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'We are not our own' : The platonic Christianity of George P. Grant: from the cave to the cross and back with Simone Weil

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By Bradley Jersak

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Bangor University
Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies

June 13, 2012

For Eden

"A noble wife, who can find?
She is worth far more than rubies!"

"WE ARE NOT OUR OWN"

THE PLATONIC CHRISTIANITY OF GEORGE P. GRANT: FROM THE CAVE TO THE CROSS AND BACK WITH SIMONE WEIL

BRADLEY JERSAK

ABSTRACT

George Parkin Grant (1918–88) was one of Canada's greatest 20th century minds. He is best known for his contributions to Canadian nationalism, the Red Tory tradition, and his philosophical critique of liberal technocracy. In this thesis, I will argue that behind Grant's personae as philosopher, political scientist, and social activist—indeed, driving them all—stands a cohesive core of contemplative-prophetic theology, deriving and developing from Grant's conversion. Despite his stature among our foremost thinkers, Grant's animating spirituality and constitutive convictions have not been sufficiently established or adequately assembled. Louis Greenspan explains,

> There are those who seek in Grant's philosophical writings a systematic statement of philosophical first principles, a *summa Grantium*, but this enterprise is very hazardous. The interpreter must ... deal with the very unusual framework of Grant's problematic. ... [It] must be considered in the framework of Grant's commitments to philosophy and Christianity ... Much of his thought was engaged with Simone Weil, but he published very little on her work.[1]

The unique purpose of this thesis is to venture this precise challenge. That is, I will enucleate the life and thought of George Grant to its generative kernel—'the heart of the matter,' to use his parlance. Drawing from an analysis of Grant's conversion experience, I will unveil Grant's four seminal doctrines— encompassed in his phrase, "We are not our own"[2]—and reveal his central concern: the primacy of the Good vis-à-vis the primacy of the will. The bulk of

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[1] Louis Greenspan, "George Grant Remembered," *Two Theological Languages* (1990), 4.

[2] Grant, *GP*, 62–3.

the thesis traces this conviction through four abiding doctrines, which comprise Grant's calling as a contemplative theologian and social prophet. These doctrines include:

    i.   his deconstruction of liberal modernism,

    ii.   his classical contemplative way of knowing and being,

    iii.   his Platonic Christianity and (anti-)theodicy of the Cross, and

    iv.   his call to love-centered justice as Canada's prophet of lament.

Thus it will become obvious that Grant's career as a political philosopher and lifelong educator were inextricably dependent on two prior vocations. First, he was a *contemplative theologian of the Cross* in the Platonic Christian tradition of Simone Weil. And second, he was a national *social prophet*, lamenting Canada's slide into the shadows of American liberal hegemony.

I will argue that Grant's owlish vision, illumined by love, was expressed for him in Plato's Good, fulfilled in Christ's Passion, and exemplified in the life and thought of philosopher-mystic-activist Simone Weil. This is widely acknowledged. But this thesis will contribute two additional major elements to Grantean scholarship on these fronts.

It will be the most thorough work to date in tracking Grant's resonance with and reliance on Simone Weil. I identify the extensive overlap in their thought, both before and after he discovered her works. The reader will see the spiritual and intellectual correspondence between Grant and Weil on each of his four pillar beliefs. It will be the first work to chart Weil's cosmology of consent and demonstrate Grant's integration of it into his theology of the Cross-as-consent and his "politics of justice and consent."[3]

Finally, this *Summa Grantium* will be the first to outline and elucidate Grant's four principal doctrines using four stages of Plato's analogy of the cave (*The Republic*, Book 7, 514a–520a), which Grant and Weil consciously identified as their own spiritual experience.

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[3] Grant, *ESJ*, 12.

CONTENTS

FIGURES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF ACCOMPANYING MATERIAL

ABBREVIATIONS

George Grant Books

ESJ   *English-Speaking Justice.* Sackville, NB: Mount Allison University, 1978. Toronto: Anansi Press and Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1985. Toronto: Anansi Press, 1998.

Lament   *Lament for a Nation: the Defeat of Canadian Nationalism.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965, 1970. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1994. Montreal / Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995.

TE   *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America.* Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1969.

TJ   *Technology and Justice. Toronto:* House of Anansi Press, 1986.

TH   *Time as History.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971, 1995.

PMA   *Philosophy in the Mass Age.* Toronto: Copp Clark, 1959. New York: Hill and Wang, 1959. Toronto: Copp Clark, 1966. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995.

George Grant Collections

CW 1   Davis, Arthur and Peter C. Emberley, eds. *Collected Works of George Grant: Volume 1 (1933–1950).* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.

CW 2   Davis, Arthur, ed. *Collected Works of George Grant: Volume 2 (1951-1959).* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

CW 3   Davis, Arthur and Henry Roper, eds. *Collected Works of George Grant: Volume 3 (1960–1969).* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.

CW 4   Davis Arthur and Henry Roper, eds. *Collected Works of George Grant: Volume 4 (1970–1988).* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

GGR   Christian, William and Sheila Grant, eds. *The George Grant Reader.* Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1998.

MSO   Jersak, Brad. *George P. Grant: Minerva's Snowy Owl.* Abbotsford: Fresh Wind Press, 2012.

SL   Christian, William, ed. *George Grant: Selected Letters edited, with an introduction by William Christian.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.

George Grant Interviews

GC   Cayley, David. *George Grant in Conversation.* Toronto: Anansi, 1995.

GP   Schmidt, Larry, ed. *George Grant in Process.* Toronto: Anansi, 1978.

Simone Weil (English)

FLN   *First and Last Notebooks,* Trans. Richard Rees. London / New York / Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970.

FW   *Formative Writings,* 1929-1941. Trans. D.T. McFarland and W Van Ness. Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1987.

G-G   *Gateway to God.* Ed. by David Raper. London: Fontana, 1974.
         Gravity and Grace. 1952. Trans. Emma Craufurd and Mario von dur Ruhr.

G&G   London/New York: Routledge, 2002.

IC   *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks.* 1957. Trans. Elisabeth Chas Geissbuhler. London/New York: Ark, 1987.

LPh	*Lectures on Philosophy.* (*Leçon de philosophie*, Librairie Plon, 1959). Trans. Hugh Price. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
LP	*Letter to a Priest.* 1954. Trans. A. F. Wills. New York: Penguin, 2003.
NFR	*The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties towards Mankind.* Trans. A. F. Wills. New York and London: Routledge, 1952.
NB 1	*The Notebooks.* Trans. Arthur Wills. Volume 1. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956.
NB 2	*The Notebooks.* Trans. Arthur Wills. Volume 2. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956.
OL	*Oppression and Liberty*, Amherst, MS: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973.
SNL	*On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God.* London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968.
SWR	*Simone Weil Reader.* Ed. George A. Panichas. Mt. Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell, Ltd., 1977.
SE	*Simone Weil: Selected Essays, 1934–43.* Trans. by Richard Rees. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.
70L	*Simone Weil: Seventy Letters.* Trans. by Richard Rees. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.
SWW	*Simone Weil: Writings Selected with an Introduction by Eric O. Springsted.* Modern Spiritual Masters Series. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.
TG	*Thinking God: A Bilingual Simone Weil Reader.* Trans. Benjamin Bergery, 2002–05. <http://simoneweil.net/lesautres.htm>.
WG	*Waiting for God.* Trans. Emma Craufurd. New York: Harper, 1951, 2009.

