. Many of the philosophical undercurrents he examined in 1965 persist well into the 2020s. Technology and industrial mass society continue to fight against human excellence and dignity. One can only imagine what Grant would make of the growing reliance on generative-AI to replace human thought and artistic creativity. Modern men continue to think of themselves as essentially free by nature, living in a natural world that exists solely to be controlled and manipulated according to our endless willing. "Such a society cannot take seriously the conception of an eternal order by which hu-

man actions are measured and defined" (Grant 2005/1965, p. 71). The world those words described in 1965 is still very much with us.

For these reasons, 60 years after its publication, *Lament for a Nation* remains a classic of Canadian political thought. The political phenomena that inspired Grant to write it—in anger, he later admitted (Grant 1996, p. 243)—have not gone away, as the brief recounting above makes clear. Beyond that, he offers a unique perspective on modernity—that is, from the borderlands of the empire that more fully than any other instantiates modern principles.

The essays in this special issue of *Cosmos + Taxis* reflect on the various lessons of or arguments put forth in *Lament for a Nation*. Some focus on the political questions Grant raised in 1965 (nationalism, the survival of Canada, the future of conservatism and right-wing politics), some are more overtly philosophical in orientation, reflecting on the ontological concerns Grant thought were raised by the 1963 Bomarc missile crisis, and some seek to shed light on Grant's philosophical influences, especially Plato and the French mystic and philosopher Simone Weil. The articles by Tyler Chamberlain and Ryan Alexander McKinnell present a dialogue regarding Grant's political wisdom (or possible lack thereof). This special issue ends, fittingly, with a reprint of a short article by Grant's friend and biographer William Christian that was written to coincide with Grant's funeral on September 29, 1988. In addition to providing a touching account of the person George Grant, it helpfully contextualizes *Lament For a Nation* within Grant's broader philosophical concerns. Despite their different approaches, subject matters, and evaluations of Grant's thought, all articles in this issue share the assumption that the themes in *Lament for a Nation* remain relevant to Canadian political and philosophical life even after 60 years. Though any piece of scholarship should be judged on the basis of its rigour, logical consistency, and interpretation of relevant texts, perhaps these articles can also be judged by whether and how much they inspire the reader to pick up *Lament for a Nation* for herself.

One of the pleasures of working on collections of essays is having the opportunity to read the essays as they are drafted and finalized. This project was no different, and I would like to close by thanking all contributors for their stimulating articles. Additionally, without early comments by Ryan Alexander McKinnell and Leslie Marsh, the idea for this special issue would not have taken shape. Thanks to all of the above for your roles in putting together this special journal issue to commemorate 60 years of George Grant's *Lament for a Nation*.

NOTES

1 Interview on *Sunday Morning Futures with Maria Bartiromo,* Fox News Network, June 29, 2025. https://youtu.be/YdqKZDJQoDw?si=t8aXhPfpBtZEvCfG.

2 There are differences of opinion on the question of how seriously Trump and his inner circle "mean" the language of annexation, but it is nevertheless true that Justin Trudeau thought it was serious enough to publicly accuse Trump of threatening annexation, a direct political threat Canada has not faced from the USA for decades but that has loomed over Canada's head for centuries. See David Orchard (1993).

3 These numbers are from a poll conducted by Ipsos in January 2025. The summary of results can be found on the Ipsos website here: https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/43-percent-canadians-would-vote-be-american-if-citizenship-and-conversion-assets-usd-guaranteed.

4 Perhaps the clearest example of this is Prime Minister Mark Carney's 2021 book *Values: Building a Better World for All*. Carney, by all accounts a decent man with a humane political vision, nevertheless has little recourse to any moral language but the modern. He does make use of an Aristotelian-inspired framework of virtues as habits, but at the end of the day he cashes out his moral ontology in the language of our values. The Grantian question is whether such modern language can truly preserve a distinct Canadian political identity.

5 A January 2025 survey conducted by Angus Reid found that while 10% of all Canadians favour joining the USA, 20% of those who voted for the Conservative Party of Canada supported joining. The results can be accessed at https://angusreid.org/canada-51st-state-trump/.

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Lament for a Stillborn American Post-Liberalism

JEREMY SETH GEDDERT
Assumption University

Abstract: In *Lament for a Nation*, George Grant identified America as the vanguard of liberalism, and thus a threat to Canadian nationalism. His prophecies seem prescient, as many Canadians today long for American right-liberalism. Yet Americans today increasingly reject right-liberalism, with some embracing a post-liberalism that bears surprising resemblances to Grant's thought. Did Grant misread America? Might America have innate non-liberal resources? Can post-liberalism perhaps claim a legitimate American provenance in the ordered liberty of Puritan Massachusetts? This article argues in the negative. The largest faction in the American New Right descends not from the Puritans, but from a Borderlander tradition diametrically opposed to ordered liberty. Moreover, as Grant showed, even the orderly Puritans nonetheless planted the seeds of liberalism in their emphasis on technical education and liberation of the will. This helps to explain why current Republican anti-liberalism takes the form not of Grant's pre-modern Christianity, but of Nietzsche's post-modern self-assertion.

Keywords: George Grant, Post-Liberalism, Ordered Liberty, New Right, American Conservatism

INTRODUCTION

The post-liberal moment in America is underway. The American New Right directs its fury not simply toward political "liberals," but equally toward "establishment Republicans" who retain the "fusionist" neoliberalism of Ronald Reagan. These American anti-liberals critique not only the border enforcement policies of the Biden Democrats, but the neoliberal immigration consensus enabled by George W. Bush.[1] This New Right rejects free trade, opting instead for economic warfare against China, Canada, and rest of the world. National Conservatives delight as Donald Trump pivots away from traditional NATO allies and retreats from Reagan-Bush-style democracy promotion. This reactionism happily withdraws funding to American universities that have used their academic freedom to endorse Hamas and to critique the West. "Make America Great Again," cries the New Right. "End the forever wars." "Drain the Swamp."

Enlightened Canadians love to dispatch these slogans as the deranged ramblings of disinformed hillbillies. Such Yankee sentiments allegedly express white patriarchal rage at the long-overdue reckoning of America's racist colonial-

ism. Donald Trump thus embodies an inevitable and regrettable—but ultimately transient—speedbump that merely slows the inexorable Hegelian advance of democracy, equality, human rights, and inclusion. Southern Evangelicals have not yet begun to digest Charles Taylor's "The Politics of Recognition" as they line up to cast Liberal ballots.

Yet to dismiss this phenomenon as a mere species of rage with some light intellectual window dressing is to miss the point. True enough, politics is not driven by pure philosophy; even the ordinary supporters of the French Revolution were not quoting Rousseau. But as Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out, Rousseau nonetheless precipitated the Revolution and clarified its meaning (Tocqueville 1955, pp. 138-41, 145-48). And many of these Canadian dismissals overlook the changing American self-perception after the end of post-Cold-War unipolarity, which is producing significant new schools of thought on the American Right. One of the most influential—and most deeply surprising—calls itself "post-liberalism."

Perhaps the ur-moment of post-liberalism was a 2019 declaration in *First Things* entitled "Against the Dead Consensus." This statement begins by acknowledging that its signers range from hearty Trump supporters to "Never Trump" Clinton voters. Yet they all agree that "there is no returning to the pre-Trump conservative consensus that collapsed in 2016" (*First Things* 2019). One signer, Patrick Deneen, had just written *Why Liberalism Failed*—recommended even by Barack Obama—and has more recently penned *Regime Change*. Together with Deneen, C. C. Pecknold (another signer) and Gladden Pappin formed *The Postliberal Order*, whose November 2024 headline confidently proclaimed, "Trump's Victory Inaugurates the Postliberal Era" (Pappin 2024). These later teamed up with Adrian Vermeule, whose *Redeeming the Administrative State* riled up Reaganite neoliberals from the title alone.

Canadians should exhibit an innate interest in the intellectual transformation of the American Right, simply because American foreign policy will always matter to a country with such a long border. They should be especially interested ever since Donald Trump declared economic war on Canada, and began openly envisioning Canada as a US state.

But Canadians are now affecting a different—and more disconcerting—interest in America. A March 2025 Ipsos poll bore the telling headline: "Four in ten (43%) Canadians age 18-34 would vote to be American if citizenship and conversion of assets to USD guaranteed." Needless to say, they are not all Albertans. Three of eight Canadians under 55 agree: nearly the same percentage as Quebeckers who voted for separation in 1980 (Ipsos 2025). In other words, at a time when Canadian intellectuals hold up Canadian left-liberalism as a contrast with America, an unprecedented number of ordinary Canadians would eagerly sell out their Canadian liberalism for the right price. How did the Canadian "wealthy and the clever"—that class targeted by Grant in the opening phrases of *Lament*—miss this development?

For one, Canadian elites no longer read George Grant. In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant had argued—loudly and clearly and even angrily—that Canadian liberalism would inevitably lead to continentalism. If Canadians really wanted liberalism, they would get it good and hard from America. For Grant, Canadian liberalism was a departure from the distinctive Canadian identity. That identity, Grant argued, lay in Canadians' own pre-modern inheritance. This inheritance was grounded in the traditional Christian natural law of Richard Hooker, not the enlightenment liberalism of John Locke, let alone the progressivist liberationism of Thomas Paine (Grant 2005 [*Lament*], 321).[2] Hooker had argued, with the pre-modern tradition, that virtue and order were prior to freedom. (This own formulation was the core of Grant's Christianity: the "recognition that I am not my own" (Grant 1978, pp. 62-63)). But Canadians increasingly saw their British inheritance not as a link to Europe, and thus to a pre-modern inheritance, but rather as a progressive liberalism that would render this inheritance a footnote of history. Hence Grant's famous *cri de coeur* which opens the penultimate chapter of *Lament*: "the impossibility of conservatism in our era is the impossibility of Canada" (Grant 2005 [*Lament*], p. 325). Canadians would become *de facto* Americans not from the whip of compulsion, but through the co-optation of the liberal American soft empire: "the fate of the willing" (Grant 2009, p. 704).

But herein lies an irony. If Canadians today are attracted to America, is this not a blow against (Canadian) liberalism, and indeed a victory for post-liberalism? I seek to extend this question even fur-

ther. If America-friendly Canadians are rejecting the liberalism led by their own "wealthy and the clever," shouldn't Grant have found a very silver lining? Might America actually be saving Canada from the very liberalism that undermines what is distinctive about Canada? Might Grant, in the 21st century, have looked South for inspiration? Might American post-liberalism, paradoxically enough, help to restrain American liberal imperialism and strengthen the Canadian sense of nationhood?

This paper seeks to temper such optimism. It suggests that a genuinely American post-liberalism must ultimately critique modern liberalism from a post-modern perspective, not a pre-modern one. In other words, it suggests that while there may be helpful post-liberal voices in America, there cannot be an authentically American post-liberalism; Americans can be post-liberal only in spite of themselves. And it suggests that Grant already saw this coming.

I: AMERICAN POST-LIBERALISM: THE DESCENDANT OF PURITAN NEW ENGLAND?

Grant's *Lament for a Nation* seems to lurk in today's post-liberalism in America. Most obviously, Grant excoriated the Canadian elite that hated the populist Diefenbaker. Post-liberals, like most factions of the American Right, critique the elite and welcome a populist challenge. But the parallels go deeper. For instance, Grant identified the essence of liberalism in the liberation of the will from the guidance of God and nature. Deneen, in particular, has argued that liberalism conditions its subjects to make choices that will best preserve their future realm of freedom (Deneen 2012). (The dramatic decline in marriage and fertility rates since his writing only seems to confirm his diagnosis.) Grant foresaw the "mental health" state; writer Rod Dreher (another "Dead Consensus" signer) often cites Philip Rieff's *Triumph of the Therapeutic*, and critiques what Christian Smith has called "moral therapeutic Deism." Grant raged against the will-enabling technique of abortion; post-liberals excoriate Canada's MAiD regime, which is now the fifth-leading cause of death in Canada. Grant spoke at teach-ins, and understood nineteenth-century British socialism to restrain greed and promote the social good (Grant 2005 [*Lament*], pp. 318, 330). Deneen also measures the economy more through "deaths of despair" rather than through ever-growing GDP, and Vermeule seeks to empower the administrative state (Deneen 2020; Sunstein and Vermeule 2020). Grant hated free trade; post-liberals support increased tariffs. Finally, and most deeply, Grant's critique of liberalism was grounded in his traditional Anglican Christianity and his great respect for pre-modern Catholic Quebec. American post-liberals are disproportionately Catholic, and generally embrace Catholic Social Thought as an economic model.

Had he lived to today, Grant surely would have been heartened to see a few American thinkers critique liberalism.[3] Might he have consequently softened his outlook toward America itself? In his own day, Grant had argued that the American essence was thoroughly liberal. When he looked southward, he had seen the very spearhead of modernity; the vanguard of Hegel's "universal and homogenous state." Today, might he have instead seen a country with the native resources to critique liberalism? Might he now see 20th-century liberal America as an aberration from a more truly non-liberal American tradition?

Deneen seems to see it that way. He argues that American "inheritances, practices and self-understandings…include, above all, America's religious inheritance, including the Puritanism that was present before the Founding" (Deneen 2020). Alexis de Tocqueville agrees. He points out that colonial New England was not populated in the usual fashion of a colony (or, for that matter, in the fashion of Fort McMurray): by poor, uneducated, single men seeking a better economic life. Rather, it was populated by middle-class families who sacrificed their economic station in life for ideational reasons: to establish a society on Puritan principles. In this account, it was these fervent religious believers who birthed and nurtured the spirit of America (Tocqueville 1990, pp. 3, 13-16).

The Puritans surely embodied a central post-liberal claim: that order comes before liberty (Deneen 2023). For Puritans, liberty belonged to the community, not to individuals. Liberty thus implied significant restraints on individuals, as long as these restraints were written in law. One such law went so far as to punish any man who would "exceed the bounds of moderation." Even more central was the idea of "soul

liberty": "the freedom to order one's own acts in a godly way—but not in any other." These liberties implied laws enforcing the Sabbath and punishing doctrinal nonconformists. Furthermore, Puritan liberty included a "freedom from fear" (later employed in Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal) that led to laws assisting the poor (Fischer 1989, pp. 200-205). In other words, one was guided by the community toward a pre-existing standard of nature. For this reason, liberty was not given to all, but had to be earned, which explains why gentlemen possessed more liberties than ordinary men. One first had to demonstrate the ability to attain that standard; only then was one entrusted with liberty. Nature preceded will. In all, the Massachusetts Puritans would seem to constitute a promising foundation for an authentic American post-liberalism, and a pre-emptive rebuke to Grant's vision of liberal America.

Yet this hypothesis faces two substantial objections.

II. OBJECTION ONE: LIBERAL MATERIAL CAUSE OF AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The first objection to this hypothesis is that the Puritans constituted only one of four major migrations from Britain to America. More damagingly to this hypothesis, Puritan descendants today in New England, New York, and Michigan (Han et al., 2017) are, by far, the *least* likely of the four groups to vote Republican today. It is a different one of these four migrations that constitutes the electoral strength of the contemporary American Right: the Borderlander Scots-Irish.

These migrants came from the English-Scottish borderlands, having been caught in the crossfire between Anglo-Saxons and Scots for centuries. They often came by way of Northern Ireland, a region that did little to tame their violent impulses. They were overwhelmingly poor, and migrated for reasons material rather than ideational. When they first arrived through Philadelphia, they startled the locals with their vulgar manners and their revealing dress. Yet as Fischer writes, "even in their poverty they carried themselves with a fierce and stubborn pride that warned others to treat them with respect." Unlike the Puritans, for whom liberty of the will had to be earned through adherence to God and nature, Borderlanders emphasized "absolute equality of dignity and right" (Fischer 1989, pp. 605-11). This meant that "no one has a right to tell the self-reliant [Borderlander] what to say, do or think" (Mead 1999, pp. 12-13). Hence, the Borderlander concept of liberty was not an ordered liberty. Instead, it was an arch-libertarian concept of "elbow room," one that enshrined individual sovereignty.

Borderlander family relations reinforced this individual sovereignty. Borderlanders tacitly permitted young men and women to "sow their wild oats": at one point, over 90 per cent of first pregnancies were to unmarried women. The resulting solemnizations were prompted by individual policing from the bride's father, as indicated by the term "shotgun wedding." Likewise, borderlanders reared their children in a fashion "highly indulgent and permissive." As Fischer (1989, p. 687) describes, "For backcountry boys, the object was not will-breaking as among the Puritans….The rearing of male children in the back settlement was meant to be positively will-enhancing. Its primary purpose was to foster fierce pride, stubborn independence and a warrior's courage in the young." Yet this paternal permissiveness was punctuated by frequent bouts of alcohol-fueled domestic violence, as if to emphasize its essential lawlessness (Fischer 1989, pp. 680-81, 687).

In Borderlander country, order came not from the law, but from the principle enshrining every man as sheriff—and thus vigilante—of his own hearth. Fischer describes the backcountry credo as "do unto others as they threatened do unto you," an antipathy applied "to all strangers without regard to race, religion or nationality" (Fischer 1989, pp. 617, 650). The champion of Borderlanders, populist president Andrew Jackson, was taught by his mother not to sue for justice, but to "settle them cases yourself" (Fischer 1989, p. 765). This informal maxim was widely known as "Lynch's law," prompting a legacy of atrocities too voluminous to list here. Needless to say, they did not involve scrupulous attention to such legal niceties as due process. Liberty was not a reciprocal relation; it did not demand even an adherence to mutually-agreed limitation of will. One's will was bound only by one's self-chosen code of honour. The Borderlander concept of the will thus seems to militate against Grant's pre-modern Christian belief that "my will is not my own."

It is surely no coincidence that the Declaration of Independence concluded a decade in which two-thirds of the entire Borderlander migration took place. Indeed, over this decade, Borderlanders in the Carolinas had taken up a wave of vigilante 'law enforcement' known as "The Regulation," one that prepared them for a greater war. Of course, one could object that the Revolutionary War began in Massachusetts—a predominantly Puritan state. Yet one of the few Borderlander settlement areas proximate to ideational centres was indeed Central Massachusetts (Fischer 1989, pp. 636-37). The county seat, Worcester, took its name from the English city where, in 1651, Cromwell's forces had decisively defeated those of the Crown. In September 1774, Worcester (Massachusetts) saw the first successful episode of 4,622 Patriot vigilantes forcing colonial officials to recant their offices, accomplishing an effective transfer of power. When the actual first shots of the Revolution were fired in April 1775, British Regulars marched on Concord only because they knew that they had already lost Worcester.

These Borderlanders today—from West Virginia to South Carolina to Arkansas—form the energy of the Republican party. Yet they are an odd fit for post-liberal intellectuals. As Tanner Greer notes, "When I read New Right writings and meet with New Righters in person I cannot help but notice how *Northeastern* their vision of politics is." Greer characterizes their vision as "unapologetically elitist, hierarchical, and communitarian. The right-wing base, in contrast, is rebellious, egalitarian, and individualist" (Greer 2021). Hence, post-liberals have their work cut out for them:

> Pity the Whig who wishes to lead the Jackson masses! Spare a prayer for the post-liberal politico who must herd the backcountry crowd. The pillars of the New Right's rising moral order are the most licentious and rebellious people in the nation. This is an unstable foundation for a post-liberal body politic if there ever was one" (Greer 2021).

Yet the Borderlanders may have a surprising commonality with Puritans. Ironically, Borderlanders may even embody the Puritans' dirty little secret: their unacknowledged children.

III: OBJECTION TWO: LIBERAL FORMAL CAUSE OF AMERICAN REVOLUTION

To be sure, the American Revolution was not led merely by Borderlanders, but by Puritans. Yet even in Boston, one can trace the cause of the Revolution not to Puritan mores of ordered liberty, but to a proto-Lockean liberalism.

Alexander Hamilton, the Tory who became a Revolutionary in Boston, acknowledged that the Revolution did not actually hinge on "the petty duty of 3 pence per pound on East India tea." Rather, it rested on a rejection of the British sovereign right to collect customs duties in the first place (Hamilton 1774, pp. 2-4). An objector might interject that the Crown—the King, with the advice and consent of Parliament—held this prerogative as the inherited sovereign. After all, today the United States Congress, not the legislative assembly of Puerto Rico, sets tariff rates on Chinese goods arriving in San Juan.[4] (The US Congress may even delegate this power to the absolute prerogative of one man; the current President seems rather fond of it). But Massachusans agreed with Hamilton. They considered this prerogative to be their own long-held sovereign (and exclusive) right. As early as 1636, Massachusetts imposed its own (seemingly illegal) customs duties on foreign ships. When the Crown attempted to do likewise in the 1680s, Bostonians had—in ostensible violation of the rule of law—violently resisted British customs collectors (Sabine 1957, pp. 40-43). (These acts of vigilantism would prefigure the American "wild west," whose importance in distinguishing America from Canada merits its own separate treatment (Grant 2005 [*Lament*], p. 327)).

The violence of the 1689 Boston Revolt could only have been legitimate if the legislative sovereignty of the Massachusetts Bay Colony—even in its relations with other sovereign nations!—rested with the legislative assembly of the colony, not with the King, in Parliament. Under this theory, the Crown—the King, in Parliament—could not be, and could not ever have been, a legislative sovereign for Massachusetts. It could only be a mere executive branch—the servant of a legislature elected by the people of Massachusetts.

Hence, even if Massachusetts claimed to acknowledge its Royal Charter, its *de facto* sovereignty could not have flown downward from an inherited monarch, or even from an inherited legislative body; it had to rest in a liberal social contract. How fitting that the Pilgrims had already signed the Mayflower Compact! (Indeed, the very Puritan appropriation of uncultivated land in the new world also prefigured Locke's concept of the state of nature, especially when Locke himself had identified America as one such instance of the state of nature). In other words, its liberty did not flow from the pre-existing order represented by the British Crown; its order was not ontologically prior to liberty. Rather, its (admittedly impressive) order was built on the foundation of a voluntary, liberal foundation: the acts of will in which signatures were affixed to a social covenant and checks marked on ballots for assembly representatives.

The idea that sovereignty flowed from the bottom up, rather than from an inherited obligation to Parliament, flowed naturally from Congregational Calvinist polity, in which the pastor was accountable not to any bishop above but to his congregation below. But as Grant notes, Puritan Calvinism also imparted to America a deeply (if perhaps accidentally) modern approach to education. Calvinist moral seriousness came from adherence to a Divine Command theology that grounded obligation in the will of God; this moral order did not flow from any natural theology that grounded obligation in God's reason. Reason, after all, had been corrupted in the Fall. Hence, the Puritan quest for Christian wisdom was effectively narrowed to the study of theology, which left the other traditional arts and sciences in an ambiguous state. When the Puritans effectively separated moral education from liberal education, their pursuit of applied science would now be restrained only by direct Biblical prohibitions, of which there were few. Of the Puritans, Grant writes that "Salvation was one thing; the educational process was another. Thus they came more and more to be held apart. The educational process gradually came to be concerned only with the teaching of techniques, so that Christians could be effective in the world" (Grant 2002 [*Philosophy in the Mass* Age], pp. 369-70). In Grant's telling, the Puritan approach to reason naturally produced a more uncritical attitude to modern technology.

If this dim Puritan view of reason eclipsed the traditional concept of reasoned spirituality, the Reformed emphasis on ordinary vocation further diminished the role of contemplation in the Christian life. In Grant's words, "the old philosophical education, which was intended as a means to the contemplative vision of God, became largely beside the point" (Grant 2002 [*Philosophy in the Mass Age*], pp. 369-70). Thus man's participation in revelation no longer occurred in retreat from worldly activity, in a posture of quiet receptivity. Rather, Reformed Christianity witnessed God's revelation in pragmatic and active human pursuits. The implication? Grant perceives that "the Puritan interpretation produced a driving will to righteousness more than a hunger and thirst for it" (Grant 2009 [*English-Speaking Justice*], p. 239). This "will to righteousness" naturally mirrors the Calvinist understanding of God as a Being who wills—and indeed a God who wills damnation for some. (It is surely no coincidence that the doctrine of "limited atonement" was first codified in the 1619 Synod of Dort, a mere 50 km from where the original Pilgrims were planning their voyage to America). In sum, the Puritans espoused the seeds of modern liberalism: a bottom-up approach to authority; a liberation of technology to provide more choices to the individual; and a heavy emphasis on the self-assertion of the active life.

By the Founding generation, only twelve per cent of New Englanders were church members, and by the 1820s, most Congregationalist churches there had become liberal, Deist, or even Unitarian. This paved the way for a distinctively Protestant pragmatism, one that did not critique technology itself, but focused on spreading its fruits in an egalitarian fashion (Grant 2002 [*Philosophy in the Mass Age*], pp. 370, 373).

Such an implicit emphasis on the "last man"—while yet rejecting Marx!—paves the way for an inevitable backlash that seeks a return of greatness. But this desire for greatness, lacking the Christian image of Christ, cannot recall the classical image of Socrates. A traditional Christianity that understands nature as a precondition to grace can, as it secularizes, retain a classical pagan sense of nature. A bad Catholic or Anglican can be a good Aristotelian. But a Puritan Christianity that rejects nature will, as it secularizes, stare into Nietzsche's abyss of nihilism. Thus a bad Puritan is less likely to be a good Aristotelian, and more likely a good Nietzschean. Grant recognizes that American pragmatism (now typically manifested in right-

wing "common sense") is an even faster road to postmodernism than is Marxism (Grant 2002 [*Philosophy in the Mass Age*], p. 374). The Calvinist will to righteousness unwittingly enables a Nietzschean will to power.

IV: AMERICAN POST-LIBERALISM AS POST-MODERNISM

Politicians often stretch the truth. But Donald Trump may be the first President to revel in telling falsehoods that can be immediately disproven upon their utterance. To take one example, Trump did not attempt to justify the extradition of Kilmar Abrego Garcia to a Salvadorean prison by pointing out that Abrego had allegedly been apprehended for two hours while driving eight undocumented passengers with no luggage from Texas to Maryland (United States Department of Homeland Security 2025). Rather, Trump insisted on the obviously false claim that a doctored image of Abrego's hands proved a connection to Salvadorean gangs. When the interviewer called him out on it, Trump threatened in real time to punish the interviewer. Why should Trump resort to plausible evidence if he can coerce the public to accept his obvious lies as truth? The evidence-based approach would require acknowledging a pre-existing source of order in the concept of *logos*; the alternative asserts a Nietzschean "will to truth." Fittingly, Trump's own cabinet secretaries respond to difficult questions with Trump flattery, asserting that "the world's best negotiator" can solve otherwise intractable problems through the force of his will alone.

Trump's post-modern emphasis on the will is increasingly wedded to technology. The likely key to Trump's 2024 victory was his conversion of tech leaders—for decades a determined Democratic demographic. But did the tech leaders really convert? Elon Musk asserted that his older views—more or less Bacon-Mill liberalism—remained unchanged; they were simply now more at home in the Republican party. In this, Musk speaks for a legion of tech leaders—Marc Andreessen, Peter Thiel, Eric Schmidt—who now saw their belief in scientific progress as better allied with religious conservatives than with DEI-espousing Ivy League graduates. These personal associates of J. D. Vance know that social conservatism—traditional marriage, opposition to abortion, emphasis on the Western canon—is not a priority under Trump (Andreessen 2025).

To be sure, Musk now claims to be a "cultural Christian," and espouses some superficially pre-modern positions, such as pronatalism. Yet while Musk has sired (as of this writing) twice as many children as Grant, he does not aim to father his children as God the Father loves His Son. (In this, Musk is bros with Trump, the latter of whom bragged to Howard Stern that to raise his own children was effectively beneath his dignity). Rather, Musk is motivated by scientific progress, which allegedly compels genetically superior humans (such as himself) to reproduce with gusto.

Likewise, America's leading pronatalist influencers, Malcolm and Simone Collins, are atheists who employ surrogacy, utilize IVF to preselect embryos, and claim to promote not eugenics but "polygenics." They name their children not after saints, but after pagan gods ("Titan" and "Torsten") or pagan Emperors ("Octavian").[5] In the words of one chronicler, the Collins' utilitarian "branch of effective altruism considers the suffering of humans today to be "pretty irrelevant" because the suffering of billions of future humans could be eliminated if they succeed in creating a "technophilic, interplanetary" species" (Kleeman 2024, p. 10). The marriage of post-modernism and technology is apparent. But already in *Lament,* Grant saw that "without the conception of such an [eternal] order, conservatism becomes nothing but the defence of property rights and chauvinism, attractively packaged as appeal to the past" (Grant 2005 [*Lament*], p. 329).

Grant's observation raises the question: is the American New Right even conservative? Mary Harrington, in her article "The future belongs to right-wing progressives," has instead dubbed it "space fascism" (Harrington 2024). Much earlier, in *Lament,* Grant had pointed out that an imperialist society, one out to conquer more frontiers, cannot be a conservative one. But the conquest of space has long been an American drive. As Grant noted, Sputnik did not threaten America, but invigorated it.

The animating frontier of conquest today is Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), a prelude to Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI), under which AI (some believe) could become not only superhuman but self-di-

recting. Many tech leaders call ASI a "god," hoping it could bring incredible happiness and incredible longevity to humanity. Yet they also acknowledge that such a "god" could also enslave or eliminate humanity; Geoffrey Hinton, the "godfather" of AI, has estimated a 10-20% chance. Three-quarters of AI scientists caution against the direct pursuit of AGI, instead advocating for "AI systems with an acceptable risk-benefit profile" (Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence 2025, p. 66). Yet this does not seem to stop the industry. Indeed, one tech promoter has argued that the benefits of attaining immortality justify the existential risk to all planetary life (Urban 2015). Elon Musk recognizes this threat to human existence, but his backup plan to prioritize humans over machines is cold comfort: Neuralink will "achieve a symbiosis with artificial intelligence." An observer writes that "The goal is to develop a technology that enables humans "merging with AI" so that we won't be "left behind" as AI systems become more and more advanced" (Thomas 2024). Few seem to appreciate the irony that Musk joined Trump to combat the transgenderism of his own child, while yet advocating for a form of transhumanism as a way to combat ASI-induced extinction.

Indeed, on his first day in office, alleged post-liberal Donald Trump signed an executive order removing his predecessor's requirement that AI companies share the results of their safety testing with the government before they are released. Trump's tech allies rejoiced. Indeed, kingpin venture capitalist Marc Andreessen recently stated that his (and the broader AI community's) unwavering support for Trump arose from the prior administration's caution around AI. They found it unacceptable that the Biden administration sought to classify AI research, in the same way that the government limited certain areas of physics curing the Cold War, and throttled the free market in start-up nuclear power (Andreessen 2025). For the New Right, it seems, the combination of free enterprise and scientific technology must be unleashed, even as this cocktail portends existential risk to human civilization. But God forbid that the Chinese get ahead. Grant would surely see a defense of property rights and national chauvinism, in service to a technology that explicitly tries to eclipse the eternal (and even merely human) order. And he would be little surprised that an allegedly conservative, putatively post-liberal American order would pursue the creation of a mechanized Overman: the frankenfruit of Bacon and Nietzsche. It was but one more "triumph of the will" (Grant 2009, pp. 726-28).[6]

CONCLUSION

In the end, the ideas of thoughtful post-liberals in America—ideas with which Grant might have had significant affinity—have a hard time accounting for actual American phenomena. American post-liberal intellectuals, in hopes of returning to a classical concept of order and virtue, find themselves situated in an America that seeks to liberate the will. The New Right's actually existing post-liberalism has not, in fact, rejected the liberal emphasis on the will; it has radicalized the will through a post-modern (and post-human) augmentation of liberalism. It has not put its capitalism in the service of a transcendent order; it has turned its capitalist competition into a Nietzschean struggle. Granted, America may furnish post-liberalism with ample critique of the Marxist "last man," but post-liberalism's consequent reference to greatness seems to look to the overman (or the man-god), not the Incarnate God-man. If the New Right is illiberal, it is so primarily in its discomfort with the rule of law, an attitude with a long American pedigree.

Indeed, the most natural home of North American post-liberalism is likely found in the tradition of Canadian Toryism, of which Grant is the best-known (but far from the only) expositor.[7] This Canadian Tory tradition arose in 1783, when those orderly Puritans who consciously rejected Locke were forced to migrate north. There they continued a pre-modern tradition that self-consciously perceived itself as rejecting democratic-republican popular will.[8] They also established an (admittedly uneasy) coexistence with a pre-modern Quebec that saw itself as France without the Revolution. Grant, among others, recognized in this marriage the basis for an indigenous Canadian post-liberal unity (Grant 2005 [*Lament*], p. 331).[9] Post-liberals in America may need to look north if they wish for a (North) American post-liberalism.

Such a suggestion would likely vex post-liberals in America. Yet if three in eight working-age Canadians are willing to sell out their Canadian liberalism for the right price, their openness would seem to substantiate the continued existence of an American liberalism willing to offer such terms. After all, no American post-liberal worthy of the name would court Canada with such pecuniary incentives as to "have your Car, Steel, Aluminum, Lumber, Energy, and all other businesses, QUADRUPLE in size, WITH ZERO TARIFFS OR TAXES" (Trump 2025). But Canadians should not get too proud. This fact also reveals—as per Grant's diagnosis—an advanced Canadian liberalism that is not particularly nationalistic. Canadian liberal (and indeed Liberal) nationalism still struggles to articulate substantive Canadian distinctives sufficient to motivate economic sacrifices in fidelity to a Canadian vision. Merely being "Not American" will no longer do. How can Canadians recover their own tradition? One final irony comes to mind. Perhaps more speeches by post-liberals visiting Canada, such as Deneen's exhortation to recover Grant at the 2025 Canada Strong and Free Conference (Deneen 2025), might strengthen both Canadian sovereignty and American post-liberalism.

NOTES

1 George W. Bush's campaign genius, Karl Rove, endorsed a guest-worker program in a 2007 speech, saying "I don't want my 17-year-old son to have to pick tomatoes or make beds in Las Vegas" (Krikorian 2007).

2 Most references to the work of George Grant are to the 4-volume collected works. For the sake of clarity, the original book being cited is named in square brackets.

3 Grant was not temperamentally incapable of appreciating American non-liberals; in his later years, he discovered and admired the Southern Agrarians. See Grant 1996, pp. 358-60.

4 As the US Constitution states in Article I, Section 10, Clause 2, "No State shall, without the Consent of the Congress, lay any Imposts or Duties on Imports or Exports."

5 Machines also figure prominently: "Industry" (reflecting Musk's progeny "Mechanicus")

6 In one of Grant's final articles, in which he criticized the legalization of abortion in Canada, Grant described the marriage of modern technology and the "resolute mastery of ourselves" as the "triumph of the will." (Grant was fully aware of the fascist provenance of the phrase, which he used at the title of his article). I thank Tyler Chamberlain for highlighting this connection.

7 For a comprehensive exposition of thinkers, see Massolin 2021, Chs. 1, 6, and 7.

8 For specific figures, see Geddert 2023; Geddert forthcoming. For a more general treatment, see Vaughan 2004.

9 As Grant notes here, "To Catholics who remain Catholics, whatever their level of sophistication, virtue must be prior to freedom." Indeed, in 1775, Quebec had already made the choice to stay with Britain: "Quebec was not a society that would come to terms with the political philosophy of Jefferson or the New England capitalists."

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George Grant's Anti-Imperialism: Old Right or New Left?

BRIAN T. THORN
Nipissing University

Abstract: This article discusses the nature of George Parkin Grant's opposition to imperialism, especially of the American variety. Grant opposed the American war in Vietnam and often presented American liberal modernity against Canadian traditionalism. In this article, we attempt to explain Grant's ideology in light of the "Old Right" ideology of traditional moral and religious values and anti-interventionism, and the "New Left" ideology of localism and communitarianism. This article argues that Grant's anti-imperialism came more from the "Old Right" viewpoint—even if Grant himself might not have approved of this viewpoint—although with surprising connections to some "New Left views. With the new rise in some elements of "Old Right" views in the Trump movement, Grant's expressions of opposition to imperialism, and support for a vision of Canadian nationalism, in *Lament for a Nation* remain as relevant as ever.

Keywords: Liberalism, Conservatism, "Old Right", "New Left", Nationalism, Imperialism, Independence, Continentalism.

INTRODUCTION

As part of *Lament for a Nation*, George Parkin Grant expressed views that, taken in isolation, would not have seemed out of place in much more leftist publications from the 1960s. Writing in 1965, Grant praised Howard Green, Canada's external affairs minister under John Diefenbaker, for Green's criticisms of U.S. President John F. Kennedy and of Kennedy's efforts to place BOMARC missiles on Canadian soil. Then, Grant remarked on Canadian Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker's tepid defence of Canadian nationalism in the face of what Grant saw as American advancement against Canadian independence. Grant noted that Diefenbaker "did not criticize American world policy but insisted that Canadian defense policy not be determined in Washington. Only at one point did he by implication criticize American world policy … at no other time did he imply any criticism of America's world role; he simply affirmed his belief in Canadian sovereignty" (Grant 2013, pp. 29-30). Here, Grant portrays Diefenbaker's words and actions positively, although he implies that the Prime Minister could have done much more to forestall Canada's integration with the United States. Later, Grant strongly criticized Canada's Liberal Party, arguing that "it was under a Liberal regime that Canada became a branch-plant

society; it was under Liberal leadership that our independence in defence and foreign policy was finally broken" (Grant 2013, p. 39). Grant presents ideas that prefigured late-1960s and 1970s-era "left nationalism," such as that of the "Waffle Movement" within the New Democratic Party (NDP). Grant also spoke to the concerns of "New Left" activists within groups like the Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA), established in 1964. Taken on their own, these statements could be read as endorsements of a leftist ideology.

ARGUMENT AND ORIENTATION

Of course, we cannot take these statements out of context and in isolation. Many, perhaps most, commentators on Grant present him as a conservative traditionalist. Grant argued for Protestant religion as the basis of society, the traditional nuclear family, and opposition to abortion. Grant also offered critical support for a British vision of Canada. This viewpoint is not incorrect but this paper argues for a more nuanced and complex view of Grant's ideology, where the "Old Right" and the "New Left" ideologies meet. Simply put, this paper argues that, although Grant's views *largely* cohered with those of the "Old Right" in the United States and Canada during the 1900-1954 period, some of his ideas can also be equated with the localist, communal, even Jeffersonian, values of the "New Left" in the United States and Canada. This is why we see some "New Leftists" of the 1960s and 1970s supporting Grant's views on issues like Canadian nationalism, the war in Vietnam, American imperialism, and community vs. individualism (Azzi 1999, pp. 126-7). We cannot ignore the more left-wing, or "liberal" elements of Grant's thought, even if his overall ideology was conservative. This paper begins with an overview of "Old Right" and "New Left" ideologies and then moves into a discussion of Grant's ideas in *Lament for a Nation*, examining his ideas in light of the discussion of the "Old Right" and "New Left." It is true that Grant himself, in his opposition to Lockean liberalism and American individualism, did not directly address ideas from the American "Old Right." Yet, even if unknowingly, Grant's views dovetailed with the localist, decentralist, often Christian, vision of many "Old Right" thinkers and politicians. The paper concludes with an attempt to unite the ideas of "Old Right" and "New Left," using Grant's views as a basis for this new kind of politics but introducing other thinkers to the discussion, notably Karl Hess, Jeff Taylor, and Ralph Nader. The paper gently chides Grant for not looking more deeply into American conservative ideologies, which might have strengthened his anti-imperialist, pro-traditionalist arguments.

"OLD RIGHT" AND "NEW LEFT IDEOLOGIES": POLAR OPPOSITES OR MANY SIMILARITIES?

