

## JUSTICE IN THE THOUGHT OF GEORGE GRANT

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George Grant is undoubtedly Canada's most provocative and probably most misunderstood thinker. Compared to other philosophers, his work is widely known among non-specialists largely because he considered his thought a public matter and went out of his way to deliver it to large numbers via radio talks and public addresses. Partly due to these efforts, Grant has more enemies than friends, at least among liberals and progressives. The essence of the liberal critique is that Grant is merely a nostalgic, tiresome remnant of a traditional class that has been by-passed by progress and has not reconciled itself to the better life that now exists.<sup>1</sup> For example, John W. Holmes, the dean of Canada's "Middle Power" diplomatic corps, says of Grant: "Nostalgia is seductive. The Grantian vision of our bucolic Canadian paradise lost is somewhat reminiscent of the lament of the Reaganites for the world of Booth Tarkington and the Land of Oz."<sup>2</sup> For Roland Puccetti, Grant is a leading figure in the "Mausoleum," rather than the "Searchlight" tradition, of philosophy because he rejects

just about everything that has been done by philosophers since the time of Bacon and Descartes. It is all intellectual heresy, a corruption of the Good and the True: saving exceptions being the historical turning back to and thus partial rejuvenation of Ancient Verities found in Hegel and Nietzsche.<sup>3</sup>

These sentiments represent the increasing reaction to Grant in the late 1980s.

## GEORGE GRANT

Many observers of the public scene, like Robert S. McElvaine,<sup>4</sup> are speaking openly of the fact that North America, and the West more generally, is going through a political transformation, away from the "conservatism" of the last twenty years, towards a new kind of "progressivism" that is not yet fully developed or manifested. Evidence of this change may be seen in the declining repute of Reagan-style conservatism in North American politics and the rise of an admittedly twisted liberalism, all part of what Michael Weinstein has called "state-sponsored community."<sup>5</sup> The health authorities of Sweden propose to set up an "AIDS colony" on an island near Stockholm, for example, to "protect" the healthy population, and so far they have met surprisingly little public resistance.<sup>6</sup> Measures like this — the use of the "positive" state in the "public interest" — are likely to be more common in the coming years as the population becomes accustomed to state leadership and initiative in the interests of "justice."

In this new environment it will be easier for people to slur and misrepresent thinkers like Grant, both in writing and conversation, with charges of nostalgia and antiquarianism. Grant's thought and its influence among thoughtful people is not secure and cannot be taken for granted because it already appears to many to be more and more irrelevant as time passes. Despite this, we are seeing few efforts to recover and defend the truth in Grant. Much of the current criticism of Grant's thought is valuable in itself but focusses rather narrowly on certain aspects like technology, or his ethics and nationalism.<sup>7</sup> He published his first article over forty years ago and yet little has been done to try to understand his work as a whole. Joan O'Donovan comes closest to this, yet even her analysis does not answer the question of how the publications of the 1970s and 1980s fit in with his earlier work.<sup>8</sup>

It is therefore the goal of this essay to begin the recovery outlined above by examining both the continuity and the flux in Grant's thought through the identification of a single theme around which the diversity of his thought clusters. In this essay I argue that in his latest book, *Technology and Justice*, Grant has returned full-circle: in the 1940s and 1950s his public writing displayed certainty based on Kantian liberalism with a relatively benign view of modern life. In comparison to his critique of modernity made in the 1960s and 1970s, Grant now expresses total certainty once again, based on "God as Goodness," and also more readily identifies the positive aspects of modernity.

As we will see, George Grant's chief occupation during his forty years of scholarship has not been negative or destructive, nor merely the act of tearing down what exists while failing to offer "positive," "theoretically acceptable alternatives," as Ian Box has suggested.<sup>9</sup> Rather, it is my claim that much of his effort has been directed toward the positive reconstructing of society, consistent with a dominant sense of justice. One might suggest that almost any of Grant's major concepts, like "technology," "modernity," or "the Good," also provide a theme through which to un-

derstand the entirety of his efforts. The advantage of justice is that it is central to all of his writings, from 1944 until the present, and allows us to see the continuity and variation within his thought. Technology was not a major concern for Grant until the 1960s, and modernity and the Good were of little importance before 1950.

One more issue, that of method, must be resolved before I proceed. How can one best understand the essence of a thinker like Grant? First, the background of the thinker — his loyalist roots, for instance — must be considered, then his works, and influences, in the order of their composition. Ironically, the historicist Antonio Gramsci makes the strongest argument for this strategy. We should, he says, examine the catalogue of the thinker's works, "even those most easily overlooked, in chronological order, divided according to intrinsic criteria." In addition, the "[s]earch for the *Leitmotiv* [sic], for the rhythm of the thought as it develops, should be more important than that for single casual affirmations and isolated aphorisms."<sup>10</sup> It is toward an understanding of Grant's "leading theme" that this paper is devoted.