Simone Weil (French)

AD	*Attente de Dieu [Lettres écrites du 19 janvier au 26 mai 1942].* Éditions Fayard, 1966.
CS	*La Connaissance surnaturelle.* Paris: Gallimard, 1950.
EHP	*Écrits historiques et politiques. Œuvres completes Tome II. Vol. 1.* Éditions Gallimard, 1988.
ELD	*Écrits de Londres et dernières letters.* Paris: Gallimard, 1957.
IPC	*Intuitions pré-chrétiennes. Nouvelle edition.* Paris: Fayard, 1985.
LR	*Lettre à un religeiux.* Éditions Gallimard, 1951.
Oeuvres	*Oeuvres*, Quarto Gallimard, 1999.
Pensées	*Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu.* Paris: Gallimard, 1968.
PG	*La pesanteur et la grace.* Librairie Plon, 1947.
SG	*La Source grecque.* Paris: Gallimard, 1963.

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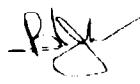
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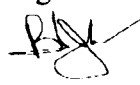
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Chapter 1
Introduction
"We Are Not Our Own"

1.1 Introductory Comments: Rationale and Hypothesis

George Parkin Grant (1918–88) is considered by some to be one of Canada's greatest 20th century thinkers.[1] He is best remembered for his philosophical and political critiques of modern western liberalism and for instigating a mid-sixties revival of Canadian nationalism through his best-known work, *Lament for a Nation: the Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965). Grant's family connections (nephew of Gov. Gen. Vincent Massey and uncle to MP Michael Ignatieff), his activism in political and ethical affairs,[2] and his synonymity with the Red Tory tradition[3] make him a unique feature in Canada's historical landscape.

Nevertheless, Grant's contribution has been marginalized at times by the Canadian philosophical elite[4] and minimized by activists who believed his philosophical theory and theological reflection signaled a shrinking from the political fray.[5] His prophetic lament is frequently dismissed as stark pessimism— its victory, however effective, purely ironic.[6] And his apparently contradictory left-wing conservatism (an oxymoron in our day) can be perplexing. He has yet to be acknowledged for his influence as a philosophical precursor of the Radical Orthodoxy movement in the UK, bridging John Oman, C. S. Lewis, and William Temple to post-secular theologians like John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and

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[1] University of Toronto professor, Graeme Nicholson calls Grant "Canada's most significant public philosopher." (Graeme Nicholson, "Freedom and the Good," *Athens and Jerusalem: George Grant's Theology, Philosophy, and Politics* (2006), 323). George Ramsay Cook, a top Canadian historian, calls George Grant one of Canada's top two most important political thinkers of the 20th century (Cayley, *GC*, back cover, viii).

[2] E.g., his vocal opposition to the overthrow of Diefenbaker (Grant, *Lament*, 1965), nuclear weapons, and the Vietnam War; his star status with the New Left of the 60's (Cayley, *GC*, 28); and his commentary on the abortion issue after Roe v. Wade (cf. Grant, *ESJ*, 1978).

[3] Cf. Ronald S. Dart, *The Red Tory Tradition: Ancient Roots, New Routes* (1999).

[4] Most notably through the counter-critiques of Fulton Anderson et al at the University of Toronto. See below.

[5] E.g., Robin Mathews, *George Grant's Betrayal of Canadian Nationalism* (2004); Robin Mathews, "Nationalism, Technology, and Canadian Survival," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 5:4 (1970): 44–9.

[6] Hugh Donald Forbes, *George Grant: A Guide to His Thought* (2007), 230; Michael Ignatieff, *True Patriot Love: Four Generations in Search of Canada* (2009), 142–8.

Graham Ward.[7] His political genius was a key inspiration in the resurgence of Red Toryism in the UK (e.g., Philip Blond of think-tank *Respublica*,[8] often referred to as PM David Cameron's 'philosopher-king').[9] Yet Grant's influence on these fronts has occurred largely incognito.

We will better understand and implement Grant's contribution to Canada and beyond when we recognize that behind his engagement in historical events, behind his political theories, and behind his philosophical speculations—indeed, what drives them all—stands a coherent and consistent core of *contemplative-prophetic theology*. Grant's doctrine (and Grant himself) resisted and transcended typical categories. This makes systemizing his thought a difficult endeavor.

> There are those who seek in Grant's philosophical writings a systematic statement of philosophical first principles, a *summa Grantium*, but this enterprise is very hazardous. The interpreter must face the task of dealing with works that are most effective when they are read as polemics. He or she must also deal with the very unusual framework of Grant's problematic. ... [It] must be considered in the framework of Grant's commitments to philosophy and Christianity ... Much of his thought was engaged with Simone Weil, but he published very little on her work.[10]

Nevertheless, herein I shall hazard just such an enterprise, beginning with Grant's 1942 conversion, "the recognition that I am not my own,"[11] as the taproot at Grant's center. This primordial revelation—God as the ultimate Good who illumines us by love—was expressed for him perfectly in Plato's Good/God, fulfilled ultimately in Christ's Passion,[12] and exemplified explicitly in the life and

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[7] Harris Athanasiadis to Brad Jersak, personal correspondence, 06/26/2010. Cp. Grant, *TJ* (1986) to Brandy Daniels, "The Academy, the Polis, and the Resurgence of Religion: An Interview with Graham Ward," *theotherjournal.com* (2008). See http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk as representative of Radical Orthodoxy.

[8] See http://www.respublica.org.uk.

[9] Both Milbank and Blond acknowledge Grant's inspiration and influence. John Milbank to Brad Jersak, personal correspondence, 06/28/2010; Philip Blond to Brad Jersak, personal correspondence, 06/28/2010.

[10] Louis Greenspan, "George Grant Remembered," *Two Theological Languages* (1990), 4.

[11] Larry Schmidt, *GP*, 63.

[12] Grant, "Five Lectures on Christianity," *Athens and Jerusalem* (2006), 229-30.

teachings of the French philosopher-activist-mystic, Simone Weil (1909–1943).[13] Out of that root grows the deeply consistent but radically diverse branches of Grant's thought: his analysis and deconstruction of modernity, his synthesis of 'Athens and Jerusalem,' his Weilian theodicy of the Cross, his political theories that transcend left and right, and his social engagement as Canada's prophet of lament.[14]

While a number of biographers, reviewers, and essayists explore these areas as facets of Grant's thought,[15] (acknowledging especially his indebtedness to Plato, Christ, and Weil[16]) with the completion of Grant's *Collected Works,*[17] we can commence with a critical examination of Grant's lifework as a specifically *contemplative theologian*[18] and Canadian social *prophet.*[19] These vocations sprout from their underlying doctrines: four essentials derived from Grant's conversion that would undergird his mission as a classic philosopher, political scientist, and Canadian nationalist.

1.2   Overall Aim Defined

1.2.1   Overall aim

My overall aim is to enucleate[20] George Parkin Grant's *contemplative-prophetic*

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[13] The French Christian Platonist, philosopher, and labour activist arrived (11/25/1942) and then died (08/24/1943) in London during the window of time between Grant's first and second stay there. She would become his guide through Plato's cave. Cf. W. R. Sheppard, "The Suffering of Love: George Grant and Simone Weil," *Two Theological Languages* (1990), 20–62; Joan E. O'Donovan, *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice* (1984), 176.

[14] M. Darrol Bryant, "The Barren Twilight: History and Faith in Grant's *Lament,*" *GP,* 110–19.

[15] E.g., Forbes, *A Guide* (2007); Harris Athanasiadis, *George Grant and the Theology of the Cross: The Christian Foundations of His Thought* (2001).

[16] Cf. Frank Flinn, "George Parkin Grant: A Bibliographical Introduction," *GP,* 199.