On the surface, the values of the "Old Right" and the "New Left" seem to have little in common. Yet, a closer examination reveals more similarities than might appear at first glance. In the context of the United States, the "Old Right" referred to a loosely connected group of elected officials, activists, writers and journalists, and academics from roughly 1914-1954. This group strongly opposed the League of Nations, international entanglements, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, and American entry into the Second World War. "Old Right" supporters also opposed American intervention in the Cold War of the late-1940s and 1950s, and favoured localist, individualist solutions to American problems, rather than solutions imposed on Americans by the federal government in Washington, D.C. (Raimondo 2008, pp. 52-3, 173-7). Examples include famed aviator Charles Lindbergh, journalist John T. Flynn, writer Garet Garret, historian Charles Beard, Senator Burton Wheeler, Rep. H. R. Gross, Rep. Howard Buffett, writer Rose Wilder Lane, Rep. George Bender, General Robert E. Wood and writer Isobel Patterson. "Old Right" supporters often, although not exclusively, hailed from rural areas, and from Midwestern, Rocky Mountain West, or Pacific Coast states, where opposition to federal government controls and overseas interventionism was strong (Doenecke 2003, pp. 2-3). Many, like Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, favoured frugality, anti-corruption and limited government in domestic policy. "Old Rightists" like Taft also supported rural and small-town values, Protestant religiosity,

low taxes, small business and local manufacturing concerns, and an American foreign policy that did not intervene in European, African, or Asian affairs (Radosh 1975, pp. 121-2, 168-95).

Taft and other "Old Right" supporters expressed scepticism toward aspects of internationalist American foreign policy like the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, membership in NATO, and, later, the Korean and Vietnam Wars (Doenecke 1979, pp. 11-12, 20-6). With the defeat in Congress of the 1954 Bricker Amendment—an attempt to restrain the power of the President to proclaim international treaties—the "Old Right" faced defeat. Yet, elements of the Old Right ideology continued, notably in the person of Rep. Eugene Siler, a conservative Republican opponent of the Vietnam War (Kauffman 2008, pp. 125-6; Raimondo 2008, pp. 180-3). As a strong Baptist, much like later Old Right supporters like Oregon Republican Governor and Senator Mark O. Hatfield, Siler supported a vision of New Testament Christianity that opposed alcohol, pornography, and abortion, as well as foreign wars. Protestants like Siler and Hatfield saw Americans as "peaceful Christian agriculturalists" who needed to return to a Bible-based Christianity as well as the values of the American Founding fathers with a local, "human scale" kind of politics (Johns 2006, p. 589). Given the endorsement of Bible-based Christianity among some elements of the Old Right, we can easily see elements of Old Right ideology within George Grant's views, even if Grant saw the modern United States as endorsing a libertarian, modernist ideology, which went against Grant's Anglican traditionalism. Even in the context of Canadian history and political ideologies, where the Old Right view was weaker, we can see Grant, along with such writers and politicians as Cornelia Wood, Muriel Manning, and Judith Robinson, as an exemplar of an "Old Rightist" viewpoint.

In Canada, "Old Rightist" values, sometimes called "Toryism," implied a close connection with what Old Right figures in Canada saw as British values, or at least values borrowed from Britain. This viewpoint encompassed ideas like veneration for the British Crown and its' traditions, and liberty and diversity for those who accepted the Crown. The Canadian Old Right view also encompassed discipline, a hierarchical vision of society with the lower classes accepting the dominance of the upper class, and an acceptance of an established church, in this case Anglicanism, as the official church of the nation (Champion 2010, pp. 81-92). "Old Rightists" in Canada borrowed from their version of Edmund Burke's view of society. The "Burkean" vision emphasized "ordered liberty," where freedom came from English/British values such as those in Magna Carta, but also implying an acceptance of tradition, authority, and hierarchy (Thorn 2023, pp. 17-19). Part and parcel of this viewpoint was a belief in the power of the, federal and provincial, Canadian states to order society economically, by creating an independent Canadian economy based on industry and natural resources. Early Canadian politicians like independent Canada's first Prime Minister John A. Macdonald saw Canadian culture as inheriting the "rich culture" of Britain and reading authors like Milton, Shakespeare, Keats and Burke, among others (Bliss 1994, p. 16). Macdonald and other old conservatives also argued that the Canadian state would order Canada socially and economically by creating harmonious social relations between the warring classes and ethnicities of society, and mediating between different groups in society by uniting the Canadian state and private business. At the same time, Red Tories would maintain Canada's tie to Britain's liberal and military traditions (Bliss 1994, pp. 13-17). All of this was true even if more liberal Canadians eschewed a direct tie to more conservative elements of British history and culture (Champion 2010, pp. 94-5). Thus, Grant's views on the primacy of the commonwealth and the collective over the needs of the individual go along well with Canadian "Red Tory" or "Old Right" views (Dart 1999, p. 42).

The "New Left" perspective, by contrast, seems much less in line with Grant's views. Nonetheless, as we shall see, there are parallels that can be drawn between the two viewpoints. We can see the "New Left," as distinguished directly from the North American "Old Left" of the 1930s and 1940s. "The Old Left" emphasized protest at the factory—the point of production—and the labour movement and working classes as the main forces that would effect change in North American society. Thus, "Old Leftists" were often social democrats—notably the Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in Canada and union activist Democrats in the United States—or even Communist Party members, who focused on class issues first and foremost. The "Old Left" often emphasized a "top down" approach, with the state being the main so-

cial force to implement higher wages, better working conditions, and help for the poor and common people (Gitlin 1987, pp. 82-5; Palmer 2009, pp. 248-250). In contrast, the "New Left" emerged during the late-1950s and 1960s in opposition to this approach.

Indeed, scholars have portrayed the New Left as a typically American, almost anarchic, approach to radical, leftist politics. With the establishment of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1960 and the subsequent Port Huron Statement of 1962, written largely by Tom Hayden and Al Haber, the New Left in the United States came into being. The SDS and other New Left groups borrowed heavily from the American individualistic tradition of Henry David Thoreau, and the transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman (Gitlin 1987, pp. 101-111). The New Left challenged big government and big corporations, favouring a return to smaller, more authentic, communities and to individualistic, participatory democracy. New Left activists often criticized the labour movement as well, in contrast to the "Old Left's" focus on the labour movement and working-class people. New Leftists began and supported "new social movements" such as civil rights and anti-racism, the "second wave" feminist movement, environmentalism, and lesbian and gay rights movements (LGBT). There was no "centre" to the New Left movements and many different viewpoints and movements sprang up during the 1960s and 1970s. Common ideological threads among new left groups included green politics and environmentalism, decentralism and localism, populism rather than elitism, community, and a "back to the land" ethic that borrowed from 19th-century American activists like Thoreau and 20th-century anarchists like Edward Abbey (Taylor 2013, pp. 520-4; 2006, pp. 100-01).

In the Canadian context, too, the New Left was drawn to anarchism, anti-statism, anti-war politics as well as decentralization and anti-racism (Palmer 2009, p. 255). This is especially important in the long tradition of "statism" on the Canadian left. Indeed, most Canadians, with some exceptions, on the liberal left or even on the socialist and communist left, have historically gravitated toward statist solutions to social problems (Leier 1990, p. 105n). Yet, the New Left ideology in Canada, was different. In particular, Canadian new left organizations like the Voice of Women (VOW), the Combined Universities Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CUCND), and the Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA) focused on peace, non-alignment in the Cold War, scepticism toward anti-Communism, anti-racism, and decentralization. Among the Canadian New Left, much scepticism existed toward the possibility of Canadian governments, federal and provincial, to truly solve issues like racism, poverty, war, and sexism. SUPA activists, much like their counterparts in the SDS in the United States, went to poor areas of Canadian towns and cities to work directly among poor and working-class people. In Canada, New Left activists also spoke out against racism toward Canada's Indigenous population, and even went to live and work on remote and isolated Indigenous reserves, not always without issue (Palmer 2009, pp. 265-70). Like in the United States, Canadian New Left activists were often "Red Diaper Babies," the children of leftist activists from the 1930s and 1940s, who had inherited their parents' sense of injustice, if not all of their ideology (Kostash 1980, pp. 6-7).

Similarly, New Left supporters in Canada and the U.S. fought for authenticity above all else, seeing the conservatism of the 1950s and their parents' generation as something to overcome. To that end, the New Left generation favoured individualism over institutions and conformity, irrational adventures in drug-taking and more liberated sexual experiences, and returning to the land and rural areas like the West Kootenays in the province of British Columbia. Urban areas like Vancouver's Gastown and Kitsilano and San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury also became outposts of New Left values (Kostash 1980, pp. 111-121). Much like their American counterparts, Canadian new leftists looked for anti-authoritarianism, libertarianism, decentralization, authenticity, and anti-establishment values.

GEORGE GRANT'S AFFINITY TO THE "OLD RIGHT": AN OFTEN FORGOTTEN VIEW

We can see many similarities between Grant's viewpoints and those of the Old Right. Grant remarked that Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker implicitly symbolized the final gasp of the British tradition in Canadian politics and culture. Indeed, Grant argued that the Canadian ruling class "was radically re-

shaped … from 1940 to 1957." Grant saw this change as a move away from British, "Tory" traditions of the Crown, gradual change, localism, and religion to a viewpoint based on American ideologies. After 1940, Grant asserted, the ruling class "found its centre of gravity in the United States. The Liberal Party ruled Canada for most of the period from the 1920s-1957, with some interruptions. As Grant argued, "during the long years of Liberal rule, the strength of the Conservative Party was maintained by those who were still to some extent oriented toward Great Britain" (Grant 2013, p. 10).

Indeed, Grant saw Diefenbaker, coming from the isolated province of Saskatchewan, as an outsider to the business elite of Canadian politics. Grant wrote that Diefenbaker "only came to leadership because of support of the fringe area of the country, and because the Toronto group was at the end of its tether." Coming from the West, Diefenbaker was not a favourite of the business elite in the Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal axis who had largely ruled Canada since Confederation in 1867. Grant noted that business elites in Central Canada donated funds to both the Liberals and Conservatives because business leaders desired favouritism regardless of which party came to power. Yet, corporate elites in the 1957 federal election "did not expect or support the defeat of the Liberal Party" (Grant 2013, p. 11). Grant argued that corporate elites, whom by 1957 had become largely pro-American, did not favour Diefenbaker's pro-British, traditionalist ideology. If unknowingly, Grant's ideas hearkened back to the old, Canadian conservative tradition of John A. Macdonald's pro-British views. Similarly, Grant saw Diefenbaker and Howard Green's opposition to American imperialism and support for Canadian independence as a kind of localism in opposition to American domination. Grant noted that Green "cried out against Canada becoming a vassal … but such independence in international relations was not something the dominant forces in Canadian life could accept" (Grant 2013, p. 36). In that Grant supported Canadian nationalism against American imperialism and internationalism, Grant was a "localist." Like many Old Right supporters in the U.S., Grant endorsed a "country first" viewpoint in foreign affairs.

Elsewhere, Grant followed up on these points by presenting John A. Macdonald as Diefenbaker's hero. Accurately, Grant suggested that Diefenbaker was the heir to Macdonald's nationalist viewpoint of Canadian independence—a "Canada first" viewpoint—from the United States, under a British conception of the Canadian nation state. The "intellectual elite," centered in Central Canada, disliked Diefenbaker, seeing him as a "Westerner" whose nationalistic, pro-Canadian independence, views did not dovetail well with the pro-American, continentalist views of those in Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. We can see Diefenbaker's views, convincingly presented by Grant, as similar to the nationalistic, "America First," viewpoint of many on the American "Old Right." The more internationalist, pro-NATO, Canadian establishment disliked Diefenbaker and his nationalist, even localist, sense of Canada (Grant 2013, p. 25).

Elsewhere in the text, Grant wrote more explicitly and compellingly about the virtues of tradition as an important element of Canadian history and society. Grant criticized big business and the Canadian government for throwing aside Canadian traditions of the land and church in favour of capitalist modernity, which Grant saw as being connected with an American vision of society. Grant remarked that capitalism "is, after all, a way of profit-making. That activity led the wealthy in the direction of continentalism … it is this very fact that has made capitalism the great solvent of all tradition in the modern era" (Grant 2013, p. 46). In the same passage, Grant expanded upon his critiques of liberal capitalism. He argued that "when everything is made relative to profit-making, all traditions of virtue are dissolved, including that aspect of virtue known as love of country. This is why liberalism is the perfect ideology for capitalism." Grant continued by saying that American-style capitalism "demolishes those taboos that restrain expansion. Even the finest talk about internationalism open markets for the powerful" (Grant 2013, pp. 46-7). Here, we have a typically "Grantian" statement. In his support for tradition, which Grant saw as typified by religious belief and support for rural and British values, and in his attacks on liberalism, Grant saw Canada's increasing ties with the U.S. as negative. As seen, many, although not all, American Old Rightists like Eugene Siler and Mark Hatfield, both Baptists, hoped for a return of American values to those of the Protestant Church, exemplified by opposition to abortion, secularism, and modernity. It is true that Grant's view of English Toryism, with its' focus on balancing the needs of society, the state, and the individual and the focus on the

partnership between the state, religion, and the people, was not quite the same as American "Old Right" liberalism, with its echo of John Locke (Dart 1999, pp. 63-5). In particular, Grant envisioned a much larger role for the federal state in ensuring social welfare than American Old Rightists, with their focus on state and local government did. Yet, with that said, Grant's beliefs in religion and morality as key focal points in society and his opposition to imperialism go along well with an American Old Right view.

In another passage, Grant remarked on Canada's local culture and the destruction of localist values. Canada's increasing turn to American liberal individualism related all elements of society to profit-making. This, in turn, destroyed local and traditional values. Grant remarked that "modern civilization makes all local cultures anachronistic. When modern science has achieved its' mastery, there is no place for local cultures." Grant applied this argument against modernity, in its' American variety, to Canadian history and society. He wrote that "our culture floundered on the aspirations of the age of progress." "Canada," Grant wrote, for many internationalists and supporters of liberal capitalist modernity, "a local culture, must disappear" (Grant 2013, p. 53). Much like supporters of the "Old Right" in their American and Canadian varieties, Grant argued for support of the national against international and the local and particular against the national and the universal. Grant argued that modern liberal capitalism, typified by the United States, had given up history, tradition and the "authority of discipline" in favour of hedonism, unfettered markets, and the commercialization of almost every aspect of society. Grant contrasted this newer vision of American capitalism with an earlier, "producerist" vision of capitalism prior to modernity that "was full of moral restraints" (Susman 2003, pp. 1-27). Modernity and automation in 20th-century industrial capitalism led to the end of the "work-ethic of Protestantism." In keeping with this "the titillation of the jaded tastes of the masses serves the purpose of the corporation elites" (Grant 2013, p. 58).

Here, Grant criticizes capitalism more directly with his attacks on modernity as an element of society that brought in a new version of capitalism that commercializes all aspects of modern life. Similarly, for Grant, modern liberal capitalism refers to a business ethic without any form of responsibility, which leads to the destruction of traditions like family and church. American Old Rightists like Siler and Hatfield, as well as Democrat Harold Hughes with his opposition to alcohol and near-pacifism, had similar views surrounding American modernity (Taylor 2006, p. 251). Grant specifically mentioned *Playboy* magazine, founded in 1953, as an example of the new American variety of consumer culture capitalism that destroyed traditional sexual mores (Grant 2013, p. 58). We can hear echoes of Grant's critiques of capitalism in work like Barbara Ehrenreich on the decline of responsibility among men in 1950s-era America (Ehrenreich 1983, pp. 42-51). In short, Grant's ideas, as we have seen, dovetailed well with "Old Right" viewpoints in both their American and, especially, Canadian, varieties.

GEORGE GRANT AND THE "NEW LEFT:" AN UNEASY RELATIONSHIP

We can also see affinities between Grant's views and those of the "New Left." In a 1970 introduction to a new edition of *Lament*, Grant expressed ideas that would not have looked out of place in a Marxist interpretation of Canadian history. Referring to John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy, Grant remarked that "how much closer were 'Jack and Jackie' to the culture of Forest Hill and Westmount than was the remembering rhetorician from Prince Albert," a reference again to John Diefenbaker. Here, Grant discusses the class links between elite American practitioners of corporate capitalism and imperialism and their counterparts in Canada. Grant continued by commenting on Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Eliot Trudeau's ideology, in commenting that "Mr. Trudeau's policies may be inadequate, vacillating and tailored to please the dominant powers, yet they all show traces of care about Canada which could not have been present in Howe's worship of the corporation," a reference to William Lyon Mackenzie King's "minister of everything," C. D. Howe, a strong supporter of American-style corporate capitalism. In the same paragraph, Grant expressed some hope, and even admiration, for young people in Canada, remarking that their "desire for independence is greater than for many generations." Similarly, and tellingly, Grant then argued that young people in Canada "unlike the generation of 1945, which scrambled into the corporations, they

have a realistic suspicion of corporate capitalism," which went against "any nationalism" (Grant 2013, pp. lxx-lxxi). Grant coupled this rhetorical support for young Canadians' support for "left nationalism" with attacks on the American war in Vietnam. Here, we can see Grant's, somewhat begrudging and tentative, support for "New Left" ideas in opposition to American imperialism. Grant's ideas about American intervention in Canada went alongside the "left nationalist" viewpoint of social democratic Canadians. For example, for Mel Watkins and James Laxer in the "Waffle Movement" in Canada's NDP and among some members of the federal Liberal Party such as Walter Gordon, Lester Pearson's finance minister from 1963-1965, Canadian left nationalism became a strong ideological trend (Azzi 1999, pp. 168-174).

Elsewhere, in the main text of *Lament*, Grant expressed criticisms of what he saw as Canada's quasi-colonial subservience to the United States. Perhaps unconsciously borrowing from C. Wright Mills' ideas, as well as echoing points from the Port Huron Statement, Grant asserted that "in the 1960s, state capitalism organizes a technological North America. The ruling classes are those that control the private governments (that is, the corporations) and those that control the public government which co-ordinates the activities of these corporations" (Mills 1968, pp. 147-170). Grant continued that "North America is the base of the world's most powerful empire to date, and this empire in is competition with other empires" (Grant 2013, p. 9). Grant's implied critique of technology and empire dovetailed, at least implicitly, with the critiques of "big government" and corporations that political scientists and historians have portrayed among ideologues of the "New Left." Grant continued in the same section of *Lament* to offer an analysis of Canada's subservience to the United States. Drawing on his knowledge of Canadian history and culture, Grant suggested that "since 1960, Canada has developed into a northern extension of the continental economy … our traditional role—as an exporter of raw materials (particularly to Europe)—with highly protected industry in central Canada—gradually lost its importance in relation to our role as a branch-plant of American capitalism" (Grant 2013, p. 9). Thus, Grant remarked on Canada's economic dependence on the United States and the American economy. Grant drew on older traditions of the "Canadian political economic tradition," exemplified by Harold Innis's notion of the "staples thesis." Innis presented a vision of Canadian history based on Canada's natural resources like fish and fur being exploited by foreign powers such as Britain and the United States (Innis 2001, pp. 383-402).

Grant continued by suggesting that economic dependence led to the subservience of Canada's military to American foreign policy goals. Grant stated that "our ruling class is composed of the same groups as that of the United States, with the signal difference that the Canadian ruling class looks across the border for its final authority in both politics and culture." Grant concluded that "our military is less influential at home than is the case in the United States. Of all the aspects of our society, the military is the most directly an errand boy for the Americans" (Grant 2013, p. 9). In this evocative passage, Grant offered a direct critique of the Canadian ruling class's wish to put Canada under the power of American elites. In his view, Canadian business and political elites, exemplified by Lester Pearson's Liberal Party, had introduced a vision of corporate liberal capitalism, bereft of any sense of moral restraints. Yet, as we see here, Grant's view of Canada's relationship with the United States, and his critiques of modern capitalism and militarism, stood in the same vein as New Left critiques both of American domination of Canada and the triumph of corporations in North America.

In a number of other passages from *Lament*, Grant criticized both Marxism and modern liberalism for upholding technological progress and centralization at the expense of local and particular traditions, which Grant favoured. While Grant's views on this subject reflected Old Right ideas about local traditions, they also went along well with the "left-libertarian" views of many New Leftists, who used Jeffersonian and "back to the land" ideas typical of American libertarians, localists, and anarchists such as Henry David Thoreau and Edward Abbey (Taylor 2006, p. 238). In supporting a localist vision of society, Grant wrote that "indigenous cultures are dying everywhere in the modern world. French-Canadian nationalism is a last-ditch stand … the reality of their culture, and their desire not to be swamped, cannot save them from the inexorable facts in the continental case." Grant tried to contend with how to maintain a local, indigenous culture in the face of the power of the modern, centralist state and modern technology. He remarked

that "all the answers face the same dilemma: Those who want to maintain separateness also want the advantages of the age of progress … nationalism can only be asserted successfully by an identification with technological advance." Yet, Grant argued, "technological advance entails the disappearance of those indigenous differences that give substance to nationalism" (Grant 2013, pp. 74-5).

Although he did not use the words "community" or "authenticity"—typical words often used by New Left supporters—Grant implied that modern technology did not give humans true freedom. Rather, modern Canadian society needed "a definition of human freedom quite different from the modern view that freedom is man's essence. It implies a science different from that which aims at the conquest of nature" (Grant 2013, p. 94). Using ideas similar to anarchists, Grant further argued against the power of the "universal and homogenous state," which he equated with American-style corporate capitalism. Grant offered a tacit critique of American imperialism and the military-industrial complex that Dwight Eisenhower famously spoke against (Sherry 1995, pp. 233-6). These views, too, show how Grant's ideas went along well with many elements of a New Left ideology. Decentralization and localism, a land ethic, opposition to militarization, and a quest for a new kind of community and authenticity were key parts of Grant's ideology, as they were of many branches of the New Left.

CONCLUSION: ARE GRANT'S VIEWS A WAY OF RECONCILING THE "OLD RIGHT" AND "NEW LEFT"?

What are we to make of this investigation of George Grant's political ideology? Although the "New Left" element of Grant's views represents the weaker aspect of his perspective, the evidence above suggests that the "Old Right" and "New Left" had much more in common with each other than partisans of either viewpoint cared to admit. Perhaps Grant was correct to note the similarities between these two views. Partisans of the mainstream political "right" and "left" often fail to notice the affinities between their views (Taylor 2013, pp. 293-320). In fact, there are ways that we might unite the "Old Right" and "New Left" in an ideology based on a vision of libertarianism—an idea that supports as much human freedom as possible—and localism, that is, the view that all political and social solutions to problems must be found at the most local level possible. Indeed, Karl Hess, a former speechwriter for libertarian conservative and Presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, supported a vision of localism, coined the term "anarcho-capitalism," and also endorsed free markets, anti-militarism, and civil liberties for all (Johnson 2015, para. 7). It is true that Grant, as a traditionalist foe of modernity, saw libertarianism as an element of modern American capitalism, which he opposed. Similarly, as we have seen, Grant's view of religion and the relationship between the church, state, society and the individual borrowed from the old English Toryism of More, Ridley, and Cranmer, and not the American ideologies of Jefferson and Locke, where much American Old Right ideology stemmed from (Dart 1999, p. 63). With this in mind, in the end, Grant probably should have paid more attention to the "Old Right" ideas of Taft, Hughes, Hatfield, Hess and others: after all the high point of Old Right ideology came during the 1930s-early-1950s when Grant was active in writing and publishing. Conservative foes of the Vietnam War like Eugene Siler and Harold Hughes were politically active during the 1960s, when Grant wrote *Lament* and other texts. Grant's view of American ideology and society was perhaps somewhat narrow in that he saw American liberalism and conservatism as both stemming from the "liberal" views of thinkers like John Locke. In fact, American conservatism, as espoused by the Old Right, went back to the Christian, localist values that Grant favoured. Had Grant looked more deeply into American history and political ideology, as well as the Old Right figures of the 1930s-1960s, he might have realized that his views had more in common with some elements of American conservatism than he had assume.

Similarly, political scientist Jeff Taylor has convincingly argued, many links exist between the Old Right and New Left. Old Rightists and New Leftists might find common ground on the basis of opposition to corporate power, a return to morality and religion, local answers to problems, anti-militarism and anti-interventionism in foreign policy, and a land ethic (Taylor 2006, p. 238). Barry Goldwater, in 1968, re-

marked to Hess that "when the histories are written, I'll bet that the Old Right and the New Left are put down as having a lot in common and that the people in the middle will be the enemy" (Hess 1969, pp. 28-9).

We can see specific examples of this Old Right-New Left coalition in the joining of Ralph Nader and Pat Buchanan to oppose a congressional pay raise in 1989 and 1991. As part of the opposition to the Gulf War of 1990-1991, American liberals and conservatives similarly joined together to fight overseas expansion in the Middle East. Conservative columnist Joseph Sobran even recommended the writings of anarchist scholar Noam Chomsky during the early-1990s. Leftists and rightists in the U.S. and Canada, such as Ron Paul, Ralph Nader, Ed Broadbent and David Orchard, also opposed trade agreements that went against local sovereignty such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1992-1993 (Taylor 2006, pp. 238-39). Nader has explicitly called for a left-right coalition to battle against the power of corporations, the subservience of much of the mainstream media, and foreign interventionism (Nader 2014, pp. 2-10).

Most recently, in the Canadian context, Ontario Conservative Premier Doug Ford has come out against President Donald Trump's tariffs, using similar language to Liberal Party and even NDP supporters. Thus, although George Grant's ideology had more in common with the "Old Right" vision, we can see elements of "New Left" viewpoints creeping into his writing. Similarly, we have seen that the "Old Right" and "New Left" have much in common in their views on economic and foreign policy concerns. In a sense, a return to localist and nationalist ideas go along well with a traditionalist and moralistic viewpoint, which Grant might have favoured, since the overarching state is a product of modernity. In the United States, important, if largely forgotten, Old Right figures like Mark Hatfield, Eugene Siler, and Harold Hughes expressed ideas like pacifism, opposition to abortion and violence, morality, and Protestant religiosity, which Grant's ideas dovetail with. I have argued elsewhere that "traditionalist localism" is a potentially fruitful way of combining traditionalism and modernity, as well as leftism and conservatism (Thorn 2023, pp. 27-8). Perhaps this unity of Old Right and New Left ideologies might be a fruitful way to unite leftists and religious conservatives of various stripes in contemporary North America. In these days of "Trumpism," a potential annexation of Canada, perpetual foreign wars, a modernist morality, and the unchecked power of the state in conjunction with powerful corporations, perhaps a union of Grantian ideas of the "Old Right" and "New Left" is needed to unite people of different political persuasions against statism and war.[1]

NOTES

1 This article is dedicated to the memories of Jane Power and Jack O'Dell, two strong opponents of militarism and imperialism as well as exemplars of Canadian nationalism.

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Grant's Lament

ROBERTA BAYER
Patrick Henry College

Abstract: The fate of Canada is entwined with the fate of western civilization. A few years after publishing *Lament for a Nation*, Grant gave a series of talks on Nietzsche's philosophy, later published as *Time as History*. This paper explains Grant's reservations about any hope for Canadian nationalism in light of the overall darkness of a future lived in oblivion of eternity. The dominating progressivism of this age obscures any possibility of identity or nationality.

Keywords: time, historicism, Nietzsche, Heidegger, eternal return, goodness

> "Surely the deepest alienation must be when the civilization one inhabits no longer claims one's loyalty" (Grant 1969, p. 76).

Human actions are driven by whatever is perceived to be good. At the end of *Lament for a Nation,* Grant concluded that "because of our modern assumptions about human good, Canada's disappearance is necessary" (Grant 1970, p. 97). In later writings Grant explained why this is so. Insofar as people turn away from the beneficence and goodness of God, they will find themselves in danger of a darkness in mind and thought, wherein it is impossible to say what is 'good' or 'just' irrespective of any calculation of utility or convenience.

Justice is seen not only in revealed biblical teaching, but also derived from natural moral reasoning, in good part inherited from ancient Greece. In Plato's dialogues and Scripture, justice is united to love. Furthermore, this love is self-giving unto death—confirmed in the life of Christ himself. For all the injustices committed by men and women who called themselves Christian, Grant never doubted that the greatest teaching about justice was enucleated both in Socrates' statement that it is better to suffer injustice than to commit injustice, and Christ's teaching that happiness lies in hungering and thirsting for justice (Grant 1998, p. 435). The fate of Canada and the fate of the West have been shaped and entwined with this account of justice. To be just, moreover, requires wisdom, and wisdom lies in apprehending that there exists an unchanging justice and goodness, without which human beings cannot judge rightly about how to live.

Western civilization was built on the certainty of God's goodness and justice. Natural sciences were pursued in trust that there is a truth to be discovered, and because that is simply the nature of reality. Even as the sciences devel-

oped and changed human perceptions of nature in the Age of Enlightenment or Progress, thinkers continued to hold that within creation there is a reason, or natural law, an underlying order and purpose in nature. From Galileo to Hegel, "the classical writers [were viewed] as a preparation for the perfected thought of their own age" (Grant 1970, p. 95).

The optimism of the Age of Progress was not fated to last, indeed it turned against itself. The idea that the past is preparation for the present led people, eventually, to believe that they had progressed past the ancients, indeed surpassed them, in all matters of truth. Past knowledge was made irrelevant not only in the study of the natural sciences, but also in ethics and metaphysics, matters related to human nature and human reason. Does reason progress through history? If so, does that imply that all ideas of the eternality of God, and of truth are redundant? To answer in the affirmative would lead philosophers into new and unexplored territory. They would go on to draw together heaven and earth, into a single whole in time, governed by chance and necessity. This phenomenon, also called historicism, is to view history as a process in which truths are revealed. It is a totalizing worldview in which chance and necessity are more foundational to reality than order. Inevitably, such a view of reality came into competition with the inherited ancient and Christian account of eternal goodness and truth. All this Grant observed in his writings.

In Plato's dialogue the *Timaeus* (37c-e), which takes the form of a creation myth, time is described as the "moving image of eternity." Time, in perpetual motion, is spoken of as a shadow or image of that which is unchanging and eternal—which does not move and yet from which all motion comes. The account of creation in Genesis would later lead Augustine to recognize that time must be a creature of God Himself—brought into being out of nothingness. God, seeing all things, knowing all things, ruling all things, is outside of time; there is no before and after in God, He simply is. This is the very nature of the Godhead, as Augustine explained in the ninth book of the *Confessions*.

By the end of the 19th century, after the optimism of Enlightenment had run its course, Friedrich Nietzsche described time as perpetually circling. In the manner of Epicurean philosophy and pagan myth, this ever-circling reality he called the Eternal Return of the Same. It was to the contrast between Plato's account of time as the 'moving image of eternity' and the Eternal Return of the same that Grant turned, in a series of lectures first given on the radio in 1969, later edited and published as *Time as History.* In this book Grant wanted to address the changing ideas of time and that legacy, which simply stated, had led to thinking of time as history, and history as process. He did this through the work of Nietzsche, and in so doing explained to readers the roots of nihilism and historicism in modern thought.

Time was re-conceived in modernity not only because of various movements within philosophy but also through advances in our understanding of the universe. In the 20th century, astronomers and physicists began to speak of time as relative to light. Quantum theory and the theory of relativity revolutionized the study of the physical sciences. It opened new insights into time and space. Yet, in truth, the discoveries in outer space reveal nothing new about God. Nor can such knowledge take anything away. Physicists have, famously, been divided on points of religious faith. Werner Heisenberg argued in *Science and Religious Truth* that quantum physics, religion and western philosophy are not in conflict as to ultimate truth because God is omniscient. Other physicists, quite differently, maintain a stolid materialism. To Aristotle this would have been unsurprising. Physics is the study of changing reality, which can be measured. Its purview is the world, whereas the study of metaphysics was always directed to what is always, what is unchanging, indeed before change—or at least what keeps the ever-changing in existence. The latter study is at root theological in a way that physics cannot be.

For Grant, the conceptions of justice which had come forth from the age of progress were by necessity caused by changes in metaphysical philosophy, and untouched by physics which is descriptive of reality, but not able to reveal the nature of God. For indeed, it is only questions about the nature of God which can or will address the deepest questions of human flourishing or human perfection. For Grant, it was the metaphysical accounts of time which by necessity were determinative of our day and age, they had shaped how justice is conceived in relation to this world.

In the fifth century before Christ, Plato spoke of justice as that reality, that thing of beauty, beyond all comprehension, as a goodness beyond nature, and thus beyond being and becoming. Plato wrote that the objects we see receive not only their existence, but also their intelligibility, from the Good itself—the Good which most truly "is" and from which the forms derive their reality. In that sense Plato speaks of the Good as "beyond being" (*Republic* 505a, 506d, 508e). The study of philosophy began with the search for this end. The force of historicism directly affects this teaching, for if all knowledge is a matter of historical process, then whatever we call truth is entirely relative to experience. To face an abyss as to questions about justice and human happiness is indeed a novelty and not a satisfying one. It was for Nietzsche to observe that if the 'historical sense' is all-encompassing, then mastery of everything is the only response. If oblivion of eternity or 'finality of being' holds sway absolutely in postmodernity, as it seems to do, there is reason to lament.

Yet this end was not foreseen by the men of the age of progress. In the optimism of the age of progress there remained echoes of Christian teaching. Hope in eternal life was transformed into the idea of human perfectibility in this world, achievable in time. Yet, the unalterable fact of death never sat easily alongside such optimism, and so attempts were made to 'solve' the problem of death, by extending human life, overcoming the finality of becoming, mastering time to one's own benefit.

However, as Nietzsche wryly observed, when men decide that God is dead, what purpose have they given themselves to live? What reason have they to expect a future good? If the world exists by accident, then life either ends in nothingness, or as the pagans once thought, is a perpetual repetition of what has passed. People who still hold onto the dregs of Christian morality, without any reason to do so, without any faith in God, are as he called them 'last men' who live for pleasure alone, or 'nihilists' who live for mastery and control. Low birth rates, disinterest in marriage, demand for euthanasia is evidence of what Nietzsche predicted was inevitable, to a civilization which had arrived at the point of attempting to transcend the limits of their failure. Grant quoted Nietzsche: "A little poison now and then: that produces pleasant dreams. And a lot of poison at last, for a pleasant death" (Grant 1995, pp. 44-45). Alternatively, he predicted, as did Sigmund Freud, cataclysmic war in the future.

For Nietzsche this did not mean that men are freed from thinking. "It simply means that thinking is carried on over an abyss that it can never fathom. Philosophy is simply the highest form of 'the will to power'" (Grant 1995, p. 51). His 'philosophy of the future' would come forth from those who were strong in the face of this abyss. They would be masters of the earth, using their technical skills to gain mastery. They would create their own values" (Grant 1995, p. 47). The *ubermensch* would provide hope in an ecstatic and triumphant existence. For Nietzsche the "question is whether there can be men who transcend the alternatives of being nihilists or last men, the creators of their own values" (Ibid.). "Man is the as yet undetermined animal," he judged (Grant 1995, p. 50). They must love fate—*amor fati,* joyfully embrace mastery through the will to power. "To live on earth, to be masters of the earth, to deserve to be masters because we can live in joy, requires the act of *amor fati*, held outside of any assertion of timelessness" (Grant 1995, p. 54). Its achievement "must be willed in a world where there is no possibility of either an infinite or finite transcendence of becoming or of willing" (Ibid.).

Secularized Christianity had had an unintended result—namely failure. The dream of eternal life in this world is a dystopian dream. When William James and Sartre write of the burden of freedom, the need to make truth, they are also speaking of a dream. Yet, can a sense of 'abandonment' and 'angst,' as Sartre put it, be avoided if one has accepted the finality of becoming?

Ancient Greek tragedians knew of fate, they wrote of it in their tragedies. Against that tragic vision, the Apostle Paul taught that Christ had redeemed time (*Ephesians* 5:16). History is of absolute importance to a Christian. Christ's incarnation at a particular time and place, a recorded event, noted even by those outside the church, is of absolute importance. Redeeming the world had eternal import (Grant 2005, v.3, p. 472). Grant asked: is it possible for mankind to live without hope, to think as historicism demands, which is to believe that "what is known about the past [is] so irrelevant to our being" (Grant 1995, p. 31). History and self-understanding are always intertwined.

The interrelation of history to identity is of great importance. Canada, for example, is a constitutional monarchy, created in 1867. It was the work of men who, in retaining a monarchical form of government, retained a form of government which took its existence to be founded within the ordering of divine providence. Subjects were given the right to participate in their governance and some of those rights date back to the Magna Carta. They had been affirmed by courts and legislatures and kings over centuries. How can one know what a nation is, much less understand its foundations in justice, without knowing that history? No one seems interested in that question. Yet if one wants to defend the nation of Canada, where else to seek its identity? The guideposts are gone. It is as if, to draw an analogy from Plato, one finds oneself in a pre-Platonic world, in a cave looking at shadows without reality on the wall. The nation lies in the shadows.

On a recent visit to Ottawa, I toured the National Gallery and found myself reflecting upon paintings by Canadian artists Arthur Lismer, A. Y. Jackson, and Emily Carr. Faded memories came to mind of lectures on the unique qualities of the images of nature which have been characteristic of the Canadian imagination. The paintings show a geography which is harsh, cold, a severe nature, not very amenable to human life. Although the landscapes in the pictures had been the cause of so much suffering and hardship for early settlers, the startling beauty of the barren, northern landscape is seen through their eyes.

This led me to reflect on Grant's comments about the beauty of the Nova Scotia shore. He described it as though it belonged in a Group of Seven painting—"curves and lights of the rock and sea in a North Atlantic bay" (Grant 1986, p. 39). Grant had made this remark in passing to a visiting scientist who, however, did not see what Grant saw; to him, the Nova Scotia coastline in all its harsh beauty revealed only a neutral object for scientific observation. The fact-object distinction of modern science frames nature; "the archetype of thought is now that science that frames instrumental hypotheses and tests them in experiment, a kind of willing" (Grant 1995, p. 62). In this moment one sees the conflict between wisdom as it was once conceived and the current situation. For what is identity if it is not identification with something that one loves? The free-floating anxiety of our era has something to do with the fact that people do not know what to love. Certainly, historicism and progressivism have warned against loving the past.

What is it to see beauty in nature? What is it to love? Grant argued, much as had C. S. Lewis in *Abolition of Man*—a book which Grant apparently liked—that beauty witnesses to the innate purposefulness of nature. Furthermore, it is reasonable to love what is beautiful in nature, as it is reasonable to love the evidence of beauty and goodness in the past.

Grant wrote: "Can we describe that enrapturing as the immediate engrossment in the beauty of the world, which points to good which is quite unrepresentable" (Grant 1986, p. 47)? Well, yes, because the mind is capable of receptive or passive insight. He explained this point through an account of artistic inspiration. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, in his *Briefe,* wrote that inspiration to compose a piece of music came to him as if it were a gift from God. He related this experience by describing the moment when he saw the whole idea of a piece of music all at once, as if in a single glance, as if he had received illumination from a higher source. From this illumination he was able then to direct his active reasoning powers, and his highly trained mind, to composition (Grant 1986, pp. 47-48). Mozart was very clear that this moment of insight was not irrational. It did not fall into what a modern philosopher might call today the subconscious. In this moment he was conscious of what is good and should be valued because real. What is good and beautiful is indeed real and apprehended and to some degree expressed in art.

Hence, not all reasoning is a making, not all reasoning is instrumental. To confine all reasoning to making (technological) is simply inadequate to thought. Yet in our day and age the paradigmatic illusion is that human beings can never encounter anything but themselves (Heidegger 2013, p. 27). Nature is nothing except what is to be mastered. We are, fundamentally, makers, not thinkers.

Heidegger observed that this all-encompassing idea of reason as making is a matter of *enframement*. He of course thought that this enframement is absolute, that we had no recourse to understanding but out of existence itself, and so every thought and action is determined by existential historical conditions. But Grant argued against this because Heidegger refuses to see that the truth is that whether or not people are necessarily aware of it, the mind needs and longs for the beneficence and goodness which is not simply of

our own making. The mind longs to know the goodness that is beyond necessity, beyond, as Grant insisted, all being and becoming.

Implied by this discussion is a simple observation, which is that people in the Western world are confused as to who they are. On the one hand they take themselves to be historical beings without access to eternal truth. On the other, that they are freely acting masters of nature, which gives up its goodness to our technological skills. Hence the free-floating anxiety as to identity. But in a world where the only alternative is to construct meaning, anxiety and despair follow. "The self-conscious animal has always been plagued by anxiety as to whether it is good to be in the world. But to modern man, though life may not yet be meaningful for everyone, the challenge is to make it so. To distinguish the language of willing and thinking, and to say that modern life has near its center the will's challenge to itself to make the world, must in no way imply that the modern world is not made by reasoning" (Grant 1994, p. 24). Instrumental reason, on its own, is plagued by having no end. If all is process, reason is never satisfied, never finds truth, never finds God. Nonetheless some philosophers have tried to place God within instrumental reason, and at the very extreme, to speak of God as process itself. Alfred North Whitehead, as Grant noted, in process philosophy, gave God a biography (Grant 1995, p. 10). He placed God in time.