### Justice as "Proper Conservatism"

George Grant's scholarly activities began toward the end of the Second World War and focussed on the question of whether Canada was a "nation" and whether it should remain part of the British Commonwealth. In "Have We a Canadian Nation?" Grant answered yes, Canada was developing as a nation, and must seek out principles to organize the community around, for "unless we know why we exist, unless we know what we are trying to build here in Canada ... we will inevitably be shaped by the REPUBLIC," the United States.<sup>11</sup> Post-1783 British North America, in rejecting the American Revolution, was conservative in the sense that it had always sought to preserve order over the excesses of freedom found in the United States. For Grant, it was right and just that Canada should become a strong independent nation. In *The Empire: Yes or No?*, Grant clearly believes that postwar justice will be served by a strong British Empire, a "third force" that will prevent U.S./U.S.S.R. dominance of the new international organization and of the postwar world.<sup>12</sup>

Even in 1944, justice, as the mediator between inward life and outward existence, and the state as the individual writ large, were present in Grant's thought. Canada must strengthen its national existence, and this "strength can only come from within ourselves.... Only if we can build up within ourselves a way of life that justifies our existence will we continue to exist."<sup>13</sup> Justice in the inward life and in the outward existence would continue to be an important part of Grant's thought. In fact, as we will see, at different points in his life one or the other of these two elements is given a dominant role in his writing.

## GEORGE GRANT

This early work laid the foundations for the first definition of justice in Grant's thought, which can be referred to as "proper conservatism" or Kantian liberalism. After his return from Britain in the late 1940s, Oxford doctorate in hand, Grant turned his attention to what he at first identified as the conflict between the classical belief in the transcendent and the modern belief that the explanation and end of life is found in the world. During this period, which spanned the 1950s until the publication of his first major work, *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (1959), Grant conceived of justice as a sort of "proper conservatism" (his own phrase) which required that people try to reconcile Natural Law with modern progress.<sup>14</sup> As we will see, the terms which characterize Grant's thought at that time, especially in *Philosophy*, were moral law, freedom, progress, and self-legislation. *Philosophy* concluded this approach to justice, which was developed in numerous articles during the 1950s.

In 1956, for example, Grant put forward this early conception of justice in an article entitled "The Uses of Freedom: A word and our world." The concept of freedom, he said, was in a state of confusion because thinkers from vastly different perspectives used "freedom" very differently, and this confusion worked "against the good life."<sup>15</sup> Most importantly, freedom had a different meaning for classicists, who accept some form of transcendence, than for the modern who believed that the world holds the key to both the meaning and the method of human life. "And as most educated people, consciously or unconsciously, have been divided within themselves by this conflict, their uses of the word 'freedom' are a product of their own division" ("Freedom," 516). He attributed the decline of the classical and the rise of the modern to the particular circumstances of Protestant religion (Puritanism in North America), which "brought into the western world a fresh interest in action through its intense desire to shape the world to God's purposes" ("Freedom," 519), which clearly predominated over the "spiritual inwardness" generally associated with Puritanism. Like *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, "The Uses of Freedom" was a pre-Vatican II work, and Grant did not anticipate that the Roman Catholic Church would further abandon Natural Law in the face of modernity. So during the 1950s there was a conflict within people between the classical and the modern account of life, and Grant saw that the trend of the disappearance of inwardness/contemplation/limit, in favour of hedonism/freedom, had to be arrested.

"The view of freedom appears most clearly in a negative form, that is in the dying out on this continent of personal relations, art, philosophy and prayer" ("Freedom," 524). In each of these cases, the growth of the "progressive spirit" led to the remaking of the world — manipulation — toward the realization of our latest desires. Humans inevitably became objectified because they were open to manipulation just like everything else. The rise of hedonism makes art only "an imaginative coating to existence rather than ... the recognition and statement of reality," and hence it can

never successfully compete with science as the society's "gate to reality" ("Freedom," 525-526). Importantly, at this stage Grant did not believe that the disease would necessarily be terminal. The history of the loss of all "reference to the transcendent" and the rise of "worldly reformism" must not simply be seen as a loss, he says, because "[o]ur continent in this century has had its great moments." Specifically, until recently the medical profession was a fine example of the best the human spirit had to offer, and there was good in the hope of the "liberal democratic faith," despite the fact that it undermined the transcendent. Nor can we know the extent of the debasement, because the verdict is not yet in on the efforts of the elite to revive transcendence. "The Uses of Freedom" ends in a particularly appropriate way, with the author offering a contingent prediction that "[a]s thought about our proper end disappears," the social elite will increasingly "pour" pleasure and perversion into the "vacuum." Remarkably, he concludes that "[h]ow God shall reconcile the world to Himself is not a matter we can comprehend."

If in 1956 Grant's early conception of "Justice as 'Proper Conservatism'" was still developing, by 1959 it had reached its height. In the United States edition, *Philosophy in the Mass Age* was appropriately subtitled "An Essay on the fabric of Western Culture and the need for a new moral philosophy." Grant's chief goal was to light at least part of the way to this new moral philosophy. The term "proper conservatism" comes from the concluding chapter, entitled "Law, Freedom and Progress," in which Grant tried to answer the key question: "How can we think out a conception of law which does not deny the truth of our freedom or the truth of progress?" (*Philosophy*, 98). His terminology had changed from previous years but the thrust was similar. Law, in this case, was the rule by which people lived, and was his main vehicle for discussing questions of justice. While Natural Law declined in influence in recent centuries, the "progressive spirit" became more influential, and since we must accept that both will now always exist, the problem is developing a law that can reconcile the two. Grant defined Natural Law as "the assertion that there is an order in the universe, and that right action for us human beings consists in attuning ourselves to that order" (*Philosophy*, 28), while the "progressive spirit" was the view that humans are the "makers of history, the makers of our own laws ... authentically free since nothing beyond us limits what we should do" (*Philosophy*, 42). The general goal of the book is to restore "moral philosophy" to its previous rigour, for recently it "has come to be associated with vague uplift" (*Philosophy*, v). The chief dilemma is that as the space program indicates, "[m]en may not long remain bound to the earth, but will they remain bound by anything in what they do?" (*Philosophy*, 98).