[17] The final volume was released in 2009: *Collected Works of George Grant, Vol. 4: (1970–1988).*

[18] 'Contemplation' as defined by Grant is openness to love that enlightens the intellect. Cf. Cayley, *GC,* 178. He would embrace the term conditionally, in connection with Plato's dependence of the intelligence on love (Schmidt, *GP,* 107).

[19] 'Prophet' in Grant's case applies to naming and "lightening the darkness which enshrouds justice in our era" (Grant, *ESJ,* 86–9).

[20] Cf. Grant on 'enucleation': Grant, *TH,* 13–14.

theology, the kernel of which is his Platonic Christianity[21] of the Cross, birthed in his conversion and confirmed by his three-decade meditation on Simone Weil.[22] Many of these terms are loaded and variously understood, so defining them in light of Grant studies is necessary from the outset.

1.2.2 'Enucleate'

To *enucleate* is to articulate the animating core of Grant's thought, enfolded in his conversion, then unfolded in his published and unpublished works, his essays, classnotes, and personal correspondence. Grant's conversion in context establishes his fundamental premises and their corollaries, the acorn from which his doctrines inevitably develop and by which he makes judgements. *Enucleating* entails something beyond a strict retelling of what Grant thought and said. I hope in some measure to engage with his ideas—to think *with* him and with those whom he also enucleated.

1.2.3 'Conversion'

George Grant's initial flash of insight is received like a revelatory gift. He knows something. He knows that he knows. The insight is of a transcendent nature and not really negotiable in his mind. He keeps watch for this knowledge elsewhere, and finds it most perfectly in Weil's integration of Plato and Christ. Grant is so convinced, that every modern or ancient philosopher, and even the Scriptures, are subject to what he 'knows.' These are his *a priori*, stubborn facts. They come as light to Grant while on the verge of ending his own life, and he gives himself to them wholly, continually using them as a plumb line to assess and address new questions and situations.

But Grant is not content to come out and be written off as a 'God told me so' pietist or a generic romanticist. His revelation had to be fleshed out and communicated in a mature, thoughtful, and rational manner. If his truth were indeed true, how might he bring it to the public arena with no recourse to an argument from revelation?

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[21] "He often called himself 'a lover of Plato within Christianity.'" (Forbes, *A Guide* (2007), 3).

[22] Grant said, "Of all the twentieth century writers, she has been incomparably my greatest teacher." (Grant, "Introduction to the Reading of Simone Weil," *CW* 4: 808). Cf. Weil, *NB* 1: 241; Cayley, *GC*, 172–87.

1.2.4 'Contemplative'

One of Grant's tasks in making the case for contemplative knowledge of God as the Good was the need to redefine the mind (intellect/*nous*) itself as a contemplative faculty, not a Cartesian organ. He finds grounds for this in the Greek philosophers (esp. Plato) and again, Weil (but also Heidegger) helps him articulate it.

Grant resisted the word *contemplation* whenever he felt it being used in the Aristotelian sense of "the thinker as the height of human existence."[23] But he resonated with Plato and Simone Weil, embracing the fullness of their focus on contemplative or *noetic*[24] ways of knowing. Grant's contemplation is defined by the following features:

- Contemplation necessarily exceeds the limits of what can be known through mere logic.[25] Grant rejects the enthronement of rationalism (ironically established in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*) and Baconian empiricism that exclude contemplative ways of knowing.

- For Grant, the content of contemplation is focused on a direct experience of or access to ultimate truth—the Good or God (following Plato, contra Heidegger).

- Following Weil, contemplation depends on the grace-gift of faith (i.e., the intellect illuminated by love). Grant virtually equates contemplation and love, defined as "attention to otherness, receptivity of otherness, consent to otherness."[26]

- Moreover, he attempts to (re-)reverse the modernist reversal and subsequent negation of *vita contemplative* by *vita activa*, but like Plato and Weil, Grant believes those who draw from the contemplative well are

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[23] Schmidt, *GP*, 106–7.

[24] Though often translated and defined *nous* in terms of the intellect (Greek *nous*), moderns tend to reduce *intellect* or *mind* to the brain's capacity for rational pursuit. For Plato, the intelligence is a higher way of knowing than reason or logic, and the *nous* is not merely the rational mind. The *nous* is a combination of mind and heart, a capacity or organ for intuitive, mystical understanding. Its highest function is open receptivity to the overtures of divine love in meditative silence that perceives and receives these overtures. (Ron Dart to Brad Jersak, personal correspondence, 08/11/2009).

[25] We will note Grant's use of Heidegger, especially Heidegger's contemplative posture of *gelassenheit*.

[26] Schmidt, *GP*, 107.

compelled to a life of justice and self-giving love.

1.2.5 'Prophetic'

Biographer William Christian calls Grant "an honoured prophet in [his] own country,"[27] but comments that Grant would not have claimed any special revelation.[28] By *prophetic*, we refer here specifically to his faith-driven and justice-directed public engagement and political commentary. In the tradition of one of Grant's Platonic mentors, Leo Strauss, "The prophet's principle task is to provide political guidance to the community."[29] He saw it as his "task to warn us that the society we are fated to inhabit enshrouds justice in darkness."[30] In his most influential book, *Lament for a Nation* (1965), Grant's title use of the term *lament* identifies his approach with the genre of the prophet Jeremiah.[31] That is, he felt that part of his role as a public thinker was to act as a social conscience; to raise a divine standard of justice whereby darkness is exposed, society is judged, and his hearers urgently invited to the higher way of the Good. He believed that "the job of thought at our time is to bring into the light [the] darkness as darkness" in order to propagate a continuing dissatisfaction as a first step back to hope.[32]

1.2.6 'Theology'

Grant's contemplative agenda is neither a spirituality without content, nor a particular dogmatic system in which to be baptized. Plato-Weil-Grant made it abundantly clear that the presence of pure Goodness—manifest as love, beauty, and justice—is the very Reality we await. Moreover, the classical notions of the virtues and Christ's *Beatitudes* take us into the ethical core and centre of the Good. For Grant (and Weil), the ultimate, universal manifestation of Plato's Good

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[27] William Christian, *George Grant: A Biography* (1994), xxiii.

[28] "Grant believed in revelation, I don't think he thought that any special revelation had been vouchsafed him." (William Christian to Brad Jersak, personal correspondence, 11/25/2009).

[29] David Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Philosophy, Prophecy, and Politics in Leo Strauss's Early Thought* (2008), 113; Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law* (1995), 122.

[30] Christian, *Biography* (1994), ix.

[31] *The Lamentations of Jeremiah* in the Hebrew canon.

[32] Grant, "'The computer does not impose on us the ways it should be used,'" *CW* 4: 296–7.

is seen in Christ crucified—Plato's 'just man' fulfilled in self-giving love and the unforeseen perfection of justice through forgiveness of one's enemy.

Just as Grant sees Christ fulfilling Plato, so his theology addresses some of the big philosophical questions. In the wake of the war and his conversion experience, Grant the contemplative theologian asks:

- What is ultimately there? (God and ultimate reality questions)
- Is God ultimately good or willing? (the nature of God question)
- What is the Good in time? (providence and justice questions)
- Who am I in this universe? (being and becoming, essence and ethics, etc.)
- What is the right (just) and good way of life together? (the Socratic program[33])

Philosophy is important to Grant because when he encounters God as the Good, new questions surface. How do we reconcile ultimate Good with the affliction in the world? How do we reconcile a *good* God with the oft times violent and *willing* (i.e., willful) God of the Scriptures? Our sacred texts reveal both a nationalistic stream and a prophetic stream offering contradictory guidance. Grant had to turn to something other than the Bible, which to him (and Weil) often seemed conflicted and contradictory.