Where does one go with such a view of reason without end? It most certainly does not sustain virtue (Grant 1995, p. 44). All of this follows upon seeing time as history. "[T]he recognition of the dominance of time in which no past is past and no future has not yet been and yet in which there is openness to the immediate future—the conception of time as history reaches its height and yet is not hypostasized into a comforting horizon" (Grant 1995, p. 56).

Infinite regress is, however, if given any serious thought, quite impossible. The earliest philosophers, Socrates and Plato, rejected that alternative. The mind cannot accept it; it is to be swallowed up in irrationality and darkness.

Grant asked: "What then could be the position of those who cannot live through time as if it were simply history… and yet live in the dynamism of present society? In that position there is a call to remembering and to loving and to thinking" (Grant 1995, p. 65). The "conception of time as history is not one in which I think life can be lived properly. It is not a conception we are fitted for. Therefore, I turn away from Nietzsche and in so turning express my suspicion of the assumptions of the modern project" (Grant 1995, p. 58). "I do not understand," he wrote, "how anybody could love fate, unless within the details of our fates there could appear, however rarely, intimations that they are illumined, intimations, that is, of perfection (call it if you will God) in which our desires for good find their rest and fulfillment" (Grant 1995, p. 60). "Whatever the differences in what came to us from Jerusalem and from Athens, on this central point there was commonness. The height for man was a passion" (Grant 1995, p. 61). And by that he meant, in the words of Simone Weil, that "faith is the experience that the intellect is enlightened by love" (Grant 1996, p. 38).

In the Platonic tradition, broadly conceived, this account of intelligence being enlightened by love had a long heritage. Boethius, in the fifth chapter of the *Consolation of Philosophy,* and Thomas Aquinas, in the *Summa Theologiae* (S.T. I. q.79, a.8), both spoke of two sides to reasoning, *intellectus* which is receptive, and what Grant would call passive, and *ratio* which is calculative, necessary to all our modern scientific and economic projects. Its forebears are Plato's account of the experience of knowing the Good, and in Aristotle's distinction between practical and speculative reasoning. Grant observed that the "core of the intellectual history of the last centuries has been a criticism of that ancient account of thought" (Grant 1995, p. 62).

In the past, the "height [of thought] for man could only come forth out of a passion" (Ibid.). At the "core of our lives is the desire for perfection, and only that desire can make us less imperfect" (Grant 1995, p. 61). Surely the deepest alienation must be when the civilization one inhabits no longer claims one's loyalty" (Grant 1969, p. 76). This is alienation from any real identity, which is to say alienation from the beneficence and goodness of God. Progressivism will dominate the way of thinking of Canadians, if they try to frame themselves as creators of identity, without reference to their history. This bars the very possibility of

Canadian nationhood. "All of us are increasingly enclosed by the modern account" (Grant 1995, p. 61). One cannot have an identity in a vacuum.

As I looked at those pictures in the National Gallery there was a sense of rootedness which is a relief, it was to recognize a part of oneself in the vision of what I was looking at, an echo of an identity I left behind when I moved to the United States. There is a cost to being in a world where one makes one's own values.

Defining oneself by hatred of another country is only a bit of nihilistic *ressentiment.* Defining oneself by hatred of one's own past is to will one's death. It hinders real progress, which lies in the life of the mind, and the satisfaction of the deepest desire of the human soul, which is to know and love what should be known and loved—the God who is just, timeless, and good. Grant simply said in *Lament for a Nation* that Canadian identity lies within the intellectual inheritance of the western world, its philosophy and its faith, and to say otherwise is suicidal. Can a nation survive this situation? That is a serious question, which if not addressed, is cause for lament.

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Sacrificing Liberty: George Grant on Liberalism, Technology, and Progress

PHILIP D. BUNN
Covenant College

Abstract: This article explores and responds to George Grant's analysis of the tension between liberalism and progressivism, particularly with respect to the "progress" of technology. The promise of liberal pluralism, namely a diversity of tastes and values, often comes up short against the reality of a public unity of taste and value in favor of progress and the spread of technology and its foreseeable consequences. Liberalism has, perhaps paradoxically, fostered the spread of illiberal phenomena with the aid of technology. While Grant's critiques have intuitive appeal and explanatory power, I argue that Grant underemphasizes a strain of liberalism that has a moral core that could provide a limiting principle against technology on liberalism's own grounds. That is, a certain liberal concept of freedom could provide the resources to critique technology as threatening to that freedom's development and exercise. Liberalism's much-remarked-upon "failure" may then not be an inevitability, though liberals attempting to preserve human good against technology would do well to grapple with Grant's analysis.

Keywords: George Grant, Technology, Liberalism, Progressivism, Liberty, Freedom

INTRODUCTION

On the question of technology, progress, and the relationship of liberalism to both, George Grant was in many ways a forerunner of our contemporary postliberal moment. In prefacing his chapter on technology in the infamous *Why Liberalism Failed,* for example, Patrick Deneen alleges that liberalism contains no internal limiting principle that would allow itself to oppose the progress of even the most inhuman technologies. As with other developments in liberalism, the spread of technology is one of the "[bases] of liberalism's success" which almost paradoxically "ushers in the conditions for [liberalism's] own demise" (Deneen 2018, p. 90). That is, technology expanded many kinds of liberty in obvious ways, but ultimately did not uphold or sustain the ideals of liberalism. The unified embrace of one kind of freedom, freedom to do as one wishes, as the highest human good, or at minimum the highest political good, and the faith in a kind of progress ultimately leaves liberalism impotent to address some of its most pressing problems at the hands of technology: alienation, oppression, expansion of state and corporate power over the individual, and more.

This and other critiques are, in many ways, echoing arguments advanced by Grant many decades ago. These views get an early statement in Grant's landmark work *Lament for a Nation* and gain fuller expression in his later writings on technology specifically. The tension between liberalism and progressivism that Grant presciently identified is a tension between competing, contradictory claims of highest goods, or perhaps denial of the ability to discern highest goods. By embracing what Grant calls "open-ended freedom," freedom without an end goal defined with reference to human goods, North American liberalism paradoxically entrenches a homogenous, conformist culture. While ostensibly allowing maximal free choice, in reality, the public sphere embraces the dogma of progress which can hardly be questioned. The diversity championed by liberalism is or will be swallowed up by technological progress at its expense. Grant thus asks his readers seriously to consider that the growth of liberty and the spread of technology, though often happening together in historical fact, may ultimately be at odds in principle and in demonstrable ways.

Where Grant perhaps errs, and where other critics might unfortunately follow him in that error, is in the firm statement that "Liberalism… denies unequivocally that there are any given restraints that might hinder pursuit of dynamic dominance" (Grant 1965, p. 57). While it may be historically true that limiting principles within liberalism were in some sense on the "losing" side, at least in the grand march of the history of ideas, there are ideas internal to liberalism that can oppose the relentless pursuit of "dynamic dominance."[1] Namely, a view of liberty as a normative good that requires some education or training to be prepared for it would be capable of maintaining principles by which it could criticize or actively oppose certain forms of progress if they were found to be limiting to that liberty. To the extent that liberalism may lack the teeth to actually bring about this resistance, Grant's criticism may hold, but I will argue that liberalism's failures against progress are at least partially due to a liberal self-forgetting, forsaking or sacrificing principles previously considered integral to it, or at least to certain forms of it.[2]

I will begin by surveying and summarizing Grant's argument, then assessing its persuasiveness and accuracy some 60 years since its formulation and finally conclude by suggesting that even students and appreciators of Grant can find some grounds for hope in portions of the liberal tradition.

PROGRESS AND/OR PLURALITY

Grant's *Lament for a Nation* begins in a way likely to feel foreign for most contemporary readers. To start, for many readers the concerns feel literally foreign; Americans encountering Grant might puzzle over the relevance of Canadian election results from the distant decades past. The political concerns, too, might feel outdated. Debates over the wisdom of NORAD, the extent of Canadian entanglement with United States foreign affairs, these are issues that are at least not perceived as ones of pressing contemporary relevance.[3] Readers struggling to latch on to the abiding relevance of the work may find, when Grant turns specifically to broader political ideologies and new technologies, that they have found the meat of the case.

When Grant turns to the doctrine of progress midway through *Lament for a Nation,* he begins with a claim liable to shock some readers: "North American liberalism expresses the belief in open-ended progress more accurately than Marxism" (Grant 1965, p. 56). I say this claim might be shocking because, by many common understandings, Marxism represents a belief in progress *par excellence,* an embrace of progress in history driving humanity toward a future paradisical vision of an absence of scarcity and the presence of real equality. Communism and utopian thinking are, in many minds, synonymous, both forms of what Eric Voegelin so memorably identified as modern manifestations of Gnosticism (Voegelin 1987). In what sense, then, does North American liberalism embrace and express a belief in progress that is "open-ended" in a way that Marxism does not?

Grant clarifies: the doctrine of progress itself within liberalism has become divorced from any substantive concept of the good for human beings or what is good for them. In a measured kind of praise, Grant says that "In Marxism, technology remains an instrument that serves human good" (Grant 1965, p. 56). That is, Marxism maintains a concept of what is good for human beings and sees the progress of history and the unfolding of material conditions in history as ultimately ending at some "human good." While new

productive technologies are, indeed, alienating to the worker under capitalism, they represent a marked improvement in the situation of man's life in the world prior to the capitalistic mode of production. Of life prior to the advent of this period or in the absence of new productive means of production, Adam Smith could say, and Marx could follow, that "Such nations, however, are so miserably poor that, from mere want, they are frequently reduced, or at least thing themselves reduced, to the necessity sometimes of directly destroying, and sometimes of abandoning their infants, their old people, and those afflicted with lingering diseases, to perish with hunger, or to be devoured by wild beasts" (Smith 1981, p. 10). In contrast, what Smith calls "civilized and thriving nations" produce a surplus that enables care even for those who do not work. Continuing in the progress of history, in the long run it is technology that enables material and spiritual progress on the Marxist account. As Grant understands Marxism, this "progress," is understood as such with reference to a potential end state, an end state which is itself defined by the needs and goods of and for human beings.

Liberalism, in contrast, embraces "an open-ended progression in which men will be endlessly free to make the world as they want it… It understands more fully the implications of man's essence being his freedom" (Grant 1965, p. 56). Liberalism, on this understanding, becomes a kind of political philosophy of existentialist essence-creation, where what is "good" is measured not with reference to any conception of human nature, but with reference to the increased power of men to remake the world in whatever manner they choose. Grant continues: "As liberals become more and more aware of the implications of their own doctrine, they recognize that no appeal to human good, now or in the future, must be allowed to limit their freedom to make the world as they choose. Social order is a man-made convenience, and its only purpose is to increase freedom" (Grant 1965, pp. 56, 57). By purging any substantive account of human goods or ends, liberalism is freed to single-mindedly seek progress without an ideal or end goal in sight.

This full-throated embrace of progress for the sake of progress, freedom to progress against any appeal to human good, is seen in Grant's later essay "Thinking About Technology." Exploring what he calls the "co-penetration of knowing and making" (Grant 1991, p. 12), Grant argues that in the modern approach to science, flowing from modern philosophy, the mere ability to do something is cleanly taken as the necessity of doing something, competing claims about what is "good" for human beings notwithstanding. In fact, the progress of modern political philosophy has led to

> … a great change… in the public conceiving of goodness…. The modern conception of goodness is of our free creating of richness and greatness of life and all that is advantageous thereto. The presently popular phrase in the modern account is 'quality of life.' The modern conception of goodness does not include the assertion of a claim upon us which properly orders our desires in terms of owing, and which is itself the route and fulfilment for desire. In the prevalent modern view, owing is always provisional upon what we desire to create. Obviously we live in the presence of the existence of others, and our creating may perforce be limited because of what is currently permitted legally to be done to others. However, the limitations put upon creating by the claims of others, whether nationally or internationally, are understood as contractual: that is, provisional. (Grant 1991, p. 30).

Whatever works to improve my quality of life, in other words, is desirable regardless of what it might do to the quality of life of others, and does not permit reference to any outside, constraining standard of goodness, no higher cause. No arguments about the good of local independence, diversity of communities, or preservation of nature or the cleanliness of the environment could be advanced against automobiles and the highways on which they drive; the imposition of homogenizing interstates and rapid-speed transportation could not be held back by arguments about the rooted, embodied needs of human beings. As Grant put it in the earlier essay, "What matters is that men shall be able to do what they want, when they want" (Grant 1965, p. 57).

FREEDOM OR IMPOSITION?

Returning to *Lament,* Grant continues:

> Liberalism is the fitting ideology for a society directed toward these ends. It denies unequivocally that there are any given restraints that might hinder pursuit of dynamic dominance. In political terms, liberalism is now an appeal for "the end of ideology." This means that we must experiment in shaping society unhindered by any preconceived notions of good. "The end of ideology" is the perfect slogan for men who want to do what they want. Liberalism is, then, the faith that can understand progress as an extension into the unlimited possibility of the future. It does this much better than Marxism, which still blocks progress by its old-fashioned ideas of the perfectability of man (Grant 1965, pp. 57, 58).

But it is precisely this imposing character of the products of North American liberalism that cuts against many liberal intuitions. Liberals once defended an appealing picture of taste pluralism that would obtain in a society freed of objective standards of human good: if "The human good is what we choose for our good," (Grant 1965, p. 57) and our choices are matters of taste, which are subjective, then a liberal order considered good with reference to its own ideals ought to preserve at least the possibility of a plurality of tastes and values. This is precisely what other liberals have defended: "In an earlier generation, liberals such as John Dewey claimed that this doctrine improved upon the past because it guaranteed a society in which all could do what they wanted, in which the standards of some would not be imposed upon others. Tastes are different, and we should have a society that caters to the plurality of tastes" (Ibid.). But has this plurality of tastes been preserved? Grant argues no.

As perhaps a trite example, related to the homogenization occasioned by the proliferation of automobiles mentioned above: Though car drivers are trivially in control of the direction in which their car is driving, their use of the car is dependent on a much larger system with assumptions that go far beyond the mere individual choice to use a car or not use one, and for which purposes. This leads inexorably to a smoothing-over of traditional distinctions between places, visible in the common commercial institutions, loss of local traditions, decline in traditional cultures, and so on. This can easily be seen by the presence of familiar corporate coffee chains and fast-food restaurants in even some of the most historic cities on earth. This is precisely the baked-in assumptions inherent to technology that Grant articulates so well in "Thinking About Technology," where automobiles and computers alike are cast as having an intended use, a normative directionality, and foreseeable consequences that cut against our intuitions of their supposed "neutrality" as tools. The ubiquity of these new tools then represents the widespread imposition of their use and the assumptions inherent in that use, namely a homogenization both of consumer taste, represented in commercial homogeneity, and of acceptable values themselves.

Grant argues that the dominating faith in technological progress and the engineering of humanity's destiny has, in contrast to earlier liberal faith in the union of progress and plurality of tastes, actually imposed a unified approach to the world. Where the Deweys of liberal history promised free expression of a broad variety of tastes,

> This is not what is happening in our state capitalism. In the private spheres, all kinds of tastes are allowed. Nobody minds very much if we prefer women or dogs or boys, as long as we cause no public inconvenience. But in the public sphere, such pluralism of taste is not permitted. The conquest of human and non-human nature becomes the only public value (Ibid.).

The pluralism of private taste, in other words, cannot simultaneously admit fervent public opposition to the central doctrine of progress. If tastes are to be free and unfettered and diverse, they must be so in the domain of the "private." Publicly speaking, Grant argues, no "taste" or "value" that opposes the march of

technological progress will be entertained or admitted. In a seemingly strange but ultimately foreseeable way, two parts of the modern story, liberal pluralism and technological optimism, seem to have come to oppose one another.

This is precisely the story that Grant is telling both in *Lament* and elsewhere. In his *English-Speaking Justice,* for example, Grant outlines a central tension in what he there calls English-speaking liberalism, which I take to be roughly identical to what Grant in *Lament* calls North American liberalism. Grant there distinguishes English-speaking liberalism from progressivism in that modern liberals are concerned with "much more than a justification of progress in the mastery of human and non-human nature" (Grant 1998, p. 5). Rather, moderns have "affirmed that any regime to be called good, and any progress to be called good, must include political liberty and consent" (Ibid.). That is, progress within liberal politics is, or at least ought to be, weighed against the liberal value system. Progress is not viewed as an inherent good. This is an important distinction, crucial to the tension Grant develops as he delves further into John Rawls' theory of justice throughout the work. Mere progressivism apart from an affirmation of contract-based liberty would be a fundamentally consistent political philosophy, toward which things may be trending. However, modern man often finds himself in a tense position of paradoxically affirming both liberalism and technological progress.

Part I of *English-Speaking Justice* begins with an exposition of the interrelation between liberalism and technology. Grant writes:

> Over the last centuries, the most influential people in the English-speaking world have generally taken as their dominant form of self-definition a sustaining faith in a necessary interdependence between the developments of technological science and political liberalism. Most of our scientists have been political (and indeed moral and religious) liberals (Grant 1998, p. 3).

Grant goes on to note that "some convinced modern liberals" speak of their political philosophy as if it is a "product of modern science itself" (Ibid.). However, Grant challenges this innate notion by presenting two propositions:

> On the one hand, [liberalism] is the only political language that can sound a convincing moral note in our public realms. On the other hand, there are signs that modern liberalism and technology, though they have been interdependent, may not necessarily be mutually sustaining, and that their identity may not be given in the nature of reason itself. These two propositions are fundamental to this writing (Grant 1998, p. 6).

To simply summarize, modern man in the English-speaking world believes the "best expression of moral truth" is found in liberal philosophy (Grant 1998, p. 7). However, a simple glance at our current technological situation tells us that "technological development does not sustain political liberalism" (Grant 1998, p. 8). Technology, while aided in its progress by liberalism, has created illiberal phenomena. Grant here refers to Heidegger and argues, "the sciences are now organized around cybernetics—the technology of the helmsman…. Technology organizes a system which requires a massive apparatus of artisans concerned with the control of human beings" (Grant 1998, p. 9).

Of course, Grant is fully aware of the dark irony of Heidegger's role as a critic of technology and a simultaneous unflinching proponent of perhaps the most machine-like political system of extermination in human history. But this use of Heidegger is intentional and reflects a key point of concern for Grant: in their fundamentals, in the spirit that drives them, in their reference to or rather rejection of substantive concepts of the Good, both liberalism and fascism enable the worst abuses of humanity technology enables.[4] Moving beyond Grant's technological time, we might say that a Nazi could only dream of the species-shaping opportunities enabled by ever-more-powerful reproductive technologies that have found a market and a welcome society under liberalism.

A BRIEF LIBERAL REPLY

It may be, however, that Grant's criticism of liberalism, though compelling and accurate in fact, misses components of liberalism that its proponents would do well to resuscitate. Namely, Grant argues that liberal freedom requires freedom to relentlessly pursue progress regardless of the cost. But both before and since Grant's time, this system of control was or has been under scrutiny by those within the liberal tradition.

As a relatively contemporary example, Francis Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future* (Fukuyama 2002) offers a kind of liberal Aristotelian argument against new biotechnologies, namely that in their attempts to modify human nature, these technologies have dramatic implications for all nature-based ethical systems and the concept of human equality itself. By bringing a modified teleological approach into his liberal democratic theorizing, Fukuyama thus offers a rejoinder against Grant's claim that no opposition to dynamic freedom is available. Whether or not Fukuyama's argument would be persuasive to Grant or will be persuasive to those who share his views is a separate matter from the simple fact that rejoinders have been made and ought to be grappled with by those critics of liberalism who suggest there are none.

Surely Grant cannot be faulted for failing to respond to a work out of time, but there are those with whom Grant was familiar who could be marshalled to similar purposes. Adam Smith, for example, fits neatly into the history of English-speaking liberalism that Grant identifies, and as such is likely to fall beneath his critiques of the same. But it is Smith who, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Smith 1982), suggests that one who has honed the twin virtues of sympathy and self-command will have achieved the "perfection" of human nature. This form of liberalism, championed by thinkers like Smith and noted of late by thinkers like Kahan, has a moral dimension that guides its approach to progress much in the way Grant grudgingly credits Marxism with doing the same. In other words, though it may still share failings with other thinner forms of liberalism, not all liberalism lacks the limiting principles that leave it impotent in the face of progress.

This moral dimension to liberalism may be somewhat unfashionable. A strident critic such as Grant would also likely suggest that the moral dimensions, such as they existed within liberalism, were untenable in the face of the singular embrace of freedom as the highest knowable good for human beings. The fact remains, however, that within liberalism there remains a strain that argues that freedom properly conceived is not merely the freedom to do as one wishes, but the freedom to develop into the proper enjoyment of that freedom. This approach to liberalism is conceived by its proponents not, at core, "an open-ended progression in which men will be endlessly free to make the world as they want it," but rather as an opening of the avenues of the development of virtue.

Grant's reply to such a suggestion might also come from *English-Speaking Justice,* namely that the English-speaking liberalism that ultimately gave birth to Rawls, who he so roundly critiques, is an inheritor of a Lockean turn that dismisses the Aristotelian tradition's belief in a *summum bonum* based on man's nature. "To Locke, the untruth of the traditional teaching means that there is no such highest good given to human beings in their recognition of the way things are" (Grant 1998, p. 17). Instead, the "way things are" lends itself to contractual justice. Justice, on both the Lockean and Rawlsian accounts, is rendered an artifact created to solve problems of inconvenience inherent in nature, not a virtue related to the nature of man and his highest good. Rawls does, Grant argues, strongly differ from Locke, in that the Rawlsian original position is entirely an abstraction from reality, while Locke believes the state of nature is a truth about reality. Nevertheless, in the absence of the older teleology, is it not clear that the better form of liberalism would lead to its lesser, later counterpart? Like his measured praise for Marxism in *Lament,* Grant's concessions to certain liberals in *English-Speaking Justice* are heavy with criticism.

Grant's thorough-going critique of liberalism would likely put to rest the notion of trying to resuscitate the virtues of liberalism by returning to other sources within the same flawed tradition. But if we contemporary citizens of liberal democratic societies are unwilling fully to follow Grant down his own homogenizing path, if we are unwilling to equate the ideas, institutions, and outcomes of liberalism and totalitari-

anism, it is possible that we can constructively receive his criticisms and seek at the very least for the best, neglected parts of the tradition in which we live.[5]

CONCLUSION

In Plato's (1991) *Republic,* Socrates memorably describes the different types of regimes as reflective of the different types of souls that inhabit them. Each soul has a sort of ruling chief concern, a fundamental care it values above all else. This fundamental care is echoed in the political arrangement of the corresponding city. The democratic soul is of particular note for contemporary readers, as Plato seems to have been given prophetic insight into the habits of mind and character of the contemporary college students to whom the text is often taught. One whose soul is democratic embraces the principle of equality, unable to distinguish between higher and lower pleasures, and unable to determine what is noble and worthy with any constancy. Instead, the democratic man is one who:

> Lives along day by day, gratifying the desire that occurs to him, at one time drinking and listening to the flute, at another downing water and reducing; now practicing gymnastic, and again idling and neglecting everything; and sometimes spending his time as though he were occupied with philosophy. Often he engages in politics and, jumping up, says and does whatever chances to come to him. . . And there is neither order nor necessity in his life, but calling this life sweet, free, and blessed, he follows it throughout (561c-d).

Though this man, "attached" as he is to "the law of equality," is obviously not an ideal man, the analogous city may have something to commend it: the democratic man, Socrates says, is "all-various and full of the greatest number of dispositions, the fair and many-colored man, like the city" (561e). The democratic city is "fair and many-colored" because it represents all the variety of human dispositions, perhaps even the best and noblest while admittedly making space for those with worse, disordered dispositions.

By straightforwardly embracing the "fairness," or beauty, of this city without a hint of Socratic irony, liberals like Dewey favor the diversity and variety offered by a pluralism of tastes. However, Grant argues, this pluralism is actively undermined by the progressive spirit, where distinction and difference are trampled alike in the absence of a limiting principle. Though liberalism has provided political freedom for those who pursue progress, progress will not willingly submit itself to liberal principles. Thus, Grant's criticism of the march of progress and technology in liberal political communities is as powerful today as it was when it was written. It was given greater heft in his later work on technology and requires serious attention from both critics and proponents of liberalism. There are points both in principle and in practice, however, when one might feel constrained to question Grant's doomsaying and look to the liberal tradition with a slightly friendlier eye.

NOTES

1 Alan S. Kahan's helpful recovery or elucidation of the "three pillars" of liberalism, namely political liberty, market freedom, and morality, is one example of a thinker within the liberal tradition attempting to excavate those parts of liberalism that do not unequivocally make this categorical denial that Grant describes. See Kahan (2023).

2 Grant's totalizing summary of liberalism broadly could be subject to many of the critiques or rejoinders offered against more recent critics of liberalism. See, e.g., Cherniss (2021) and Rosenblatt (2018).

3 Or, at least, they may not have been relevant until the political events of recent months. Coincidentally timed, Donald Trump's escalation of a kind of trade war with previously friendly neighbors like Canada may provide the impetus for many to revisit Grant's classic work in the year of its anniversary.

4 Grant's willingness to elide perhaps important distinctions between liberalism and other 20th century political ideologies is the subject of a recent penetrating critique. See McKinnell (2023) and the articles by Chamberlain and McKinnell in this issue.

5 It may likewise be true for Grant that certain aspects of liberal theory have merit (e.g. political liberty, Grant says, is a good to be sought even in Plato, contra Karl Popper's misreading of him), but that the outworkings of liberalism themselves are evidence against the likely success of resuscitation within the liberal tradition. That is, despite any good ideas latent in the tradition, the universalization and homogenization he decries throughout his works, from *Lament* onward, nonetheless came. However rosy we might be about the ideas of certain liberals on paper, the facts on the ground weigh heavy. My thanks to Tyler Chamberlain for helpful suggestions on this point.

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George Grant, Simone Weil, and the Contemplative Life

COLIN CORDNER
Carleton University and Shambhala Canada

Abstract: One of Grant's going concerns throughout his career was one of the very possibility of Canada, or any other distinct society, in the face of the homogenizing, technological impulses of modern society—the willful drive for the complete mastery of both nature and human nature, and the elimination of chance. In Simone Weil, the French mystic philosopher, Grant thought that he had found a light of radical spiritual and intellectual resistance to what he held to be the Western fate. There is, however, a great question as to what path of thought and practice Grant drew from Weil. In this essay, I seek to enucleate the contemplative practices and education which Grant seems to have apprehended both from Weil, and from their mutual teacher, Plato. In the process, I endeavour to unpack the meaning, in practice, of Grant's favourite paraphrases of Weil: "love is consent to otherness" and "faith is the experience of the intelligence illuminated by love." Essentially: how does one learn, in flesh, heart, and mind, how to contemplate, and therefore to not be modern, give-up the technological will to power, and open-up to the worthiness of difference, e.g. the possibility of a Canada?

Keywords: George Grant, Simone Weil, Plato, contemplation, meditation, education, Socratic method, political theory, Canada, Canadian nationalism, multiculturalism, interculturalism, pluralism, technology

INTRODUCTION

The present essay continues a line of pursuit commenced nearly two decades past, with my first exposures to the work of George Grant. It continues to ask the question that he raised, most famously in *Lament for a Nation*, of the possibility of a distinct Canada, in the face of the universal and homogenizing drives of modernity.

The first published fruits of my studies of Grant appeared as, "Grant, Time, and Eternity" in *Canadian Conservative Political Philosophy* (Cordner 2023). It continued into a rocky trail thereafter, eventually issuing forth "George Grant and Simone Weil on Consent to Otherness," published in *Reading George Grant in the 21st Century* in Cordner 2024. Even so, fifteen years into the study, it was clear that the end of the trail lay not quite yet in sight, let alone underfoot. Each forgoing leg on the journey has left open questions which required further reflection and investigation.

In "Grant, Time, and Eternity," an initial attempt was made to pigeonhole Grant in light of the remarkable "polyphony" of the works published in his lifetime (Planinc 1992, pp. 17-45). I queried honestly Grant's seeming self-identification as a Christian Platonist. To enucleate the problem, I proceeded by way of a textual exegesis of symbols, understanding by "symbol" a token (in this case words) that calls to mind an intelligible experience or relationship, for the sake of re-establishing it more deeply in the present through recognition, reflection, and understanding.

The symbols which I focused on, and could be reliably found throughout Grant's works, were *time*, *eternity*, *necessity*, and *freedom*. Through textual exegesis, I sought to trace the changes in Grant's thoughts regarding these primary experiences, and thus, through a careful winnowing, come to a settled opinion about his proper place among the many pigeonholes of philosophy.

The results of that winnowing-down of the path was the conclusion that Grant was some sort of Christian Platonist. But to my mind at the time, he was a rather odd exemplar of the model (if indeed it is even possible to speak of a "normal" Platonist). Odd because Grant's Plato was read through the French mystic philosopher Simone Weil, who is easily interpreted as a Gnostic Christian of some sort. Given the typical understanding of the path of *gnosis* as one of radical pneumatic transcendence of the world, and the belief that the world and material embodiment to be evil or delusory, it was difficult to reconcile with Plato's dialogues, let alone Grant's own tireless good works in the world.

To understand the paradox, it was then necessary in "George Grant and Simone Weil on Consent to Otherness," to glean insight into Grant's Weil, and to come to understand why he was so taken with her *as a thinker*, rather than simply a figure of religious saintliness and charity. Thus the follow-up study focused upon an experiential exegesis of two paraphrases of Weil that were often repeated by Grant: "Love is consent to otherness" and "Faith is the experience of the intelligence illuminated by love."

What came of that second stage of exegesis was a better understanding of Weil's own kenotic theology and what it meant to Grant. In resumé, Weil—at least the Weil of *Awaiting God*—presents the creation as an act of supreme self-denial of the divine.[1] Rather than the world being posited as arising out an act of power and will—a typical conception of God's nature in the West—the world is conceived as born from a sort of divine emptying-out. It is a sort of withdrawal of God that allows beings to exist independently and in full dignity, outside of the divine presence. This is the primordial consent to otherness—God's utter consent that there should be something other than God. This "consent to otherness" too, is the symbolic expression of the mystery of divine, or supernatural, love and of the contemplative intelligence which is able to patiently love, behold, and apprehend the real just as it reveals itself.

Thus, Grant's Weil presented a mode of existence and a *logos* of the divine mystery which directly addressed his principle concerns: how human beings should live, and how, in principle, moderns may recover their senses, understand themselves, and overcome their endless drive towards the mastery and control of nature and human nature. It thus became clear why Grant could take Weil as a thinker of the highest order.

Still some very significant questions remain. The fundamental one is this: what is the path forward, even if we admit the grounds and intended fruition are good? Having enucleated a theoretical view of the good, what, if any practices of attunement to the good can we take from Grant? Some may perhaps say none, that Grant's pessimism was an obstacle to any positive practice of the true and the good. They may even legitimately point to Grant's own statements of his self-professed inability to follow Weil in living her faith in intelligence and love, *encarnata*.

I am not dissuaded, as I have long been convinced that there is more going on with Grant than this. His lifelong public engagement, intellectual and spiritual openness (despite his very definite opinions on everything), and acceptance of his need to continuously rectify his own thoughts and bearings vis-à-vis the good suggest as much.

Therefore, I intend to stake out here a sketch of a Grantian praxis that Grant seems to take from his two closest teachers—Plato and Simone Weil. More precisely, I aim to draw out how Grant seemed to have practiced a path of Socratic-Weilian contemplation and dialogue. Textually, or biographically, I will make use of Grant's published Graduate Seminars on Simone Weil, 1975-6 as a case in point.

I: THE SOCRATIC GRANT–MIDWIFERY AND APORIA

In "George Grant and Simone Weil", I wrote:

> Whatever else one may think of Grant's thought, one cannot accuse him of a philodoxer's preoccupation with mere opinions and ideas. Rather, his concern was clearly and consistently the adequate and true expression and enucleation of primary experiences (e.g. the experience and meaning of transcendence and immanence, being and time). Such experiences, over the long chains of human history, find expression in mythic, philosophic, theological, and mystic symbols. These then must be subjugated to analysis, elaboration, correction, or rejection.
>
> To perform such an analysis of symbols, one must then have some adequate knowledge of the primary experience given expression in the symbol. This, at the very least, demands a sympathetic imagination and engaging in the partnership of dialogue with that person or tradition evoking the experience through the symbol. One must also be capable of submitting the substance or fruits of the dialogue to critical investigation, ending wherever it will. We may recognize in this procedure the analogue of the familiar Socratic method of zetema ("questing"), with its accent on dialektikos and elenchus, noesis and dianoesis, and frequent aporia (Cordner 2024, p. 36).

At this juncture, it would be best to unpack this Socratic structure of contemplation to better understand Grant's contemplative praxis as a thinker. To begin at that requires us to begin at the beginning of the Socratic tradition, with Socrates himself, as he is remembered in the works of Plato and, to a lesser extent, Xenophon.

Setting to one side for the moment the issue of Socrates' irony as a special problem, and as a practice not adopted by Grant (I've never heard of Grant accused of being round-about or exoteric), one is perennially struck by Socrates' persistent questioning of his partners in dialogue. Be they wary or unwary, guarded, combative, or open, the questioning itself takes centre stage. Socrates' partners respond to this *elenchus* in a variety of ways—dogmatically, with annoyance, hostility, bewilderment, dullness, or open-ended partnership in the pursuit of better understanding (*episteme*).

Quite typically, those who are hostile in the dialogues with the old Satry are also those whom accuse him of using irony to dissemble. That is to say, they accuse him of secretly harbouring ideas, perspectives, and opinions (*doxa*) of his own on whatever subject they are discussing—say, whether virtue can be taught or what justice is—but that he feigns ignorance to avoid a fair fight.

On the other side are those who seem to take Socrates' earnest professions of ignorance as somehow true and honest, even if they are perplexed at what exactly Socratic ignorance *is*. Socrates, after all, is obviously not an idiot. Nor does he claim to be without knowledge or understanding of anything. Famously, he claims knowledge of the art of midwifery (learned from his mother, Phaenarete) and the art of love (*eros*, learnt from the prophetess Diotima). In spite of his professedly lax industry, we may assume that he was a more than competent practitioner of his father's craft (*techne*) of stone-working—particularly if there is anything to the ancient tradition that holds that he crafted several works that once stood in the Athenian Parthenon.[2]

Whether or not his partners accept his ignorance, Socrates' elenchus—persistent questioning in pursuit of perennial verities—has a typical result: it produces *aporia*. Like a midwife, Phaenarete's son prods, encourages, walks, and massages his charges until they give birth to their *doxa*. These are then submitted to inspection, and, if they turn out to be "wind-eggs" (that is to say, sterile or lifeless), they are put aside. This process of giving birth and inspection of *doxa* is the essence of the *elenchus*. And, most often, the inspection reveals a *doxa* which is not fecund—it is a dead-end, a bit of ignorance mistaken for understanding.

Existentially, the end-result of the *elenchus* is thus aporia. One feels emptied out, like a womb after birth. Whether one reacts with anger, anxiety, or relief at having one's wind egg taken away, one aspect re-

mains the same: the womb of the psyche is returned to a state of full, receptive potential. There is again the space to try again to conceive knowledge. Or, at least "beautiful doxa"—those with more life and potential to them.

It is worthwhile to note that, in his own classroom practice, Grant followed the outline of *elenchus* in his graduate seminars: (i) frequently begging the question, (ii) questioning his own understanding of the subject of his lectures, (iii) by bringing his student's essays in as the immediate subject of a present inquiry, and (iv) his insistence to students that one must battle-out within oneself the contradictions one seems to find in a thinker—using the paradox like the two limbs of a pair of pincers to grope towards an understanding otherwise out of reach.[3] Clearly, no seemingly settled opinion laid safe in Grant's presence, and one can only take studying with him as a prolonged education in withstanding intellectual and existential discomfiture.[4]

II: GRANT'S SOCRATES–*DIALEKTIKOS* AND *NOESIS*

To this extent at least, one may recognize the worth and necessity of Socrates' own professed *aporia*—and Grant's too—even when they sting others with it: one cannot honestly know in advance where the birthing will take one. We may also be reminded by Grant's dictum, taken from Leo Strauss, that to be a good teacher is to be before the class of students knowing truly that one or more may well be of nobler heart and clearer intellect than oneself.[5] This sort of humbleness, meekness, or open-minded self-awareness (all connoted by *aporia*) is a sort of philosophic virtue. It may then be that Socratic humour, or irony, playfully disguises actual humility under a cloak of feigned humility which one knows will be mistaken for a trick.

Be that as it may, talking oneself and others into a state of *aporia* clears the way for a reorientation and ascent. To that end, Socrates, and Grant, did not eschew relying on established, seemingly wise, traditions, notions, teachings, and hypotheses as guiding stars. Plato's dialogues are littered with references to Homer, Hesiod, Parmenides, Heraclitus, Aeschylus, Simonides, and Aristogoras, to name a few. In addition, obliquely, one senses behind those explicitly named, those traditions whom lay behind them. One recalls to mind at least the Orphic, Pythagorean, and Eleusian traditions.

Similarly, Grant draws upon thoughts and traditions ranging from Plato and Aristotle, to Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, to say nothing of Weil, the Latin Christian tradition, and the eastern traditions with which he is familiar. Grant's books, recorded talks, and even classroom notes are nothing if not a profound presentation and interrogation, in good faith and even vigorous *philia*, with each thinker or tradition that he approaches. The most obvious example of this practice is *Time as History*—Grant's good-faith enucleation of Nietzsche, whom Grant forthrightly judged had most deeply revealed the Western fate as will-to-power, while also holding that that philosophy was unfit for human beings.

These then represent the Socratic poles in Grant's philosophic practice: (i) a suspicion of one's ignorance, (ii) a rigorous querying, bringing to light, and laying bare a line of thought (Grant's famous "enucleation"), (iii) some level of *aporia* which begs for further inquiry, (iv) the recognition and contemplation of paradox or essential contradiction as a means of grasping intelligible truths that lay hidden and out of reach.[6] This is the basic, explicit structure of *elenchus* and *noesis* (seeking to understand first principles), within the framework of philosophic dialogue (*dialektikos*).

The more implicit element in the process is the rectification of *eros* or desire. The desire to know is implicitly aroused by the inquiry itself, and by the loss of surety of one's own bearings as one's opinions are laid bare, either in their barrenness or in having unwanted implications. In this vein, one may wonder how many Canadians have been turned off of Hegelian thinking by Grant's implication that living it out entailed Canada's absorption into a Universal and Homogeneous State defined by American liberalism.

On the other side of things, the desire to know the good is sparked by intimations of deprival—a nagging sense that something is missing or amiss. In *The Apology* of Plato, Socrates employs the metaphor of being a gadfly stinging and thus stirring a slumbering horse—namely Athens. Waking from the dream is irritating, but one finds the phenomenal world already revealing itself in the light once the cobwebs of

dream images are chased away. Perhaps more importantly, existentially, one finds oneself needing to find a path to the good in waking life. The desire for the good and the true is thus renewed when *elenchus* and *aporia* have stung one awake and revealed one's deprival.

Most important to the recovery of wakefulness is the separation of necessary from unnecessary desires, as Grant acknowledges (Ibid. p. 836). We might say that we need to know what is needed for a good human life, and what is unneeded distraction. Grant follows Weil in affirming that, in practice, this sort of moderation (*sophrosune*) comes about from anchoring desire on higher things by liberating it from dead-ends—that is to say, from our will to autonomy, or *libido dominandi*—rather than through repression or Freudian sublimation.

Perhaps interestingly, Grant follows and interprets Weil in understanding that the ascetic exercises (*askesis*) which produces moderation involves the soul using the body as a lever against (or, "to lift") the soul. Contrary to a common modern opinion that moderation is achieved by turning the will against the body, Weil's *askesis* is to use the body (tacitly understood as good, and naturally unburdened by unnecessary desires—say for luxury yachts) to discipline the imagination (Ibid. pp. 836-7).