Looking at 1959, it is quite correct to conclude that we are surrounded by meaninglessness, and that contrary to Natural Law we cannot identify the order in the universe. The state of the world is synonymously a call

to action to make it better, if we, like Grant, fall "on the side of law" and if we accept that there is a "meaning in existence" even in the midst of the disorder. Perhaps this affirmation is only "a matter of faith for me," but if we look at the world "[t]he need for an absolute moral law is evident, just when the difficulties of thinking such a law are also most evident." There is a disunion between the individual character, which arises from faith and intellectual power, and that which can only preserve its integrity by defending itself from modern thought, for "[t]hose who are touched by the modern world less and less maintain any sense of limit." Nevertheless we need to develop a new set of modern standards, which will only work if this new law "fully recognizes the freedom of the spirit" instead of seeming external to human will (*Philosophy*, 100-102). As Kant said, a law is moral only if it is freely obeyed, and so the new law for modern society must be a law that the free will follow willingly, though at the same time this law cannot pander to every whim.

Inevitably, there is an element of conservatism in this Kantian proposal because the law must restrain the progressive spirit from breaching the prescribed limits, since "the truth of conservatism is the truth of order and limit, both in social and personal life." However, it must be "proper conservatism" because conservatism as we know it does not address the problem of overcoming evil and in fact often requires that evils be perpetuated in the form of the rule of capital and the "right of the greedy to turn all activities into sources of personal gain." A proper conservatism would be "an order which gives form to persons, to families, to education, to worship, to politics, and to the economic system" (*Philosophy*, 108-109). It might seem odd that Kantian liberalism and "Proper Conservatism" are consistent, since liberal and conservative are supposed to be opposite to one another. The confusion is caused by the changing definitions of the two during the last two centuries. "Conservatism" is now an ideology of transformation where liberalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, exemplified by Adam Smith, once was. Elements of conservatism were found in the thought of classical liberals like Lord Acton because, like the early Grant, and unlike twentieth century liberals, they had a clear sense of limit and restraint to offset the expansiveness of freedom and democracy.

### Justice as Self-Determination

For George Grant the 1960s represented both a deepening of his analysis of the 1950s, culminating in his philosophical master-work of 1969, *Time as History*, and a shift back to the analysis of the Canadian situation, which culminated in his 1965 work *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*.<sup>16</sup> During this decade Grant moved from Halifax back to his native Ontario, and concurrently entered a phase in which his published writings displayed much greater distress toward the tendencies of

modern life. An examination of the evolution of Grant's conception of justice will reveal the importance of the concept of self-determination in Grant's complaint against the United States and, notably, the bulk of English Canada. The lament, the crying out "at the death or at the dying of something loved" (*Lament*, 2), was directed in this case at the final verdict that Canada had no future as a sovereign state. Again the concept of "the Good," which I suggested was connected to justice in "The Uses of Freedom," makes an appearance, not in explicit connection to life under Natural Law, but to the existence of a small "unimportant country." For Grant and many of his generation Canada was the only country they could claim allegiance to, and its sovereignty appeared to be the only prospect for justice in a world in which the "liberal homogeneous state" was spreading, outward, chiefly from the United States. The terminology in this period represented a shift away from the Kantian and toward the Hegelian, and from inwardness to outwardness.

The main difference between *Lament* and his previous scholarship lies in the level of analysis. In *Philosophy* Grant addressed himself mainly to the North American continent, urging the creation of a new moral system to represent a synthesis between Natural Law, represented by Canada, and the Progressive Spirit, represented by the United States. In the early 1960s, two things happened simultaneously. As his analysis of modernity deepened (later discussed with respect to his published work from 1967-69), his hope for the above continent-wide synthesis waned, just as he was hearing the death-rattle of a country in which such changes might otherwise have been manageable. By the early 1960s the struggle that Grant addressed was no longer within the individual but with a spirit in the world, the progressive spirit. John Diefenbaker represented the last gasp of the Canadian possibility, as a real, albeit junior, partner with the United States in leading the "noble" Western civilization.