Grant saw how asserting, "Thus saith the Lord," without an ethical leash to limit willing gives rise to false prophets. This was a problem in the Greek-Roman debates as it was for the Marcionites with the Hebrew tradition. Is it hubris to question gods? What if the gods are acting immorally? Are we more moral than the gods? Can we sit as their judges?

Grant's solution is to follow Weil in turning to Plato's description of God who is the good, the true, and the beautiful—the God he had met (or inferred) on his personal Damascus Road, the same God who had 'possessed' Weil around the same time, and ultimately, the God they behold on a Cross. They both see Plato's perfect God fulfilled in Christ as the incarnation of the Good, the true, and the beautiful in time.

1.2.7 'Platonic'

Grant was an unabashed Platonist whose interpretation of *The Dialogues* was

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[33] Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem* (2008), 118–21.

rooted in long-term, careful study *of* (not just *about*—which excludes too many questions[34]) his favourite philosopher. Grant took seriously:

- the distinction between Socrates and Plato;
- the mystical, religious, philosophical, and political elements in Plato and his *Dialogues*;
- the relationship between revelation and reason;
- the affinities between Greek philosophy and Christian revelation.

For Grant and Weil, Plato's Socrates foreshadows the Gospels. Grant's Plato represents neither an anachronous, calculating rationalist from the eighteenth century, nor a Gnostic dualist of the early church, trying to escape his body.[35] Rather, Plato represents the best of classical Greek thought through a practice of reason, contemplation, and justice in both the personal and public realm.[36] Grant's Plato points us to the reality of the Good—God, ultimate purpose, perfection— and gives us contemplation—the eye of the soul, beholding in love—as a means to know the Good. To know the Good is to live justly in a world dominated by affliction.[37]

1.2.8 'Christianity'

George Grant believed that in Christ, "revelation of a decisive nature has once and for all been given."[38] What Christ revealed in his life and Passion was the height of humanity in self-giving love.[39] Yet Grant's theology exhibits serious tensions with the Western Christian tradition (especially the Calvinist Puritans). For example, like Weil, Grant's nonviolence caused him to hold the Old Testament at arm's length; his contemplative bent caused him to lean eastward, to both the Christian Greek fathers and pagan philosophers; his belief in Christ's universal relevance opened him up to dialogue even further East, with the Hindu scholars and their scriptures; and his exaltation of the Cross as primary can make

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[34] Grant says, "Non-evaluative analysis cuts men off from openness to certain questions" of "immediate and ultimate meaning," and "the crucial judgment about 'values'—whether they are good or evil." (Grant, *TJ*, 125–6).

[35] Schmidt, *GP*, 103–5.

[36] Bernard Zylstra, "Philosophy, Revelation and Modernity," *GP*, 149–50.

[37] Cayley, *GC*, 178–9.

[38] Grant, *TE*, 53.

[39] Zylstra, "Philosophy, Revelation and Modernity," *GP*, 150.

him sound ambivalent to the importance of the Resurrection.[40]

Grant's Christianity is Gospel-centered with a special emphasis on the Beatitudes, Gethsemane, and especially the Crucifixion as God's redemptive answer to human tragedy (vis-à-vis the resurrection as a reversal of defeat).[41]

1.2.9 'Of the Cross'

The 'problem of evil' was a major practical and philosophical focus for Grant.[42] If God is truly good, what do we make of the horrendous affliction in our world? How could a good God allow it? From Job to the Stoics[43] to Plato, from Luther to Hobbes, from Hegel to C. S. Lewis, the world's great minds have wrestled to close the chasm between the Good/God and necessity/calamity through rational explanations of free will, divine providence, and ultimate redemption. Echoing Martin Luther and then Simone Weil, Grant's concern is that "the theologian of glory says that evil is good and good evil; the theologian of the Cross says that the thing *is at it is*."[44] The final phrase has come into modern parlance in the expression, "It is what it is," which is to say, we cannot and need not justify or rationalize tragedy—exactly the point that Weil and Grant extracted from Luther. In other words, in our desire to rationally reconcile the goodness and perfection of God with the affliction of humanity, our doctrine of providence fails by resolving the issue in ways that sanctify real evil as part of God's Grand Plan. Good triumphs finally on the backs of many particular tragedies and victims. Worse, they feed and justify Western Christianity's "exclusivist, imperialist, arrogant and dynamic tendencies."[45]

Grant could not live with this, so he turns to Weil. She felt it was far better to behold the problem as a true contradiction (*not* paradox)—to gaze into the

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[40] Harris Athanasiadis, "Waiting at the Foot of the Cross," *Athens and Jerusalem* (2006), 262.

[41] Sheila Grant, "George Grant and the Theology of the Cross," *George Grant and the Subversion of Modernity* (1996), 247, 255.

[42] Cf. Bruce Ward, "George Grant and the Problem of Theodicy in Western Christianity," *Two Theological Languages* (1990).

[43] E.g., Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*. Cf. Ricardo Salles (ed.), *God and Cosmos in Stoicism* (2009); Elizabeth Asmis, "Myth and Philosophy in Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 47 (2007): 413–29.

[44] Grant, *TE*, 21, 2n. Quoting Luther, *Werke*, Weimer edition, vol. 1 (1883), 354. Emphases in quotes throughout this work are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[45] Grant, *TE*, 76. Cf. Ted Heaven, "George Grant on Socrates and Christ," *Athens and Jerusalem* (2006), 316.

abyss in astonishment and say something like, "God is good *and* all is *not* well." Grant repeatedly refers to her cry, "I am ceaselessly torn between the perfection of God and the misery of man."[46] Gazing into the abyss of this infinitely wide chasm, Weil was not swallowed by despair but rather, she beheld the crucified Christ. Grant explains that in the *Republic*, Plato refers to an infinite distance that separates the order of necessity from the order of Good—and for Simone Weil, necessity is "that order which God must cross to love God."[47]

1.2.10 Simone Weil

Grant effectively introduced Simone Weil's thought to Canada in his 1952 CBC review of *Waiting on God*.[48] But more than that, no Canadian intellectual represents Weil's brand of Platonic Christianity and contemplative philosophy as thoroughly as Grant. His great epiphany and the primary doctrines that sprang from it came to Grant independently, eight months before Weil's death and nearly a decade before he discovered her. When he finally began to read her works, he found a kindred spirit with shared convictions. In 1958, we find Grant crossing Canada by train, where he begins to wrestle in earnest with her thought, at first experiencing some frustration.[49] Over time, Grant internalized and transposed Weil's thought for the Canadian scene and in the typically milder Canadian way, became Canada's Weil—a distinction he would humbly deny.[50]

We shall say much more throughout concerning Grant's resonance with and adoration of Weil as a guide. For now, we'll take his word for it:

> I have no doubt at all that she is, in the traditional categories of the West, a great saint, ... With Simone Weil you have to combine this staggeringly clear intellect with something that is quite beyond the intellect, namely

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[46] Cayley, *GC*, 56; David Cayley, "The Moving Image of Eternity," *Ideas*, CBC (1986), 19.

[47] Cayley, *GC*, 175; cf. O'Donovan, *Twilight of Justice* (1984), 80–5.

[48] GPG to Dear Ould, 10/22/1951–11/2/1951 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.1).

[49] GPG to Sheila Grant, 06–07/1958: "I have been reading Miss Weil but she gets on my nerves and her absolutist mysticism is tiring." (Jersak, *MSO* 14.2).