The imagination, and our habit of trying to expand ourselves over the universe, comes to the fore in Weil and Grant's exposition of Weil, as the chief culprit in our immoderation. The body, after all, is already always in the present, and its needs are easily satisfied. It is the unhealthy psyche that seeks to be in another now, in the past or in the future, thus already imagining something different, unnecessary, and often quite self-important.

Disciplining the imagination, therefore, is the prelude to being able to desire what *is*, the necessary and the good. Meditation on the body is a good ally in the endeavour. I believe that it is correct to say that for Grant and Weil, the *elenchus*, which unmoors our imaginations from their false or lesser goods, serves the function of clearing the way for us to again desire and seek the truly good and beautiful.

III: CONTEMPLATION OF BEAUTY AND NECESSITY

In her highly fecund work, *Awaiting God*, Simone Weil outlines various paths of contemplative love which would serve to reorientate one's being to the good, or God. These practices are *love of neighbour*, *love of beauty*, *love of religious ritual*, and *friendship*. Interestingly, Grant seems only to give attention in his writings—classroom notes included—to Weil's exposition of the love of beauty. This is a curious omission, but his attention to the love of beauty at least accords well with his attention to Plato, particularly *Republic, Symposium,* and *Phaedrus*. Whatever the case for the omission, it behooves us here first to understand what Grant took from Weil as a positive path of contemplation through the love of beauty.

Understanding Weil's love of beauty requires holding several things in mind. One is her presentation of true attention (we may now in our day say "mindfulness"), as a kenotic act (or non-act) of being receptive. That is to say of allowing one's intelligence to be mirror-like and unobscured by the imagination. A good mirror receives and reflects what *is* simply. It does not colour or impose itself upon the world that it reflects.[7]

The second aspect to keep in mind is Weil's Pythagorean-Platonic understanding of necessity or *ananke*. As Grant noted, the modern mind habitually thinks of necessity in terms of force and materiality. We easily leap to thinking of necessity as an obstacle to our own wills, or as what we might impose on others through the force of will. A sort of violence of the will and a desire to master necessity thus shadows the modern soul.

By contrast, Weil and Grant take necessity to refer principally to the intelligible order(s) of the world, most eminently on display in the mathematical and ontological principles which we first come to know through the study of numbers and geometry. The complexities, forces, and forms of the phenomenal world partake in these, and are truly comprehended by knowing the intelligible. Moreover, the intelligible world, for Weil's part, is known to us really only through the flesh.[8]

A third aspect to keep in awareness is, again, Weil's essentially kenotic practice of loving or desiring. Far from being properly an act of pursuit—an interpretation which Weil rejects—desire is said to be most purely expressed as awaiting in patient longing for the beloved to reveal themselves at the door, until imagination and expectation have worn themselves out. At that point, being receptive, and the self-set aside, the beloved may be able to reveal themselves.

We can easily infer then that, for Weil, love is receptive desire, and attention is receptive intelligence. Both are emptied of the self, and are mutually sustaining in patient faith, in the sense of trust or confidence, in the real. Moreover, readers of Plato's *Republic* and *Symposium* can't help notice the parallels between the path to philosophic education sketched in those dialogues, and Weil's sketch of proper study.[9]

Through the attentive love of beauty of the world—which is to say necessity or *ananke*—one comes to a love of the cosmic order and of the transcending dignity and beauty of all things in their place and in their good, bad, or ugly way. Again, learning to love and contemplate the beauty of the intelligible forms of the world becomes the jumping-off point for being receptive to the good or God.

Two potential misunderstandings confront us at this juncture. The busy, imaginative mind easily presumes that attention (and thus contemplation) is achieved through some sort of psycho-physical straining. One hears, "Pay attention!" and immediately the muscles tense and we seek to willfully compress awareness into a point. On the other hand, the opposite misunderstanding is to assume that attention and contemplation—that mirror-like intelligence—is achieved through some sort of non-thought—of forcibly holding the mind blank. This too is a subtle form of action. It is an attempt to *do* something, to manipulate the mind and body to create a desired effect of not-thinking. Neither of these two is the sort of action in non-action and non-action in action which drew Weil's and Grant's attention when reading the Indic *Bhagavad Gita*.[10]

Rather, attention is better understood through the metaphor of the sort of patient desire at the threshold of the beloved which Weil paints. Recognition of a problem or question provokes a desire to know. Study and questioning bring us to the threshold. Desire, and our own capacity to accommodate the tension of waiting, holds us in place. Finally, something clicks, the door opens, and the answer comes to us—along with new, greater questions as a larger awareness of the world rectifies our understanding of things.

Prosaically, we may call this the familiar "aha!", "eureka!", or "lightbulb" moment. The details of the process of discovery through the tacit integration of knowing and being has been described in much greater details in the works of Michael Polanyi. I shall not belabour them here, except to say that Weil's presentation accords well with his, and the reader may productively turn to Polanyi's work for more on the theme.

Incubation at the threshold of discovery, and being with the hints and clues, is the necessary precondition for illumination. Knowing this, and knowing that Weil knew this, explains her presentation of study as a spiritual or religious activity. Approaching school studies as an education of one's attention, in this sense of resting in desirous contemplation of parts of aspects of the whole of necessity (e.g. a mathematical proof, a Latin phrase) is to apprehend them by knowing them as hints or reflections of a greater good beyond them.

Critical too, to her mind, is the need to submit attentively to going over our errors in study when they are found out. In this way, we may again recognize the analog of the *elenchus*. Studying our errors, say, in solving an equation or proof, (i) disembarrasses us of false knowledge, (ii) inculcates humility and therefore receptivity, (iii) renews the desire to know, (iv) leads us to a better perception and integration of the clues and elements at hand. There is also, in this process, a sense of being able to recognize and accept the reasonableness of the authority of the teacher and their corrections.

Practically speaking, for Weil, the greater good, or beauty, is the beauty of the whole cosmic order itself. That education in love of beauty of the cosmos in all its rich forces, necessities, and intelligibilities, both leads to a greater love of the particular and the near at hand, and is preparation for sitting at the threshold of the good or God.

What is explicitly rejected in all of this is the treatment of study as "useful" or utilitarian, for this preoccupation naturally limits one to learning only what serves the achievement of profit, productivity, power, or prestige—all false ends, in the sense of endless pursuits without a terminus (Weil 2012, pp. 21-8). In

this, we may recognize something like Grant's familiar inveighing against the modern "multiversity"—the use of institutions of higher learning for the training of the young to be no more than contented consumers and skilled technicians. From an existential perspective, approaching study as a means of expanding the power of the self is self-defeating. Utilitarian training (one hesitates to call it education) leads not to the opening-up of the mind or soul, the cultivation of desire and attention, or the capacity for contemplation. This leads to the impasse in which intelligible things are increasingly difficult for us to love, to perceive, let alone to comprehend. This naturally undercuts the life of the arts and sciences.

IV: FAITH, INTELLIGENCE, LOVE

The foregoing sections perhaps adequately unpack one of Grant's favourite Weilian paraphrases, "Faith is the experience of the intelligence illuminated by love." What Grant understands by faith in this light is precisely that attentive, mirror-like intelligence that is transfixed in place by desire, and infinite faith that the beloved shall appear.

What is absent from this formulation is the willfulness of the self. The lover of the true, the beautiful, and the good, as Plato humorously pointed out, has much more in common with a victim, a servant, or a slave than a master or a tyrant. For all of their *askesis* and study, the philosopher (and, following Weil and Polanyi, the true scientist or true artist) can only long to "know" the beloved, and have faith that they will reveal themselves in time. And all this in full knowledge that one may very well be wrong, and start again from the beginning. The key practice is that of holding attentive in patient desire.[11] This we call contemplation.

V: TRUE IMAGINATION

Once something is "known" by the intelligence through contemplation, the imagination finds its proper place. Not as a vanguard of the self's drive for expansion and empowerment. Rather, as the faculty for making images that reflect the real, be they in the form of statues, equations, words, or what have you. Moreover, the best science and art will emerge from the greater illumination of the love of beauty of the whole cosmos—sensible and intelligible. That is to say, from love of necessity as a moving icon of eternity (Plato. Timaeus. 37d).

VI: CONSENT TO OTHERNESS

Consent to otherness—the sort of love which only desires the other to be and to behold them as they are, not to consume, alter, or master them—is the other side of contemplative attention. They may even be synonymous acts (or non-acts) when practiced perfectly. Contemplative study polishes our capacity to pay attention and bear witness (*theorein*, in Greek). When this ability to just look and behold is turned towards others, this is the essence of love of neighbour and friendship in Weil's work (Weil 2012, pp. 47-61). We have noted that these themes are unexplored in Grant's presentations of Weil, except, we may now say, in so far as they are implied in this, his favourite paraphrase of her.

In Weil's *Awaiting God*, consent to otherness is a general theme, extending down from the divine, kenotic creation, and finding specifically human expression in the four loves. Above, we have ennucleated its expression in the love of beauty and therefore education. We may now contemplate the natural expression of this consent to otherness when it spills out into our relations to other persons and societies. We may also consider how it relates to Grant's concern for the love of one's own as a point of political philosophy and human community.

Given the foregoing, it is easy to apprehend that the ability to truly look at another—to behold them and bear witness to their existence, even in their suffering or affliction—is to give up one's selfish concerns

for a moment and be truly mindful of them. At the deepest levels of attention, we may even be said to be contemplating them in their gestures and their dress, their talk and afflictions.

Attention is thus the way to the threshold of knowing others, freed of the imposition of our imaginings, plans, and self-concern. It is the basis of a sort of communion, particularly when practiced reciprocally. Nevertheless, it is rather a difficult thing to do. It cannot be done abstractly through a mere idea of loving everyone. Practicing attention to others must pass through the body and sense, like every other form of knowing, if it is not to be a phantom of the imagination.

Loving one's own—and indeed, having a "one's own"—is the most obviously human place to start. And how difficult it is already to be mindful of or contemplate in this way, our children, our parents, our friends and lovers, let alone the neighbours! Yet, our love for them, however tinctured with ego, holds us proximal to the possibility of desiring them to be and no more.[12] This then is the practical training ground for learning loving consent to the otherness of wider circles.

This recognition of a need for one's own squares Grant and Weil. It also deepens our appreciation of the deeply human problems posed by the modern technological desire to homogenize in pursuit of efficient mastery of nature and human nature. The need for one's own is not mere pleasant sentimentality. It is also the working basis for learning how to be human with ourselves and others.[13]

From the above, we might apperceive that the progressive loss of contemplative attention in the arts and sciences paradoxically undermines the technological basis of the modern enterprise. We may now also say that the loss of the basis for learning how to consent to otherness undermines the affective basis for good human society, or perhaps society altogether.

VII: WHEREIN CANADA?

Wherein may Canada factor into the equation of human life? What is particularly good about the Confederation, and what possibilities does it present for contemplating the good, and living and dying in a good, human society?

For those of us whom, by happenstance of fate, find ourselves claimed as Canadian, we find ourselves amidst an ongoing conversation not of our creation. This is the common human predicament. But it may be said that the Canadian conversation—or rather, overlapping conversations—is peculiar by virtue of its very expansiveness and relative absence of settled common opinions.

One may indeed have a certain familiar lived sense of oneself and one's own as, say, a Montrealer, a rural Acadian, a queer woman from Kingston, an urbane Cree artist, a dock worker, a rig-worker, or a multitude of other things. Identities abound in the expanses of Canada, and few would argue that there is much difficulty in distinguishing common regional or communal characters or senses of belonging.

When the issue of conversation comes to the matter of knowing a Canadian identity, however, things take an interesting turn. Some insist on the necessity of a defining creed which will summon-forth and bind the community—say as British, or Anglican, or liberal (vaguely defined), or Red Tory (even more vaguely defined). These efforts flounder on the shoals of reality for being too narrow, too parochial, and too obviously imposed and willful. Thus they are unpersuasive to those who would need to be persuaded to give-up their own to belong to someone else's dream of a particular stripe of unity. Each is a stripe that too obviously resembles the author's imagining of their perfect self, and many are justifiably suspicious of the whiff of the imperial, the colonial, and the will-to-power hovering like pipe-smoke over that conversation table, dulling the senses.

Another table at the court of the Canadian conversation denies the existence of a super-regional or super-confessional identity, its desirability, or very possibility. Good enough to have a sense of oneself as an Albertan, a Quebecer, a Black Canadian, queer Canadian, conservative or so forth. To whatever extent that Canada exists, it would thus be thought of as a collection of conversations and institutions purposed to the mediation of the interests and conflicts of these collective associations, and their preservation against destruction.

A very Hobbesian take. It has a sort of rugged spirit, but yet it is hard not to notice the seeming lack of awareness of the conversations going on in the rest of the room. If things were so settled, sensible, and obvious, wouldn't the conversations themselves obviously be settled? But we are not all so obvious to ourselves, and so, to much chagrin at this table, conversations continue on around them. They find much unspoken agreement in murmuring askance over their pints at the stupidity of the jabber. Can't we all just we get on with practical affairs?

Stopping for a moment to take in the room with an eye sharpened by Grant's Weil, we may apprehend different things. For one, we might note the Socratic, Delphic air about the whole Canadian conversation about what it means to be Canadian. We paradoxically unsettle every settled opinion about ourselves and each other. In so doing, we unsettle fixed opinions about principles—e.g. justice, freedom, charity—and are forced to re-adjudicate with one another and ourselves on what they are, what they aren't, and how to live with and by them. The overall conversation is quite aporetic and thus, irritating to many of us who find ourselves always getting swept up in it. It keeps us up when we'd prefer to sleep. Still, the great Canadian elenchus continues.

Moreover, it is remarkable to note that the steady familiarization with the habit of being politely attentive to others and a growing consent to otherness does seem to have grown deep roots in Canada. Realistically, we may well say that this habit was founded on necessity—the surest of educators. If British North America was to not become a spur of the United States, it was necessary for British Loyalists, French Canadians, Catholics and Protestants to consent to each others existence first.

Over the generations, that habit seems to have expanded surprisingly wider, and deepened in the direction of true consent to otherness. That expansiveness now begins to take in even groups and communities whom for generations were explicitly targeted and maligned. It is beyond remarkable, given history's low standards, that present generations of Canadians show not merely toleration, but even genuine ongoing interest, respect, and admiration of people and traditions (e.g. queer, First Nations and Inuit, non-Caucasian and non-Christian) many of whom their grandparents' generation actively oppressed, despised, or attempted to either suppress or brush to the margins of society.

Perhaps this turning-around may be logically square with Lockean or Millian—that is to say, liberal—ideas of freedom and toleration. But, perhaps such work in the realm of ideas is unnecessary or even obstructive to the conversation. Perhaps there is something too to recommend John Ralston Saul's reported notion that early European explorers, traders, and settlers, by necessity, learned indigenous practices of listening respectfully and consensus building that, by necessity, became the habits of Canada's institutions (Saul 2008).

Whatever the case (or cases) may be, far from being a problem to be resolved, Canada's Socratic-Delphic quest, made possible and plausible by this tacit consent to otherness (now raised to explicit reflection and analysis) may be the thing itself. It is rooted, and needs roots, in the love of one's own, and may indeed be nourished by a contemplative education of one's attention. This, I think, we can glean by looking again at Canada with eyes trained to a love of the good by a deep conversation with Grant, his Weil, and their Plato. Perhaps it might be a tad too obnoxious to suggest, bombastically, that the world, let alone the neighbours, could learn anything from the Canadian practice of conversation, self-searching, and self-denial. But, perhaps not too much to suggest that we may reflect upon and love these habits in ourselves—whoever we happen to be.

NOTES

1 Grant himself insists upon the importance of Weil's *Awaiting God* (previously published as *Waiting on God*) in a letter to Rod Crook hence it shall be the focus of this essay. See Grant (1996).

2 This tradition comes down to us via Diogenes Laertius. See Book 2, lines 64-65 of Laertius (1915).

3 Grant follows Weil in this, in fact, and quotes her at length in his 1970 *Introduction to Simone Weil,* published in *The George Grant Reader* (p. 248). Grant does not cite his source in that lecture, but it appears to be from Weil's *Oppression and Liberty* (1958, p. 173). It is worthwhile to quote Weil's very lucid comment on the Platonic practice of contemplating genuine contradiction at length:

> "The essential contradiction in human life is that man, with a straining after the good constituting his very being, is at the same time subject in his entire being, both in mind and in flesh, to a blind force, to a necessity completely indifferent to the good. So it is; and that is why no human thinking can escape from contradiction. Contradiction itself, far from always being a criterion of error, is sometimes a sign of truth. Plato knew this. But the cases can be distinguished. There is a legitimate and an illegitimate use of contradiction.
>
> The illegitimate use lies in coupling together incompatible thoughts as if they were compatible. The legitimate use lies, first of all, when two incompatible thoughts present themselves to the mind, in exhausting all the powers of the intellect in an attempt to eliminate at least one of theme If this is impossible, if both must be accepted, the contradiction must then be recognized as a fact. It must then be used as a two limbed tool, like a pair of pincers, so that through it direct contact may be made with the transcendental sphere of truth beyond the range of the human faculties. The contact is direct, though made through an intermediary, in the same way as the sense of touch is directly affected by the uneven surface of a table over which you pass, not your hand, but you pencil. The contact is real, though belonging to the number of things that by nature are impossible, for it is a case of a contact between the mind and that which is not thinkable. It is supernatural, but real."

4 See "Excerpts from Graduate Seminar Lectures, 1975-6" in Davis (2009).

5 Paraphrased by Grant, Davis (2009, pp. 833).

6 See note 3.

7 For Weil's general reflections on the interpenetration of attention, the intelligence, and desire, see Weil (2012, pp. 21-28).

8 See Weil (2012, p. 67). See Grant's summary in (Davis 2009, pp. 836-7).

9 For a point of comparison of Weil's thoughts on the practice of contemplative study to those of Plato's dialogues and Michael Polanyi, see Cordner (2017, pp. 26-40).

10 See David (2009, p. 827) and Weil (2012, p. 89). Grant indicates that he had been granted access to Weil's books and manuscripts, and "...when I was in Paris looking at SW's manuscripts and books, her copy of the *Bhagavad Gita* was shown to me, and in the margin she had transcribed in French certain lines one of which was: 'He who can see inaction in action and action in inaction, such a being is wise, etc. She took this as a text of authority, writing of what she called in French 'l'action non-aggressante,' the non-acting acting; and it seems to me this phrase takes one to the heart of what she means by attention. As you will know, those who have read her writings, the *Bhagavad Gita* becomes in her last writings in the New York and London *Notebooks* a text of comparable authority with the gospels. She returns again and again to the meeting of Arjuna and Krishna and she took Krishna to be the incarnate God. Now clearly I have no right to speak of such matters in the way that I can speak of Plato or the gospels. But nevertheless I must point out this fact."

11 For a specific example of Weil's contemplative practice, I invite to readers to refer to chapter 4 of *Awaiting God* — "About the 'Our Father'". In that chapter, Weil unpacks the the use of the "Lord's Prayer" of the Christian New Testament as a meditation by which to reciprocally heighten desire and attention to the Good or God.

In another practice, outlined in correspondence quoted by Grant in his *Introduction to Simone Weil*, Weil herself tells that it is the George Herbert poem "Love" which she recited over and over in prayer, in the context of the extremes physical affliction and attention to the "unimaginable beauty" of an Easter liturgy, when "Christ himself [suddenly] came down and took possession of me."

To quote Herbert:

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?
Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

12 Grant was quite forthright in acknowledging the difficulty of expressing love as a true consent to otherness, even with (or perhaps especially with) one's own children. This does not detract, but rather emphasizes the importance of learning to love one's own *well* and *selflessly* as the basis for spiritual growth. See Davis (2009, p. 826).

13 Davis (2009, p. 826). Cf. also Edmund Burke's comments on the same in his comments on belonging to the "little platoons" of familiar affection, through which love of one's country and of mankind can be fostered and grown in Burke (1887, pp. 292-300. Cf. too, Weil's comments, "Let us love the country here below. It is real; it resists love. It is what God gave us to love. God has willed that it should be difficult and nonetheless possible to love." and "We must, on the contrary, give our whole attention, our whole faith, our whole love to a particular religion to be able to think of any other religion with the highest degree of attention, with the faith and love that it contains" (Weil 2012, pp. 77, 81).

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"Arms Outstretched in Love to the Further Shore": Simone Weil's Silent Presence in George Grant's *Lament for a Nation*

GEORGE A. DUNN
Hangzhou City University and
Indiana University

Abstract: This paper explores the profound but usually undetected influence of Simone Weil on George Grant's *Lament for a Nation*. While Leo Strauss is typically seen as Grant's principal philosophical influence in this work, this paper argues that Weil's metaphysics of necessity and the good provides the deeper framework in which Grant situates Strauss's critique of modernity and Canada's fate. Though seldom named in connection with this work, her thought is crucial to Grant's lament and his refusal to identify historical necessity with the good. In the end, it is Weil—not Strauss—who illuminates the "further shore" to which Grant gestures in the final lines of his book.

Keywords: George Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, Simone Weil, Leo Strauss, Plato, Greek Geometry, Political Philosophy, Modernity, Alexandre Kojève, Universal and Homogeneous State

> Men's curiosity searches past and future
> And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend
> The point of intersection of the timeless
> With time, is an occupation for the saint—
>
> —T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

INTRODUCTION

We have no record of George Grant's initial reaction to reading Simone Weil. In 1952, soon after *Attente de Dieu* was translated as *Waiting for God*, Grant reviewed it for a radio broadcast, but the text of that broadcast appears to be unavailable.[1] But we do know that he was studying her closely through the 1950s and early 1960s, making him one of her earliest avid readers in North America. By the late 1950s, he had concluded that "she was nearer the truth than anyone else."[2] His praise was even more effusive in an introduction to her thought first written in 1963 and revised in 1970 for a public lecture. "[S]ince I spend a great part of my life reading and thinking about this woman," he wrote, "it must be that I think I am there drinking a fountain of divine truth (Grant 2009, p. 798).

As he was falling under Weil's spell, he was also shedding the Hegelianism that was still evident in his first book, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, and moving toward an increasingly tragic view of modernity. In the introduction to the second edition of *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, which ap-

peared in 1966, he publicly credited Leo Strauss with shattering his early faith in progress (Grant 2002, p. 401).[3] But though he did not say so at the time, the direct and indirect references to Weil in his writings of this period reveal that she gave him equally compelling reasons to reject the religion of progress. She may have been as crucial to his turn away from the modern faith as was Strauss. Or so this paper argues as it uncovers her unnamed presence in *Lament for a Nation*, the work in which Grant lays bare his disenchantment with the modern project.

Weil's importance for Grant comes to light in the few places where she appears in his early work. One might get the impression from *Lament for a Nation* that Strauss was his chief guide to ancient philosophy, but careful consideration of Grant's earlier writings shows that within a couple years of his discovery of Weil he had already come to esteem her as an authoritative interpreter of Plato. His early writings also reveal the extent to which the great theme of necessity and the good, central to Weil's reading of Plato, had taken hold of Grant's imagination. Looking at these early writings lets us take the full measure of Grant's words in *Lament for a Nation* when he tells us, "I do not identify necessity and goodness" (Grant 2005a, p. 86), and to see the book in a new light.

I: IN THE SHADOW OF THE GREAT BEAST

The first published mention of Weil in Grant's work appears in his 1954 address "Adult Education in the Expanding Economy," delivered to the National Conference on Adult Education. Here, he defends the place of humanistic education in a technological society that "presses men into the life of manipulation and organization and considers contemplation a waste of time" (Grant 2002, p. 107). His argument turns on a crucial distinction between finite and infinite ends in human life. Our concentration on finite ends like economic prosperity has so narrowed our vision that we fail to recognize the noblest end of human existence: "the journey of the mind beyond all myths out of the shadows and imaginings into the truth"(Grant 2002, p. 102).[4] For the great premodern traditions, this infinite journey was the true business of education, "the way that men became free." The "freeing of finite mind from the chains of illusion" entails "above all the freeing of it from the partial and tiresome traditions we call society—that great beast" (Grant 2002, p. 107).

These shadows, chains, and illusions evoke Plato's famous cave allegory from the *Republic*, which Socrates presents as "an image of our nature in its education and want of education" (Plato 1968, p. 193). However, the phrase "great beast" may be less familiar. In Book VI of the *Republic*, Plato compares the sophist, who "inculcates nothing else than these opinions of the multitude which they opine when they are assembled and calls this knowledge wisdom," to a man charged with the care of a great beast. The sophist comes to define the good as whatever pleases the beast and the bad as whatever enrages it. Mistaking his ability to manipulate the beast for genuine moral wisdom, the sophist is ensnared in ignorance, never grasping how radically "the nature of the necessary and the good really differ" (Plato 1968, p. 173). The great beast is Plato's image of society, an irrational animal moved by contagious passions that pass for wisdom.

This image is also prominent in the thought of Simone Weil, who explicitly links it to the cave allegory. In fact, she believed that these two Platonic images—the cave and the great beast—disclose their full meaning only when considered in tandem. In her notebooks she wrote:

> The Great Beast is the only object of idolatry, the only ersatz of God, the only imitation of something which is infinitely far from me and which is I myself. … The collective is the object of idolatry, this it is that chains us to the earth. … It is the social which throws the colour of the absolute over the relative. … Society is the cave (Weil 2002, pp. 164-5).

Society, as both cave and beast, is the false absolute that hijacks human desire. It presents the relative as absolute and invests finite beings with the infinite worth that properly belongs only to the transcendent good.

Chained to the earth and captivated by the shadows on the wall, the prisoners are idolators who worship an ersatz divinity, the society that dictates what ends are worth pursuing and what objects are worth desiring.[5] Grant is thinking along similar lines when he laments how modern education is designed "to make people comfortable and adjusted members of the world." Much of what passes for education is really just what he calls "adjustment propaganda" (Grant 2002, p. 102). Grant writes the word "adjusted" with an implied sneer, since it almost a direct antonym of "free." In the concluding paragraph he writes that "the man we call supremely free was sufficiently maladjusted to his community to die on a cross, and there is no reason to believe that we are so much better than the people who put him to death" (Grant 2002, p. 108). The aim of education should be to make us free, not adjusted.

While Weil is only implicitly present in Grant's reference to the great beast, she steps into full view a few pages later, when he turns to Weil's best known and most sustained reflection on education: "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God," included in *Waiting for God*, the collection of writings Grant reviewed only two years earlier. Grant cites her proposal that the purpose of study is to cultivate the student's capacity for attention—first through disciplines like Latin and geometry, but ultimately for the sake of loving God and one's neighbor. Arguing that a good life must combine thought with responsible action in the world, he writes:

> On this point Simone Weil says something which takes one to the very heart of the matter. She points out that the purpose of all education is the cultivation of the faculty of attention so that ultimately attention can be paid to the infinite. As she says, the attention one learns as a child in Geometry or Latin may be just what will allow one someday to pay attention to one's neighbour at some crucial moment. … Therefore, it is crucial that we should cultivate the life of disciplined thought. Otherwise, we will lose the faculty of attention. And the faculty of attention is just our freedom (Grant 2002, pp. 107-108).

If, as Grant says, attention is our freedom—and if, as Weil argues, "the development of the faculty of attention forms the real object and almost the sole interest of studies" (Weil 2009a, p. 105)—then their educational philosophies perfectly align. By developing our capacity for attention, education achieves its end of freeing us from the cave. As a philosopher of education, Grant is Weil's disciple.

Attention is a receptive engagement with a reality other than ourselves. It affords us an impersonal perspective free from social conditioning—our bondage to the "great beast"—and egocentric distortions. As Weil writes:

> The human being can only escape from the collective by raising himself above the personal and entering into the impersonal. The moment he does this, there is something in him, a small portion of his soul, upon which nothing of the collective can get a hold. If he can root himself in the impersonal good so as to be able to draw energy from it, then he is in a condition, whenever he feels the obligation to do so, to bring to bear without any outside help, against any collectivity, a small but real force (Weil 2015a, p. 15).

Attention—or, as Grant more often calls it, contemplation—liberates. It allows us to transcend the personal, delivering us from what Iris Murdoch calls "the fat relentless ego" (Murdoch 2001, p. 57), which includes the ego writ large in the form of the "we," the collective beast. It establishes a relationship with the impersonal good, with the truth that sets us free.

Yet, it is startling to hear Grant speak so dismissively in this essay of "the partial and tiresome traditions we call society—that great beast," given that a decade later he would mourn the loss of Canadian traditions in *Lament for a Nation*. Indeed, Grant tells us there that his lament is based not on philosophy but on his love for a particular tradition that claims his allegiance (Grant 2005a, p. 94). Has he forgotten what he learned from Weil and gone over to the beast?

Not at all. A similar tension is found in Weil. *The Need for Roots*, written near the end of her life, offers a much more nuanced view of the social order than what we find in her rhetorical censure of the "great beast." While the collective can become an idol, it is also owed a "very high degree of respect," being "the sole repository for the spiritual treasures amassed by the dead" (Weil 2024a, p. 7). Weil understood that human beings have a natural need to participate in social wholes that preserve cultural and moral traditions. Like Plato, she believed that our capacity for love, which at its apex is the love of an impersonal and universal good, is nurtured through relationships with particular people and communities. Love of the universal does not exclude love of the particular—it depends on it. Her argument anticipates Grant's rebuke of the modern juggernaut that tears people away from their inherited sources of meaning and grinds them into a homogeneous monoculture. Like Weil, he is wary of the modern collective but affirms rootedness in tradition, so long as it retains a capacity to orient us toward transcendence. Modern civilization fails in precisely that respect.

II: THE SCREAMS OF THE TORTURED CHILD

This notion of an impersonal good points to another reason why the "great beast" passage in the *Republic* is so important to Weil—and consequently to Grant. In her essay "Is There a Marxist Doctrine?", she paraphrases *Republic* 493e: "As Plato says, an infinite distance separates the good from necessity." But her paraphrase adds something absent from the original. Whereas for Plato the distance between the necessary and the good is merely great, Weil dilates it to infinity. "They have nothing in common," she says. "They are totally other" (Weil 2001, p. 165).

Necessity, for Weil, denotes the order of the world, including the implacable progression of cause and effect that govern the sequence of events in time. For the scientist or philosopher, this necessity can become an object of dispassionate contemplation, but in the course of our lives it is also experienced as blind force—indifferent to our needs and desires, with the power to crush us and reduce us to mere things. Yet at the same time as we experience ourselves as hapless victims of this empire of force, we discover something in ourselves that contradicts its message that we are nothing but its doomed playthings, something that marks us as born for a different destiny: our inextirpable desire for the good. "The very being of man is nothing else but a perpetual straining after an unknown good," Weil writes (Weil 2001, p. 164). This contradiction at the heart of human existence is hard to bear and even harder to think. That is why Weil believes it is denied by every inferior form of the religious life, including the modern religion of progress, which tries to persuade us that events in this world are providentially ordered toward the good.

This metaphysical framework was appropriated very early on by Grant, as is evident from a lecture titled "The Necessary and the Good in the Crucifixion" that was found after his death in a box in his study.[6] Given as part of a course on Augustine that he taught five times in the 1950s, it explores the meaning of the crucifixion, taking as its starting point the infinite distance between the necessary and the good. Curiously, however, Weil receives only a single passing mention.[7] Instead, Grant says he is using Platonic terminology.[8]

> Now if I understand Plato correctly (and before such an immense genius how can we be sure?)—the famous passage in the Republic about the transcendence of the Good arises from his recognition that the central contradiction which must arise to our thought is the contradiction between necessity and the good, call it if you will the contradiction between justice and force, between love and worldly power. Plato seems to have seen with such clarity, as surely we must, that human beings have from their very being the desire for the good, [but] are at the same time under the rule in their very selves—that is, in their thought as well as in their flesh—under the entire rule of a blind force, an absolute necessity, which at least appears absolutely indifferent to the good (Grant 2002, p. 488).

Despite his reticence about Weil, Grant is clearly indebted to her for this reading of Plato. Indeed, given how closely his language parallels hers, it is almost certain that his recognition of what "Plato seems to have seen with such clarity" was possible only because of the clarity of vision he owed to Weil.[9] His near silence about her suggests that she and Plato had almost merged in his mind, so that Plato spoke to him from out of her text. He sees Plato through her eyes.

Like Weil, Grant also believes that the contradiction between necessity and the good applies only within the human realm of experience. In the transcendent order, they are united—but in a way that eludes our comprehension. "Although we are forced to assign them a unity," Weil writes, "this unity is a mystery; it remains for us a secret. The genuine religious life is the contemplation of this unknown unity" (Weil 2001, p. 165). Our contemplation of what we can only perceive as a contradiction brings the finite mind to the farthest limit of intelligibility, where it brushes up against the supernatural. Grant describes this moment of contact using an image borrowed from Weil—a set of pincers:

> [T]here is a legitimate and illegitimate use of contradiction. The illegitimate use insists on joining together incompatible thoughts as if they were compatible. … The legitimate use seems to me this, when two incompatible thoughts present themselves to us we must exhaust every recourse of our intelligence to try to eliminate one of the conflicting and incompatible thoughts. If this is impossible—if both insist on imposing themselves on our minds, it becomes necessary to recognize the contradiction as a fact. Then it becomes necessary to use this contradiction as a kind of pincers, to try and enter directly in contact with the transcendent which otherwise is inaccessible to human beings (Grant 2002, p. 489).

As in his reading of the *Republic*, Grant remains silent about his debt to Weil for both the image of the pincers and the distinction between illegitimate and legitimate uses of contradiction. Both are taken from "Is There a Marxist Doctrine?"[10] Indeed, what Grant says so closely paraphrases what Weil wrote there that we must imagine him composing this lecture with Weil's text at his elbow.

Grant shares Weil's scorn for the illegitimate use of contradiction. Those who concoct a fictitious unity between necessity and the good in this world paper over the anguish of the human condition, which "only leads to attempts to justify evil" (Grant 2002, p. 490). For Weil, the chief culprits are the Marxists, who claim to have discovered inexorable laws of history that are guaranteed to bring about justice, even though untold suffering may have to be endured along the way. Grant casts a wider net. Marxism is just one form of the modern faith in progress, which is itself a mutant offspring of the Christian doctrine of providence. For some Christians, providence means that every event serves a divine purpose. Grant finds this doctrine repellent in both its Christian and secularized forms. "To take a progressive view of providence is to come close to worshipping force," he writes in *Lament for a Nation*. "Does this not make us cavalier about evil? The screams of the tortured child can be justified by the achievements of history" (Grant 2005a, p. 87).

These tortured screams are memorialized by Ivan Karamazov in Fyodor Dostoevsky's great novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. In 1958, Grant, in collaboration with his wife Shiela, composed a radio talk on Dostoevsky. After praising his literary brilliance, they concluded that his greatest influence lay in his "remarkable dialectic" of faith and doubt, expressed with unparalleled force in Ivan's speech in the section titled "Pro and Contra." Ivan shares his brother Alyosha's religious longing for universal harmony, but he refuses to accept it on the terms offered, purchased with the innocent suffering of children. The Grants, using Weil's language, praise Dostoevsky's portrayal of "the agonizing struggle of the believer to reconcile the necessary with the good" (Grant 2002, p. 415).

To illuminate Ivan's anguish, they quote a passage from Weil's notebooks in which she voices a similar sentiment:

> To manage to love God through and beyond the misery of others is very much more difficult than to love him through and beyond one's own suffering. When one loves him through and beyond

> one's own suffering, this suffering is thereby transfigured; becomes, depending upon the degree of purity of that love, either expiatory or redemptive. But love is unable to transfigure the misery of others (with the exception of those who are within the range of one's influence). What saint shall transfigure the misery of the slaves who died on the cross in Rome and in the Roman provinces throughout the course of so many centuries (Weil 2004, p. 255).[11]

Grant quotes this same passage in his 1959 book *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, where he describes Weil as a modern saint. However, it becomes clear there that the obstacle for *him*, the suffering that his own love of God cannot transfigure, is not just the historically remote misery of crucified Roman slaves but the horrors of his own century: "If anyone thinks the purpose of existence is evident let him contemplate what has happened in the twentieth century; let him contemplate what is happening at the very moment that these words are read" (Grant 1995, p. 92). Grant may be thinking of his own shattering experience during the Second World War, as well as the carnage of the anti-colonial struggles in Vietnam and Algeria.

These themes resurface in his "Introduction to Simone Weil," written after a 1963 research trip to France for a planned but never completed book on the philosopher-saint. He returns to her reflections on the reign of force and the use of contradiction, focusing on one sentence that he believes captures a crucial theme running through her mature thought: "I am ceaselessly and increasingly torn both in my intelligence and in the depth of my heart through my inability to conceive simultaneously and in truth, of the affliction of men, the perfection of God and the link between the two" (Grant 2002, p. 796).[12] Arguably, Weil's powerful impact on Grant stems from him being similarly torn.

But the full extent of Weil's importance for Grant comes into view when he writes that "the afflictions of modern civilization taught her to question the philosophic principles on which modern civilization is based and so enabled her to read and participate directly in what the Greeks and Indians have said about alternative principles, in a way that is quite impossible for most men" (Grant 2009, p. 791). To ascribe to Weil a "direct" participation in the "principles" grasped by the greatest premodern thinkers is to confer on her the authority of firsthand knowledge. That helps to explain why he feels so confident turning to her as a guide to Plato. But equally important is Grant's claim that she calls into questions the principles on which modern civilization is based. He does not elaborate those principles in detail, but we can easily gather what he might have learned from her that was relevant to his own project.

From Weil, Grant might have drawn the insight that modern science is fundamentally oriented toward technological domination—a sharp departure from the ancient view, in which the highest exercise of the intellect lay not in mastery or self-assertion but in receptive openness to the transcendent good. For the modern mind, technological expansion has become an end in itself, feeding the myth of limitless progress and power, while the ancients dwelt with a profound sense of limit. As we know, Weil gave Grant ample grounds to reject both the Marxist and liberal faith in progress. He speaks of "her central theme about history in general," her insistence that "the nobler and better does not necessarily survive; indeed, because of the ultimate rule of force over the world, truth and beauty can only be tenuously held in the being of any society" (Grant 2009, pp. 795-796). This tragic realism—this denial that history providentially bends toward the good—underwrites the mood of *Lament for a Nation*.

"It is because the assumptions of modernity had been smashed in Simone Weil that her commentary on Plato is illuminating," Grant wrote, adding a terse parenthesis: "(Strauss and her.)" (Grant 2009, p. 798). Strauss and Weil—this unlikely pair—are linked in Grant's mind as astute critics of modernity who enable a recovery of Plato.

III. THAT WISE MAN AND THE FLAME

When Grant wrote *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, he had by his own admission not yet fully cast off his progressivist faith—though his study of Weil would have posed a mighty challenge it. Grant's first book was no hymn to progress, yet in the 1966 introduction to the second edition he conceded that it was still "perme-

ated with the faith that human history for all its pain and ambiguities is somehow to be seen as the progressive incarnation of reason" (Grant 1995, p. 120). A corollary of this faith was his admiration for Hegel, who claimed to have synthesized the best of ancient and modern philosophy. Grant confessed that he once considered him "the greatest of all philosophers" (Ibid.). Yet, he reports that his encounter with the writings of Leo Strauss proved decisive in persuading him of the superiority of ancient over modern philosophy. In *Lament for a Nation*, he paid homage to Strauss by calling him "that wise man" (Grant 2005a, p. 93).

Strauss offered an alternative genealogy of modern philosophy. The modern project is not the triumph of the rational spirit but a severe narrowing of our horizons, a turn from contemplation and the cultivation of virtue to the conquest of nature and the alleviation of human suffering. By lowering our sights, modern philosophers sought to place the goal more readily within reach. From his reading of Strauss, Grant was led to the conclusion that Plato's account of human excellence was in fact closer to the truth than Hegel's. Yet, as important as Strauss may have been, Grant's preeminent guide to Plato was never Strauss, but Weil. As he is reported to have told a classroom of students, "Beside Leo Strauss, Simone Weil is a flame" (Christian 1993, p. 228).