For this reason *Lament* is full of references to both Canadian sovereignty and to the prospects for conservatism in the modern age, and these two are inextricably linked. "The impossibility of conservatism in our era is the impossibility of Canada" (*Lament*, 68), though it is crucial to mention that conservatism no longer meant what it did in 1959. Conservatism now stands, ultimately, for any system of thought which tries to resist the age-of-progress steamroller. Hence, the conservatism which was distinguished from "proper conservatism" is now seen to be part of the overwhelming liberal majority. The Americans who call themselves conservatives, like Barry Goldwater, were really "old-fashioned" liberals, followers of John Locke, and this was increasingly true of Canada's newly-named "Progressive Conservative" party.<sup>17</sup> So what Grant called "proper conservatism" in 1959 was by 1965 anything, including socialism, that would prevent the Monster-to-the-South from swallowing the more traditional society to the north. Socialism typically meant the "use of the government to restrain greed in the name of social good .... In doing so, was it not appealing to the con-

## GEORGE GRANT

servative idea of social order against the liberal idea of freedom?" (*Lament*, 59).

In the 1950s achieving justice meant arriving, generally, at a new synthesis of Natural Law and the Progressive Spirit. Early in the 1960s, one of his foci became that of insuring that a people would have the possibility of resisting domination by the global liberal capitalist ideology emanating mainly from the United States. Shades of this concern would appear later in his opposition to the U.S. war in Vietnam, not only a bloody affair but also another struggle between the forces of empire and the forces of self-determination. The discussion of *Lament*, an important book in itself, is really only a preparation for a discussion of Grant's more important philosophical work of this decade, *Time as History*. In retrospect, *Lament* appears as a work of transition between a period in which Grant believed that a revival of Natural Law was possible, and the later period in which he diagnosed the full "darkness" of modernity. *Time as History*, inspired as it was by his reading of Leo Strauss and Jacques Ellul,<sup>18</sup> brought him into a full deconstruction of modernity.

### Justice as the Vanquished

The early 1960s was a time of transition for Grant, from hope about our public prospects to resignation, and from activism to greater understanding. For this reason, some of his essays written between 1960 and 1965 reflect the tension of the transition and have even warranted self-rebuttal.<sup>19</sup> In the case of "Religion and the State" (1963), upon its reprinting in his *Technology and Empire* (1968), the author decided to warn the reader of the defects of the effort. One of the two purposes of including the article in the volume, he says, was that it illustrated "the futility of conservatism as a theoretical standpoint in our era." To understand what the "technological society really is," we must understand that "to partake even dimly in the riches of Athens or Jerusalem should be to know that one is outside the public realm of the age of progress" (*Empire*, 43-4).

No doubt his realization that classical and modern thought were irreconcilable came partly from his examination of the Strauss-Kojève debate, an account of which is also found in the 1968 volume. In "Tyranny and Wisdom," Grant examines the debate between Leo Strauss and Alexander Kojève on their respective answers to the question of whether the movement toward the "universal and homogeneous state" posited by Hegel is good or not, and whether the classical or the modern provides a better understanding of and a more potent defence against tyranny. Drawing on *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Kojève argued that the universal and homogeneous state is the best social order for humanity. As Grant says, Strauss, drawing on Xenophon's *Hiero*, makes the opposite case on the basis on "an account of philosophy which Kojève does not accept," specifically that "political philosophy stands or falls according to its ability



to transcend history, i.e., by its ability to make statements about the best social order the truth of which is independent of changing historical epochs" (*Empire*, 91-92). From this we can see the source for Grant's movement from a concept of justice which emphasized self-determination to a concept which denied that public justice could exist in the fully modern world. In a way, for Grant the Strauss/Kojève debate symbolized the struggle between justice and modernity. The influence of Strauss on Grant meant that he now understood exactly why justice (traditionally-defined) and modernity were irreconcilable. Therefore, his thought in the 1960s delved into modernity and its roots, and diagnosed the disease, a task which he completed in 1969.

Between 1965 and 1969 Grant also read and took to heart the work of Jacques Ellul, on technology, Martin Heidegger, and especially Friedrich Nietzsche, which is apparent in the rest of the selections in *Technology and Empire*. In "Canadian Fate and Imperialism," "A Platitude," and "In Defence of North America," Grant made primary use of concepts like technology, will, and mastery, none of which had been accorded much before. This also represents a return to the inward life after the concern for the outer world represented by *Lament for a Nation*. At the root of his present problematic was the idea that "[t]he dominant tendency of the western world has been to divide history from nature and to consider history as dynamic and nature controllable as externality" (*Empire*, 72). This is the beginning of Grant's wonderful critique of technological life, for while these ideas are consistent in many ways with his work during the 1950s and early 1960s, by 1967 his critique was much more powerful, sweeping and far-reaching. The rise of the Western world has meant the rise of the will to mastery, of the view that the world is ours to shape, that history has conquered nature, leading to imperialism, the destruction of any limits to the dominance over nature, and an externalized view of humanity which makes it fit to be manipulated as an inanimate object.

"Technique is ourselves" because technology is no longer outside of us, but is inside, part of us, and has won the battle for dominance within us. We have now become *means* rather than ends, and are hence integral to technology because of the way we calculate, function, and work — these are the limits of our horizon. Beyond the "will to mastery" is Heidegger's "will to will," our present situation, where nothing matters beyond worship of human will. Our desires are directed to activities, like moon walks and mountain climbs, in which no other motive exists except the extension of our mastery. "As our liberal horizons fade in the winter of nihilism, and as the dominating amongst us see themselves within no horizon except their own creating of the world, the pure will to technology ... more and more gives sole content to ... creating" (*Empire*, 40). Justice has been vanquished because we have even lost the language through which we might understand the nature of the Good. "In human life there must always be place for love of the good" (*Empire*, 73), but we have "no words

## GEORGE GRANT

which cleave together and summon out of uncertainty the good of which we may sense the dispossession" (*Empire*, 139). The situation is so desperate that "we have lost our ability to judge whether an absense of something was in fact a deprival" because "technological society has stripped us above all of the very systems of meaning which disclosed the highest purposes of man" (*Empire*, 137).