[50] "It is indeed true that I am scared of her because the unequivocal saints are scaring to somebody like myself who loves comfortable self-preservation." (Grant, "Simone Weil," *GGR*, 237). Ironically, even his self-deprecation sounds like Weil.

sanctity. And I mean by saint those beings who give themselves away.[51]

1.3   Scholarly Contribution

My own background in contemplative theology, atonement theory, and social justice[52] means those areas are not initially a blank slate for me. But digesting Grant and Weil has deepened my integration of theology, philosophy, and political science—in both Canadian and international contexts. Moreover, my engagement with their contemplative theology has itself been a contemplative exercise. Out of this combination of scholarship, contemplation, and prophetic activism, this thesis will make the following contributions.

1.3.1   Encapsulating Grant's doctrines

I will clarify the tumultuous birth and life-long development of Grant's four essential doctrines as a Christian pilgrim through Plato's cave. Herein, I will summarize and elucidate these doctrines as follows:

i.   Grant's deconstruction

First, I will unpack Grant's unique revisionist deconstruction of the matrix of modernity, critically outlining his sometimes surprising affirmation and critique of the ideological pillars that he believed gave rise to the worldview in which he found himself.

ii.   Grant's epistemology

Second, I will explore Grant's contemplative understanding of *noetic* spirituality and the classical way of knowing (sans modern anachronisms). He challenged modernity's exclusion of any knowledge outside the bounds of rationalist-empirical data. On the other hand, he also resisted postmodern spirituality that discards truth-content or is simply self-absorbed (versus self-giving).

iii.   Grant's theology

Third, I will detail Grant's theology as Platonic Christianity and his role as the foremost Canadian devotee and dependent of Simone Weil. We will see how her

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[51] Cayley, *GC*, 172.

[52] Cf. Brad Jersak, *Can You Hear Me? Tuning in to the God Who Speaks* (2003). Brad Jersak (ed.), *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ* (2007). Brad Jersak, *Kissing the Leper: Seeing Jesus in the Least of These* (2006).

interpretation of Plato, contemplation as attention, and 'cosmology of consent' permeate Grant's thought. This section will cover:

- *Grant's Christian Platonism* – Plato's doctrine of the perfection of God fulfilled in Christ and especially in his Passion as self-giving love.

- *Grant's theodicy of the Cross* – The contradiction between God's perfection and human affliction are not solved by any rational theodicy. Rather, the distance between the Good and the necessary is mediated by divine love revealed on the Cross (as Jesus' consent to God *and* affliction). God interacts in time, not through willful interventions, but as supernatural love through consenting people.

iv. Grant's ethics

Grant's vision of personal and social justice begins with his critique of liberal ethics, based in the value-free demands of technology or social contracts (cf. Rawls). He attacks their foundation in the contradictions of freedom through self-interest or self-will.

Grant seeks a sturdier ethical footing for justice in his theology of the Cross (cruciform love). Like Weil, he offers a politics of justice rooted in willing consent to the Good and self-giving obligation to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the other. Such a vision calls for the kenotic, peacemaking way of the Beatitudes.

I will demonstrate how these doctrines of Grant's Platonic Christianity emerge and unfold throughout his life, thought, career, and written works, then conclude by proposing Grant's model rises above the polarizing axis of left-right binaries to a higher way of shalomic justice.

1.3.2 Previous studies

I will focus on Grant as a *contemplative theologian and philosopher* in the classical tradition. Grant is most often discussed by philosophers and political scientists who analyze aspects of his political philosophy. The best of these studies are probably Joan O'Donovan's *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice* (1984) and Hugh Donald Forbes' *George Grant: A Guide to His Thought* (2007). Most are drawn to Grant's conclusions (e.g., about technology, empire, nationalism, etc.) but usually give less thought to his spiritual and theological pilings, or how these undergird the whole of his thought.

Two leading Grant scholars of the last decades, Art Davis and William Christian, have concentrated on compiling his works and biography, but have not specifically probed the contemplative-prophetic side of his work.[53] Ian Angus and Art Davis like how he uses Heidegger to deconstruct modernism, but Grant goes much further than Heidegger theologically. He does use Heidegger and the Eastern critique of Cartesian rationalism, but ultimately, for Grant, Jesus is the incarnate Platonic Good and the litmus test for the Good in time.

A few authors and essayists have approached Grant as a theologian. So far, Harris Athanasiadis has written the only book given exclusively to his theology: *George Grant and the Theology of the Cross* (2001).[54] He skips quickly over Grant's conversion to emphasize Luther's 'theology of the cross' as his orienting theology. Specifically, he believes that Luther's "Heidelberg Theses" 19–21 provide a cipher to decrypt the structure of Grant's core thought and thus to interpret and organize Grant's work—yet Luther is certainly *not* a central authority in Grant's thought. Happily, like most books on Grant, Athanasiadis acknowledges Grant's obvious affinity to Weil and Plato, but does not probe the deeper *why*-questions (esp. issues of theodicy and the nature of God) that arise from Grant's conversion.

By contrast, this thesis will demonstrate that Grant's actual centre is rooted explicitly in his own conversion (as he described it), confirmed by his primary teachers (whom he names), and can be better structured (less artificially) according to Plato's analogy of the cave (which Grant consciously used). Along the way, I intend to seek to answer the 'why' (the niggling crises) behind Grant's Weilian Platonism.

Some fine essays on Grant's theology and spirituality were included in a ground-breaking compilation entitled *Athens and Jerusalem: George Grant's Theology, Philosophy, and Politics*, but the book was pulled from shelves by University of Toronto Press when one of the editors was charged with plagiarism.[55]

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[53] Though Christian has written some fine articles on Grant and Love, Grant and Religion, and Grace in Plato. Cf. Bibliography.

[54] Cf. Robin Lathangue, "In Search of the True George Grant," *Sophia*, 43:2 (Oct. 2004): 119–23. See also S. Grant, "George Grant and the Theology of the Cross" (1996).

[55] Ron Dart, *George Grant: Spiders and Bees* (2008), 188.

Regarding Grant's use of Simone Weil, most writers nod enthusiastically, but Larry Schmidt, Peter Emberley, Wayne Shepherd,[56] Pam McCarroll,[57] and the Heaven brothers[58] are to be regarded as specialists on both thinkers. However, none have written more than an essay comparing Grant and Weil. Only Andrew Kaethler writes a full work on Grant as a *contemplative*, but his discussion—an M.A. thesis—zeroes in on Grant's affinities to and differences with Nietzsche and Heidegger.[59]

Throughout the thesis, I will also focus on Grant as a *social prophet*, whose ethical vision transcends the post-WW2 culture wars of left and right. Not easily pigeonholed, Grant applies his contemplative insights to the North American socio-political scene. Along these lines, but very specific to technocracy, John Douglas Hall regards Grant as "a Canadian political and social philosopher ... [of] considerable theological significance" because he calls forth a prophetic critique of technological society through a memory of premodern alternatives.[60] Grant's critique of *techne* and his Canadian nationalism are the most often identified aspects of his prophetic voice, but he is broader than that. Grant's faith and politics meet where the Platonic call to return to the cave comes with a politics of justice and consent, Grant's interpretation of "love of neighbour."

For background where Grant's faith and politics meet, such essential edited collections as Larry Schmidt's *George Grant in Process* (1978), Peter Emberley's *By Loving Our Own* (1990), Wayne Willier's *Two Theological Languages* (1990), and Ian Angus' *Athens and Jerusalem* (2006) serve as the superior primer essays.

1.3.3   Original contributions

What remains to be explored in Grantean studies? For my part, I shall investigate or expand on the following points.

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[56] Sheppard, "The Suffering of Love" (1990), 20–62.

[57] Pam McCarroll, "The Whole as Love," *Athens and Jerusalem* (2006), 270–86.