Grant's new orientation is on full display in *Lament for a Nation*, with his debt to Strauss openly acknowledged, while his greater debt to Weil is strangely muted. Grant builds a section of his argument around Strauss's account of modernity's two initial waves: the first launched by Machiavelli and culminating in Lockean liberalism, the second originating with Rousseau and leading to the revolutionary politics of Marxism (Grant 2005a, p. 59).[13] He also explicitly endorses Strauss's judgment that to understand the classics properly we must cast off the assumptions of the modern age, in particular, the belief that classical philosophy is at best an immature form of wisdom that has been perfected by modern thinkers (Grant 2005a, p. 93). But Strauss's influence is most evident in Grant's argument that the demise of Canada is not just the fallout from its leaders' missteps and moral compromises but is inscribed in the very destiny of the modern West.

The absorption of Canada into the American empire follows necessarily from features of the modern world that Strauss accents in his writings—its ideology of progress, its devotion to the conquest of nature, and its political drive toward what he called "the universal and homogeneous state." Grant takes this phrase from Strauss's debate with the French Hegelian-Marxist philosopher Alexandre Kojève, where it denotes a global society of supposedly free and equal men and women whose parochial loyalties have all been dissolved in an acid bath of political and social uniformity (Strauss 2013). For Kojève, such a state is the inevitable end (*telos*) of history, the final reconciliation that concludes all the political struggles that, in his Hegelian view, had propelled history forward until now. Strauss, on the other hand, while not denying that history may be heading in this direction, insisted that the universal and homogeneous state would be a tyranny, dehumanizing those who live within it.

The phrase "universal and homogeneous state" entered Grant's vocabulary soon after his discovery of Strauss. He used it as early as 1961 in a speech to the National Research Council, provoking outrage by suggesting that their scientific work served the coming of a universal tyranny (Grant 2005a, p. 118).[14] The importance of the Strauss-Kojève debate for Grant is even more evident in his essay "Tyranny and Wisdom," written in 1962, though it did not appear in print until 1964. His research trip to France for his projected Introduction to Weil was in 1963, so both thinkers were occupying his thoughts around the same time. In fact, Grant was in the midst of work on Weil when political developments drew him into writing what would become *Lament for a Nation*—a book he described in a letter as "just about Canada becoming part of the universal and homogeneous state." He may have been thinking of Weil when he added, "It is finally true that one's hope must lie in the transcendent—but what a business it is putting off one's finite hopes" (Christian 1993, pp. 241-242). Given how preoccupied he was with Weil, we might wonder how his interest in her shaped his reception of the Strauss-Kojève debate. "Tyranny and Wisdom" offers important clues.

Strauss takes an anti-historicist stance in this debate, one that Grant says "asserts an eternal and unchangeable order in which history takes its place and which is in no manner affected by the events of history" (Grant 2018, p. 98).[15] This formulation, drawn nearly verbatim from Strauss, likely appealed to Grant

because it echoes Weil's turn to a transcendent good that relativizes all our finite hopes. Using Weilian language absent from Strauss, Grant describes the ancient philosophical posture as "the contemplation of necessity" (Ibid.), rather than seeking mastery. More tellingly, he homes in on two aspects of Strauss's argument, both pertinent to Weil's understanding of the ancients, though neither is a major theme for Strauss in this particular essay.

First, Strauss argues that the ancient Greeks recognized the possibility of a technological science but rejected it, believing it would undermine human excellence. For them, the highest excellence was philosophy—contemplation of an eternal, unchanging order. Because such contemplation presupposes a realm of necessity beyond human control, the modern project of conquering nature represents a denial of classical philosophy. Strauss supports his claim with three classical citations, but Grant presses for more convincing evidence—and then suggests where Strauss might find it: ancient geometry. To understand why the Greeks turned away from the technological application of science, he writes,

> it would be necessary to understand Greek geometry and what those Greeks who were philosophers thought geometry was and also what place geometry played in Greek religious practice before Aristotle. As a student of religion, it is quite clear to me that geometry had for the educated Greeks an essentially religious significance . . . (Grant 2018, p. 100).

Grant identifies himself as "a student of religion," but he might have said student of Simone Weil, since her essay "The Pythagorean Doctrine" explores the religious significance of Greek geometry at length. Grant cites it in a footnote, subtly directing Strauss to the evidence he seeks. The footnote appears at the end of this sentence:

> One could wish, therefore, that even if Strauss did not include a discussion of Greek geometry in his text that he had included references to scholarly writings which would illuminate what he says about Greek geometry and its relation to their philosophy and religion (Grant 2018, p. 100).

But Strauss had said nothing about geometry or Greek religion, maintaining only that the Greeks viewed the conquest of nature as "destructive of humanity" (Strauss 2013, p. 178). It is Grant—clearly thinking of Weil—who reframes the issue in these terms, perhaps just to give himself a reason to cite her.

For Weil, Greek geometry was about building bridges—though not the kind engineers construct. Geometry was an image of divine truth, a reflection of the necessity that undergirds the universe. But the Greek geometers' most intoxicating discovery was that geometrical proportions could express relation between incommensurable magnitudes. Geometry thus offered a model of the mediation or *metaxu* (μεταξύ)—the bridge—between the finite and the infinite, between human affliction and divine perfection. "To sum up," she wrote, "the appearance of geometry in Greece is the most dazzling of all the prophecies which foretold the Christ" (Weil 2024b, 168). To unpack this arresting claim would require a deep dive into her views on both Greek mathematics and Christ as mediator. What matters here is that Grant takes this moment to gesture—delicately but deliberately—toward Weil, whose sacramental reading of the Greeks would have been totally alien to Strauss.

This issue touches on the second key theme of Grant's commentary: the relationship between the history of philosophy and biblical religion. Grant is struck by Strauss's "remarkable reticence" about what authority, if any, biblical revelation should have over the philosopher (Grant 2018, p. 108). Grant draws a plausible inference: while Strauss is not a believer, he does not see it as the philosopher's task to undermine religious faith among those who need it for moral guidance and consolation. But, as Grant notes, everything hinges on what we take the true substance of biblical revelation to be, as opposed to how it has been interpreted by certain dominant theological schools. "The effort to understand Biblical religion," he writes, "is as much a philosophical task as to understand its relation to the pursuit of wisdom" (Grant 2018, p. 107).

Elsewhere in his writings, Strauss offers his account of biblical religion. In his reflections on the tension between Jerusalem and Athens—a central theme of his thought—the two cities represent opposed ways of life: one governed by divine command, the other by free inquiry.[16] They are fundamentally incompatible, since the philosopher cannot submit to any authority other than the dictates of his own unfettered reason. But Grant rejects Strauss's opposition between faith and reason, turning to a different teacher: Simone Weil. As we have seen, she finds in Greek philosophy what the title of one collection of her essays calls *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks*. In that spirit, she writes, "The Gospels are the last marvellous expression of the Greek genius, as the *Iliad* is the first" (Weil 2002, p. 212).

Weil can claim this continuity between biblical and Greek thought because she conceives of faith quite differently from Strauss. Faith, for her, does not limit the philosopher's freedom to pursue truth. It resembles the loving contemplation of beauty more than an assent to some dogma.[17] "Intellectual adherence is never owed to anything whatsoever," she declares in words that Strauss could have adopted as his own motto (Weil 2012, p. 196). Strauss had much to teach Grant, but when in the final paragraph of *Lament for a Nation*, he turns his gaze from Canada's temporal collapse and to an eternal order apprehended by faith, it is Weil—not Strauss—who serves as his signpost.

Canada is fated to be swallowed up into the universal and homogeneous state, but not for the reasons Kojève gives. Canada's fate is sealed not because history is what Weil calls "a machine for manufacturing the good" (Weil 2001, p. 173), but because certain *beliefs* about the good have taken hold of modern human beings. Briefly, the achievement of the universal and homogeneous state has come to be regarded as "the pinnacle of political striving" (Grant 2005b, p. 52). As Weil argues, human beings possess an innate yearning for a good they cannot name, but society—the "great beast"—supplies it with an orientation and content. Strauss shows us how the teachings of modern philosophers introduced new judgments about the good. "As these judgments are apprehended and acted upon by practical men," Grant writes, "they become the unfolding of fate" (2005b, p. 91). Grant builds on Strauss's analysis, but his language of necessity and fate frames this great modern event—the coming of a new planetary civilization dominated by technology—within a metaphysical scheme derived from Weil, one structured around the chasm between necessity and the good.

IV. THE FURTHER SHORE

Strauss was Grant's chief guide to the great modern philosophers, while the Strauss-Kojève debate helped clarify the trajectory of the modern world those philosophical architects had shaped. But Grant turned primarily to Weil for his understanding of the eternal order in which history unfolds and of the philosophy of Plato, whose account of human excellence he came to believe was true. Yet, when it came to communicating what he had learned from her to a broader public, Grant proceeded with a curious reserve.[18] For instance, she is almost invisible within the pages of *Lament for a Nation*, even though some of her most basic insights supply the scaffolding for his argument. Laurence Lampert's 1975 essay, "The Uses of Philosophy in George Grant," offers a compelling explanation. Lampert argues that Grant, being fully aware of the obstacles facing the philosopher who hopes to gain a hearing in the modern age, adapted his rhetorical strategy accordingly.[19] Grant learned that "philosophy must always be cognizant of how it is being heard if it is to maintain its frail hope of making a difference" (Lampert 1978, p. 183). Edwin B. Heaven and David R. Heaven directly address Grant's general reticence about Weil in their 1978 article "Some Influences of Simone Weil on George Grant's Silence." "It is neither smart politics not timely pedagogy to speak publicly of the eternal," they write in explanation of his reluctance to say much about Weil (Heaven and Heaven, 1978, p 73). Weil's presence in *Lament for a Nation* is muted then not because she was irrelevant to its argument, but because invoking her directly might have undercut its effectiveness. Still, she does appear—behind a veil, as it were—at key moments in the text.

When Grant turns at the end of his book to the question of whether Canada's disappearance is good, he adopts—or perhaps feigns—a stance of agnosticism, claiming not to know whether the universal and

homogeneous state is the best political order. But this profession of ignorance seems to undermine the very premise of his book as announced in its title. "As the central issue [of the goodness of Canada's disappearance] is left undecided," he writes, "the propriety of lamenting must also be left unsettled" (Grant 2005b, p. 94). Yet it seems that his decision to frame the book as a lament has already settled the question.

Turning from the last pages of the book to its beginning, we find Grant defining a lament as "the celebration of a passed good" (Grant 2005b, p. 4). But there are two kinds of people incapable of lament. The first are those for whom the good is entirely absent, even as memory. For them, despair is absolute and leads to suicide, not lament. The second are the saints, those rare souls who can endure any loss because they possess an absolute certainty that "the destruction of good serves the supernatural end; therefore, they cannot lament." Is this statement not a veiled nod to Weil, whom Grant revered as both a saint and a genius? Situating himself between despair and certainty, between the suicides and the saints, Grant tells us of himself, "Those who write laments may have heard the propositions of the saints, but they do not know that they are true" (Grant 2005b, p. 5).

We need to consider Grant's language carefully. The "destruction of good" in our world is experienced as evil—indeed, it comes close to the very definition of evil—especially when the ruined good is something dear to us, loved as our own. Grant thus frames his lament in the context of the greatest of all theological quandaries: the problem of evil. Evil experienced directly in one's own flesh is an occasion of anguish, but it is also a theological problem, precisely because to experience something as evil presupposes some awareness of the good it corrupts or destroys. As Grant asks, "what could evil deprive us of, if we had not some prior knowledge of good?" (2005b, p. 4). The attempt to think together the reality of evil and the primacy of the good—or, in theological language, the sovereignty of God—opens an abyss. At stake is thus both the intelligibility of the world and the possibility of loving it. What the propositions of saints like Weil tell us is that God grants permission to evil because it serves some *supernatural* end.

For Weil, the supernatural is what lies outside of time—unchanging, beyond the reach of the finite intellect and ordinary experience. If the end served by evil is supernatural, it cannot be our arrival at some historical destination, such as the universal and homogeneous state, nor even the more remote future harmony envisioned by Ivan Karamazov but rejected because the tears of a single child was too high a price of admission. Only something that persists at all times, something coeval with every moment of human woe and human joy, could be a supernatural end. For Weil, that end is the possibility of a universe existing independently of God, filled with beings capable of answering God's love with their own.

In creating such a universe, Weil says, God withdraws, relinquishing power and ceasing to be all in order to make room for otherness. Out of this renunciation arises the web of necessity that governs the world. Indifferent to our needs, without remorse or pity, necessity is infinitely distant from the transcendent goodness of God—and yet as the source of all order and regularity, it is what makes our existence possible. As such, it points to the good that lies on the other side of necessity. From Weil, Grant would have heard the following proposition concerning the "supernatural end" served by the destruction of the good: "Relentless necessity, wretchedness, distress, the crushing burden of poverty and of labour which wears us out, cruelty, torture, violent death, constraint, disease—all these constitute divine love. It is God who in love withdraws from us so that we can love him" (Weil 2002, p. 32). A hard proposition, no doubt.

Even when the universe sends its most brutal afflictions, robbing us of all we hold dear, it remains beautiful and therefore lovable precisely because of its underlying order, which the saint contemplates with loving attention. "The sea is not less beautiful in our eyes because we know that sometimes ships are wrecked by it," Weil writes (Weil 2009b, p. 129). The beauty of the world is a sign of the goodness at its source. Weil—and Grant—use the phrase *amor fati*, the love of fate, to describe the possibility of loving the good by loving its image in the world: the impersonal necessity that governs all things.[20] Though we are powerless to alter this necessity, we can offer our consent. Weil believes that is enough.

> It suffices for him to consent fully, at every instant, with love for the order God has created in the world, to all wounds without the least exception which the course of events may bring him. This

> unconditional 'Yes' which is pronounced in the most secret point of the soul … is *amor fati*, it is the virtue of obedience, the Christian virtue excellent above all others (Weil 2024c, p. 118).

This unconditional affirmation of the order of the world is the central proposition of the modern saint Grant held in highest esteem, whose words he believed even if he had no firsthand knowledge of their truth.

From Weil's hyperborean standpoint of *amor fati*, lament is impossible because everything happens in accordance with necessity. But looking to Weil confronts Grant with a dilemma. If he laments the loss of Canadian sovereignty but also judges it necessary, he cannot escape the question: "how can one lament necessity—or, if you will, fate? The noblest of men love it; the ordinary accept it; the narcissists rail against it." Not counting himself among the noblest but surely no narcissist, he frames his lament as a "celebration of memory" (Grant 2005b, p. 7). He is not railing against necessity—even if he later regretted that his "book was written too much from anger" (Grant 2005b, p. lxxiii)—but celebrating a good, albeit one that can survive only as a memory.

But memory gets only the penultimate word. Grant ends his *Lament* by evoking something older and deeper than the memory of those dashed hopes his forebears invested in Canada. One might still "live in the ancient faith"—whose modern oracle is Weil—

> which asserts that changes in the world, even if they be recognized more as a loss than a gain, take place within an eternal order that is not affected by their taking place. Whatever the difficulty of philosophy, the religious man has been told that process is not all. *Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore* [They were holding their arms outstretched in love toward the further shore] (Grant 2005b, p. 95).

This final line, from Virgil's *Aeneid*, describes souls gathered at the river Styx and yearning to cross over. Grant places himself on this bank. Dwelling in the ruins of fragile temporal goods like his beloved Canada, he strains across an infinite expanse to the imperishable good on the other side. There is a boundless chasm between the cruel necessities that must now be endured and the enduring good for which we long. From Simone Weil he has learned that the only bridge across is *amor*.[21]

NOTES

1 See Grant (2002), Appendix 3: Radio and Television Broadcasts, p. 536. His review of Weil was broadcast on December 16, 1952. *Attente de Dieu* first appeared in English in 1951, though in *George Grant in Process* (1978), Grant says that it was sent to him to review in 1950. In that place, he also says that since first reading her, "she has been the central influence on my thought about the most important matters" (p. 65).

2 Letter to Shiela Grant in June/July 1958; quoted in Christian (1993, p. 229).

3 In his introduction to the 1966 edition of *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, he writes, "my debt is above all to the writings of Leo Strauss. … As the greatest joy and that most difficult of attainment is any movement of the mind (however small) towards enlightenment, I count it a high blessing to have been acquainted with this man's thought."

4 This phrase is Grant's translation of a motto he attributes to Augustine of Hippo: *ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem*. It is inscribed on Grant's gravestone.

5 Weil's picture of idolatry is similar in many ways to the mimetic theory of René Girard, whom she influenced. For a good introduction to Girard's life and thought, see Haven 2018.

6 See Grant (2002, p. 443).

7 Grant (2002, p. 484): "We are not able to choose the Cross. As Miss Weil so brilliantly has put it: 'We might choose no matter what degree of asceticism or heroism, but not the Cross—that is to say penal suffering.'"

8 Grant (2002, p. 482): "I am going to start from two Platonic terms which I have used consistently—the Necessary and the Good."

9 Cf. Weil (2001, p. 164): "The essential contradiction in human life is that man, with a straining after the good constituting his very being, is at the same time subject in his entire being, both in mind and in flesh, to a blind force, to a necessity completely indifferent to the good."

10 See Weil (2001, p. 164).

11 Quoted by the Grants in Grant (2002, p. 415).

12 This line is from a letter she wrote to Maurice Schumann in 1943. It appears in Weil (2015b), where it is translated somewhat differently on p. 178: "I feel an ever increasing sense of devastation, both in my intellect and in the centre of my heart, at my inability to think with truth at the same time about the affliction of men, the perfection of God, and the link between the two."

13 It is interesting that Grant makes no mention of the third wave of modernity described by Strauss. Strauss argues that this third wave, the radical historicism of Nietzsche and Heidegger, found political expression in German National Socialism.

14 For an account of this controversy, see Christian (1993, p. 223).

15 Cf. Strauss (2013, p. 212).

16 See for example his essays "Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections" (1985) and "Progress or Return?" (1989).

17 Grant unpacks Weil's understanding of faith at length in "Faith and the Multiversity" (1986).

18 He abandoned the book he was writing on her. It was not until 1986 that he published his first essay-length meditation on her thought, "Faith and the Multiversity" (1986). Clearly, Grant struggled with how to translate her thought into an idiom that he believed could be heard.

19 Lampert's essay first appeared in *Queen's Quarterly* but was reprinted in *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations* (1978). Soon after its originally publication, Grant wrote a letter to Lampert saying that "it is much the best thing that has ever been written about myself" (private letter dated Mar. 10th, 1975).

20 For the importance of *amor fati* in Grant and Weil, see Dunn (2024).

21 Many thanks to Tyler Chamberlain, who read an earlier draft of this paper and made helpful suggestions for improvement.

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Lament for a Nation, Lament for Liberalism

B. W. D. HEYSTEE
Memorial University

Abstract: This paper revisits the arguments of *Lament for a Nation* and *English-Speaking Justice* in a contemporary political context. In 2025, the United States government threatened to unravel the "rules-based order" which it established over the previous 70 years and to annex Canada. This threat seems to contradict *Lament for a Nation*'s arguments that the United States leads a global, liberal regime called the "universal and homogeneous state" and that Canada is already a part of this regime. In fact, it is consistent with Grant's broader analysis and criticism of liberalism. In *English-Speaking Justice*, Grant argues that liberalism cannot ultimately give reasons why we ought to be just so that, when brought to its logical conclusion, liberalism leads to nihilism. The "universal and homogeneous state" as a project is bound to collapse into nihilism and its leading member—the United States—need not take its commitment to international liberalism seriously. In Grant's view, open violence, imperialism, and disregard for law are part of the logic of liberalism playing itself out.

Keywords: George Grant, Leo Strauss, Alexandre Kojève, John Rawls, Liberalism, Nihilism, Canada, Universal and Homogeneous State

INTRODUCTION

The events of 2025 have made it a fitting year for a retrospective on *Lament for a Nation*, regardless of the essay's sixtieth anniversary. For Canadians, the year notably began with American threats to annex Canada and turn it into "the 51st state." Such threats may have initially been a source of amusement to readers of Grant because such readers know that Canada ceased to exist as a nation many decades ago. In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant remarkably declares that even though Canada retains its formal political existence and separate institutions, as a nation it is dead and in the most important respects it is at one with the United States. Annexation does not seem like a significant threat if Canada is already a part of the United States. Nevertheless, readers of *Lament* cannot but ask themselves a number of questions: in 2025, how materially different are Canada the United States? Would Canada be better or worse off if formally integrated into the United States? If Canada should remain separate, to what purpose? What vision of the good life significantly distinguishes Canadians from Americans? The Trump administration's threat to annex Canada and the reaction of Canadians would seem to

suggest that Canada remains other than the United States in some important, if vestigial, respect. Those whom Grant once moved and with him lamented the disappearance of Canada find themselves wondering if or why threats of annexation matter.

One reason these threats are significant is because they suggest that Canada has been expelled from the inner circle of the American empire, though the significance of this expulsion is itself ambiguous. In order to be annexed, Canada must be outside the United States. Hence the objections of Canadian politicians and pundits that a once "friendly" relationship has now ended: Canada has rudely discovered that it is not so close to the United States as it once believed, and it is sad to find oneself on the outside. Indeed, no country is particularly close to the United States any more now that the global "rules-based order" has been upended. At first blush, it would appear that the argument of *Lament* is incorrect insofar as it does not anticipate that Canada and the United States could grow apart. And to the extent that *Lament* remains convincing, it should cause us to welcome this newfound distance from the United States and the dissolution of the "rules-based order." These events suggest that Canada is less a part of the global American empire or what Grant called the tyrannical "universal and homogeneous state," and that the trajectory of history no longer clearly bends toward this state. Taking freedom as its highest principle and invalidating all public accounts of the good life, the universal and homogeneous state is destructive of human excellence; hence, events which put this state in question should be welcomed. At the same time, Canada's expulsion is part of a renewed imperialism from the United States: Canada has been expelled only so that it can be annexed, perhaps through military invasion. Greenland and Panama too are under threat. After decades of relative peace, violent conquest is now a legitimate geopolitical option rather than just the tool of certain aberrant autocrats. And this is to say nothing of increasing disregard from the American government for due process and the rule of law. In the face of renewed imperialism and disregard for law, one cannot help but have serious misgivings. Those convinced by the argument of *Lament* may be unsure how to interpret recent events, including the threat of annexation.

To make sense of the situation, I suggest that it is worth revisiting *Lament for a Nation* and what may be taken as a companion book, *English-Speaking Justice*. By revisiting the argument of *Lament* and then placing it alongside *English-Speaking Justice*, we will see that Canada's apparent integration into and subsequent expulsion from the American empire are not contradictory developments but in fact belong to the same logic of liberalism playing itself out. In order to show this, I outline the criticisms of liberalism found *Lament* and *English-Speaking Justice*, showing how the latter apparently contradicts the former but is in fact advancing a more thorough and profound criticism. From start to finish, *Lament for a Nation* advances a full-throated criticism of liberalism and its heartland, the United States, arguing that liberalism is destructive of human excellence. *English-Speaking Justice* expresses remarkable sympathy for liberalism in acknowledging its historical success in guaranteeing a measure of justice and laments that this guarantee is now coming to an end. In effect, *Lament* decries the collapse of conservatism before liberalism, while *English-Speaking Justice* decries the collapse of liberalism. What we find in *English-Speaking Justice*, however, is that liberalism's historical success is a function of a latent "civilizational contradiction" that will eventually descend into a profound moral nihilism. Interpreted in this context, Canada's expulsion from the American empire and the renewed appetite for violent imperialism do not contradict *Lament for a Nation* but reflect Grant's broader analysis of liberalism. We may have lamented the death of Canada as a nation, but the coming collapse of the global liberal order is cause for a second lamentation.

I: LAMENT FOR A NATION AND THE UNIVERSAL AND HOMOGENEOUS STATE

Though much of *Lament for a Nation* is spent discussing the details of Canadian politics, the real force of the book is to show how liberalism is destructive of human excellence and how it necessarily implies the disappearance of particular nations, such as Canada. Whatever the specifics of the 1963 federal election, it is part of a broader historical project, namely, the coming to be of the universal and homogeneous state. The universal and homogeneous state is a global society of free and equal people and is the implicit aim of

liberalism. Grant argues, however, that far from creating the conditions of universal liberation, the universal and homogeneous state would be a tyranny of the worst kind: oppressive, nihilistic, and opposed to human excellence. For all its detailed discussion of Diefenbaker's foibles and the Bomarc Missile Crisis, *Lament*'s broader argument is that the progressive realization of liberalism is also the end of human well-being.

Lament for a Nation is remarkably sparse on theoretical details, so to make sense of its argument it is first necessary to take a theoretical detour. In arguing the end of liberalism is the "universal and homogeneous state," Grant is adopting a term from a debate between Leo Strauss and Alexandre Kojève. The latter argues on Hegelian grounds that the universal and homogeneous state is the goal of all historical striving. Kojève contends that a study of history shows that human beings are fundamentally motivated by a desire for recognition. That is, everyone desires that others recognize the dignity of their inherent freedom (Strauss and Kojève 2000, p. 143). The conflict which this universal desire produces is the basis of all political struggle: history is filled with individuals and classes engaged in struggle to exact recognition from one another, usually by one party violently subduing the other. Overcoming this conflict requires a political regime in which everyone's freedom is recognized and such a regime must be both universal and homogeneous. First, for everyone to receive recognition, the state must *include everyone* and hence must be universal. Second, if everyone receives recognition, the state must be socially homogeneous: if everyone's inherent dignity is recognized then they are of equal political status. (Conversely, if someone has a lesser political status, their freedom is unduly limited and they are deprived of the "recognition" that their superiors enjoy.) (Strauss and Kojève 2000, p. 146). Thus only in a state which is both universal and homogeneous can the universal desire for recognition be satisfied and the basis of political conflict resolved. The purpose of meaningful human activity is to bring this state into existence through political struggle and "real work" (Kojève 1969, p. 211). Following Grant, we may call this account of politics "liberalism" because it asserts that the genuine basis of politics is the freedom of human beings and that the solution to political struggle is the full and complete realization of that freedom.

It is this account of liberalism and the universal and homogeneous state that Grant criticizes in *Lament for a Nation* and the essay which is its theoretical backdrop, "Tyranny and Wisdom." In the latter work, Grant largely adopts Leo Strauss's response to Kojève in arguing that the universal and homogeneous state (and hence, liberalism as a whole) cannot be expected to meet its own standards or standards furnished by non-liberal "conservative" thought. On the one hand, Kojève contends that such a state would end political strife because it is universally satisfying, but this is dubious. For the state to be universally satisfying, there would need to be universal agreement about the nature and end of politics, i.e. about the conditions which would provide satisfaction. But it is the nature of things that wisdom is rare and opinions diverse so universal agreement is highly unlikely (Strauss and Kojève 2000, p. 193). Further, Kojève contends that the meaningful life consists in the struggle to bring about the universal and homogeneous state. The implication of this is that once such a state exists, there will no longer be a struggle and hence no longer any meaningful life. A state which deprives human beings of meaning can only be a state filled with Nietzschean Last Men and Nihilists (Strauss and Kojève 2000, pp. 208-9; Grant 1969, pp. 93-94). The universal and homogeneous state aims to make everyone free but deprives them of anything to do with that freedom.

On the other hand, the universal and homogeneous state cannot meet standards furnished by conservative thought, i.e. the idea that there is some good to which freedom should be subordinated. Grant primarily takes his cues from ancient thought, which contends that the good life and human excellence consist in the pursuit of wisdom; the best state is the one that best enables that pursuit (Grant 1969, p. 94). In the universal and homogeneous state, the presumption is that politics has been "solved" and there is no longer any need to "pursue" wisdom: we already have it. Indeed, not only is philosophy unnecessary, it cannot even be tolerated because it would only serve to undermine confidence in the political solution we already have. Grant suggests that if a universal and homogeneous state were ever realized, it would be all but compelled to suppress philosophy and, hence, human excellence (Grant 1969, p. 96). Whatever its pretensions to the contrary, the universal and homogeneous state would be an oppressive tyranny that under-

mines the possibility of a satisfying or worthwhile life. The forceful conclusion of "Tyranny and Wisdom" is that the project implicit in liberalism does not lead to a satisfying liberation, but only to nihilism and the destruction of human excellence.

In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant reiterates the above argument, though putting it in somewhat more conventional political terms. He argues that Diefenbaker's 1963 electoral defeat reflects a broad consensus within Canada about the nature and goal of politics: Canadians like Americans are liberal in that they take freedom as the guiding principle of politics. Particularly in the United States, this is exemplified by the commitment to open-ended progress because that commitment denies that any account of good should limit that progress. Human beings are free to change the world and themselves and there can be no determinate limit on that freedom. Because the United States is the most committed to open-ended progress, Grant takes it to be the "spearhead" of the universal and homogeneous state (Grant 2005, pp. 52-55). The implication of this is that the United States and Canada following it are opposed to conservatism and hence the cultivation of human excellence. Conservatism in its various forms means that the highest principle is not freedom, but some notion of an unchanging good (Grant 2005, pp. 63, 66). A society which takes freedom as its highest principle is definitionally opposed to conservatism. Grant argues this is problematic because conservatism of some kind is prerequisite for the cultivation of human excellence or virtue. The idea of excellence or virtue necessarily implies that there are some ways in which human beings fulfill their well-being and others in which they do not or do so to lesser degrees. Humans ought to be or behave in one sort of way and not another. A conservative society will maintain traditions and institutions in support of human excellence. To the extent that a society has rejected or excluded conservatism and has committed itself to liberalism and open-ended progress, the traditions and institutions necessary to the cultivation of excellence will languish and disappear (Grant 2005, pp. 74-85).[1] As a result, a society that is committed to liberalism is opposed to conservatism and is "destructive of human excellence" (Grant 2005, p. 84).

In the context of this analysis, closer integration with the United States is to be rejected and any separation should be welcomed. Since the 1960's, Canada and the United States have become increasingly close, particularly with the 1992 signing of NAFTA and its 2020 successor agreement, the CUSMA. Indeed, Canada's integration into the American empire has been part of a broader construction of a global administrative regime which has been dubbed the "rules-based order." The "rules-based order" has aimed to bring everyone under a single set of integrated laws and to give everyone equal political status under those laws. Thus the "rules-based order" roughly corresponds with Grant's "universal and homogeneous state." To the extent that Canada has developed closer ties with the United States and increasingly turned toward liberalism, and to the extent that the hegemony of "rules-based order" has increased in both scope and detail, to that extent has conservatism and the cultivation of human excellence been excluded. It seems, therefore, that we should welcome the fact that the development of the universal and homogeneous state has been interrupted, because such interruption means that there is renewed possibility for human excellence. Whatever difficulties are on the immediate horizon, the dissolution of the liberal order and Canada's expulsion from the inner circle of the American empire would appear to mean that Canada has an opportunity to renew conservatism and pursue the good life.

II: JOHN RAWLS AND THE FAILURE OF CONTEMPORARY LIBERALISM

Within the context of Grant's broader analysis of liberalism, however, the dissolution of liberalism should come with serious reservations. Grant returns to the theme of liberalism nine years later in *English-Speaking Justice*, wherein he asks whether the liberal tradition can continue to sustain justice in the English-speaking world as it has done for the last centuries. In this book Grant acknowledges and praises the fact that liberalism has been the chief guarantor of justice in the English-speaking world but decides to put that guarantee under examination. He conducts this examination by turning to a contemporary representative of liberalism, John Rawls, and his book *A Theory of Justice*. Taking Rawls as a representative of contemporary liberalism as a whole, Grant finds that liberalism is unable to say why anyone ought to be

just. Grant thereby exposes a crucial weakness in liberalism which should give us pause before celebrating the end of the universal and homogeneous state.

Grant prefaces his examination of Rawls by noting that liberalism has become the only convincing moral language in the English-speaking world. Grant takes liberalism's monopoly on moral plausibility to be more or less self-evident. He says that for an argument to seem convincing or respectable, it must be premised upon "the broad assumptions of modern liberalism" and that arguments outside these assumptions are automatically rejected "as irrational and probably reactionary" (Grant 1998, p. 6). Convincing arguments assume that there can be no universal knowledge of goods, that justice is something negotiated among free individuals, and that morality is and ought to be limited to the private realm. Though there are occasionally illiberal movements, arguments, or reactions, these find themselves against the times and do not long last because, contradicting liberal assumptions, they appear "irrational."

Grant identifies two reasons for this liberal consensus. First, he asserts that those who have shaped and continue to shape society take it to be the best articulation of moral truth. That is, liberalism is taken to be the moral system that best reflects reality, the underlying nature of the world and what can be known about it (Grant 1998, p. 7–8). This includes affirmations about what humans and the world are and are not, i.e. that human beings are autonomous subjects and the world is composed of objects.

Second and more notably for our purposes, the liberal consensus is a function of its past practical success. Grant notes that in contrast to other theories, liberalism has been the chief guarantor of justice in the English-speaking world for centuries. Its main alternative, utilitarianism, always left individuals vulnerable to abuse because the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" means that no one in particular is guaranteed justice and may be callously discarded or trampled by the wants of the many. By contrast, liberal contract theory "has always supported a legal and political system which grasped the nitty-gritty of justice in its details" and therefore has been useful to politics in practice (Grant 1998, p. 14). When politicians needed to bridge theory and practice, when they needed to bring universal justice to particular human beings in particular circumstances, liberalism proved itself up to the challenge. Grant contends that the liberal consensus emerged because liberalism has offered an extremely workable and manageable system of justice. Far from the progressive destruction of human excellence described in *Lament for a Nation*, in *English-Speaking Justice* liberalism is presented as the historical guarantor of justice.

Given this apparently well-deserved liberal consensus, Grant therefore deems it worthwhile to examine a contemporary theoretician of liberalism, Rawls, to see if liberalism still passes muster. Grant examines Rawls by comparing him to his avowed chief influences, Locke and Kant. From Locke, Rawls inherits the idea that social arrangements are and ought to be the result of individuals calculating their self-interest. For Locke, the basis of this calculation is an apprehension of the state of nature, from which we can learn that the greatest evil is death. Everyone is to some extent aware that death is to be avoided (if possible, comfortably), and through that shared awareness an ordered community can be founded (Grant 1998, p. 18). This desire for comfortable preservation provides ongoing motivation for each member of society to consent to social relations which limit their freedom because, at any moment, one could in principle be thrust out of society into a perilous and miserable state of nature (cf. Bloom 1975, p. 652).[2] According to Locke, justice is a contract made between rational individuals who calculate on an ongoing basis that cooperation is in their own best interests because it assures their comfortable self-preservation.

From Kant, Rawls inherits the idea that justice should not be based on our understanding of nature, but on our rational deliberation which alone can be the source of moral principles (Forbes 2007, p. 53). According to Kant, morality is the one fact of reason and our very rationality as human beings commands that we should be just at all times. Though all other activities are only circumstantially good or necessary, our rationality imposes a categorical imperative upon us that we should be just and fair in all that we do (Grant 1998, p. 26). Indeed, the moral fact of reason is the linchpin of Kant's moral theory, because it is upon this fact that all other moral elaborations rest. Nature is arbitrary and cannot be a moral reference, so instead morality should be a purely rational question. Whatever the other details of his moral system, the

strength and foundation of Kant's argument is a certainty about our moral commitments derived from understanding of our rational character.

Despite his avowed debt to Locke and Kant, Rawls's theory of justice stands in marked contrast to the theories of those two thinkers. Like Locke and Kant respectively, Rawls affirms that justice is grounded in self-interest and that it must be a matter of rational deliberation (Rawls 1971, pp. 12, 251). In contrast, however, Rawls denies that knowledge of nature or rationality could itself provide a reasonable basis for morality. In referencing nature and rationality, Locke and Kant advance what Rawls calls "comprehensive doctrines," and the simple fact is that such doctrines invite widespread disagreement (Song 2006, p. 102; Rawls 1996, p. 58ff.). There is widespread disagreement about the significance of nature and about the essential character of rationality, so we should not reference those in setting up a system of justice. Given this disagreement, a securer foundation for a social contract which avoids such disputes is the "original position." Grant summarizes the original position as follows:

> The original position is an imagined situation in which an individual is asked to choose principles of justice for his society under a 'veil of ignorance'. This veil conceals from him his particular circumstances, and therefore eliminates from his choosing those motives of self-interest which would otherwise corrupt the fairness of his judgement. In the original position, we all would choose fairly because we would be abstracted from knowing the detailed facts about our condition in the real world… Chosen from this abstracted position, the principles of justice are the basis for the constitution of any just society in any time and place (Grant 1998, p. 19).

In the original position, individuals try to determine what set of rules would be in their overall best interests, without knowing the exact situation they are in or what would be to their particular best interest.[3] Such an arrangement is necessary because we know that our interests are likely to be in conflict with those of others. The veil of ignorance would ensure that we strike a fair balance between those competing interests, ensuring that, overall, everyone's interests would be satisfied to the greatest degree. This system would earn everyone's consent because it is in everyone's interests.

Grant argues that in rejecting Locke's state of nature and Kant's moral fact of reason, Rawls does not simply revise and update liberal theory but unwittingly exposes a crucial weakness within it. The state of nature and the moral fact of reason are not simply details of Locke and Kant's respective theories, but crucial foundations upon which everything else depends. Rawls rejects these foundations because they are "comprehensive doctrines" which can have no foundational role in justice, but he does not offer an adequate alternative. In effect, Rawls fails to explain why someone would be motivated to adopt a "veil of ignorance" and, under that veil, only then determine how society should be arranged; or, once those arrangements have been made, why someone should afterwards consent to those arrangements. Rawls does not say why each of us is motivated to enter into the bargaining of the original position in good faith, nor does he say why we should admit everyone into that bargaining along with us rather than only admitting our useful peers or superiors (Forbes 2007, p. 52). The original position certainly seems fair, but it is unclear why we should be motivated by fairness. It would seem that it is necessary for all bargaining parties to come to the table already committed to justice as fairness if the original position is going to provide a solid foundation; but by that account the original position would be derivative and not productive of justice.

Grant notes that it is ambiguous whether the bedrock of Rawls's system is self-interest or a commitment to fairness, though he concludes that it is self-interest (Grant 1998, p. 43). As Robert Song explains, Rawls would go on to clarify that it is fairness. The parties negotiating in the original position come to the table with prior, albeit differing, commitments to liberty and equality. Though the parties would have to come to an agreement independent of their respective "comprehensive doctrines," they would do so on the belief that all are free and equal citizens and thereby reach an "overlapping consensus" (Rawls 1996, p. 10; Song 2006, p. 104). Nevertheless, Song notes that Grant's objections still hold water: "the freedom and equality of citizens are everywhere assumed and nowhere defended… Rawls's appeal to the political con-

ception [of justice] as a free-standing doctrine does not justify the liberal democratic values of liberty and equality, except within public cultures already committed to them" (Song 2006, pp. 110-11). Rawls would seem to be avoiding Grant's objection by insisting that the historical fact of modern democracies is that they are already committed to justice as fairness. Should that commitment flag, it would seem that liberal theory is ill-equipped to revive it. Without a prior commitment to justice, it is altogether unclear that Rawls's system has the teeth necessary to be a workable system of justice, even when that justice is inconvenient.

III: CIVILIZATIONAL CONTRADICTION

Rawls' failure to give an adequate foundation for justice is occasion to reexamine the liberal tradition and to reconsider its coherence. Grant argues that upon such reexamination, we find that in fact liberalism is pregnant with a civilizational contradiction which cannot be ignored or dismissed out of hand. The nature of that contradiction is that the widespread commitment to justice which has hitherto sustained liberalism is a remnant of pre-modern ontology, and this stands in contradiction to modern ontology. The result is that as we become increasingly conscious of what modern knowing tells us, we discover that it is unclear why justice is good for us and we descend into moral nihilism.

Grant argues that in the modern West there has been preserved a pre-modern moral tradition which stands in contradiction to modern forms of knowing. The pre-modern moral tradition takes as its foundation an account of the good, however variously that account is expressed. For Grant, morality founded in the good is exemplified by Plato, who argues in the *Republic* that "justice is due to all human beings and that its living out is, above all, what we are fitted for" (Grant 1998, p. 87). Put otherwise, Plato exemplifies an account of why it is good for us to be always just and how justice extends to all human beings in virtue of what they are. That is, the pre-modern moral tradition is inseparable from pre-modern ontology because it depends on affirmations about what things are. Grant contends that modern moral theories, including and especially liberalism, are continuous with and a legacy of the pre-modern moral tradition. For much of the modern West, that tradition has expressed itself through Christianity in its various forms, including even those forms which consciously rejected Greek philosophy, such as Calvinism.[4]

Opposite this pre-modern tradition has been a scientific tradition at the heart of which has been a denial of good. According to this tradition, knowledge is identified with objectivity and has nothing to say about judgments of good and bad; such judgments are relegated to the status of "values." The modern scientific project "affirmed at its heart that in 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" (Grant 1998, p. 73). The world increasingly came to be understood as a complex of mechanical causes and effects. By its very principle, this understanding of the world required that accounts of goodness be eliminated so that, in the end, the world could be understood 'objectively.' Of course, the implication of denying goodness is the denial that justice is good for us or needful. In the modern account of things, there can be no comprehensive doctrine about why justice is necessarily good for human beings because there can be no account of the good.