Grant's greatest philosophical work was yet to come. *Time as History*, a series of essays delivered as the 1969 Massey Lectures broadcast on CBC Radio, is Grant's full treatment of Nietzsche and the culmination of a decade's work.<sup>20</sup> For most thinkers *Time as History* could have been the crowning philosophical achievement, since it appears to be the culmination of a life's work. The themes of *Time as History* are familiar enough, but Grant had never before given them such coherent and exhaustive treatment. Terms like chance and uncertainty take on a new prominence. At the root is the idea that the English language has become the language of destiny and if we are to understand the direction in which humanity is moving we would do well to understand some of the chief concepts in the language, especially that of "history." History in the past has never meant what it means today. It means both the "study of the past" and "human existing." More importantly, we believe that we are "historical beings" who can solve the riddle of ourselves by examining our historical development. History was once separate from nature and for a long time we held on to Natural Law by believing that even as nature changed, Natural Law and the rules derived from it and which we were to live by, remained more or less constant. This modern conception of history, present in the thought of Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel, described "the human situation in which we are not only made but make." Humans were part of evolution but they also had the capacity to act as the "spearhead [which] can consciously direct the very process." For Grant, we conceive of history as action-oriented, just as Benedetto Croce argued was the case (*Time*, 6-7).

Given this sense of history, humanity developed in the last several centuries a number of attitudes about the world which explain very neatly our development. Because of "mastery through prediction over human and non-human nature" and the idea that human accomplishments would "unfold" as time passed, modern society and its ideologies became oriented toward progress, mastery of the future, and issuing periodic calls-to-action to members of the human collective. Because of this concern for the future and for protecting ourselves against uncertainty, "we all more and more truly exist in the collective, and less and less pursue purposes which transcend it." This future orientation also makes humans the most powerful and the most violent of creatures. We have cultivated "resolute will" instead of contemplation in ourselves because of this orientation, boundless desire has replaced limits, and creation has more and more concerned itself with creation for its own sake, "the 'creation' of novelties." Meaning is found not in what exists, "but in that which we can yet bring to be"

(*Time*, 12, 19-20). As Arthur Kroker has said in his fine discussion, "*Time as History* ... contains a formidable and comprehensive phenomenology of the modern mind .... Grant reverses the usual critique of technology by compelling us to examine the implications of the Western mind and the modern personality in the development of technological society."<sup>21</sup>

Grant turns to Nietzsche because he "thought the conception of time as history more comprehensively than any other modern thinker before or since" (*Time*, 22). Not only did Nietzsche have a sense of history, but he also understood that "there are no reasons to justify belief in the goodness of rationality as our given purpose," nor has any transcendent idea developed to take the place of God, which we realized was a horizon and could no longer believe in (*Time*, 28-30). The belief in rationality led to science, which undermined the belief in rationality as something more than part of science. The problem is, "we cannot deny history and retreat into a destroyed past," and yet "how can we overcome the blighting effect of living without horizons?" Justice as the vanquished is well illustrated here because justice, which was a creature of the past, is, like the past, dead. Modernity has been attacking justice for several centuries and it was Nietzsche who finally helped Grant see that modernity has emerged as the victor.

As for the remainder of *Time as History*, Grant finds that Nietzsche's analysis of modern society has been fully realized in our age. The "last men" are in the majority in technological society and live in "debased happiness," and the "nihilists" would "rather will nothing than have nothing to will" (*Time*, 34). Both are gripped by the spirit of revenge, and neither deserve to be masters of the earth. Grant objects to Nietzsche's urging of *amor fati*, saying that we cannot love fate "unless ... there could appear, however rarely, intimations of ... perfection in which our desires for good find their rest and their fulfillment" (*Time*, 46). Our only resort, in the midst of the darkness we find around us, is to search for intimations of deprivals, including an idea of the Good. As always with Grant, he tried to leave us with hope and some reason to seek the Good despite the brilliant discussion of the death of justice and the dominance of progress, action, and time as history.

### Justice for the Vanquished

After *Time as History*, many readers of George Grant's work had difficulty in understanding the "new" direction he adopted in the 1970s. Why, after he delivered the final blow to modernity, did he take up a series of ethical issues in which, on the surface, he appears to assume many things about society which he denied in the late 1960s, including the prospects for reviving Natural Law as a ground for social conduct? Grant's predecessor as Canada's most important philosopher, Harold Innis, also became less and less hopeful about the future of the modern world and Canada, and

yet his response was to explore history itself rather than to discuss primarily the Canadian/Western situation. In *English-Speaking Justice*, his major work of 1974, Grant chose to re-engage himself in public ethical debate, but this represented a radicalization of his thought rather than a moderation, in that the focus was to demonstrate that liberal technological society was unjust even according to its own historically-developed principles.<sup>22</sup> This shift toward the public ethical debate is also a shift and rebalancing, from the concern for inward justice in *Time as History* to a greater concern for the outward. This entailed a redefinition of justice, which I refer to as "Justice for the Vanquished." It was perfectly consistent with what we knew to be Grant's opinions, though in the past they were expressed less strongly.