[58] Edwin B. Heaven and David R. Heaven, "Some Influences of Simone Weil on George Grant's Silence," *GP*, 68–78.

[59] Andrew Kaethler, *The Synthesis of Athens and Jerusalem* (2009).

[60] Douglas J. Hall, *Thinking the Faith* (1991), 397–8. Cf. Douglas J. Hall, "The Significance of Grant's Cultural Analysis for Christian Theology in North America," *GP*, 120–9.

i. Analyzing Grant's conversion

This thesis will be the first to critically analyze Grant's conversion experience through Grant's own accounts in letters, journal entries, and interviews. I will be the first to trace and summarize Grant's core doctrines as a cohesive package inherent in his conversion. While his understanding and articulation of his basic belief system develops over time, the essentials abide as a coherent standard by which he scrutinizes everything.

ii. Mapping Grant's core doctrines through Plato's cave

This thesis will be the first to map Grant's core doctrines using Plato's cave analogy, which Grant interprets as the process of enlightenment or conversion. Grant alluded to his sojourn in those terms, referring to his escape from the cave, beholding the sun, and return to the cave. The cave stands at the heart of his Platonic understanding of grace, illumination, and justice. This thesis will identify, organize, and situate Grant's core doctrines into the stages of Plato's analogy for the first time.

iii. Exploring Grant's contemplative epistemology

Some scholars have focused on George Grant's deconstruction of modernistic rationalism but have not sufficiently looked at the contemplative tradition that he thereby accesses. This thesis will take the additional step of exploring his Platonic redefinition and delineation of reason and the intellect. Grant's dependence on the 'intellect enlightened by love' challenges Cartesian anachronisms and reestablishes ancient contemplative receptivity as warranted knowledge.

iv. Tracking modernity to competing images of God

This paper will be the first to explain exactly *why* Grant turns to Weil's Plato to make sense of his conversion experience and to communicate his revelation philosophically. Some see his synthesis of Athens and Jerusalem as an effort to make his message palatable to the broader unchurched culture. While this is true, I will explore how Grant addressed his own deeper crisis within Christian scripture and theology by addressing the heart of the matter as the competing images of a Good God of love vis-à-vis the willful God of power or force.

v. Applying Weilian Platonism to Canadian justice

This thesis will examine how Grant creatively transposes and contextualizes Weil's Platonism to address prophetically (in the social critic sense) the unique issues of the post-war Canadian culture wars. I will show how he applies his

principles to technology, politics, and ethics in ways that neither Weil nor anyone
else had conceived.

vi. Extending Grant's dependence on Weil

This thesis is the first book-length treatment of Grant and Weil's corresponding
doctrines of which I am aware. Shorter essays have been given to his dependence
on her, but nothing exists approaching this scope or using this methodology. I will
track her voice through all of Grant's core doctrines and especially demonstrate
how her Pythagorean cosmology informs Grant's *theologia crucis* and his politics
of justice in *English-speaking Justice*.

vii. Broadening the Grantean sources

This thesis is the first work since the completion of Grant's *Collected Works* to
cite his archived unpublished letters and lecture notes (in select cases, I will be
the first to decipher them from his raw notes) and place them within the context
of Grant's developing theology.

To summarize, I am arguing the following: Grant's doctrines grew from
his conversion experience and from his subsequent reflections upon it. His
doctrinal premises can be organized by his conscious journey through Plato's
cave analogy and were supported by his meditations on Weil's work.

1.3.4 Critique of Grant

As occasion arises throughout this dissertation, I will constructively engage and
critique Grant's proposals and assertions. The following are suggestive examples:

i. Grant's conservatism?

Considering Grant is a conservative who opposes liberal self-made belief systems
in favour of the classical traditions, his theology (like Weil's) is independently
conceived and unique. I will critique some of his more radical views, such as his
ambivalence towards the Hebrew Scriptures and understatement of the
Resurrection. He calls us beyond subjective hyper-individualism to an eternal
order, but his own doctrinal framework is demonstrably personal, birthed in his
personal conversion and/or reflections. His insights might even be correct, but
conservative? I shall argue both yes and no.

ii. The Good versus the willing?

Grant's pitting of the Good versus willing (a la Nietzsche's will-to-power) can
sound very black and white, an either/or that lacks the both/and necessities of life

and politics. He appears to apply the phrase 'will to power' in ways that ignore Nietzsche's deeper intent (neither will nor power but life-affirmation). In truth, Grant is more subtle and nuanced than that. He engages Nietzsche's brilliant observations about modernity to ponder the tension between the Good and willing, contemplation and action. He also carries on a sustained critique of the willful *making* and *mastery* connected to so-called 'objective science' and technological thinking.

iii. Self-giving or self-denying?

Grant's skepticism may be on target, but at times, the 'not my will' of Christ is overshadowed by Weil in ways that can be as recklessly life-denying as they are self-giving or self-denying (in the Gospel sense). This contra Nietzsche's underplayed life-affirming ideal. Grant's hagiography of Weil too easily blesses or justifies her envy of the crucifixion and her self-destructive trajectory in the name of love. Her objections aside, Grant has insisted that her saintly life validates her teaching as second only to Christ—surely an overestimation by all accounts.

iv. Grant's Plato?

Grant challenges caricatures of Plato the dualist or rationalist and emphasizes those aspects of Plato that marry reason and revelation, religion, and philosophy, thinking contemplatively and acting justly. With Weil, Grant sees Plato's theological-mystical side and calls for a contemplative (versus calculative) understanding of his work. I will show that while contested, Grant's Plato is valuable when applied to a contemplative theology of the Cross.

v. Contemplative vision?

I also intend to move beyond Grant in the area of contemplation. First, while he deals with the various sources of knowledge (via reason, contemplation, and revelation), he does not consider how contemplation *without an impartation of knowledge* may nonetheless lead to transformation. Further, Grant's notion of the contemplative 'vision' of God in the Platonic tradition smacks of modernist abstraction when he reduces *seeing* to symbolic language for either *realizing* or *loving*. Contrast this with the long-standing testimony of those mystics whose

spiritual vision included gazing on an inner vision. That is, to the biblical seers, to *behold* meant to purposely look and actually see with the eyes of the heart.[61]

vi. Grant's justice?

Grant's call for a justice rooted in the ultimate good of unselfish love leads him (in *English-Speaking Justice*) to critique Rawls' version of contractual justice as an appeal to love's opposite: selfishness. But upon reflection, we might make the case that Rawls is actually universalizing the Golden Rule by helping self-centered people and societies through a thought experiment that puts them in others' shoes even before they have attained the maturity of selflessness.

The reader is encouraged to see in these critiques something that initially appears superficial or reductionist in Grant's understanding, but then on second thought, reveals Grant's subtle genius for holding conflicting ideas in tension.

1.3.5   Supplementary works

During the course of my research, in addition to the work done here, I published secondary and interdependent discoveries as well as supplementary research (including select unpublished letters and classnotes by Grant) in three collections: *George P. Grant: Canada's Lone Wolf* (2011), *George P. Grant: Minerva's Snowy Owl* (2012), and *Red Tory, Red Virgin: Essays on Simone Weil and George P. Grant* (2012). These serve as companion volumes of original contributions to this thesis, which I will occasionally footnote.[62]

1.4   Scope and Approach: Plato's Cave

1.4.1   Organizing principle

As noted, I have outlined Grant's major doctrines logically, according to his (and Weil's) interpretation of Plato's cave:

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[61] Cf. John 14; 16; 2 Cor. 3–4; Col. 3; Rev. 1; 3–5.