Consequently, in the modern West there have been built parallel edifices which stand in contradiction to one another. Our moral traditions unavoidably depend on pre-modern affirmations about the world, but those affirmations bear no fundamental relationship to what modern science tells us about the world. In Canada, loyalism depended on memories of pre-modern accounts of the human being to justify the restraints that society should place on the individual (Grant 2005, pp. 68-69). In the United States, the Calvinist commitment to justice was not modern in nature but belonged to that antique tradition which said, "Happy are those who are hungry and thirsty for justice" (Grant 2009, p. 525). Such commitments stand in contradiction to the project of modern science. This contradiction has left justice in a precarious position.

According to Grant, justice has survived this precarity because, by and large, the fundamental contradiction between our moral and scientific traditions has simply been ignored. There have, of course, been those who could not ignore this contradiction and have attempted to resolve it; Locke, Kant and Rawls all attempted to do so in their own way. In Grant's view, those various attempts at reconciliation betray an attachment to a justice that cannot ultimately be sustained in the face of what those modern thinkers know the world to be. They know that some system of organization and cooperation is necessary to any society and attempt to work out such a system while accepting what science tells them about the world. But with Rawls's failure to offer a foundation for justice, it is increasingly clear that within the modern paradigm of knowledge—that is, within modern scientific objectivity—there are no reasons why justice is needful.

Grant argues that the contradiction between modern science and the liberal tradition of justice is not an accident and therefore not something to be brushed off or even corrected. In his view, liberalism and modern science have the same distinctly modern source, namely the idea that human beings are autonomous will. On the one hand, to say that human beings are autonomous will is to say that human beings are free and that at their innermost the meaning of their lives does not depend on the external world. The external world is morally indeterminate and the locus of morality is human freedom. Hence, external arrangements between human beings should be morally neutral and therefore "liberal."[5] The external world says nothing about what humans essentially are, let alone what they ought to be, because the power of the will does not depend on the external. The assertion of a fundamental human freedom bears liberalism as its political consequence.

On the other hand, the human being as autonomous will also expresses itself as modern science. As autonomous, human beings understand themselves as separate from the natural world. As a result the world appears to us as object—that which stands over and against us.[6] The world stands apart from us, ready to be understood in objective terms, i.e. according to the paradigm of modern science. According to this paradigm, that which can be represented to us as knowledge is represented in objectivity (Grant 1986, pp. 36-37). From this basic position emerges the whole scientific and technological edifice which has come to dominate the modern world. The affirmation of autonomous will leads a paradigm of knowledge which says nothing about goodness. Liberalism and modern science are both expressions of the same distinctly modern claim that human beings are autonomous will and therefore belong to the same civilizational "destiny" (Grant 1998, pp. 82-83; cf. Heidegger 1991).

As this "destiny" plays itself out, liberalism and modern science are forced to confront each other and the consequence is moral nihilism. Modern science is taken to give the best account of what is, but that account says nothing about justice or why it is good for human beings. When liberalism is pressed and we are forced to ask why justice may be compelling, we find that we are unable to provide a good answer. The reason is that our commitment to justice is a holdover from antiquity, the broader arguments of which no longer appear compelling in modernity. In effect, liberalism's commitment to justice is not native to modernity and not essential to liberalism. When modern liberalism is brought to its logical conclusion—i.e. when it is thought as part of a unified destiny to which modern science also belongs—we find that it cannot give robust reasons for being just. As a result, Grant dramatically declares that a "terrifying darkness" is descending upon justice, within which we cannot know why justice is good for human beings (Grant 1998, p. 86). Liberal 'justice' cannot but be dispelled by modern science and the outcome is a nihilism in which there is no need for justice.

IV: THE FUTURE OF LIBERALISM

Grant's assessment of liberalism in *English-Speaking Justice* is not a departure from his prior criticism in *Lament for a Nation*, but an intensification of that criticism. In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant argues that the disappearance of Canada is part of a broader historical building of the universal and homogeneous state, a state which is structurally opposed to human excellence. The progressive realization of the liberal regime is at the same time the destruction of human excellence. In surprising contrast to *Lament*, however, *English-*

Speaking Justice clearly expresses sympathy for the practical tradition of liberalism—but this sympathy is preparation for an even more severe criticism. Despite liberalism's historical provision of justice, liberalism is unable to give adequate reasons why we ought to be just. The reasons upon which it has hitherto relied are pre-modern in nature and stand in contradiction to modern ways of knowing the world. When confronted with the conclusions of modern science from which it cannot be divorced, liberalism cannot give adequate reasons for justice. Contemporary nihilism is not an accident or error of liberalism, but liberalism brought to its logical conclusion.

In this context, it is with some trepidation that Canadians may confront their expulsion from the inner-circle of the American empire, the apparent dissolution of the "rules-based order," and the flagging American commitment to the rule of law. Canada's membership in the American empire came with a commitment to freedom as the highest political principle and to open-ended change and hence a rejection of conservatism. That is, Canada's membership in the American empire came with a rejection of limits and restraints upon freedom. Canada's expulsion from that empire, however, does not indicate a recovery of those limits. Canada did not voluntarily turn away from the universal and homogeneous state out of a renewed sense of conservatism but was forcibly expelled from the inner-circle of the American empire so that the United States could dominate it and, if possible, annex it. Indeed, following this expulsion, Canadian politicians seem more committed than ever to preserving the rules-based order first built by the United States. Though the United States seems to have abandoned it, Canadian politicians want to preserve the universal and homogeneous state and, if possible, become its leading member. In the liberal vacuum created by the United States, Canada enthusiastically recommits itself to the liberal order and the construction of the universal and homogeneous state, even and especially while it appears to be collapsing elsewhere.

What are we to make of this recommitment? At first blush, it suggests that *Lament for a Nation* was wrong or, minimally, incomplete in its analysis. Canada's recommitment suggests that it is now on the bleeding edge of liberalism and that the United States is being left behind. The United States does not appear to be driving forward the liberal project because, if it were, it would be building the universal and homogeneous state. Liberalism in the United States seems to have stalled or perhaps recentred itself in Canada and/or Europe. What is more, the fact that liberalism could stall in a country like the United States suggests that liberalism is not so inevitable as Grant argued.

If we consider the situation through the lens of *English-Speaking Justice*, however, we can see that precisely the opposite is true: the United States has not been left behind, but continues to represent liberalism at its most developed. In *English-Speaking Justice*, Grant shows that liberalism as a project cannot ultimately sustain itself. Whatever commitment to fairness, equality, and justice it may have long harbored, liberalism is part of a modern destiny which itself cannot ultimately provide reasons for justice. Though liberalism provided a workable system of justice for centuries, when its details are worked out and it faces increasing scrutiny, we find that it cannot provide compelling reasons why justice is due to everyone. Historically, liberalism has aimed for justice in building a society of free and equal people, but ultimately that project is hollow to its core because it cannot give reasons for itself. When modern liberalism has unfolded itself and brought itself to its logical conclusion, it collapses upon itself in recognition that it has no compelling reasons for justice. The end of liberalism is the abandonment of liberalism.

Seen through this lens, the United States' abandonment of the rule of law and the global administrative regime that is the "rules-based order" reflects the fact that liberalism is *more* developed there than it is in Canada. The United States committed itself to liberalism earlier and with less attachment to the pre-modern world than Canada. Liberalism has developed more rapidly and completely in the United States. The consequence of this is that the United States also approached liberalism's collapse more rapidly. As the end state of liberalism is nihilism and an abandonment of justice, the turn away from the "rules-based order" and the rule of law indicates that the United States continues to lead the development of liberalism. Canada may still be trying to build a universal and homogeneous state, but as the logic of liberalism works itself out Canada too will discover this project is not ultimately compelling and will join the United States in liberal collapse.

This trajectory of liberalism would appear to stand in contradiction to the argument of *Lament*, but is in fact in agreement. In *Lament*, Grant does not discuss the collapse of the universal and homogeneous state in any detail. Nevertheless, he indicates in that book and in "Tyranny and Wisdom" that liberalism and the universal and homogeneous state are a project of self-contradiction. As I noted above, the universal and homogeneous state cannot be expected to satisfy its own criteria: instead of providing universal satisfaction, it would be a state filled with Last Men and Nihilists. The universal and homogeneous state purports to make everyone free, but deprives them of anything to do with that freedom. The two responses to this empty freedom are to delude oneself into the comfortable life of a Last Man or to recognize that the liberal project and its promise of justice are hollow and so descend into nihilism. Grant knew well in *Lament for a Nation* that the universal and homogeneous state would ultimately collapse upon itself leaving only nihilism in its ruins.

Seen through the lens of *Lament for a Nation* and *English-Speaking Justice*, the recent turn of events should come as no surprise. It was not a matter of 'if,' but 'when.' Though the United States, Canada, and a great many other nations have apparently shared a liberal consensus, we have now discovered that this consensus is not durable and will not provide a long-term guarantee of justice. Liberalism long preserved the belief that everyone should be treated fairly and justly, and thereby inspired great hope in a universal and homogeneous state. Yet those who now occupy the seat of political power openly question why other countries or individuals deserve justice or respect when such justice and respect is not obviously in the self-interest of the powerful. Opposition politicians and pundits can only offer floundering and anemic responses because they find there are no coherent reasons why justice is owed to everyone. Whatever appeal the universal and homogeneous state may have once had, that appeal has faded. Why should there be international cooperation? Why shouldn't the United States annex Canada if annexation will enrich Americans? Why should we bother with due process for the weak and the marginal? Any response to these questions is too obviously sentimental and out of touch with reality. The way we have come to know the world tells us that we owe nothing of justice. Justice is merely a convenient arrangement that lasts so far and as long as it convenes with self-interest.

Canadians may find that their hoped-for universal and homogeneous state is collapsing before their eyes and that this turn of events is difficult to bear, particularly as it does not obviously come with a recovery of conservatism. The universal and homogeneous state has collapsed because its guiding principle—liberalism—cannot find coherent reasons for justice. We may have first lamented the impossibility of conservatism, but now we find ourselves also lamenting the collapse of liberalism as it is replaced by nihilism. Nevertheless, we should not despair. Though nihilism is a frightening prospect, Grant counsels us to take heart even in the face of catastrophe:

> It would be the height of pessimism to believe that our society could go on in its present directions without bringing down upon itself catastrophes. To believe the foregoing would be pessimism, for it would imply that the nature of things does not bring forth human excellence (Grant 2005, pp. lxxv-lxxvi).

NOTES

1 Grant cites the example of Quebec and its Catholic traditions. The commitment of Quebec to the vision of the good life provided by Catholicism meant that it could resist the progressivism which dominated the rest of North America. But as Quebec sought the material benefits of a progressive society, it also unwittingly undermined the social structures which allowed Catholicism to shape and cultivate its vision of a life of virtue.

2 This reading of Locke obviously rings of Hobbes. For Grant, Locke and Hobbes have essentially the same teaching; the main difference between them is that Locke employed "bland and indirect rhetoric" and thereby found

support in "generations of English-speaking bourgeois." A difference in rhetoric is not, ultimately, a difference in substance (Grant 1998, p. 18).

3 Later in his career Rawls would go on to clarify that the original position is a device used by legislators and community representatives to ensure that their negotiations over social arrangements are fair. The original position is not employed by "egoistic" individuals, as Grant's description would suggest (Song 2006, pp. 103-5; Rawls 1996, pp. 72ff., 105-6). Nevertheless, the fact remains that, even if they are not directly involved in legislation or negotiation, the member individuals of a society must consent to the negotiated social arrangements if contractarian justice is going to work. Grant would insist that for Rawls's theory to work, every member of society must, in principle, see that the negotiations conducted in the original position are in their overall interest.

4 Grant also argues that this pre-modern tradition was necessary to make distinctly modern moral theories practically workable. For example, Lockean contractarianism on its own is insufficient to guarantee an ordered society because it could not justify certain necessary life-risking occupations (e.g. a soldier). Lockean contractarianism requires a populace broadly committed to unconditional justice. Historically, Protestantism provided the "moral cement" for this commitment. Thus even modern political theory has depended on the pre-modern moral tradition (Grant 1998, p. 62).

5 It bears noting that the moral neutrality of external relations is not necessarily a function of moral agnosticism. For example, for Kant the duties imposed by the moral fact of reason are quite indubitable. Yet precisely because morality belongs to the will alone is it necessary to have a morally neutral state: the state should create the space for individuals to freely self-legislate morality (Grant 1998, p. 28). We may remind ourselves, however, that for Grant liberalism's commitment to justice is a holdover from pre-modern thought and not native to modernity itself.

6 As Grant notes elsewhere, "object" comes the Latin *ob* + *iacio* = thrown against. The German word is *Gegenstand*, that which "stands against." What is indicated in both is the separation between knower and known (Grant 1986, p. 36).

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A Love of One's Own: How the Good Touches Ground in National Belonging

TOIVO KOIVUKOSKI
Nipissing University

Abstract: This essay explores George Grant's use of the phrase "a love of one's own" as describing a basis for political community. Drawing on Grant's use of Plato, I seek to understand how an idea of shared goods possessing both eidetic stability and some claim to universality can touch ground in beautiful, distinguishing particulars. Given Grant's critique of the possibility of Canada existing independently of a powerful neighbour to the south with, in his words, no history pre-dating modernity, what can Canadians appeal to as being distinctly our own? Within the wash of liberalism, what kinds of autochthonous belonging can be intimated here so as to answer the perils of our time, without resorting to some form of mythologized ethno-nationalism?

Keywords: George Grant; Plato; national identity; political community; American empire; Canada

Given the rise of decidedly illiberal regimes, social movements, and insurgencies of various religious and ideological stripes, given animus by pushback against globalization and critiques of liberalism, George Grant's lament at the impossibility of Canadian nationalism in 1965 now seems quaintly sage. His concern at the time was that, in practical terms, Canada was incapable of charting an independent foreign policy given its reliance on the United States for defence, and that ideologically, there was little left of Canada's founding nations to distinguish Canadian values from the wash of liberalism, and a shared devotion to the realization of human freedom as the highest good. In the absence of such distinctions at the levels of practices and perceptions, there would be little reason to balk at the suggestion that Canada should be willfully annexed by its neighbour, in order to enjoy greater material prosperity by doing away with that supposedly anachronistic border.

And yet Grant was clear in his insistence that his lament at the fate of Canada was by no means a tragic assessment; that the lament bore out a remembrance of something good, even if that calling of memory was felt as an intimation of deprival. He repeatedly called his readers towards a "love of one's own" as a means by which the Good as such could touch ground, and manifest in beautiful, distinctive particulars, even as those differences were being levelled and homogenized.

This essay will explore Grant's use of this phrase—a love of one's own—as a way of countering the shallowness of liberalism as public faith, as in a secular belief in prog-

ress that is no longer sufficient for the purposes of social cohesion, lacking shared aspirations towards a common Good, which is what any national community needs.

A LOVE OF ONE'S OWN

What is one's own, in its distinguishing uniqueness, such that its defining form, the singularity that holds together its granular particulars, can participate in a universal good? For every community is constituted by its shared goods, and all human, historical communities are temporal phenomena, held together for a moment in what Plato calls a moving image of eternity (*Timaeus*, 37d). This is the great paradox at the basis of possibility for transcendence, both noetic and emotional. That is, the unchanging must somehow move a human being, this most temporally-oriented, historical and rhythmic of living beings, while remaining unmoved itself. And the particular must somehow participate in the universal, without diminishing or taking away a part of the universal as such, while at the same time retaining its particular beauty and goodness. A beautiful paradox, and for that vexing reason a perennial question in the history of ideas, from the time of Plato to the present.

For if what is one's own in a political sense is not to be somehow reductionist, say to a biologically deterministic racism, as in some kind of ethno-nationalist, blood and soil belonging (impossible in North America except for its First Nations, though apparently possible elsewhere, as in illiberal democracies and various populist, racist nationalisms), then that which is most our own must be considered with this quality of transcendence, or experience of otherness built into it. A love of one's own demands this, because love implies the knowledge that something essential to one's being is beyond oneself. All communities are predicated on this basic need for others. This basic attachment to and consideration of one's neighbours implies that they are not entirely like us, and that we need each other precisely because of this.

Plato tells this story about love in the *Symposium*, which has a younger Socrates being instructed and questioned by the priestess Diotima. The priestess tells Socrates an origin story for the god Eros, which has him being born of two other deities, Need and Resource, and with love thus implying lack and the desire for some needed other, and the means of finding some fulfillment with them (*Symposium*, 203b-204c).

This Platonic love is born out of incompleteness, what Grant would call our "intimations of deprival", including the needs that we carry with us as living animals, along with the resourcefulness of intelligence by which the human race meets those living, breathing needs. We direct our intelligence to solve the problems of the world, because we are such needy creatures, needing first and foremost a political community in which we can each be born and gather together with others for decent, hopefully prosperous, and happiness-making lives.

The paradox at the core of this idea of community in terms of a love of one's own is that human desire lays claim to a universal, as in a common good that a community can share in, while at the same time touching ground in beautiful particulars. For although this Platonic idea of love is premised on the possibility of transcendence, finding something essential to one's being beyond oneself, still the object of erotic attention must entail this specific beautiful person, or this particular political community.

This mode of participation of the particular in the universal, and the temporal in the eternal, culminates in Diotima's teaching to Socrates concerning that which is "alone by itself and with itself, always being of a single form; while all other beautiful things that share in it do so in such a way that while it neither becomes anything more or less, nor is affected at all, the rest do come to be and perish" (*Symposium*, 21a).

Perhaps there is a measure of grace in this paradox, that would save political identities from the overdetermination of just what is loveable as one's own. For if what is one's own is given at the level of reductionist level of, say, race, then there would be a strict, unquestionable identity between members of that community. It would be in the blood, the skin colour, hair and eyes. National community at this level would be no more of an open question, no more open to constitutive deliberation and collective choice, than the choice of who one's parents are.

Rather, what is so wonderful about this idea of a love of one's own as the good is that there always remains a gap in that moment of appeal, a kind of open synapse between how the good lights up particulars and how it transcends them.

And yet, in desiring to know what Plato means by the Good as such, that source of the being of beings inasmuch as they are what they are, true to their innermost self-same form, it is quite possible to get the idea wrong, and in precisely an opposite manner to what Plato intended. For the notion of the Good as the singular, defining idea, by which all things share in some specific, archetypal form of goodness, whether it is to be a good horse, or a good regime, or a good person, or a good law, is easily confused with an imposition of anthropocentric ideals.

It is a lapse in dialectical thought to be sure, to leap from the assurance that there are universal and eternal truths that undergird and make sense of our temporal, worldly, particular experiences, to some kind of assumption that those universal and eternal truths can be known in an ideologically fixed way. But it is easy to see how one could be misled in this way, in a synaptic leap between particular and universal, or temporal and eternal, especially if the question of the good is framed within the specific context of historicism, with all ideas conceived as specific and relative to their time and place, or as mere moments in a progressive history of ideas. Or in the terms of radical historicism, the good is less loveable when conceived as an open-ended overcoming of horizons, with ideas of the good re-jigged as values tested by their improbability, as means of self-overcoming for the human will, rather than standards by which our wills are to be guided and tested.

Indeed, post-modern interpretations of Plato from Nietzsche to the present have characterized the radical re-jigging of the Ancient Greek *eidos* as a defining moment in the history of ideas: from *eidos* as the mere outward looks and visible aspects of a thing in Homer, an *eidos* dwelling in a mythic cosmos where being is characterized by shifting forms, power and the appearance of power, to its defining essence and source of being in Plato, where the *eidos* is what is real because it does not change.

Plato's ontological emphasis on eidetic stability as the measure of beings is thus cast as the logo-centric turn in the history of ideas, a turn that diminishes a world of appearances in flux to being mere shadows on the cave-wall of mass opinion, in an over-weaning imposition of ideals onto reality. For if the fundamental principle underlying Plato's substitution of *muthos* for *logos* as the true word is true, namely the principle of non-contradiction, that a being cannot be both itself and other than itself at the same time, then historicism is wrong in principle, and that which changes can only be known in relation to that which does not change, such that "the nature of the necessary and the good really differ" (*Republic*, 436b).

It is this basic distinction between what may be necessary, including the compulsions imposed by power in its various permutations, and what is good, that is dissolved by historicism in its various instantiations, from secular faith in progress, to open-ended conceptions of values and the revaluation of values as historically specific goods created by the fiat of human will. For if the many changing conceptions of the good as values are the animus of historical change, being both the ends and means of liberating the human will, then the good cannot stand independently of supposed historical necessity, but is a self-fulfilling ideal to the extent that the human historical will is empowered to realize it. In Grant's view, this formulation of the revaluation of values as measure of human, historical accomplishment is incoherent, for to what end and purpose (and within what limits) is the will so conceived liberated?

> In the conceptions of history now prevalent among those 'creative' men who plan the mastery of the planet, changing the world becomes ever more an end in itself. It is undertaken less simply to overcome the natural accidents that frustrate our humanity and more and more for the sheer sake of the 'creation' of novelty. This movement inevitably grows among the resolute as the remnants of any belief in a loveable actuality disappear. We will, not so much for some end beyond will, but for the sake of willing itself (Grant 1995, p. 27).

What goes missing in such conceptions of what is worth doing are any measures by which to discern when the will is misguided, beyond technological measures of efficiency of means and efficacy of design. It is at this historical juncture that it is worth asking what could ground, moderate and guide shared aspirations beyond the relentless pursuit of freedom, so as to begin answering Grant's question, "how do we know what is worth doing with our freedom?" (Grant 1969, p. 138)

THE PLACE OF THE GOOD

Even when Grant seeks to root the shared good in some apprehension of autochthony, of belonging to place, the very soil beneath our feet, he does so in a way that cannot be reduced to some mere stuff of which we're made. His friend Dennis Lee recounts:

> George Grant once gave me a particular gift. We were sitting in the living room of his house in Dundas. I'd been telling him about the patch of ground where I most belong—a couple of acres by a lake north of Toronto, where we spent summers when I was a boy.
>
> "How *marvellous*, Dennis!" he boomed, with that outsize gusto which always took me off guard. A tumble of ashes came snaking down his cardigan. "How *marvellous*! It's what Plato meant, isn't it?..." Abruptly I felt myself paddling along about twenty steps behind him. How had Plato come into this?
>
> But he went on—more gingerly, I thought. "…That we're made to love the Good." *What*? I tried to interpret the shift in his tone, since the sense was eluding me. He seemed concerned that he might be offending me; evidently the connection between my cottage and the Good was so obvious that I might feel patronized if he spelled it out. I tried not to let my bewilderment show. "And the way we come to love the Good is by first loving our own. … How marvellous for you, having that place in Muskoka to love!" More ashes tumbled onto the cardigan.[1] (Emberley 1990, p. 11)

It may help political philosophy to have poetry on its side. It can take a poet's eye to find the fullness of a character in a detail like cigarette ashes tumbling down a professor's cardigan. Or likewise, for a philosopher to uplift a friend's memory of a childhood cottage (a very Southern Ontario term: as one approaches Northern Ontario it would be called a "camp" instead) into an apprehension of Plato's idea of the Good.

There is that basic wonder in the experience of some especially beautiful aspect of one's community, whether it is the ritual of summers at camp on the lake, or an enlightening talk with a dear friend. As the experiences of shared goods scale up, from family, to friendship, to community, those attachments do get thinner.[2] This is where poetry can once again help political philosophy, by providing myths, those likely stories that recount impossible to know, cosmogonic origin stories, and that can guide virtuous action without dictating as doctrine, since myths need interpretation.

Though Plato is the first to begin the transformation of *muthos* from the true word that it is for the poet Homer, in the direction of mere story, to be replaced by *logos*, the philosopher Plato is also quite ready to lean on myths where reason cannot go. For myth can help philosophy in accounting for how the *polis* is a larger ordered whole, and indeed how we may each be ordered wholes within ourselves, with the parts of our souls harmonized within- being friends to ourselves, with that unity within pointing to a cosmological order that transcends any one of us.

For as both Plato and Aristotle seem to agree, myth and philosophy bear a certain likeness, in that both begin in wonder.[3] It is a good sign for a philosopher to be capable of this, much as Grant exclaims with marvel at his poet friend's recollection of summer cottage life. This is both because this kind of experience, quite like Platonic love, attaches meaning to the world, while at the same time causing one to question what those meanings are.

What then might be those particular sources of wonder that could ground and overarch a distinctively Canadian identity, as familiar as the path from one's front door and as universally shared as the sun in the sky? Grant calls out the Canadian Rockies as a national landmark, as awesome as chunks of rock can be. Anyone who has stood before them, whether native or tourist, cannot help but to feel a twinge of awe. And yet, Grant observes that,

> When we go into the Rockies we may have a sense that gods are there. But if so, they cannot manifest themselves to us as ours. They are the gods of another race, and we cannot know them because of what we are, and what we did (Grant 1969, p. 17).

This is the kind of primal autochthony that Grant means—gods gone absent from a landscape reduced to matter in motion subject to forces, mere stuff, where meaning is produced through the overcoming of the environment, subjugated through the overcoming of technological horizons. This casts back to the settler experience in North America, except for the *Autochthones* whom Grant rather tragically, and perhaps unfairly, assesses as having been just barely allowed to survive in this new world (Grant 1969, p. 16). And yet this is the still animating primal for the new North Americans, their encounter with a new land in a way that allowed for the old world, and its myths and histories pre-dating the age of progress, to be left behind, if not altogether forgotten.

What distinguishes the Canadian experience of North America for Grant is that there lingers an apprehension that something has gone missing in the devotion to progress through the technological transformation of nature into resources. For unlike the revolutionary origins of the United States, which meant that it had no history pre-dating the era of progress, Canada was borne out of the constitutive relations between three founding nations: British, French and First Nations. This has meant that the freedom of the individual is not sacrosanct in either Canadian political culture or constitution, since our identity is constituted by those relations amongst others.

Older virtues, dating back to Plato, or the Anishinaabeg Grandfather teachings, like love and wisdom can perhaps still have some play in public discourse here, without being de-valued into mere values conceived as self-made horizons of the human will. A sense of self-worth can still be linked to respect for others and for the natural world, as if human beings have a given, purposive nature in themselves that makes those presences of nature into something more than mere externalities. For as Socrates implies when he refuses to flee an unjust punishment to save his own life, it is never justified to repay injustice with injustice, in his case because he owed his being to Athens (*Crito*, 50e). Just so, to be Canadian is to be obliged to one's community, and to the lands and waters that sustain a sharing in common goods.

And yet, the Canadian experience makes one aware of the powerful drive to transform nature into a hostile field of happenstance, and to view others as an incidental collection of pleasure-seeking automatons who may be either useful or harmful to oneself, depending on the circumstances. There is a persistent truth in Grant's indictment that there are no real options within the ideological wash of liberalism, other than between an older version of classical liberalism conceived as conservatism, though ultimately owed to thinkers like Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke, and versions of late modernity traceable to Rousseau, Hegel and Kant, who conceived human freedom through the lens of historicism. Between the early and late moderns there is a fundamental consensus though that the ultimate measure of human relations with each other and with the non-human natural world is human freedom, however variously conceived.

If there is to be such an awareness of this ideological straight-jacket, then some perspective from outside of the asylum is needed. And this is where some recourse to older traditions and myths upholds the critical perspective of being Canadian. For while Canadians may understand American political and popular culture, to the extent that the country is awash in both, they can still know that this is not all.

It may indeed be true that history brings certain necessities to bear on the human experience, and that human nature consists at least in part of violent compulsions, drives and aversions. But if necessity is not all, if there remains some light between what is perceived as being necessary and what is thought to be

good, then it is not enough to shrug off the forces that come to bear on a diminutive neighbour from the most powerful nation the world has known, militarily and economically; but rather, as Grant indicts, "… it would be immoderate and uncourageous and perhaps unwise to live in the midst of our present drive, merely working in it and celebrating it, and not also listening and watching or simply waiting for intimations of deprival which might lead us to see the beautiful as the image, in the world, of the good" (Grant 1969, p. 143).

It is telling that in the face of some apparent necessity, Grant invokes ancient, classical virtues: moderation, courage, and wisdom. Even in the times when those virtues and others were first and most fully articulated by Plato and Aristotle, the vicissitudes of regimes threatened the sort of standing back and looking on that would allow a person to see power for what it was, without functioning as a lackey to the current political order. With Athenian regimes then violently lurching from democracy, to oligarchy and back again, and given the manifest threats to the practice of philosophy- in the execution of Socrates by the Athenian *demos*, the imprisonment of Plato by the tyrant Dionysius, and Aristotle's flight from Athens so that it could not sin against philosophy a second time—the possibility of philosophy is always precarious. Regimes are all, every one of them, even more precarious, to the extent that none of them always was, or always will be. So, to find something of enduring importance in any one ephemeral collection of human beings remains the shared providence of philosophy and poetry, which can beautifully transcend their time.

This is part of what Grant accomplished in his lament at the passing of Canada as an independent nation, given the forces brought to bear on that particular state as it sought to articulate a truly independent foreign policy. The point of the lament was not to force an articulation of a distinctively Canadian foreign policy, or a means of unravelling the continent's branch-plant economy, however well-intentioned the efforts of practical people who did so as critiques of his *Lament for a Nation*.[4] The point was rather to step back from the underlying premise of liberalism, that freedom is the highest good for human beings, and that historical forces march humanity in that direction. The specific means by which he suggested doing so require articulating what goes missing in that drive, and this is partly why particulars matter. His response to the universalizing and homogenizing effects of what we might now call globalization was to decry them as false universals, set apart from the beautiful particulars that are the way to an idea of the good that transcends any one of those particulars.

If there is something obvious to the point of oblivion about the apparent goodness of the universal and homogenous state- for why would one possibly not want to eliminate wars between states, or class conflict within them?- then there is an ephemeral, searching character to the connections between the particular instantiations of beauty that hold us together as families and communities and the notions of the good that such connections intimate. The "intimations of deprival" that Grant articulates in the face of an American imperium functioning as the spearhead of modernity depend on these intimations of beauty, from Dennis Lee's attachment to his cottage in Muskoka to the awe experienced as the Rockies rise into sight over the western prairies. As human beings, with our own dear perspectives, unique territorial situations, and mortal limits, we cannot leap over our own shadows in some kind of direct link between particular and universal. The good must touch ground for us, and yet precisely because it must, that apprehension of the good is limited by our specific experience of it.

As a rejoinder to Grant in part, I cannot see how his intimation of Canada's mortal limits was an affirmation that the drive towards continental integration in North America had "made Canada redundant" (Grant 1998, p. 78). For even if all that remains are these antiquated languages of moderation, courage and wisdom, then that can hardly be called redundant, even if those languages have little currency in popular discourse, shameless as it may be. It is never redundant to be able to think; indeed in the classical tradition it is precisely the divine uselessness of philosophy that is sign of what it is good for, being unlike technical knowledge suited to solving the problems of the world. In the original meaning of thought as *theoria*, it is to be beset by what is. The theorist as such would have in its most archaic, basic sense meant a delegation to the Olympic games or religious festival, whose role was to bring back an account of what they saw, with this requiring that they were not active contestants or believers themselves[5] (Gadamer 1981, p. 17). This seems

to be very much what Grant is doing in bearing witness to Canada's precarious relation with the United States, that is being beset by what is, so as to know things for what they are.

Grant's quite correct apprehension as to the imperial dimension of America's existence, at a time when talk of American imperialism was the limited province of the Marxist-Leninist school of political economy, has been borne out quite clearly, from a full-throated endorsement of empire as being good for the United States and the world in its neo-conservative moment, to a less ideologically ambitious pivot to regional hegemony presently. After the end of history, in the absence of a cumulative negation that would bring freedom and equality to the whole of the planet, one is apparently left with a multi-polar collection of great powers content to cut deals amongst themselves to coerce their weaker neighbours into submission as vassal states. There is in the latter less ideological coherence, though the imperial drive remains, with Canadian sovereignty vulnerable in either case, whether steam-rolled for some progressive historical purpose, or simply taken up in the desire for power after power. And it is this precariousness of Canada's situation that calls upon some principled sense of the good as retort, if only to know what goes missing if those imperial designs succeed.

NOTES

1 It is worth noting that Grant's preface to *English-Speaking Justice* recognizes Dennis Lee and Alex Colville as "two artists who taught me about justice".

2 Aristotle seems right in his critique of Plato's *Republic* in this regard, (*Politics*, II.A.1.) though this may be a matter of the audience of the *Politics* if we pair it as natural accompaniment to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, addressed more to the *agathai ge kai kalai*, the good and fine, (I.8.13.) practical gentlemen, rather than to pure students of philosophy, and thus treating that "city in speech" (*Rep*ublic, 369a) as an impractical blueprint rather than as an archetypal test-piece for actual regimes.

3 "For this feeling of wonder shows that you are a philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning of philosophy, and he who said that Iris was the child of Thaumas made a good genealogy" (*Theaetetus*, 155d).

"It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize; wondering in the first place at obvious perplexities, and then by gradual progression raising questions about the greater matters too… Now he who wonders and is perplexed feels that he is ignorant (thus the myth-lover [*philomuthos*] is in a sense a philosopher, since myths are composed of wonders)…" (*Metaphysics*, 982b11).

4 For a contemporary example, see Michael Byers' *Intent for a Nation*. However pragmatic his intentions or idealistic his tone, his advice that Canada adopt a multi-lateral approach to security through pooled sovereignties is not a detraction from Grant's argument in principle, while his advocacy of a post-national form of identity as being uniquely suited to cosmopolitanism and global governance seems to align with Grant's point that the corrosive effects of liberalism as ideology undermine any distinctive claims to national identity based in autochthonous belonging.

5 Liddell and Scott (1968) account for *to theoreion* simply as "a place for seeing".

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Ontology, Democracy and Totalitarianism in George Grant: A Response to Ryan Alexander McKinnell

TYLER CHAMBERLAIN
Trinity Western University

Abstract: This article responds to Ryan Alexander McKinnell's recent critique of George Grant that accused him of minimizing the differences between American democracy and Soviet totalitarianism. This article recognizes that Grant described America and the USSR as rival empires and ascribed a similar underlying philosophical foundation to both political systems but contextualizes those claims within two considerations. First, Grant explicitly endorsed the political principles of freedom, equality, and representation. His concern with the ontological basis the USA shared with the USSR was not that it rendered political differences trivial but that it could not sustain a constitutional political order for long. Second, against McKinnell's claim that Grant downplayed the difference between modern ideologies, I argue that Grant corrects the Straussian tendency to conceive of early modern liberalism as a safeguard of constitutional liberal democracy. On the contrary, the ontological basis for the undermining of freedom, equality, and representation is fully present in early modern liberalism.

Keywords: George Grant, Democracy, Totalitarianism, Ideologies, Ontology

INTRODUCTION

For those of us unpersuaded by the neo-Hegelian progressivism that expects political freedoms to increase over time, Liberal Democracy and the associated principles of freedom and equality are the results of historical accident, prudent statecraft, and perhaps once-lost metaphysical or theological convictions. The sweep of human history reminds us that healthy political institutions, once gained, can be just as easily lost. For that reason, the political philosopher must find an appropriate balance between criticizing injustice and preserving what is noble in their political situation. Haphazardly encouraging readers to disregard what should be protected is highly imprudent. It is for this reason that Ryan Alexander McKinnell's recent essay, "Between the Pincers: George Grant and the Crisis of Totalitarianism," raises timely questions with which admirers and detractors of George Grant ought to wrestle.

McKinnell suggests that Grant's invective against modern technology and its political manifestation in the Universal Homogenous State ultimately does not allow him to account for the moral and political differences between Liberal Democracy and Totalitarianism. Since Grant argues that all modern ideologies are products of the tech-

nological drive to mastery over human and non-human nature, the American and Soviet empires are ultimately pursuing the same end. "For Grant," McKinnell writes, "the ideological differences between liberalism and communism are superficial as both are merely variants of the technological agenda to create the Universal Homogenous State (UHS). The United States and the Soviet Union are only 'rival empires' because they both share a conception of the end or goal of human striving" (McKinnell 2024, p. 272). He goes on to describe Grant's "collapsing of the differences between liberal democracy and totalitarianism," such that "Grant's reflections on the crisis of totalitarianism instill profound doubts about the justness of liberal democracy compared to its totalitarian counterparts and our commitment to its preservation" (McKinnell 2024, pp. 272, 273). McKinnell concludes his essay by suggesting that Grant suffered from a failure to carry out the "central task of political science: differentiating between better and worse in light of the good" (McKinnell 2024, p. 284). Put another way, we might say that Grant, the inheritor of the political traditions found within classical philosophy and religion, was so focused on highlighting the dangers of the modern technological dynamo that he failed to properly undertake the prudential task of supporting the lesser evil of liberal democracy in the face of the totalitarian threat. This is in contrast to other proponents of classical thought like Leo Strauss who nevertheless understood American-style liberal democracy to be an important good worthy of defense and protection, even if only in contrast to the horrors of Nazi Germany and the USSR.

There is much to be commended in McKinnell's argument. He is certainly right to endorse the classical and prudential emphasis on better and worse in light of the good. One is reminded of Montesquieu's political maxim: "The best is the mortal enemy of the good" (Montesquieu 2012/1720, p. 281). Moreover, McKinnell has done Grant scholars a great service in reminding us that there is indeed a tendency in Grant's writings to minimize the moral differences between capitalist democracy and communist totalitarianism. He is not entirely off-base to suggest that Grant might have been imprudent in broadcasting liberalism's inability to sustain itself without the moral cement provided by classical philosophy and religion. Moreover, McKinnell is in line with other careful readers of Grant who point out his downplaying of the political.[1]

This article is an attempt to provide an alternative explanation of the potentially troublesome elements that McKinnell identifies. The question that remains to be settled is whether Grant's specifically *political* thought is as essentially problematic as McKinnell suggests. I do not think that this is so, and will attempt to show this by asking the two following questions:

1) Does Grant's critique of modernity implicate the political principles of freedom and equality themselves, or just the ontological foundation by which modernity claims to uphold these political principles? In other words, is Grant's central claim that liberal democracy is bad (or at least no better than totalitarianism), or that it cannot be sustained by what moderns (capitalist as well as socialist) believe about themselves and the world?
2) Does Grant downplay political-ideological differences to the extreme extent that McKinnell claims he does?

Given the theme of this special issue of *Cosmos + Taxis*, I will address these points primarily by way of arguments in *Lament For A Nation*, though other texts will be brought in as required as they elaborate on arguments Grant makes in *Lament*.

ONTOLOGY AND POLITICS

We can begin by clarifying the way in which Grant takes the USA and USSR to be, as McKinnell put it (referencing Heidegger), metaphysically the same. McKinnell's argument begins with the undeniable fact that Grant spoke of American liberal capitalism and Soviet Communism is being vehicles of technological progress and of each working toward the Universal Homogenous State: "The masses and philosophers have

both agreed that this universal and egalitarian society is the goal of historical striving. It gives content to the rhetoric of both Communists and capitalists" (Grant 2005/1965, p. 52).[2] The UHS, Grant argues, will be brought about by the technological control of human and non-human nature. Both ideological systems are progressive in the sense that they see history as moving towards a particular endpoint at which all people will be free and equal once natural restraints have been technologically removed. Over and above any abstract arguments from the nature of justice, this is concerning to Grant as a Canadian—that is, as a member of one of the particular cultures that will be eradicated by this universalizing impulse.

One way to understand Grant's point here can be summarized by the following statements:

1) The UHS is undesirable (for a number of reasons).
2) The American and Soviet politico-economic systems each work towards the implementation of the UHS.
3) Therefore, the American and Soviet politico-economic systems are roughly morally equivalent.