During the 1960s, Grant believed "deprivals" meant that the best that humans could hope to do in the modern world was to listen for intimations of the Good, for we could never be certain of it. As he wrote in 1968, "to listen for the intimations of deprivation requires attempting a distinction between our individual history and any account which might be possible of what belongs to man as man."<sup>23</sup> At that time Grant recognized that his conception of the Good might only be a result of his circumstances. Despite this, whereas *Time as History* pointed to the death of justice, at least on the surface *English-Speaking Justice* appeared as an effort in favour of a "traditional" view of justice. As the title suggests, the latter is about the present defects in the English-speaking account of justice, and Grant is not at all reluctant to identify right and wrong. In this book, abortion, euthanasia, and exploitation of the weak are wrong, and Grant wants to do something about them. Canada had amended its abortion law in 1969 to permit abortions when the life or well-being of the woman was judged to be in danger, and the Roe v. Wade decision, which outlawed certain state restrictions on the availability of abortions in the United States, had just been handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court.

A number of elements in the book also shed light on Grant's motives for writing it, and on the meaning of justice. On the surface, this book is about the failure of justice based on social contractarianism. After defining liberalism and noting that a persuasive moral case can be made today only by using the language of liberalism, Grant devotes much of the book to a critique of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, one of the most popular modern discussions of its kind. In other words, after noting that only liberal discourse can have an impact in modern society, Grant proceeds to show that liberal bourgeois society is unjust even according to *its own principles*, let alone his own. His chief complaint about Rawls's work is that it offers a contractarian view of justice by drawing on thinkers like Locke and Kant, but neglects the elements of tradition, like reason in Kant, which informed those thinkers' views. The impact of this neglect is that Rawls cannot "state clearly what it is about human beings which makes them worthy of high political respect. Where Kant is clear concerning this, Rawls

is not" (*English*, 33). Grant is also unhappy with the rules generated by Rawls. "His account of the substance of justice puts together the claims of bourgeois individualism and progressive equality, typical of official American liberalism" (*English*, 40-41). It is hard to imagine a more scathing criticism from someone who believes in a classical, transcendent sense of justice: "All that need be said about Rawls's approach to classical philosophy is that in a book on justice there are four times as many references to a certain professor [sic] Arrow as there are to Plato" (*English*, 95).

The real provocation in *English-Speaking Justice* comes in the final section, in which Grant makes the case against the contractual view of justice which places the idea of individual rights above the idea of Good. If we can say that a foetus is not a person, then "[w]hat is it about any members of our species which makes the liberal rights of justice their due?" (*English*, 71). If we can deny the label of "person" to a foetus, then why not deny it to every other weakling in society? What of the mentally handicapped, the criminal, the mentally or terminally ill? Can liberalism itself survive if we place "convenience" ("individual rights") over "good"? What we have, in other words, is a situation in which one's strength or weakness determines the sort of "justice" that one receives. "The price for large scale equality under the direction of the 'creative' will be injustice for the very weak" (*English*, 84). In other words, modern contractarianism claims to provide justice to persons in society and yet provides no basic principle, beyond the erratic legal interpretation of the Constitution, to ensure that all who deserve protection will receive it.

Grant's consistent support for justice as a balance in the inward life leading to justice in the external plays a noticeable role in his critique of Rawlsian thought and of the modern definition of the self. "As justice is conceived as the external convenience of contract, it obviously has less and less to do with the good ordering of the inward life." It is problematic to define justice as "conventional and contractual" since such a definition undermines the mutual interdependence of "inward and outward justice" (in the sense that just relations come from and support inward justice) (*English*, 84-85).

While *Time as History* explored the development of intolerance of the flesh, *English-Speaking Justice* identified the implications of this intolerance for modern society. While Grant's goal is apparently to "understand" technological society, he writes here with unprecedented passion. As he says in the book's final passage, our "lack of tradition of thought is one reason why it is improbable that the transcendence of justice over technology will be lived among English-speaking people", but we get the definite sense that we are obliged to try (*English*, 89).

## GEORGE GRANT

### Justice as Faith and Love

Grant's last major published work, *Technology and Justice*, represents a new public affirmation of his faith in goodness and a return, full-circle, to the certainty which was so clearly part of his work in the 1950s.<sup>24</sup> This new certainty is based on a public affirmation of his belief in "God as Goodness," followed by a critique of modernity bringing out both the positive and the negative. Ever since his conversion in the 1940s Grant has been a strong believer in the Christian God, and his current faith does not appear to be substantively different from his faith of the 1950s.