[62] *George P. Grant: Canada's Lone Wolf* (2011), co-written with Ron Dart, is a collection of essays on political philosophy now in use as a text at the University of the Fraser Valley. *George P. Grant: Minerva's Snowy Owl* (2012) and *Red Tory, Red Virgin* (2012) include essays on political theology and previously unpublished primary sources quoted herein.

Plato's Cave	Grant's Doctrines
i. The dark cave of delusion: Humanity as prisoners in a cave of delusion; where shadows are mistaken for reality.	*i. Naming the darkness as darkness— Grant's deconstruction:* The matrix of modernity.
ii. Into the light, illumined by love: The prisoner is released and dragged out into the sunlight; the mind's eye is given sight.	*ii. The intellect illumined by love— Grant's epistemology:* A contemplative understanding of *noetic* knowledge and the *vita contempletiva.*
iii. Beholding the sun: a. The Good as the source of intelligibility, existence and reality, knowledge and truth. b. The painful distance between contemplating the perfect light of the divine and enduring the shadow of necessity.	*iii. The perfection of God and the affliction of man—Grant's theology:* a. Christian Platonism b. Theodicy of the Cross c. Cosmology of consent
iv. Return to the cave: The necessity of returning to the cave to stand for what is right and just; and the persecution of those like Socrates by those who remain in the shadows.	*iv. The love of justice as light in the darkness—Grant's ethics:* A vision of personal and social justice rooted in love of the Good, self-giving, and peacemaking.

Using this outline, I will thoroughly examine Grant's life and thought as a contemplative theologian and social prophet in the tradition of Plato and Weil, in whose works he was immersed.

1.4.2 Rationale for Plato's cave

I have chosen to order Grant's thinking according to the stages of Plato's cave for a few reasons. Although Grant's doctrines unfolded in greater depth and breadth over time, as we shall see, the big picture came to him in the moment of his

conversion (analogous to Mozart's experience[63] of *seeing* a whole symphony in a flash before composing it). A clear logic structures his journey in that Grant's four major doctrines follow the major stages of Plato's cave analogy, a conversion story with which Grant identified. He not only interpreted and taught Plato's cave as an analogy for the path from delusion to enlightenment; Grant was aware that he was somehow also walking this path in his own experience. The analogy helps us make sense of Grant's thinking by gathering what otherwise seem to be a disconnected plethora of ideas, issues, and projects into an obvious and cohesive journey—one that Plato laid out explicitly with the escape from and return to the cave. Each element of Plato's description of the cave corresponds to one of Grant's four cardinal premises or over-arching doctrines.

But George Grant was specifically a Platonist fulfilled in Christ.[64] As a Christian Platonist, he sees Plato's vision / Socrates martyrdom as Athenian forerunners for Christ. Christ's revelation eclipses and exceeds Plato's philosophy in that the Gospels place charity above contemplation.[65] Grant is drawn to the role of love described in Plato's *Symposium*, but sees the Cross as new territory wherein Christ raises love and justice to their apex through the forgiveness of one's enemies.

1.5   Major Sections: Grant's Four Doctrines

1.5.1   Out of the shadows and imaginings: Naming the darkness as darkness / *Grantean deconstruction*

We begin by tracking Grant's exit from the cave of the modernist matrix. Through the tragic events Grant witnessed as a young man,[66] he experienced disillusionment with Hegelian progressivism and the whole modernist experiment. With help from his study of John Oman[67] and Leo Strauss,[68] Grant

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[63] Grant, *TJ*, 47–9.

[64] This fulfillment is not merely a Christianizing of Platonism or a straight across synthesis. Grant embraces but exceeds Augustine's "faith seeking understanding" with an intimations theme (promise-fulfillment) that we see in Weil's *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (1957, 1987).

[65] Cayley, *GC*, 62.

[66] Esp. his father's bitterness after WWI and his own breakdown during the London bombings of WWII.

[67] George Grant's Ph.D. dissertation at Oxford was on John Oman, entitled "The Concept of Nature and Supernature in the Theology of John Oman." (Grant, *CW* 1: 157–419). He challenges scientific rationalism's sufficiency to give an adequate

extends Nietzsche and Heidegger's deconstruction of modernism, targeting the will to power through technology, liberal notions of freedom, and its self-spun web of open-ended human nature.[69] Grant's sustained attack on modernist assumptions, language, and ways of thinking is reminiscent of Jeremiah's call to tear down the idols of the age (Jer. 1), clearing a path out of the dark cave of delusion. In fact, to Grant, this *is* the role of philosophy: "The study of philosophy is the analysis of the traditions of our society and the judgment of those traditions against our varying intuitions of the Perfection of God."[70]

Grant's analysis takes the form of deconstructing questions. He asks:

- What are we enmeshed in? What principles underlie how moderns act?
- How do these enfolding principles unfold in our decisions and actions?
- What is the seed that carries modernity's genetic code? How does this seed grow from philosophy to principle, then to practice?

He sees modernity as the dominant, unchallenged dogma of the day, a matrix of divergent emphases (from Marxism to American Republicanism; from Rationalism to Romanticism; from Machiavelli to Nietzsche; from the Calvinist Puritans to the American Civil Liberties Association) and a collection of commonly held ideas,[71] including progressivism, liberalism, technological mastery, historicism, and rationalism/empiricism. One of Grant's summaries of the modernist matrix reads as follows:

> The mastery of human and non-human nature in experimental science and technique, the primacy of the will, man as the creator of his own values, the finality of becoming, the assertion that potentiality is higher than actuality, that motion is nobler than rest, that dynamism rather than peace is the height.[72]

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account of identity and reality. The supernatural is not, for Oman, proven by inference from the natural world, but by an "immediate experience of the supernatural." (Grant, "Nature and Supernature," *CW* 1: 183).

[68] E.g., Grant, "Tyranny and Wisdom," *TE*.

[69] E.g., throughout Grant, *TH*.

[70] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 152–3.

[71] See Jersak, "Grant and the Matrix: Complex of Ideologies," *Red Tory, Red Virgin* (2012), 71–4.

[72] Grant, *TH*, 44.

To Grant, modern liberalism as the new establishment ethic is found wanting in light of (i) history's tragedies and (ii) philosophy's inadequacy when judged by the standard of justice. His prophetic indictments against a society dominated by technology and liberal progressivism that result in tyranny are spelled out repeatedly and with increasing urgency from his 1958 lectures (published as *Philosophy in the Mass Age*) until his death in 1988. Against an era where individuals, governments, scientists, and corporations would will their way to power to their own peril, Grant declares, "Not my will," with Christ in Gethsemane, choosing instead the way of the Cross and loving service to a higher Good.[73]

1.5.2   Into the Light: The intelligence illumined by love / *Grantean epistemology*

Having followed Grant's lantern through the darkness, we will study Grant's proposed remedy to modernity: his understanding of and call to the classic, contemplative, and *noetic* way of knowing—the *vita contempletiva*.

Grant can transcend the Athens/Jerusalem tension because he does not read the classic philosophers through Cartesian/Baconian rationalist lenses.[74] Grant saw how they held *logos* (rational) and *mythos* (intuitive poetic) together. The intelligence (*nous*) was not simply *mind* or *reason* in our modern sense of mind vs. heart or reason vs. revelation. Rather, the *nous* was the mind-heart capacity to perceive the transcendent (that which exceeds the limits of *dianoia* or mathematical reason) when illumined by love (as in Plato's three great analogies[75]).

For Grant, the zenith of ultimate reality is the love of God seen in Christ's Passion. Like the early Christian Platonists in Alexandria (Origen and Clement), he integrates Plato's Good and the Cross of Christ into a common contemplative vision. Grant's Platonism is in full bloom when he says,

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[73] Cf. Grant, "Conversation: Theology and History," *GP*, 107–8.