The second and third points could be extended even further by looking to Grant's argument that the United States is better situated as a progressive force, owing to Marxism's holding on to a pre-modern conception of the human good. American-style liberalism, Grant insists, rejects even this in favour of "an open-ended progression in which men will be endlessly free to make the world as they want it" (Grant 2005/1965, p. 55). If we accept this reading, the plausibility of McKinnell's conclusion comes into clear focus. If America is the spearhead of progress then its Liberal Democratic political institutions would appear to be implicated.

However, this rests on a failure to properly distinguish between the Liberal Democratic principles of freedom, equality, and representative government themselves, and the modern, progressive—and shall we say, *technological*—ontology by which these principles are supported in our age. It is clear that Grant hoped to raise awareness of the limitations of the modern technological ontology, but it is also clear that he defended liberty, equality, and representation as important political goods themselves. If America is the spearhead of progress, it is not because of its commitment to elections or an enshrined Bill of Rights, per se, but the ontology that undergirds them. To take just one example from *Lament For a Nation*, in a crucial passage Grant notes that the Capitalist democracies in the English-speaking world are preferable to the totalitarianisms of eastern Europe: "whatever the imperfections of American government, it remains at least formally constitutional, while the Marxist societies are tyrannies" (Grant 2005/1965, p. 61). It is clear that whatever Grant was lamenting in this book, it was not the constitutional form of government that nominally defines the American regime.

Much of Grant's project in the years after the publication of *Lament For A Nation* was to further articulate what Peter C. Emberley has called "the language of lament" (Emberley 2009, p. 351). He does this particularly well in *English-Speaking Justice*, which opens with the reminder that the technological character of modern civilization has "determining power over our politics and sexuality, our music and education" (Grant 1985/1974, p. 1). The target of Grant's lamenting—in *Lament For A Nation* as well as here—was not simply the political *superstructures* in which we live but the novel understanding of the relationship between man and nature that acts as a *substructure* determining everything else. A recurring theme in this work is that modern ontological assumptions cannot sustain a politics of freedom and equality, despite the lip service paid to them. This is seen most clearly in Grant's critique of John Rawls, especially worth exploring here given Rawls' status as one of the great expositors of liberal democracy in the 21st century. Grant's attitude toward Rawlsian liberalism sheds light on his alleged hesitation to defend liberal democracy in the face of the totalitarian threat.

The question Grant poses to Rawls is whether contractarianism "can provide a foundation for the principles of justice he [that is, Rawls] builds upon it" (Grant 1984/1974, p. 16). Rawls' 1971 book *A Theory of Justice* is compared to the work of Locke and Kant, the chief difference being that while the latter thinkers provided at least a minimal foundation in nature for their democratic principles, Rawls provides none.[3] The problem with Rawls is that he provides no answer to the question of *why* human rights ought to be respect-

ed or all people should be free and equal (Grant 1985/1974, p. 33). The famous two principles of justice are arrived at not because anything about nature or human persons makes them better than rival principles, but simply because they are what rational calculators would choose if given the opportunity. They are, in Grantian terms, values. Note his comment in *Lament For A Nation*: "Man in his freedom creates the valuable. The human good is what we choose for our good" (Grant 2005/1965, p. 55). For all of Grant's criticisms of Rawls, the reader searches in vain for substantive criticisms of the principles of justice themselves. Grant does not take serious issue with anything Rawls says about representative government, distribution of wealth, or the political equality of all citizens:

> [Rawls] advocates many liberties and equalities as the necessary content of a just regime. Sensible people can disagree with Rawls about the details of these liberties and equalities; but surely any decent human being will agree that liberty and equality are at the heart of political justice (Grant 1985/1974, pp. 42-43).

Rawls' failure, which for Grant is typical of the failure of *all* modern thought, lies in the inability to provide an ontological basis for these political goods, retreating instead into the subjective realm of freely created values. Insofar as there is a similarity between American democracy and Soviet totalitarianism, it is that since both are expressions of technological modernity and man's belief that his essence is absolute freedom to shape himself and the world, *neither* can adequately ground a salutary politics. But as I will argue below, Grant does not draw from this the lesson that representative government is not to be preferred over totalitarianism.

This is not to say that Grant does not criticize some of the political outworkings of modern liberalism or American practical policy. He criticized the Vietnam War throughout the 1960s and was outspoken against the movement for legalization of abortion and euthanasia in the 1970s and 1980s. *Lament For A Nation* features a persistent note of anti-imperialism in the face of Canada's loss of sovereignty. Grant was no strong defender of American foreign or domestic policy. However, we must say that when Grant criticizes America for its moral failings, he laments that it is not living up to the principles of freedom, equality, and representative government; the charge is not against those fundamental political principles themselves. The Vietnam War was so abhorrent to Grant because it revealed the modern willingness to set high-minded principles aside when they stood in the way of technological and economic efficiency. In other words, America was not too democratic but insufficiently democratic. Values freely chosen can be freely set aside in the name of technological efficiency or other requirements of the UHS.

Grant traces this setting-aside to modernity's inability to properly ground its principles in a view of human persons that makes rights their due. Recall the question with which Grant begins *English-Speaking Justice*, namely whether contractarianism can ground liberal principles of justice. The conclusion of his analysis is that it cannot.

I will close out this section by briefly mentioning a line of argument that appears throughout Grant's writings. Modernity cannot sustain the political principles of freedom and equality, and it certainly did not produce those principles in the first place. Classical philosophy and religion, however, grounded political thinking in an "eternal order by which human actions are measured and defined" (Grant 2005/1965, p. 71). Men participate in a world not of their own making, and wisdom and virtue involve adapting oneself to this world and giving to each person his or her due. Whether articulated in Platonic or Christian terms as the good or God, respectively, there is an objective moral order that determines the way people should be treated. The upshot is that modern liberal democracies grant equal rights because of their inheritance from classical philosophy and religion. Without the "moral cement" (Grant 1985/1974, p. 62) of the lingering, even secularized, Christianity that provided a basis in thought for the practical insistence on equal human rights, there is no good answer to the question of why all people should be respected even when doing so economically or politically inconvenient. To the extent that American Liberalism maintains constitutional protections of freedom and equality, it does this in spite of its ontology, not because of it.[4] The ontology that

has come to predominate, and which is to blame for the erosion of democratic freedoms, was largely shared with America's rival empire to the east. Language like this was taken up by McKinnell to highlight what Grant took to be similarities between the American and Soviet regimes, but I hope to have demonstrated that the similarity was on the level of underlying ontology. Grant did not minimize the real political differences between democratic and totalitarian political institutions. A close look at *Lament For a Nation*'s catalogue of contemporary ideologies will bring this into focus.

GRANT ON MODERN IDEOLOGIES

An important line of argument advanced by McKinnell is that Grant downplays the differences between modern ideologies. He writes:

> Grant contended that the differences between conservatives and liberals are a question of degree, not principle. Furthermore, not only does Grant's thesis collapse the distinction between conservativism and liberalism, but he also insisted that the differences between socialism and the other two ideologies were superficial. Beneath the surface of the meditation on Canadian sovereignty, Grant argued that the traditional understanding of politics had ceased to be relevant (McKinnell 2024, p. 274).

By "traditional understanding of the political," McKinnell means differentiating between better and worse political arrangements in light of the good. If it is true that there is no meaningful difference between conservative, liberal, or socialist regimes then there would be no real reason to prefer western liberal democracy to the Soviet totalitarianism of Grant's time or perhaps to the steadily advancing illiberal democracies of the 21st century. This has a certain plausibility given Grant's language of "rival empires" and America's imperialistic conquest of Canada.[5] However, I wish to offer an interpretation of Grant's treatment of modern ideologies that paints a different picture than a mere dismissing of the political. I argue that Grant is attempting to resist the tendency of other conservative thinkers like Leo Strauss to assume, first, that there is a meaningful ontological difference between capitalism and socialism and, second, that therefore American liberal capitalism can resist the slide into tyranny by holding the line, ontologically, as it were.

As we have seen, Grant argued that modern liberal thought lacks a sufficient ontological foundation for the freedom, equality, and representative government it purports to uphold, a claim that puts him at odds with other post-war conservatives like Leo Strauss. Despite Strauss' criticisms of modernity, he nevertheless believed that early modern thinkers – and the American republic inspired by their writings—preserved enough of the classical mindset to ground a stable constitutional order. Catherine and Michael Zuckert put Strauss' endorsement of the United States this way:

> [S]econd-wave theorists came to be impatient with the moderate elements of first-wave regimes, elements such as rule of law and constitutionalism, representative democracy, and separation of powers. These were seen as drags on history, or on human power to refashion man and society.… In a word, Strauss maintained that second-wave theory and practice conduced readily to tyranny, whereas first-wave regimes, especially the American regime, were cognizant of the dangers of tyranny and built more wisely against them. Strauss, unlike Heidegger, had no difficulty pronouncing the judgment that a mode of organizing political life prone to tyranny was much inferior to one that did not tend that way (Zuckert and Zuckert 2006, p. 76).

This instructive passage, which I take to represent something like McKinnell's view, makes an important claim. The second wave of modernity more fully embraces man's essence as freedom and is thus perfectly willing to remove constitutional protections of the individual in order to remake the world. There is therefore a meaningful ontological difference between the first and second waves and the regimes they

inspired, such that the first wave can ground healthy politics on its own terms and should be endorsed by proponents of democracy and constitutionalism. This organizational schema of modern ideologies can be summarized as follows. Even though the LIBERALISM of Locke, Smith, et al. represents a significant departure from classical thought, that fact that it conserves order, the rule of law, and an autonomous private realm entails that there is nevertheless something intrinsically CONSERVATIVE about it. There is a larger gulf, on the other hand, between these ideologies and the SOCIALISM inspired by later modern thinkers like Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx. My contention is that Grant wishes to correct this schema, not simply to minimize the differences between or conflate all three ideologies.

The purpose of the fifth chapter of *Lament For a Nation* is to articulate and defend the claim that the United States is the spearhead of modern progress; Grant defends this claim against objections from Marxists and American conservatives.[6] Against Marxists who see American capitalism as a reactionary force standing in the way of historical progress, Grant makes the provocative suggestion that liberal capitalism more fully embraces man's freedom. Insofar as socialism conceives of history as moving toward a defined endpoint in which all men will be free and equal, it retains the classical notion of a telos that transcends human willing. It defines the good for man as the satisfaction of objectively defined material needs. In our current historical period before the withering away of the state, socialism actually shares with conservatism the political project of using the state to restrict private enterprise in the name of the common good. My intention is not to defend Grant's claim that socialism is less progressive than capitalism (though we should expect nothing less from a philosopher who fits the bill as a Horowitzian "red tory…who combines elements of socialism and toryism"), but to show that his point was not to conflate the politics of liberalism and socialism (Horowitz 1966, pp. 158-159).

Turning his attention to the American conservatives who see their country as preserving western values in the face of Soviet tyranny, Grant argues that what is specifically traditional or conservative in first-wave regimes is a historical holdover from classical and Christian morality, not a result of first-wave modern thought itself. Once liberalism succeeds in undercutting even this waning pre-modern foundation for political order and the rule of law, the principles of freedom and equality that many mistakenly take to be intrinsic to liberal thought will fall by the wayside. The following passage from *Lament For A Nation* explores this idea:

> Bourgeois Protestantism, with its Catholic and Jewish imitations, have survived in the United States and give some sense of the eternal to many people. Nevertheless, these traditions—no longer the heart of American civilization—become more residual every year. Sceptical liberalism becomes increasingly the dominant ideology of those who shape society; and, it was argued earlier, this ideology is the extreme form of progressive modernity (Grant 2005/1965, p. 62).

This brings us to a crucial point of difference between Grant and Strauss, namely the relationship between Jerusalem and Athens—or, between faith and reason. Strauss took them to be at odds with each other and hence would not deign to suggest that the west's political saving grace could be found in their coming together. Grant departs from Strauss when he suggests that biblical religion and classical philosophy present similar moral ontologies. In a long commentary on Strauss' engagement with Alexandre Kojève on the end of history and the Universal Homogeneous State, he puts his disagreement with Strauss this way:

> …not simply that he fails to synthesize Greek and Biblical morality, but that he holds an incomplete and one-sided account of Biblical theism itself, and that certain errors in his political philosophy stem from that misinterpretation (Grant 1969, p. 111).

I want to suggest that one of the "certain errors in [Strauss'] political philosophy" Grant might've had in mind is precisely the belief that first-wave thought itself gave rise to, or at least is sufficient to maintain, constitutionalism and representative government in the absence of the pre-modern philosophical and theo-

logical convictions that gave rise to them.[7] The point I am driving towards is that, for Grant, the so-called conservatives who see America as the guardian of western values are not truly conservatives, since they represent a strain of thought that most fully represents the progressive tendencies of modernity. In addition to being more progressive than SOCIALISM, LIBERALISM represents a complete break from the premodern CONSERVATIVE tradition. It is at this point that McKinnell notes a Grantian conflation of conservatism and liberalism—i.e. that contemporary conservatives are really just liberals in disguise—but here Grant is not so much bringing conservatism and liberalism together as alleging that the group calling themselves conservatives are deluding themselves and others. Grant maintains that there *is* a genuine political conservatism, conceptually distinct from modern liberalism even if it is no longer a practical possibility in the age of progress:

> The impossibility of conservatism in our epoch is seen in the fact that those who adopt that title can be no more than the defenders of whatever structure of power is at any moment necessary to technological change. They provide the external force necessary is the society is to be kept together. *They are not conservatives in the sense of being the custodians of something that is not subject to change* (Grant 2005/1965, p. 66; my emphasis).

CONCLUSION

At one point, McKinnell writes the following, which I take to capture the gist of his critique: "Despite the contrast between Soviet collectivism and American individualism, in Grant's presentation, the differences between the two political systems were trivial" (McKinnell 2024, p. 278). Or, as he quotes from *Technology and Empire*, published 4 years after *Lament For A Nation*: "the directors of General Motors and the followers of Professor Marcuse sail down the same river in different boats" (Grant 1969, p. 27; quoted in McKinnell 2024, p. 277). As I noted above, I think that there are legitimate textual grounds for the view that Grant saw both empires as outgrowths of a similar technological ontology. Moreover, he did not express strong support for America's role in the world of the 20th century, especially when compared with other post-war conservative thinkers. The language of "rival empires" would have been anathema to Leo Strauss and his followers, some of whom are associated with the Neoconservative movement in American foreign policy. Grant was no supporter of American foreign policy and was not convinced that a world shaped by an allegedly liberal America was necessarily going to be much better than one shaped by Soviet communism. Both, after all, desired the same Universal Homogeneous State. We must ask, however, whether it is really the case that Grant trivialized the specifically political and institutional differences between American democracy and Soviet totalitarianism. Or, as I have put it in this essay: is Grant a genuine supporter of the political principles of freedom, equality, and representative government?

I might offer the following summation of the analysis and claims above. In my view, McKinnell follows Strauss in drawing a close connection between first-wave modern liberal theory and the political principles of freedom, equality, and representative government, such that he sees Grant as throwing those principles into question when he criticizes modern liberalism. On the Straussian interpretation of modernity, combined with the disjunction between Athens and Jerusalem, that might be valid. However, Grant goes to great lengths, in *Lament For A Nation*, *English-Speaking Justice*, and elsewhere, to demonstrate that liberal theory is not the source of those principles.[8] The moral and metaphysical foundation for human rights and equality is the pre-modern thought of classical philosophy and religion. Freedom, equality, and the right of all citizens to political representation *were* unqualified political goods for Grant, so there is no question of Grant's trivializing the difference between the American and Soviet political systems themselves.

This is demonstrated in an essay written before Grant had discovered Strauss, a 1961 contribution to a volume set to coincide with and support the creation of the democratic socialist New Democratic Party of Canada.[9] We see in it two themes that are explored in *Lament For A Nation* and elaborated in *English-*

Speaking Justice: the importance of individual freedom and equality that form the basis of western democratic societies, and the difficulty that modern secular liberalism has in justifying them. I quote at length from a relevant passage:

> Equality should be the central principle of society since all persons, whatever their condition, must freely choose to live by what is right or wrong. This act of choosing is the ultimate human act and is open to all. In this sense all persons are equal....Any social order must then try to constitute itself within the recognition of this basic fact of moral personality which all equally possess.
>
> ....It must be insisted, however, that the idea of equality arose in the West within a particular set of religious and philosophical ideas. I cannot see why men should go on believing in the principle without some sharing in those ideas. The religious tradition was the biblical, in which each individual was counted as of absolute significance before God. This belief united with the principle of rationality as found in the Stoic philosophers. Among the greatest Western thinkers the conception of rationality has been increasingly unified with the religious principle of respect. To state this historical fact is not to deny that many men have believed in equality outside this religious and philosophical tradition. The question is rather whether they have been thinking clearly when they have so believed (Grant 2005a/1961, p. 41).

The point is that Grant's writings throughout and beyond the 1960s insist on the important distinction between the politics we often associate with liberalism (and with which Grant has no substantive criticisms) and liberalism's inability to provide an ontological foundation that is able to sustain such a politics. Grant's tendency to emphasize the similarities between America and the Soviet Union must be read with this in mind. One could offer a lengthy list of Grant's explicit endorsements of political freedom and representative government. Such a list is difficult to square with the conclusions reached by McKinnell. To pick just one example in addition to what has been discussed above, consider Grant's comment on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, introduced in 1982 under the leadership of Pierre Trudeau's Liberal Party:

> I believe that rights must be written down, but I don't want to be part of a nation of litigants. I am against this, but in a mass society individuals in a weak position need the law behind them—and they need the help the law can give them. We have a tradition of individual rights. It's the greatest gift we have in our society. Let's not lose it (Grant 2009/1984, p. 536).

To conclude, McKinnell raises worthwhile questions that ought to be reckoned with. For a political thinker whose career overlapped almost entirely with the Cold War, Grant was surprisingly willing to criticize the bastion of freedom and democracy and, as McKinnell also notes, less prone to criticize the Soviet Union for its own human rights abuses. Authors like Michael Ignatieff who chalk this up to a knee-jerk nostalgia for the lost era of British hegemony miss the mark, but McKinnell investigates this with a keen appreciation of Grant's thought and deeper ontological concerns. His essay commendably illuminates the political implications of Grant's interpretation of modernity, especially when compared to Strauss'. If the ontological foundation for a constitutional politics that respects human rights is only found in pre-modern philosophy and religion, then there is no meaningful ontological difference between first- and second-wave modernity and the regimes they have inspired. It is this sense that Grant attempts to convey when he describes America and the USSR as rival empires striving to realize the UHS. This is a clear departure from Strauss and other conservatives who cherish America's role in the world.

That said, I believe McKinnell is incorrect in taking Grant's drawing-together of the philosophy underlying the American and Soviet empires to imply a similar drawing-together of (or erasure of meaningful differences between) constitutional democracy and totalitarianism. Grant does not think that modern liberal thought is much better than the principles underlying totalitarian regimes, but not because there are

no important differences between democracy and authoritarianism as such. On the contrary, we have seen that Grant clearly does prefer democracy, freedom, and equality. It may be the case, as Grant himself admits in a passage quoted above, that capitalists and socialists "sail down the same river in different boats." But, we might ask: how different are the boats? Grant's primary concern was to point to the ontological river down which we all sail, but this does not imply that the political boats are identical. Throughout his corpus, Grant insisted on the justice of particular political goods, including human rights, freedom, and equality. Sailing down the same river does not require us to stop differentiating between the quality of the democratic or totalitarian boats, nor does Grant ever do so.

NOTES

1 (Gillespie 1990; Newell 2021).

2 It is worth noting here that Grant implicates systems of economic organization in the rise of the UHS, not political systems. That might be taken to imply that the culpability of Communism and capitalism are made to be roughly equal, but not the culpability of democracy and authoritarianism, per se.

3 For example:
"To put his difference from Locke in terms of the history of ethical theory, his doctrine of the original position may then be taken as the attempt to preserve the advantages of contractarian over utilitarian foundations for liberal justice, while avoiding 'the naturalistic fallacy' (call it if you will the metaphysical foundations) upon which Locke's contractarian teaching is based" (Grant 1985/1974, pp. 22-23).
On Kant: "For all Rawls' appeals to Kant, the central ontological affirmations of Kant are absent in Rawls" (Grant 1985/1974, p. 29).

4 Indeed, this can be said with some justice to sum up the argument of *English-Speaking Justice*.

5 As an aside, the fact that the language of "America's imperialistic conquest of Canada" can equally describe the state of affairs in 1965 and 2025 reminds us of the importance of *Lament For a Nation*. Grant's depiction of America as an empire to rival the USSR has taken on new (or renewed) salience in light of Donald Trump's open desire to annex Canada, Greenland, and Panama. Whatever one is to make of the political principles of liberal democracy, it does not appear that they are hegemonic among America's ruling classes anymore. Grant might say that they never were, as evidenced by American imperial adventures in Korea, Vietnam, and elsewhere.

6 I agree with McKinnell in taking this argument as directed at the Straussian interpretation of modernity.

7 Much more could be said about Grant's disagreement with Strauss concerning Athens and Jerusalem. I would direct the interested reader to (Newell 2021; Heaven 2006; Havers 2006; Forbes 2007, ch. 11).

8 For more on this point I would direct the interested reader to the 4th chapter of (Forbes 2007), entitled "Modern Liberal Theory."

9 As a fact of historical interest pertinent to this special issue of *Cosmos + Taxis*, Grant's support for the NDP ended with the events that gave rise to *Lament For a Nation*. In 1963 the NDP voted with the Liberal Party to defeat John Diefenbaker's Conservatives over the issue of American nuclear weapons on Canadian soil. Grant was furious and never again supported the NDP. In 1964 he wrote to his friend Derek Bedson that "the NDP are a kind of vacuous extension of the Liberals and I heartily regret ever having written anything for them. The last four years have cleared my head greatly and I am now an unequivocal anti-progressive" (Grant 1996, p. 223).

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The Surface of Things: The Impossibility of George Grant's Conservatism and the Possibility of Canada

RYAN ALEXANDER MCKINNELL
MacEwan University

Abstract: This essay's contribution to the symposium dedicated to the anniversary of *Lament for a Nation* explores how George Grant's neglect of the question of the regime engenders a reductionist and, at times, misguided interpretation of political philosophy and politics by examining the fundamentally flawed understanding of Canada's origins advanced in *Lament for a Nation*. At a time when Canadian sovereignty is under greater threat than at any point in the last century, it behooves us to return to the roots of our political tradition to decide if the Founders' intention is valuable and worth preserving. Grant's analysis is an obstacle to this enterprise because his failure to grasp the significance of the political not only precludes him from recognizing the full complexity of modernity, but also from understanding the intention of the Canadian Founding and the vitality of the Canadian regime.

Keywords: George Grant, Canadian Confederation, Political liberty, Parliamentarianism, Modernity

It is one of those curious twists of fate that in 2025, we find ourselves commemorating the 60th anniversary of George Grant's *Lament for a Nation*. As a scholar who has been critical of Grant's presentation of the American postwar order, modernity, and the philosophical foundations upon which it rests, recent political events have prompted a reevaluation of my earlier reproval—an act encouraged by the fruitful commentary offered by Tyler Chamberlain (McKinnell 2024; Chamberlain 2025). Chamberlain contends that I overstate the problems with Grant's political teaching by not adequately recognizing that Grant's criticism of modernity is primarily aimed at its ontological foundations, not the political principles of liberty and equality. Consequently, I exaggerate the extent to which Grant downplays the differences between liberal democracy and totalitarianism (Chamberlain 2025, p. 80, 85-86). However, despite further reflection, my criticism of Grant remains unchanged. Indeed, in my view, Chamberlain's analysis only further confirms that Grant does not appreciate the full significance of the political dimension. As this symposium is dedicated to the anniversary of *Lament for a Nation*, this essay intends to explore how Grant's neglect of the question of the regime engenders a reductionist and, at times, misguided interpretation of political philosophy and politics by examining the fundamentally flawed understanding of Canada's origins advanced in *Lament for a Nation*. At a time when Canadian sovereignty is under

greater threat than at any point in the last century, it behooves us to return to the roots of our political tradition to decide if the Founders' intention is valuable and worth preserving. Grant's analysis is an obstacle to this enterprise because his failure to grasp the significance of the political not only precludes him from recognizing the full complexity of modernity, but also from understanding the intention of the Canadian Founding and the vitality of the Canadian regime.

I agree with Chamberlain that the primary aim of Grant's political teaching was to show that the traditional basis of liberty, equality, and human excellence cannot be sustained in a society determined by the technological impulse, which culminates in the Universal Homogenous State (UHS), not that liberty itself is unvaluable (Grant 2005, p. 62). After all, Grant criticizes American conservatives not for their adherence to constitutional government but for their epistemological commitment to the dynamism of a technological society. Further, Grant states that it is preferable to live in the West because it is still formally constitutional. Chamberlain takes this as evidence of Grant's appreciation of liberal democracy and contends that his intention was only to highlight that both desired the UHS, not that their institutional arrangements were the same (Chamberlain 2025, p. 81).[1] But, therein lies the rub. Grant depreciates the difference between the American and Soviet systems *because* he assumes both have the same basis and objective, the UHS. As Chamberlain points out, for Grant, the crucial factor is not the "political *superstructures* which we live in" but what he sees as the ontological "*substructure*" (Chamberlain 2025, p. 81). Like Marx and Heidegger, Grant views political life as epiphenomenal or subservient to an underlying social reality. Convinced that the underlying logic of technology ultimately shapes the character of modern political life, Grant fails to consider whether the fact that the Soviet regime produced the Gulag and Western liberal democracies did not, demonstrates that they were not politically, ontologically, or metaphysically the same. Moreover, he does not consider the significance of the differences between liberal regimes themselves. By seeking the hidden depths of the substructure, Grant forgets that "the problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things" (Strauss 1978, p. 13). Grant does not take the regime seriously and therefore misreads the depths.

This problem is on full display in the presentation of Canada in *Lament for a Nation*. Grant claims that "the impossibility of conservatism in our era is the impossibility of Canada" (Grant 2005, p. 67). Conservatism is impossible because pre-modern or authentic conservatism puts virtue before freedom and situates human action within a divine or natural order incompatible with the progressive spirit of modernity oriented by human autonomy. Canada's existence as a sovereign political community was only sustainable and worth being sustained so long as its guiding intention reflected this pre-modern conservatism in contrast to the progressive modernity embodied by the United States. However, once Canadians fully embraced liberal modernity, the moral-philosophical rationale for Canada's independence disappeared, necessitating the country's eventual disappearance. Yet, this account of Canada's origins ignores what Canada's Founders believed. From the beginning, the intention of the Canadian political project was to establish a regime where constitutional liberty would be more secure than under American republicanism (McKinnell 2023). If Canada is impossible because its *raison d'être* is no longer sustainable or adhered to, at the very least, one should offer an analysis of Canada's Founders that seeks to understand them as they understood themselves. Grant cannot do this because, unlike the Founders, he does not assign central importance to the nature of the regime. If Grant's overarching premise prevents him from understanding the political philosophy that influenced the formation of his own political community, what does this say about his analysis of modernity itself?

Therefore, this essay reiterates my contention that Grant's failure to understand the regime results in a defective political teaching by examining his analysis of the Canadian regime. I first consider why Grant's approach to the history of political philosophy is reductionist. I then show how this oversimplified approach leads to a misleading and detrimental interpretation of the origins of the Canadian regime. The essay then concludes by considering the possibility and value of revitalizing Canada's founding principles in light of a re-evaluation of Grant's work.

GRANT'S CONSERVATISM AND THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

While most readers come away from *Lament for a Nation* with Grant's claim that Canada's continued existence as a sovereign, independent nation has come to an end foremost in their minds, often overlooked is the far more radical philosophical assertion that precedes it. Namely, that conservatism is impossible in the modern era. On the surface, this seems as strange as Grant's insistence that Canada no longer exists. After all, there are plenty of self-described conservative politicians, political parties, and thinkers. Yet for Grant, these self-described conservatives are not adherents to an authentic conservatism, but proponents of an older version of liberalism. Grant defines true conservatism as the social doctrine that public order and tradition, rather than freedom and experiment, are essential to a good life, undergirded by the view that "virtue must be prior to freedom," and the "conception of an eternal order by which human actions are measured and defined" (Grant 2005, pp. 69, 71,74). On the other hand, for Grant, the core of liberalism is the assumption that the essence of human beings is freedom, or autonomy. Since liberalism assumes that human beings are autonomous, it must reject anything that limits human freedom, meaning that any claims of divine or natural authority are denied. In effect, human autonomy entails the complete emancipation of the passions. An "open ended progression in which men will be endlessly free to make the world as they want it" (Grant 2005, p. 55; Forbes 2007, pp. 46-47). While traditional, "organic" conservatives asserted the right of the political community to restrain freedom in the name of the common good, today's conservatives celebrate freedom from the State. Indeed, Grant goes so far as to claim that socialism, by insisting on restraining greed for the sake of the community, demonstrates a closer adherence to this pre-modern ideal than the self-described conservatives of the twentieth century (Grant 2005, p. 57).

Most contemporary conservatives and classical liberals would reject the idea that they endorse the progressive doctrine of the perfectibility of man, understanding themselves as defenders of the constitutionalism of Locke, Montesquieu, and Smith in contrast to the heirs of Rousseau and Marx. Grant acknowledges this argument and at times appears to sympathize with it. However, in Grant's telling, the more extreme forms of progressive modernity manifesting in the political movements deriving from Rousseau, Marx, and Nietzsche are already implicit in Lockean liberalism. The historical unfolding of liberal modernity unleashes an inherent relativism that leads to a negation of nature as the drive for human autonomy seeks to overcome any limitations it imposes (Grant 2005, p. 52). As overcoming limitations requires the technological mastery of nature, liberalism must be understood as dependent on technology and cannot transcend it (Grant 1998, p. 85-86). Instead of remaining an instrument of liberal values of liberty and equality, technology possesses a logic of its own, the freedom to "negate nature endlessly to produce more power with which to go on negating nature," which swallows up justice in "an irresistibly more comprehensive global 'destiny'" (Newell 2021, p. 182). Ultimately, this progressive drive for mastery must culminate in establishing the UHS, a universal (worldwide), egalitarian society that achieves full autonomy for the human will. In a reversal of Hegel, who held that the establishment of the rational society entailed the full realization of human freedom, the hegemony of technology ends in human degradation. According to Grant, modern conservatives, like liberals and socialists, are striving (whether knowingly or unknowingly) for its establishment. Conservatism is impossible in the modern era because this would require rejecting the progressive spirit, placing virtue prior to freedom.

The interpretation of modernity presented here is similar in many respects to that of Leo Strauss. Indeed, Grant acknowledges his debt to and cites Strauss' "The Three Waves of Modernity." However, what is missing in Grant's analysis is what, for Strauss, is the guiding theme of political philosophy, the question of the *politeia* or the regime. Every society is a partnership directed towards some principle or purpose. For example, Montesquieu observes in the *Spirit of the Laws* that Rome's principle was expansion, Sparta's war, and England's political liberty. The regime is the form or order that constitutes or organizes a society according to its purpose or goal. It gives the community its specific character (Strauss 1959, p. 34). The Spartan and English regimes are not only distinguished by their form of government, but by the character of their laws, morals, manners, and rulers. Furthermore, every regime implicitly or explicitly grounds

the claim regarding its principle or purpose on an assertion about the best way of life for human beings: liberty, honour, piety, etc. Any claim about the best way of life for human beings and what type of regime engenders it is ultimately an ontological claim, an assertion about human nature and its relationship with the whole. To put it another way, what we see on the surface, the political dimension, is representative of this wider trans-political claim. To respond to Chamberlain, the substructure is revealed in the superstructure. Because various regimes are constituted in accordance with conflicting principles, we are compelled to evaluate the contradictory claims and ask which regime best conforms to the perfection of human nature. According to Strauss, this question of the best regime is the guiding theme of political philosophy. However, while the best regime is superior to all other regimes, classical political philosophy also teaches that its actualization relies on chance; its coming into being is outside human control (Strauss 1959, pp. 35-36). Indeed, attempting to overcome chance to actualize perfection will likely result in the destruction of humanity. The task of political philosophy, political science in its original sense, is to assess historical regimes compared to the best regime. Which offers the best approximation, or, depending on the circumstances, is the least destructive of humanity?

Therefore, while Strauss faults modern liberalism for corrupting human beings by lowering the standard of morality by advancing a doctrine aimed at self-preservation instead of virtue, this critique is qualified. Modern liberal regimes have liberty as their principle. Though lacking in virtue, they are gentle or moderate. While the permissiveness of liberal gentleness creates moral and political problems, liberal regimes retain "the old and eternal ideal of decency, the rule of law, and of that liberty which is not license, to changed circumstances" (Strauss 1999, p. 372). Moreover, despite narrowing the gap between the Is and Ought, modern liberalism still retains the appeal to the natural or moral standard against the established order (Strauss 1975, p. 91). In contrast, communist and other totalitarian regimes have the realization of a utopian society, or the Kingdom of God on earth, as their purpose. This is expressed in the form of the regime. Their institutions, laws, and mores leave no room for the toleration of dissent, brook no limitations on interfering in the private lives of citizens, and reject the practice of parliamentary politics because they are guided by a millenarian principle to, in a Voegelinian twist, immanentize the eschaton. Not only are liberal and communist regimes formally different, but they are also grounded on different philosophical principles. Moreover, as Aristotle observed regarding ancient democracies, there are variations within modern regime types. While all communist regimes are millenarian, Stalinism and Maoism are far more eschatological in their form than Castroism (see Service 2007). Similarly, although all liberal constitutional regimes have liberty as their political principle, how they are constituted is decisive in determining which come closer to achieving their intention and how well they can resist degeneration. Again, for the classical political scientist, even these more minor distinctions in the character of liberal regimes indicate deeper roots.

Though commentators such as H. D. Forbes argue that Grant's political analysis maintains the classical position that a political community is a partnership directed at a conception of the good life, this is true only in a diminished sense (Forbes 2007, p. 23; Grant 2005, p. 67). Grant reduces the various regime types to an opposition between organic political communities "rooted" in a particular moral-political tradition and homogenizing technological societies. For Strauss, the central political question of the twentieth century was the crisis of totalitarianism. In contrast, for Grant, it was a contest between localist or nationalist movements that seek to protect their traditions and identity from the homogenizing forces of technological modernity (Grant 2005, pp. 56-67; 2005a, p. 213). In this, the thinker who Grant most resembles is Martin Heidegger. In Heidegger's view, the technological impulse to turn humanity into standing reserve leads to a totalitarian organization that is so all-encompassing that it renders all political distinctions irrelevant. Thus, Heidegger claims that Americanism and Communism are metaphysically the same. Or, more infamously, Auschwitz is indistinguishable from a chemical plant (Heidegger 1977; Gillespie 1990, pp. 135-146). Though to his credit, Grant does not go as far as Heidegger and conclude that all moral differences are insignificant, he shares the judgement that the technological drive is so all-encompassing that contemporary political life becomes fully determined by it. Thus, contra Chamberlain, Grant depreciates

the political because he does not adequately reflect on whether the distinctions between the character of the American and Soviet regimes—the surface differences—indicate a deeper philosophical (dare I say, ontological?) divergence. Instead, Grant sees them both as manifestations of global technology and, convinced they share the same substructure, assumes both are metaphysically the same. Consequently, if the underlying logic of technology ultimately shapes the character of the political, then differences between capitalism and socialism or constitutionalism and totalitarianism become epiphenomenal. Therefore, like Heidegger and Jacques Ellul, Grant turns to the local community or the love of one's own tradition. The fundamental alternative lies between the modern understanding of politics and the traditional conception, which Grant refers to as "the organic conservatism that predated the age of progress" (Grant 2005, p. 64; see also Grant 1969, p. 30).[2]

From the perspective of classical political science, Grant's reduction of all modern regimes to the UHS is a consequence of the depreciation of the regime. His neglect of the regime causes him to overestimate the power of technology to subvert political life. Grant's response (and perhaps Chamberlain's), no doubt, would be that Strauss and other adherents of classical political science have failed to appreciate the power of technology. While this is ultimately a disagreement of first principles, an excellent way to evaluate this is to examine whether *Lament for a Nation* offers a veridical account of the Canadian regime and its origins. For if Grant's philosophical presumptions result in a fundamentally flawed political analysis, this is evidence of how failing to understand the surface leads to a misinterpretation of the depths.

GRANT AND THE CANADIAN REGIME

As the late Janet Ajzenstat once observed, the incredible power of *Lament for a Nation* is that it places Canadian politics within the context of great philosophical debates while expressing a profound love for Canada (Ajzenstat 2003, pp. 109-111). Nevertheless, Grant's love is dedicated to a particular idea of Canada. In Grant's dichotomy of rooted organic communities versus homogenizing universalism, Canada originates in a "genuine" conservative rejection of American liberalism. Thus, the unsustainability of conservatism necessitates Canada's absorption into the United States. While most Canadian readers reject Grant's pessimism regarding the nation's prospects, they find Grant's characterization of Canada's origins as collectivist and hierarchical—the Tory Touch—appealing. For these readers, Grant's lament for the disappearance of the British Canada of his youth blinded him from seeing that it is possible to maintain distinctive "organic collectivist" social values even as the original Toryism receded. On the other hand, Western Canadians often argue that Grant's lament is not for Canada but for Upper Canada of the United Empire Loyalists. A Canada that has little in common with their own experience (Cooper 1990).[3] In truth, both critiques miss the mark as his idea of Canada is rooted more in a romantic notion than historical reality (Ajzenstat 2003, pp. 109-110). Herein lies the problem. By placing Canadian politics and history within the meta-narrative of technological determinism, *Lament for a Nation* does not understand Canada's Founders as they understood themselves. Moreover, the influence of Grant's text has been so significant that it obscures the origins of the Canadian regime for his fellow Canadians.

First, Grant rightly observes that the existence of Canada as a distinct political community originates in the rejection of the American Revolution, what F. H. Underhill called the "Great Refusal" (Underhill 1960, p. 222). But what were the Loyalists, *Canadiens*, and colonists of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island rejecting? According to Grant, instead of adhering to the Lockean liberalism expressed by Hamilton, Jefferson and Madison, British North Americans, and the Loyalists in particular, were inspired by the premodern political philosophy of the Anglican divine, Richard Hooker. Consequently, they were motivated to build a society with a greater sense of order or restraint than American republicanism would allow. Similarly, the French Catholics of Quebec sought to preserve a distinct way of life from before the Age of Progress. Therefore, English and French Canadians could make common cause and establish a political community that rejected the liberalism that characterized the American regime. According to Grant, this

was the guiding intention behind the *Constitutional Act, 1791* and the *British North America Act* (Grant 2005, pp. 67-68).

This "conservative" interpretation of Canada's origins is familiar to most students of Canadian politics. Indeed, the presentation of a "Tory" Canada in *Lament for a Nation* is well situated within the mid-twentieth century "Laurentianism" of Donald Creighton, Harold Innis, F. R. Scott, and Frank Underhill. The most famous version of this supposition remains Gad Horowitz's "Tory Touch" thesis, which building on the "Fragmentation" theory of Louis Hartz, postulates that the distinctiveness of the Canadian political community is found in the dilution of the "rationalist-egalitarianism" of Lockean liberalism with "corporate-organic-collectivist" notions originating in pre-modern conservatism (Horowitz 1966). For those that adhere to this interpretation of Canada's origins, in addition to explaining why Canadian Conservatives (so-called Red Tories) have historically been willing to advocate state intervention in the market via the National Policy, Hydro-Ontario, or the CBC, the "Tory Touch" also serves as the foundation of a unique Canadian political culture which rather than celebrating "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness," embraces "Peace, Order, and Good Government."[4] Grant argues that the Canadian political community's distinctiveness and value stands or falls on its adherence to this Tory conservatism. "If Lockean liberalism is the conservatism of the English-peoples, what was there in British conservatism that was not present in the bourgeois thought of Hamilton and Madison? If there was nothing, then the acts of the Loyalists are deprived of all moral significance" (Grant 2005, pp. 61-62). Thus, most of the polemical fire of *Lament for a Nation* is directed at those Grant accuses of undermining Canadian distinctiveness. The chief villains being William Lyon Mackenzie King, C. D. Howe, and the Liberal Party of Canada, who, by pursuing policies of continental integration, eroded Canadian sovereignty. While formal annexation by the United States may not occur, in all essential respects, by the 1960s, Canada had been absorbed into the American empire because it no longer adhered to its guiding intention (Grant 2005, pp. 68-69).