There is continuity in his religious belief over time, but flux in the role of this religious belief in his thought. His belief in "God as Goodness" has not been this important or prominent since the 1950s. It appears, however, that Grant's new locale has more to do with this full-circle return than a change in Grant himself.<sup>25</sup> Even his most despairing critiques of modernity, written during the sixties and early seventies, raised the issue of goodness in light of the criticisms levelled against modern injustices.

George Santayana once commented that "the freest spirit must have some birthplace, some *locus standi* from which to view the world and some innate passion by which to judge it."<sup>26</sup> For Santayana this place was Avila, in Central Spain; for Grant, it was in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In Halifax (with its "intimations" of tradition and community), Grant seemed to be at home intellectually. His most profound thought comes from his time in Southern Ontario, but the writing seems unsettled in comparison to the work completed in Halifax in both the 1950s and 1980s.

The four most important "new" themes in *Technology and Justice* are: his now-total affirmation of 'Goodness' generally and Christianity specifically; his emphasis on the ever-presence and need for faith, defined by Simone Weil as "the experience that the intelligence is enlightened by love" (*Technology*, 38); a renewed concern for the language of the technological society; and the way in which viewing the human as "object" has undermined humanistic studies in the university. *Technology* carries forward past themes, but whereas *English Speaking Justice* addressed justice for the vanquished, Grant's strongest affirmation of Christianity yet, as a "lover of Plato within Christianity" (*Technology*, 90), has broadened his conception of justice to address the problem of bringing love of the "beauty of otherness" back into life. Again, where in *English Speaking Justice* Grant leaned toward the outward life, he has once again taken up the inward life. There is still the critique of the rights-oriented society, and of abortion and euthanasia, but criticism of the adoption of "value" (which usurped the place of Good) and "quality of life" now run throughout the work.

It is important to note that Grant's affirmation of Christianity has come even more clearly at the expense of Friedrich Nietzsche, who clearly occupied a central place in his thought in the late 1960s. In this book Grant demonstrates that one can accept Nietzsche or Christianity, but not both,

and if one accepts Christianity, then Nietzsche must be demoted. If Grant accepts Natural Law, that Goodness which transcends the ages, then he must criticize Nietzschean Historicism, which stipulates that "all thought (particularly the highest) depends, even in its very essence, on a particular set of existing experienced circumstances" (*Technology*, 84). In *Time as History* Grant recognized the truth in Nietzsche, but nonetheless rejected his thought; but in *Technology* he is much more negatively disposed toward Nietzsche than he was in the late 1960s. In a number of places Nietzsche is associated, inadvertently or otherwise, with syndromes which he diagnosed but did not necessarily support. In "The Language of Euthanasia," co-written with Sheila Grant, Grant, in criticizing the "quality of life" criterion applied today, comments that "[i]t must be remembered that 'quality of life' was made central to the political thought of the philosopher Nietzsche, who taught the sacred right of 'merciless extinction' of large masses of men" (*Technology*, 115). This is the full articulation of that part of Grant, present in Chapter 5 of *Time as History*, which both recognizes the diagnostic truth of Nietzsche and opposes the implications of the truth on Platonic grounds.

In the third essay in the book, "Nietzsche and the Ancients: Philosophy and Scholarship," the question of the new treatment of Nietzsche is illuminated. Whereas Grant had in the past praised Nietzsche's acuity in diagnosing modernity, we now find that he admits the genius in Nietzsche while attacking the implications of the content of the thought. Reading Nietzsche is necessary to understanding modernity, he says, but the risk is that doing so will undermine the study of the classics, specifically Plato, as a means of finding truth. Nietzsche should be taught, but only from the perspective that the teacher "rejects Nietzsche's doctrine," and that "he is a teacher of evil." It is as though in affirming Christianity publicly to this extent, Grant has found it necessary to advise the teacher to do what amounts to "inoculating" students against the truth in Nietzsche's thought on the ground that it might undermine faith in goodness.<sup>27</sup>

It would seem that his new certainty about the Good is accompanied by what is undoubtedly his strongest affirmation of the positive side of modern society since 1959. In his writing Grant has always emphasized that he seeks to examine the costs borne by life in the technological age; he makes no claim that there are only costs and no benefits. In this respect *Technology and Justice* contains what is perhaps his strongest recognition of the benefits of modern life. Of equality, he says that before one speaks against it one should consider "what it was like for those at the bottom of the ladder when the principle of equality was modified by the principle of hierarchy." As for technology, "[w]ho cannot be grateful for electric light; who cannot be aware that physics has made potential the destruction of all life on this planet?" (*Technology*, 59, 61).

Finally, in Grant's thought, the Platonic conception of justice as the mediator between the inward and the outward life once again holds an impor-

## GEORGE GRANT

tant place. He argues that historically, for those who were likely to rule, it "was necessary to understand justice within the whole scheme of the cosmos." (*Technology*, 57-58). Internal justice, as least in the form of "good habits," led to proficiency in leadership.

### Conclusion

George Grant has had a long scholarly career which, because of the breadth of his activities, might seem confusing and inconsistent at first glance. The concept of justice has allowed us to see both the unity of his efforts as well as the variation over time. His scholarship is unified by his deep concern for building a just society, whether it was the Canadian nation in the 1940s, the U.S.-Canadian alliance in the 1950s, or society in the ethical darkness of the 1970s and 1980s. A Platonic sense of justice is to be found in his earliest writings, and there is an intriguing variation, almost oscillation, over time between justice in the individual's inward life and justice in the individual's outward conduct in society.

His latest work shows that before his death he returned to a public position of certainty, now based on faith in goodness, while acknowledging both the good and the bad in the modern world. However, it is clear that George Grant will be best remembered for his work on Canadian nationalism, which remains the most accessible and "relevant" of his thought. That work took the form of a "lament," but the lament should now be made for the uncertain future of Grant's legacy. We should lament the fact that Grant will never be appreciated by modern progressives, whether they are Marxists, feminists, or national liberationists. Grant's discourse has little appeal for members of these groups because he was always too ambivalent about progress, as well as about what should be done to improve the conditions of the oppressed. The final Grantian irony may be the cruellest one of all: those who would benefit most from Grant's teachings (e.g. progressives) will not or cannot do so.

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### Notes

I am grateful to Michael Weinstein for his encouragement and help in this project. I would also like to thank the three anonymous *CJPST* readers for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1. An early attack of this sort is found in R. K. Crook, "Modernization and Nostalgia," *Queen's Quarterly* 73(2), (1966).
2. John W. Holmes, *Life With Uncle: The Canadian American Relationship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 112.



GEOFFREY MARTIN

3. R. Puccetti, "The Mausoleum and The Searchlight: Two Views of Philosophy" *Dalhousie Review* 60(1), (1988) p. 138.
4. Robert S. McElvaine, *The End of the Conservative Era: Liberalism after Reagan* (New York: Arbor House, 1987).
5. Michael A. Weinstein, "The Dark Night of the Liberal Spirit and the Dawn of the Savage," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 12(1-2), (1988) p. 179.
6. See Chris Mosey, "Swedes plan escape-proof AIDS colony on island", *Toronto Star*, 13 November 1987; "Sweden to isolate drug addicts carrying AIDS virus", *Calgary Herald*, 14 November 1987.
7. I have in mind works like Ian Box, "George Grant and the Embrace of Technology," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 15(3), (1982); Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1984); S. J. R. Noel, "Domination and Myth in the Works of George Grant and C. B. Macpherson," *Dalhousie Review* 59(3), (1979); Michael A. Weinstein, "Lament and Utopia: Responses to American Empire in George Grant and Leopoldo Zea," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 5(3), (1981); and many of the essays, taken individually, in Larry Schmidt (ed.), *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations* (Toronto: Anansi, 1978).
8. Joan E. O'Donovan, *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984). She provides an excellent account of Grant's life and religious faith, but does not adequately explain Grant's transition from the work of the late 1960s to that of the 1970s, for example.
9. Box, p. 504.
10. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (eds.), (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 383-4.
11. George Grant, "Have We a Canadian Nation?" (*Dalhousie*) *Public Affairs*, 8 (1944), pp. 161-166.
12. George Grant, *The Empire: Yes or No?* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1945), pp. 6-7.
13. Grant, "Have We a Canadian Nation?" p. 166.
14. George Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1959), p. 109. Subsequent references will be indicated by title (*Philosophy*) and page numbers.
15. George Grant, "The Uses of Freedom: A word and our world," *Queen's Quarterly*, 62 (1956), pp. 515-527. Subsequent references will be indicated by title ("Freedom") and page numbers.
16. George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965). Subsequent references will be indicated by title (*Lament*) and page numbers.
17. It is interesting to note that in his book *One-Eyed Kings*, (Toronto: Collins, 1986), Ron Graham argues that the three Canadian political parties now represent simply variants of liberalism: "Classical Liberal" (Progressive Conservative), "Modern Liberal" (Liberal), and "Radical Liberal" (New Democratic Party).
18. Grant points out the influence himself in Larry Schmidt (ed.) *George Grant in Process*, pp. 65 and 80.

## GEORGE GRANT

19. "Religion and the State" (1963) and "Tyranny and Wisdom" (1964) in *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America*, (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1969), are good examples of this tendency. Subsequent references will be indicated by title (*Empire*) and page numbers.
20. George Grant, *Time as History* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1969).
21. Kroker, p. 46.
22. George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1974/1985). Subsequent references will be indicated by title (*English*) and page numbers.
23. George Grant, "A Platitude", *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America*, p. 140.
24. George Grant, *Technology and Justice* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). Subsequent references will be indicated by title (*Technology*) and page numbers.
25. Personal interview with George Grant, July 25, 1987.
26. George Santayana, *Persons and Places* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 97.
27. Grant used the term "inoculation" to refer to the traditional attitude of English-speaking intellectuals to Nietzsche, in *Time as History*, p. 23.

## dialectica      Vol. 42, 1988, Fasc. 1

### Contents Sommaire Inhalt

LARSON David, *Tarski, Davidson, and Theories of Truth*; MALPAS J. E., *The Nature of Interpretative Charity*

Notes et Discussions - GEURTS J. P. M. and VAN BRAKEL J., *Internal Realism, Truth and Charity*; CALLAWAY H. G., *Ascent to Truth: a Critical Examination of Quine's Philosophy*; BERTOLET Rod, *Critical Study of Michael Devitt, Realism and Truth*

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