However, despite his animus against the Liberal Party, it must be reiterated that Grant's analysis of Canadian politics is situated within his overarching interpretation of modernity as the progressive unfolding of the UHS. Indeed, far from claiming that the demise of Canada is the result of a deliberate choice by Mackenzie King, Grant argues that the expiry of a distinct Canadian political community was inevitable because the attempt to build a "conservative" nation in the age of progress runs against currents of history (Grant 2005, p. 67). Conservative thinkers were destined to exercise less and less influence in a technological society, and conservatism became an empty façade. Diefenbaker's embrace of free enterprise demonstrates the decline and unsustainability of the Canadian conservative tradition (Grant 2005, pp. 14-15, 18, 69-70). Fundamentally, Canadian society abandoned the attempt to maintain a distinctive social order in favour of homogenizing liberalism. Whether it be French Canadians turning their backs on their religious heritage during the Quiet Revolution or English Canadians embracing Americanism. Grant tells the story of an organic, conservative community slowly undermined by progressive modernity embodied by American capitalism. Thus, instead of a turning point, the fall of the Diefenbaker Government was the owl of Minerva taking flight at the dusk of Canada. The end of Canada is "the unfolding of fate" (Grant 2005, p. 91).

However, the problem with the "Tory Touch" is, as commentators such as Ajzenstat, Peter Smith, and Rod Preece argue, that it is "bad history and poor political science" (Ajzenstat and Smith 1995, 2002, p. 68; Preece 1977, 1980). While Toryism may have been present in Canadian political culture, it has only ever been marginal at best, as the real contest has been between parliamentarianism, deriving from the British tradition and democratic republicanism emanating from the United States (Ajzenstat and Smith 1995, pp. 1-18). Consider Grant's claim that Diefenbaker's defence of free enterprise is inconsistent with the Canadian conservative tradition; this would surprise its originators. Far from reflecting a pre-modern Toryism, Canadian Conservative leaders' political thought and actions were always grounded in the modern liberal tradition. As John A. Macdonald declared, "I could never have been called a Tory… I have always been a Conservative-Liberal" (*Public Archives of Canada*, Macdonald Papers, Vol. 158, 64021; Preece 1978, pp. 175-179). Like their moderate liberal counterparts, Canadian conservatives were, in effect,

Burkean Whigs (Preece 1977; McKinnell 2023). Macdonald did not introduce the National Policy because he rejected liberal capitalism, but because the United States had ended the Reciprocity Treaty and imposed tariffs on Canadian goods, which several American cabinet members hoped would lead to the annexation of Canada (sometimes history does not just rhyme, it repeats). In such circumstances, Macdonald argued that Manchester liberalism allowed for exceptions to be made (Gibson and Milnes 2014, pp. 282-286*; s*ee also Dutil 2024). The same argument was behind Robert Borden's nationalization of the railroads, the Ontario Conservatives' formation of Hydro-Ontario, or R. B. Bennett's decision to create the CBC. Grant's claim that free enterprise is alien to the Canadian conservative tradition suggests that he has not examined whether the details match his meta-narrative.

This mischaracterization extends to the origins of Canada itself, as Grant fails to examine what the Loyalists or the Fathers of Confederation themselves believed the moral significance of their actions was. While certainly they saw themselves as establishing a genuine alternative to the republican experiment to the south, the philosophical foundation and moral justification are not what Grant claims they are. For the Loyalists, loyalty entailed adhering to the Whig constitutional settlement established by the Glorious Revolution. During the American Revolution, Loyalist pamphleteers such as Charles Inglis, Peter Oliver, Joseph Galloway, and William Smith centred their arguments for rejecting the Revolution on loyalty to the form of regime best suited for the preservation of political liberty. Citing Locke, Montesquieu, Blackstone, and a host of Whig political writers, the Loyalists insisted that the balanced or mixed British Constitution best achieved this principle while accusing the Patriots of advocating republicanism, which they criticized for being inimical to civil liberty (Jenson 2003; Norton 1972, pp. 127-148; Nelson 2014). In other words, the Loyalists did not reject the American Revolution out of an attachment to a pre-modern ideal, but on thoroughly modern Whig principles. This adherence to the principle of political liberty was perpetuated in the establishment of Upper and Lower Canada with the passage of the passage of the *Constitutional Act, 1791*. John Graves Simcoe, Upper Canada's first Lieutenant-Governor, declared that the intention of the new constitution was to create the very "image and transcript of that in Great Britain." For Simcoe, the defining characteristic of the British Constitution was that it secured freedom and happiness for its subjects, which Simcoe contrasted with what he described as the mutilated constitutions of the United States and France (Simcoe 1890). Therefore, the purpose of the of political order established in British North America was to imitate the form and character of the British regime. Similar claims were advanced by Egerton Ryerson, who celebrated victory in the War of 1812 by arguing that Canadians had fought in defence of the idea of liberty that animated British political institutions and constitutional tradition (Ryerson 1880, p. 457). Indeed, at times, during the nineteenth century public opinion in British North America viewed Britain (and by extension British North America) locked in an ideological rivalry with the populist republicanism of the United States and Revolutionary/Napoleonic France (Wise 1993, pp. 51-52).[5] While perspectives of the United States warmed as the century went on, the original Canadian critique remained fundamentally the same. Again and again throughout the Confederation Debates, figures such as John A. Macdonald, George Brown, Georges-Etienne Cartier, Richard Cartwright and Darcy McGee contrasted British liberty with American equality. Describing the purpose of the American federation to be the carrying out of the democratic principle, while the purpose of the Canadian federation would be to carry out the monarchical principle (Province of Canada, Parliament 1865; McKinnell 2023). While acknowledging that the American regime was oriented by similar philosophical principles, Canadian statesmen maintained that the American regime carried within it the seeds of unbridled democracy. In contrast, the British Constitution, was the only form of government that was properly constituted so that constitutional liberty and the rights of the minority were sustained. It could achieve this because a parliamentary regime, supervised by a constitutional monarch created the conditions for political deliberation while checking the ambitions of popular leaders. This is why the Fathers of Confederation sought to establish a Constitution similar in Principle to that of the United Kingdom. For although the Dominion of Canada and the American Republic shared a cultural, political, and philosophical heritage, the Fathers of Confederation understood themselves as establishing a unique regime with distinctive and superior political institutions. These insti-

tutions would sustain and, in turn, be sustained by a political culture animated by adherence to constitutional liberty. Nowhere in the Confederation Debates is there a defence of organic collectivism.

Grant asks, "If there was nothing valuable in the founders of English-speaking Canada, what makes it valuable for Canadians to continue as a nation today" (Grant 2005, pp. 61-62)? However, Grant dismisses what the Founders thought was valuable, the distinctiveness of a parliamentary regime supervised by a constitutional monarch, as "no deep division of principle" (Grant 2005, p. 72). Indeed, nowhere in *Lament for a Nation* is to be found an analysis of responsible government, the principle of constitutional liberty, or Canada's founding constitutional documents. This refusal to take the claims of the Canadian Founders seriously *is* a failure to take the political seriously. Defenders of Grant might argue that since both are modern societies, they are ontologically the same. Substructure trumps superstructure. Canadian parliamentarianism and American republicanism are just floating down the same river in what might as well be the same boat. However, the simple truth is that the idea of Canada in *Lament for a Nation* is built on a poor understanding of Canadian political and intellectual history, if not an outright mischaracterization. Or as Ajzenstat devastatingly observes, "it is a romantic fiction" (Ajzenstat 2003, p. 110). Students of Grant must ask themselves, if Grant gets so much of the surface wrong, what does this say about what the claims about the depths? The great danger of neglecting the question of the regime is losing sober insight into our real situation and projecting hopes into facts and wishes into thoughts.

THE POSSIBILITY OF CANADA

Chamberlain concludes his critique of my "Between the Pincers" by situating our differences in a reiteration of Strauss' division between Athens and Jerusalem (Chamberlain 2025, p. 85). While I understand his point, I think Karl Löwith's contrast between the classical cyclical apprehension of nature and the Christian/modern belief in linear history is more instructive. As demonstrated by the classical regime cycle, the ancient understanding of history took its bearings from the eternal cycle of generation and corruption, growth and decay. Conversely, the Church Fathers developed a theology of history "focused on the supra-historical events of creation, incarnation, and consummation." The modern philosophy of history reveals its kinship with the Christian eschatological understanding in interpreting history as progressing or developing toward a goal (Löwith 1949, p. 19; McKinnell 2022). Yet as Löwith argues, any elaboration of a plan of history cannot be demonstrated by reason; it is a faith claim. This is why the original Biblical and Augustinian understanding did not endow political-historical events with transcendental meaning. However, Grant's political and philosophical reflections are shaped by modern philosophies of history. Whether it be Hegel's unfolding of freedom or a progress in decline as with Heidegger's forgetfulness of Being, all philosophies of history profess to know the *true* desirability of political-historical events and see the historical process as leading up to our redemption or fall. This forces a thinker like Grant to ignore the visible political dimension or re-interpret the surface to make it consistent with the invisible meta-narrative. At best, such an approach is unreasonable; at worst, it is politically irresponsible.

Equipped with the sober wisdom of classical political science, one sees the problem facing the Canadian regime is the deformation of our basic political institutions and the corrosion of Canadians' attachment to the unwritten norms, habits and dispositions that sustain it. Consequently, significant efforts must be undertaken to recover the Canadian regime's founding principles and educate citizens about the underlying structure of Canadian parliamentary government. Thus, engendering the possibility of carrying out reforms that answer to the needs of the moment while returning to and renewing our political tradition. Convinced of the all-encompassing power of technology, Grant would no doubt see this as the equivalent of rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. But to give the last word to Löwith, "the question, however, is whether our task is to push down what is failing, i.e., a disintegrating world, or whether it is the more responsible task of reforming and renewing our tradition" (Löwith 1941, p. 242).

NOTES

1 The difficulty is that at other times Grant suggests the opposite. "Quite frankly, if it is a question of U.S.A capitalism lined up with the sinister Realpolitik of the Vatican against the totalitarian USSR, it seems to me hard to choose—but on the whole the USSR" (Grant 1996, p. 129).

2 I fail to see how this does not entail the collapsing of contemporary conservatism, liberalism, and socialism into each other.

3 I would argue that one of the most significant political consequences of the myth Grant articulates about Upper Canada is that he persuaded Western and Ontarian Conservatives that he was describing reality. That his voice was really was that of Loyalist Upper Canada. See (Ajzenstat 2003, pp. 109-111). So influential is Grant's story in *Lament for a Nation* for Albertan Conservatives that it has given rise to a belief that unlike those who settled on the Prairie, my Loyalist ancestors were not attached to individual liberty, nor in possession of rugged self-reliance when they carved farms and communities out of the Niagara wilderness after fleeing north with only what they could carry.

4 The claim that "Peace, Order, and Good Government" serves as Canada's *raison d'être* and distinguishes it from the United States has been repeated so often that it has become a cliché. Besides the fact that it would be a bizarre regime indeed that did not intend to achieve this, "Peace, Order, and Government" is only ever discussed in the Confederation Debates as a constitutional/legal provision, not a moral principle.

5 Of course, French Canadians held different views on this question. However, Pierre Bédard, Étienne Parent, Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine, Joseph Cauchon, and George-Étienne Cartier all held that the British parliamentary *regime* was best suited for the preservation of their specific way of life because it safeguarded the political minority.

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Lament for a Nation and Chauvinism of the West: Affinities and Parted Paths

RON DART
University of the Fraser Valley

Abstract: This paper brings into conversation two important but quite different voices—George Grant in *Lament for a Nation* and Shadia Drury in *Chauvinism of the West: The Case of American Exceptionalism*. Both take issue with the imperial drift of American liberalism, yet they do so from distinct intellectual traditions: Grant, shaped by his High Tory inheritance and a deeply rooted Canadian nationalism; Drury, through a sharper critique of neoconservatism and American exceptionalism. There are clear affinities in their diagnoses, particularly in their concern over the loss of order, the misuse of liberty, and the theological-political undercurrents of modern liberalism. But their philosophical sources and tone differ markedly—Grant's reflections being more rooted in classical and Christian traditions, Drury's more aligned with critical theory and political realism. The paper traces the shared ground and divergences between the two, arguing that both offer important, if contrasting, insights into the longstanding and ongoing tensions between Canada and the United States. Their differing perspectives help illuminate not only the political debates of their own times but also the deeper currents shaping our current moment.

Keywords: American exceptionalism, Shadia Drury, Neoconservatism, Political theology, Imperialism, George Grant, Realism, Enlightenment, U.S. foreign policy, Democracy promotion, Fascism.

> The view of traditional philosophy and religion is that justice is the overriding order which we do not measure and define, but in terms of which we are measured and defined. The view of modern thought is that justice is a way which we choose in freedom, both individually and publicly, once we have taken our fate into our own hands, and know that we are responsible for what happens (Grant 2009, p. 248.).
>
> The modern account of human nature and destiny was developed from a profound criticism of what Plato and Aristotle had written. The modern thinkers believed that they had overcome the inadequacies of ancient thought, while maintaining what was true in the ancients (Grant 2005, p. 93).

INTRODUCTION

I have, sitting before me, the 1997 edition, in The Carleton Library Series of *Lament for a Nation,* Grant's bearded face and graying hair featured on the front cover, a lighthouse on the rocks the backdrop. Sheila Grant, appropriately so, wrote the "Afterword" in which she questioned the more political "New Left" misread of Grant, those who defined Grant as a pessimist or read his reflection from Virgil that ended *Lament*: "They were holding their arms outstretched in love toward the further shore (Grant 2005, p. 95).

I have spent many a splendid moment with Sheila when she came to the West Coast (lingering lunches in Fort Langley) and when in Halifax spent time at the Grant home. It is significant that Sheila linked the quote from Virgil with George's deep grounding in their cabin at Terence Bay. Sheila summed up, by way of conclusion in her "Afterword", the connection between the passage from Virgil and their cabin retreat in Terence Bay. It was the "coast, all sea and rock. Its austere and unchanging beauty became for him an image of the timeless: a holy place. From a cabin he built on a hill, he would look across the ocean inlet to the towering rocks on the further shore, and quote the line that ends *Lament for a Nation*" (Grant 2005, p. 99). I have spent some splendid time at Terence Bay, sat by his tombstone and, gratefully so, hold in my possession (which was used as the cover of my book, *George Grant: Spiders and Bees* (2008) a copy of the large painting by Barbara Christian of Grant (the background Terence Bay). This painting has been reprinted on the cover of this issue of *Cosmos + Taxis*.

Ron Dart and Sheila Grant

There is, of course, much that could be said about *Lament for a Nation* (both then and now, now being the 60th anniversary since it was published: 1965-2025). I would, though, like to linger with some of the deeper philosophical ideas in *Lament*, highlight affinities with *Chauvinism of the West: The Case of American Exceptionalism*, the recently published book by Shadia Drury (who would, in some ways, seem to be at odds with Grant) and, also, reflect on why and how paths might be parted.

I launched this reflection by referring to the same core point in three different ways: 1) the philosophical differences between the ancients and the moderns, Grant often contrasting Plato and Hegel as reflecting such realities, 2) the image of the lighthouse on the front cover and 3) the quote from Virgil that Sheila ends her "Afterword" with—the underlying theme being permanence and flux both in thought and deed, human creation and nature, unsettled water and solid rocks, liberty and order. The ancients, Plato, lighthouse, Virgil's longing arms and solid rocks embodied the ideal vision and order by which we can know and attune ourselves to, Hegel and ever-changing restless water and waves the modern ethos.

Grant sought, in his thinking, to enucleate the core of liberalism as certain principles were enfolded within such an ideology and then, as history went from century to century, articulate how the enfolded seed unfolded into a fully developed cultural and civilization worldview—such a worldview or tradition, then, became its own imperial ideology. There are some significant affinities between Grant and Drury in how they telescope in on the genealogy of liberalism as a defining ideology that has, at a substantive level, defined and shaped the United States' founding fragment and manifest destiny. Canada has had to, with its Tory touch (a more complex fragment), engage such an imperial approach in thought, word and deed—such is the core and thesis of *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* and in a different way of Drury's *Chauvinism of the West: The Case of American Exceptionalism*. I might add that both have their arrows fixed on the bull's eye of the American empire, Drury less focused on Canada than Grant, her academic publications rarely engaging the Canadian political ethos and tradition in the way Grant did in his writings and life.

THE GENEALOGIES OF THE FRAGMENT

Grant, from the suggestive arguments in *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (see chapters 4 "History as Progress" and 7 "American Morality"), points to the Reformation in the 16th century (Luther and Calvin, Calvin in time more than Luther) as the birth of the modern liberal project. It was this focus on human liberty and choice, the idea of Divine Sovereignty and election, the complex intermingling of the two that birthed the Calvinist Puritans (both English and Dutch). It was this sense within the Calvinist psyche that they were a chosen people (harkening back to the Jewish past) that brought into being the notion that God was moving a people from the oppressive nature of the past (decadent European religion, culture and civilization not able to be reformed) into a notion of history that was to be better than what was left behind. This leaving behind of the past, liberty bringing into being a finer world, guided by Divine Providence, that, when secularized, birthed the liberal ethos of an open-ended notion of liberty, choice, history as progress and "American Morality". It was, in short, Puritanism that brought into being the purer vision of the future forward. There has been, perhaps, an inaccurate tendency to see thinkers such as Smith, Locke, Hobbes and Burke as the originators of the modern project but Grant, rightly so, argues it is the Protestant Reformation (Calvinist Puritans more than Luther and the Anabaptist-Mennonites) that are the real source of the modern liberal project, notions of the past, classical notion of *telos* the Good marginalized by a selective read and application of the Bible.

I should mention, though, that although Grant argued that it was Luther and the Reformation that birthed, in a formal and material way, the modern notion of freedom versus authority-order that it was the Jewish Biblical Tradition that birthed the notion of time as history, time as unique movements forward (unlike a cyclical notion of history—eternal recurrence of the same). Christianity and the incarnation continued such a trajectory of history as a bringing into being of something new and unrepeatable, something better and more developed. So, in many ways, the Reformation Luther initiated with his turn to the Bible was a turn to the biblical notion of time as history. It is this interpretive approach by Grant that, when fast forwarded, explains a genetic code of Puritan America.

It is significant to note that Shadia Drury treks the same pathway in her recent book, although she tends to focus almost exclusively on the historic roots of the American journey and its contemporary outworking in the areas of manifest destiny and the notion of being an exceptional state and people. But Drury, like Grant, does ground such an emerging political matrix within the puritan ethos of the 16th-17th centuries that did much to inform and define the American ethos. Thus, in chapter 1 in *Chauvinism of the West,* Puritan theology is linked with their historic and political outworking with the founding of the United States. The notions of "political theology of the covenant", "manifest destiny", "exceptionalism as a civil religion", "millennial expectations", "exceptionalism as nationalism". "Ideals or Delusion?" and "the end of history" are judiciously unpacked to reveal the founding principles of the American way and soul. Grant would certainly have been fully on board with this genealogy as the Hartzian fragment, although Hartz

never drew from the Puritan ideology in his read of the liberal American fragment. Grant and Drury were much more astute and historically accurate in landing on the American Puritans as the source of liberalism and principles, once secularized, that shape and define the American way. It is significant to note though, as mentioned above, that Grant suggests that the unfolding of the American way needs to be understood as an unpacking of the Jewish-Christian Biblical notion of time as history—Drury never really follows this deeper source that Grant draws from and Luther-Puritans embody in their approach to Christianity and, for the Puritans, their founding vision of the United States.

Chauvinism of the West moves at a hasty pace from the Puritan origins of the American soul to 20th-21st century issues and ideas of American and foreign policy: 2) Manifest Destiny Goes Global, 3) What's Wrong with Spreading Democracy, 4) Neoconservative Realism, 5) Fascist Elements in Neoconservative Realism and 6) The Political Theology of the West. There is a decidedly and definite sense in which Drury has unconcealed the American imperial origins and history in a manner that does go deeper and further than Grant does in *Lament for a Nation* and yet their affinities are obvious in their interpretation of the aggressive and imperial way in which liberty-willing are at the core of a form of liberalism once the prettied up jargon of democracy are enfolded-unfolded. Drury does not deal with the Canadian-American way and tensions as does Grant in *Lament for a Nation but* there is little doubt Grant would applaud her ever deepening diagnosis of how a type of liberalism at the core has disturbing and aggressive tendencies.

I might add that Drury would also share some of Grant's critique of Kant although Drury probes the political ideas and implications of Kant's thinking in a way Grant never did in the same way–in this way, Drury can come as a kindly corrective to some of Grant's omissions. And, although in *Lament for a Nation* Grant does not delve as deeply or thoroughly into the classical and Platonic tradition as he hinted at in *Philosophy in the Mass Age* and more substantively in later writings, crumbs are on the trail for those who have eyes to see. Even his turn to Hooker to initiate *Lament* and ending with Virgil are most suggestive and not to be missed. But, Drury, being as much interested in political philosophy as in history, with intellectual and historic events integrated and organic in her thinking, she does in chapter 4, "Neoconservative Realism" do a detailed read on Thucydides and how the Neoconservatives have misread his more nuanced read of his times and the consequences of doing so. Grant, for the most part, tended to linger with classical philosophy and not dive too deeply into the mother lode of the significant writings of Thucydides, Herodotus and the Greek Tragedians in the more meaningful way that Drury has in her past publications and in *Chauvinism of the West*. Again, I think, her turn to often ignored aspects by Grant of Greek thought, culture and history can and does come as a corrective to Grant's Achilles' heel.

There is, therefore, a sense in which Drury has probed the genealogy of the American liberal fragment both a turn to Athens and Jerusalem, the Greek historians, their neoconservative American interpreters and the Puritan founding ethos. There can be no doubt that both Puritan theology-politics and selective interpretations of Greek thought did and do play a role in Americans' self-understanding and Drury has done a judicious read of such reads and the consequences of them. I think, in some ways, it might be accurate to suggest that Drury's more nuanced read of the American way is more detailed than Grant's but Grant in *Lament for a Nation* is, obviously, more integrated in his read of Western political philosophy and how it has been worked out in a different way between the more liberal ideology read and fragment in the United States and the more layered Canadian read of Classical thought-English and European political within the Canadian culture context. Both Grant and Drury would walk side by side in their questioning and critique of the dominant ideology of Hegel and its impact on liberal progressivism that has done much to shape and define the liberal modern project (and played a significant role in Canadian thinking, also, Charles Taylor, for example, an embodiment and apologist for such a Hegelian ideology and centrist liberalism).

It is essential to note, though, that although Grant does not delve as deeply as did Drury into the genealogy of the American liberal way, he does, in a suggestive and thoughtful manner, highlight how, in chapters 3-5 in *Lament for a Nation* the modern liberal project has taken thick roots in the American journey. The fact that Grant draws from Strauss in such an interpretation and Strauss's read of the waves of modernity via Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Smith, Hume, second wave Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and their im-

pact on Washington, Madison, Hamilton and Adams (noting the complex forms of liberalism, Paine given the nod also-see chapter 5) means Grant has some affinity with Drury, although Grant tends to be, in a limited and critical way, more attentive and supportive of Strauss than Drury (who argues against Strauss both in *Chauvinism of the West* and even more so in *Leo Strauss and the American Right*) whose eyes and arguments are set steadfastly and solidly contra Strauss. Grant would certainly question how Strauss has been used by the American neoconservatives but he sees some limited and thoughtful appropriation of him whereas Drury sees a direct connection between Strauss and a direct connection between Strauss and the political far right. It is significant to note that Drury does much the same thing with Socrates in *The Bleak Implications of Socratic Religion*—significant followers of Socrates were on the reactionary right therefore he is implicated in their thinking and actions. There is a point where Grant and Drury part paths on their read of the classical and modern past and how such a read within the layered American ethos has led their notions of manifest destiny and exceptionalism. Grant would see in a read of the classical vision as embodied in High Toryism a distinctive Canadian fragment north of the 49th whereas Drury sees in the classical Homeric-Greek tragedians and historians a fount of cultural and political perennial insights we ignore to our peril.

GRANT AND DRURY: PARTED PATHS

Lament for a Nation is thoroughly immersed in, initially, the historic election of 1963 in which Pearson defeated Diefenbaker. But the historic and political choices of 1963 were but a portal and door for Grant into larger issues of political philosophy and theology. The literal lament was but the lament of the liberal Kennedy-Pearson duet defeating the Progressive Conservative Diefenbaker (and Grant was more than aware of the multiple gaffes and inept tendencies of Diefenbaker, well-articulated in chapter 2 of *Lament).* But the lamentation of sorts (reflecting in many ways the lamentation genre of the Jewish prophet Jeremiah) was much more about the passing away, the dying (so well described by Grant as the death of a much loved child) of a vision of the good, true and beautiful (increasing eclipsed since the Reformation and secularized with the modern notion of the merging of liberty-willing-techne as a way of being). This progressive and Hegelian dialectical notion of the "cunning of reason" moving history ever onward and for the better was the very ideology Grant questioned and how much of the best and wisest of the past was now forgotten, hidden and concealed from the liberal ideologues. It is in chapter 7 of *Lament* that Grant reflects on the difference between "necessity" and the "good," the former seemingly so, the necessary agenda of liberalism in all its guises, internal differences and agendas. But, is "necessity" the "good" and how do the thoughtful think and live within such a cyclopean cave, shadows more real than the greater good?

Some of the deeper philosophical and theological questions and the classical versus modern issues do not hold Drury in quite the same way as they do Grant. Grant has a deeper sense and feel for the layered texture of Christianity in a way Drury does not although both are drawn to the classical ethos but differ on where they turn and why. The Athens-Jerusalem tension that Grant sought to understand and parse does not hold Drury in the same trying and challenging way as it does Grant. Drury tends to be consistently critical of classical and modern Christianity (her criticisms of Augustine and Aquinas for example) in a way that Grant and others would be more nuanced just as her read of Strauss and Kojève, Grant would have some affinity with but not be as dismissive. But both Grant and Drury do walk the same path (reasons similar and different) for the imperial nature, in thought and deed, of the American empire, Grant often seeing it as the new Rome (even greater in reach and power than classical Rome)—Drury would certainly nod an Amen to such a perspective.

The fact that Grant saw through the imperial nature of the United States, his High Tory inheritance a layered and complex one, meant his critique of the American context drew from significantly different sources than Drury. This means that there are many diagnostic affinities between Grant and Drury but their prognosis and means of acting on the dilemma of the chauvinism of the west would be different. *Lament for a Nation*, as mentioned above, is much more about the dilemma of being a Canadian with a

Tory touch in relationship to the United States that lacks such a touch and sense. Drury has tended not to draw from the Tory touch tradition and it is significant that Grant is not even mentioned in *Chauvinism of the West* even though Grant, if alive today, would applaud much that Drury has insightfully articulated.

The ongoing tensions between the United States and Canada are not new, Sir John A. Macdonald faced them, Diefenbaker's clash with Pearson yet another version, Trudeau contra Nixon, Turner contra Mulroney-Reagan much the same dilemma as is the Trump-Trudeau/Carney clash. Grant, like Drury, would definitely and decidedly lean in the direction of Macdonald, Diefenbaker, Trudeau, Turner and Carney in the contemporary tensions although she would have legitimate questions to ask Macdonald, Diefenbaker, Trudeau, Turner and Carney. And there can be no doubt both Grant and Drury would have serious and substantive philosophical and political doubts about Carney's 2022 book *Value(s): Building a Better World for All*—the presence of Kojève breathes on almost every page. But, to Grant's credit, in the Federal election of 1988 (Grant died September 27, 1988, election November 21, 1988) Grant weakening and near the end, voted for John Turner (more the Canadian nationalist) contra Brian Mulroney, Mulroney much more the free trade Reaganite pro-American. So, I suspect, although Grant would find much of Carney's philosophic thinking rather thin and dubious, he would certainly give the nod to Carney contra Pierre Poilievre in the 2025 Federal election, Poilievre a somewhat shrunken and more reactionary version of Mulroney.

It is important when reading *Lament for a Nation* to have, as a backdrop, Grant's earlier book, *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (lectures delivered in the late 1950s, book published in 1960). Many of the main themes in *Lament* are amply covered in *Philosophy in the Mass Age*—clash between the ancients and moderns, the Reformation and more to the historic point the Biblical ethos as time as history-Puritanism as significant founding vision of the United States, appeal yet limitation of Marx-Marxism and the seeming limitless notion of liberty contra order within the United States. Most of these themes are developed within the Canadian context in *Lament for a Nation*, the ideas more nuanced and developed. But in the closing pages of *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, Grant sees clearly how limitless notions of liberty—especially as embodied by the corporate class—wreak havoc on nature. These same notions lie at the core of the American imperial ethos, something both Grant and Drury saw, understood, and critiqued—an ethos that Trump and his uncritical disciples, to some degree, have further flaunted.

CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that Grant and Drury walk the same path on many substantive issues in their read of the origins, development and contemporary situation in the United States (obviously Drury rather than Grant) but they do part paths in their approach to a variety of political philosophers—the deeper and more thorough reasons could be the core of another essay. But, there is no doubt *Lament for a Nation* and *Chauvinism of the West* have much in common and the latter reflects, in some important ways, the line and lineage of Grant and Grant's *Lament for a Nation*. It's regrettable, in some ways, that Drury never engaged Grant in her recent tome—the connection between a Canadian classic of political philosophy and a more updated approach would have enhanced the insights of both books, lament a dominant theme in both insightful and incisive books.

APPENDIX: REVIEW OF DRURY, *CHAUVINISM OF THE WEST: THE CASE OF AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM.*

Palgrave Macmillan, 2024.

Each year a few fine and must-read books are published (others not worth more than a passing glance), but there can be little doubt that Shadia Drury's *Chauvinism of the West* is a ten bell book. There is much packed into this historic read of the West and its impact on the notion and ideology of American exceptionalism—the origins, history and contemporary reality of American politics, foreign policy and global politics are parsed and exposed well and wisely.

Chauvinism of the West is divided into 6 compact, probing and arrow hitting bull's eye well chapters:

1) The Roots of American Exceptionalism,
2) Manifest Destiny Goes Global,
3) What's Wrong with Spreading Democracy,
4) Neoconservative Realism,
5) Fascist Elements in Neoconservative Realism, and
6) The Political Theology of the West.

Each of the well-paced and tightly argued chapters are divided into smaller sections that hold the reader as Shadia's argument unfolds and develops. The almost 50 pages of the "Annotated Bibliography" convert elevates the book, which challenges the prevailing way of viewing America, into a spacious library that highlights further reading for those interested in following the pathway and trail that Shadia organized and constructed.

The cover of *Chauvinism of the West* speaks its own evocative and convincing message: a metaphor of Statue of Liberty falling into the sea, foaming waves soon to bury and drown it, city in the distance soon to suffer the same fate.

The West has a long history, at the highest level, of seeing itself as the embodiment and bearer of Jewish, Greek, Roman and Christian religious, political and philosophical thought and action. But, much hinges on whose read of these Traditions is to be mined—a timely and timeless question. Shadia does a detailed read of how a form of Puritanism shaped the early American culture and ethos; how, yet again, a read of the Enlightenment magnified such an inflated sense of uniqueness; then how a selective read of Athens and Sparta defined significant domestic and foreign policy. Shadia, to her credit, highlights how a crude form of aggressive realism (read a selective approach to Thucydides on this) is counterproductive and how/why it is held high by many American neoconservatives (inching alas towards fascism—obvious to most except the most blind these days). This use/abuse of the broader and fuller Western Tradition is both counterproductive and distorts the more complex and layered notions of such a Tradition (and the lessons to be learned from it). And, again, to Shadia's credit, she lingers long with Homer and the Greek tragedians as wise and insightful political philosophers, historians and philosophers. This going back of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle seems to have some affinities with Nietzsche and Heidegger but Shadia is no uncritical fan or cheerleader of either of the German recoverers of the pre-Socratic way and its relevance for the West (and American thought, culture, former policy and politics). I might add that Shadia's read of *The Persians* by Aeschylus is worth many a meditative read, the message not to miss for our ethos, Aeschylus probably the best of the three prominent Greek tragedians. There is much to Shadia's turn to the Homeric tradition, historians and literary (tragedians) ethos of classical Greek thought that gives her read of the ancients a unique approach that differs from those who mostly linger with Plato and Aristotle.

I was reminded of George Grant's *Philosophy in the Mass Age* and *Lament for a Nation* when sifting through how Shadia has interpreted such an intellectual, political and applied approach to the chauvinism of the West and the imperial (new Romans) genetic code of the United States, but Shadia goes much deeper than Grant in her approach and should be applauded for doing so.

Many a moment in *Chauvinism of the West,* Shadia pulls bow tight and takes aim at certain forms of Western Religion and the way they distort a more complex reality with their unhelpful and unhealthy notions of certainty and their equating of Jehovah, God, Allah with our all too human reads, interpretations and applications of such approaches. Needless to say this has had a dire impact on peoples, states and communities. The merging of theology and politics brings *Chauvinism of the West* to a fit and fine conclusion, Christian and Structural Realism pondered and a questioning whether a war with China is inevitable.

Shadia has been a Cassandra of sorts to the larger academic community, her books on Aquinas, Socrates, Strauss and Kojève often at odds with those who slip into subtler forms of hagiography of such icons in the West. The intellectual Sanhedrin has certainly not been minimally on board with Shadia's read of the West and, I suspect, this summa of sorts will be no different.

I might add, by way of a parting fini, that *Chauvinism of the West* is most timely given the fact Donald Trump is again the President of the United States and such a Pied Piper (and his many naïve acolytes) embody yet the newest and yet older form of chauvinism. We should be grateful that Shadia, like the earlier George Grant in *Lament for a Nation* or Al Purdy's edited *The New Romans* or John Redekop's edited *The Star Spangled Beaver: 24 Canadians Look South* stand on guard for a distinctive Canadian vision of a different way than the empire to the south. And, may she not be treated as was Hypatia of old.

Fiat Lux
Ron Dart

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A Champion of Intellect in the Age of Technology

WILLIAM CHRISTIAN

Keywords: George Grant, Technology, Canada, Plato

About a dozen miles outside Halifax on the way to Peggy's Cove lies Terrence Bay. It is bleak in its beauty, the rocks smoothed by the incessant waves and wind. A lighthouse reminds us that this is a real Nova Scotia community that until very recently made its living from the sea.

Halfway up a hill, overlooking the water, is a cottage. George Grant, the renowned Canadian philosopher who died Tuesday, always apologized to visitors that it was "just a shack," but he was proud that, with an experienced carpenter in the early 1950s, he had helped build it with his own hands. More than any place in the world, he loved Terrence Bay. Now he and the rocks will keep company for eternity, for it is there he chose to be buried.

The last time I saw him, in July, he and his wife Sheila took my wife and me there for a picnic. We unloaded the cold salmon, potato salad and the rest from the car and made our way carefully through the rocks to a little cove. George sat on a boulder, his plate balanced precariously on his lap.

As soon as lunch was finished, he launched into conversation again; brilliant, incisive, witty, learned, elegant. He was a big man, although he had recently lost weight. He felt in good health; he was vigorous and happy. It would still be a month before he would learn of the pancreatic cancer that would end his hope of resolving the philosophical contradictions of the modern world.

Grant was best known to Canadians for *Lament for a Nation*, a slim book published in 1965. John Diefenbaker's government had been defeated in 1963 over the issue of nuclear weapons, and his Liberal successor, Lester Pearson, had knuckled under to U.S. pressure and allowed nuclear weapons on Canadian soil. Once I asked him why he had written Lament. I expected some arcane philosophical defence. Instead, he replied: "Because I was mad, damned mad. I hated what they were doing to poor old Diefenbaker."

The book was a masterpiece that affected the political consciousness of a whole generation of Canadians who thought about politics and cared about their country. It gave intellectual sustenance to those who wanted to preserve in British North America a vision of the good which differed from that which prevailed in the Great Republic to the south. The modern world had, in Grant's view, become a technological dynamo whose very heart lay in our southern neighbor.

It is important to understand Grant's analysis of technology. He was not concerned with machines. The lasers, CAT scans, space shuttles were merely the products of technology. Technology was a state of mind, a philosophy, whatever its practitioners thought they were doing. Its origins lay in now obscure philosophical quarrels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but at its core was the domination of nature, first non-human nature, and more recently the mastery of human nature as well.

For Plato, his favorite philosopher, nature had been something different. Nature provided for human beings a guide or a standard that told us what we should do. Justice was something for which human beings were fitted by nature. But the modern view saw nature as something that existed to serve mankind, to be subject to human willing. It was our instrument, and the goal of modernity was to free us from all limitations on our will.

This tidal wave of technology was threatening to overwhelm Canada, and Grant sought to warn his countrymen of the danger. You can easily imagine his reaction when he read an article by a sociologist who contended that the whole argument in *Lament* was motivated by the fact that Grant represented a declining social class. His grandfather had been principal of Queen's University; his father was headmaster of the prestigious boys' school, Upper Canada College; he was merely a professor of religion at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont.

No one who ever met him could have doubted his profound commitment to the life of the intellect. He would sit and engage in dialogue for hours, and at the most intense level. By the force of his personality and his interests he would draw you slowly up toward his level.

Although he loved to talk, his great talent was as a listener. Gently but firmly he would pay you the ultimate courtesy of taking seriously what you said. You tried to live up to his expectations. Even harder, you tried not to be distracted by the cigaret ash that would grow to excessive lengths just before it cascaded down his tie to his vest, where it would add a little to that deposited by its predecessors.

His tastes were genuinely catholic. He lived in the small Ontario town of Dundas but was a devotee of the British science-fiction show, *Dr. Who*, and would not brook a word of criticism against Martina Navratilova, his favorite tennis star. He loved the spy novels of John Le Carre, and Anthony Powell's synoptic social comedy, *A Dance to the Music of Time*. More recently he was overwhelmed by the trilogy of novels by the French fascist writer, Louis-Ferdinand Celine. He despised Celine's politics, but he thought him the greatest modern writer, and found in his novels an unparalleled unmasking of the nature of contemporary civilization.

But more than anything else, he loved Shakespeare and Mozart. As he wrote in his last major essay, "Faith and the Multiversity":

> To some cultures and to some people their attention is more agreeably occupied by Rhapsody in Blue than by Mozart's K.482. This fact raises inevitably the question: are there some works that are more worth paying attention to than others? What is given in those that are most worthy of attention? What is it that enraptures us about them, so that even in the desolation of King Lear or K.491 we are enraptured? Can we describe that enrapturing as the immediate engrossment in the beauty of the work, which points to good which is quite unrepresentable?[1]

In such writings as these, we know we are in the presence of genius.

Once I paid the price for not taking Mozart seriously enough. We were at the dinner table, and I put on a Mozart piano concerto for background music. As soon as George heard the melody, he raised his hand and pronounced: "We must listen to this." We moved to where we could hear better and the whole company listened in silence to the end.

"After all," he explained, "you wouldn't continue with your coffee if there were a performance of King Lear going on in the room." This passionate intensity affected nothing as much as his concern for the abortion debate. Along with Sheila, he was absorbed by the right-to-life movement for the last 15 years of his life. There were, for him, intensely important philosophical issues involved, as well as deep moral ones.

Although he did not parade his faith in his writings, he had become a devout Christian when he was a student at Oxford during the Second World War. From that day until his death, his faith never wavered.

However, he believed that, in the old phrase, faith and reason were allies, not enemies. In the modern world, religion without philosophy was ultimately impossible. "Without Plato's writings," he once told me, "I couldn't have made head nor tail of Christianity."

If, as is reasonable to suppose, the heavenly choir gives frequent performances of Mozart's music, George Grant will be happy. Especially if he gets to talk to Plato during the intermissions.[2]

NOTES

1 Grant 1986, pp. 46-47.

2 This article was originally published in The Globe and Mail on September 30, 1988, to coincide with George Grant's funeral.

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SIEO refers to the assimilated *Studies in Emergent Order*

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Laurent Dobuzinskis
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Simon Fraser University
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