[74] Grant is with Nietzsche and Heidegger in calling for the contemplative thinking of pre-Christian tradition. But they look to the pre-Socratics/Tragedians because they perceive Socrates-Plato-Aristotle as calculative rather than contemplative. Grant-Weil emphasize a mysticism in Plato that Nietzsche-Heidegger would not. Cf. Kaethler, *Synthesis* (2009).

[75] I.e., the sun, the divided line, and the cave. (Plato, *Republic* 6).

[Weil] wanted to understand what Plato means by the idea of good—that is God, or ultimate purpose—to take it seriously in a way that modern philosophy had never taken it seriously, and to try to understand the affliction of the world in terms of an acceptance of his perfection. ... I don't like at all the Western language that holds apart love and justice. ... I would say the crucifixion is a supreme act of justice on Christ's part— not that he was crucified but that he submits to crucifixion. It's a supreme act of justice to love his enemies.[76]

In so acting, Christ gives himself away for God's will, the Good, which is to say, Love.

1.5.3 Beholding the Sun: The perfection of God and the affliction of man / *Grantean theology*

In the previous section, my emphasis was on the *way* of contemplative knowing. This section will unpack the *content* of Grant's contemplative model.

i. Grant's Platonic Christianity

Namely, how the absolute goodness and perfection of God (a la Plato) is infinitely distant from the realm of necessity and the affliction of humankind. While this distance must be maintained, the Good spans the distance through the Incarnation of Christ.

ii. Grant's theodicy of the Cross

Leaning on Weil, Grant struggles through how absolute goodness relates to human affliction in history; how absolute affliction and wretchedness (and creation's arresting beauty[77]) lead us to silent receptivity; how in the soul's silenced gaze, the understanding is enlightened by love;[78] and how we experience true freedom as the Good fulfilled in charity eclipses the pseudo-freedom of the ego-bound will.

For Weil, our emergence and liberation from the cave of illusions comes through a mystical encounter with transcendent love that happens when we are

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[76] Cayley, *GC*, 178-9. Cf. Grant, *TJ*, 73-4.
[77] Weil, *NB* 2: 553.
[78] George Grant employs Weil's definition of faith: "Faith is the experience that the intelligence is enlightened by love." (Weil, *NB* 1: 240).

utterly silenced by humbling contradictions that remind us that we are not All.[79] The greatest of these is the contradiction between God's goodness and human *malheur* (non-redemptive suffering). The one event that bridges the abyss between God's perfect presence and God's horrifying absence is the Cross of Christ. In Grant's words,

> Whatever Christianity may be, it cannot get away from the crucifixion. Whatever Christianity may be, one sees here the just man being most hideously put to death, and this means to me that in Christianity there is always not only the presence of God but also the absence of God.[80]

1.5.4 Return to the Cave: A politics of justice and consent / *Grantean ethics*

For Grant, personal and social justice were rooted in love of the Good, self-giving, and peacemaking. We will observe how Grant's Platonic Christianity empowers him to re-enter the public fray, where true justice is framed in terms of love (Plato's 'what is due'; Christ is 'love of neighbour') and obligates the just one to speak and act.

Grant's theology of the Cross especially guides him from the core of contemplative stillness into his politics of justice. The Cross-as-consent to the Good and love of the other is his foundation for action, not merely a theoretical aside or speculative retreat from it. In the tradition of Plato of just demands on just men,

> You must therefore each descend in turn and live with your fellows in the cave and get used to seeing in the dark; once you get used to it you ... will recognize the various shadows, and know what they are shadows of, because you have seen the truth about things right and just and good.[81]

This responsibility compelled Grant to his role as a public 'prophet' to Canadians enveloped in the modernist matrix. Grantean justice can be boiled down to three major foci:

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[79] Weil, *NB* 2: 411.
[80] Cayley, *GC*, 128.
[81] Plato, *The Republic* (1955), 285.

- Plato's definition (justice is giving what is due);
- Christ's incarnation (justice is giving the unjust enemy what is due; i.e., forgiveness!);
- Weil's obligation (to the needs of the other).

In all of this, Grant could not study these matters as one perusing a museum. He lived in conversation with the ancient sages who might shed a light on the crises of justice in modern technological society.

1.6   Results

This study will recall and clarify for the reader the deep wellspring and central doctrines driving Grant's Canadian dream of justice, a perspective fundamentally distinct and too quickly forgotten on our continent. It will show how Grant's justice flows from a greater Good than the selfish demands of the ego or ambitions of a technological empire, accessed not by reason alone but through the *noetic* way of knowing that opens itself to divine love (a la Plato, focused on Christ) and its transforming vision.

I hope to be part of the growing recognition of Grant's greatness as a theologian (by Grant scholars), a fact still virtually unheard of in Canadian seminaries. And yet:

> In *Technology and Justice* (1986), ... drawing on his 30-year meditation on the French philosopher Simone Weil, he came to the conclusion that western civilization was fundamentally flawed, both morally and spiritually. It was fated to disappear and was collapsing from within. As a Christian, however, Grant expressed faith that something nobler would replace it. During his lifetime Grant's reputation was primarily as a political thinker. Since his death, attention has increasingly focused on the religious dimension of his thought, and many scholars consider him one of the most original Canadian theologians of the second half of the twentieth century.[82]

In summary, theologically, I will zero in on Grant's use of Weil to synthesize Plato and Christ (Athens/Jerusalem; Philosophy/Theology) as a contemplative

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[82] William Christian, "Grant, George Parkin," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (2012).

foundation for social justice. His approach to theodicy, birthed in the real affliction they both suffered, centers on their theology of the Cross. This solution may yet receive its fair hearing in modern (using the term advisedly) Christian apologetics. Thus understood, Grant takes his place as Canada's great Platonic Christian—our contemplative theologian-prophet of the Cross.

Chapter 2
George Grant's Biography: Selected Cairns on the Contemplative Journey /
Grantean Conversion

2.1   Introduction

> There is one continuum, at least, in Grant's later works which does not
> receive adequate attention ... Because it is certainly true that Grant, like
> Simone Weil, was suspicious of what he called the "historical
> personalizing of thought," it is easy to underestimate the extent to which
> Grant's thinking was rooted in the world. His hearkening to the suffering
> of Christ at Gethsemane and Golgotha is grounded directly in his personal
> experience of human limitation and human suffering.[1] (Wayne Whillier)

Preliminary to an elucidation of George Grant's cardinal doctrines, we ought to
note the major biographical cairns that orient us on the path of his contemplative-
prophetic journey. Beyond these brief signposts, William Christian's biography[2]
provides details not required here.

In this chapter, I propose:

- to identify the biographical backstory and conditions that ripened Grant's
  heart and mind for conversion. These include his progressive liberal
  pedigree and his experience of disillusionment with modernity after two
  world wars.

- to closely analyze Grant's conversion testimonies and identify the
  contemplative-prophetic theology—Grant's doctrines and their
  corollaries—that emerged directly from that experience.

- to illustrate how Grant's seminal doctrines manifest immediately in his
  Oxford dissertation and persist through to his ascendance to national
  prominence in 1965 via *Lament for a Nation* and the Toronto teach-in.

- to identify Grant's primary guides on the contemplative path. I will give
  special mention to Grant's Socrates as fulfilled in Christ, to his 'yes' and
  'no' to Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, and to his use of Leo
  Strauss but devotion to Simone Weil. The chapter will conclude by

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[1] Whillier, "Introduction," *Two Theological Languages* (1990), v.

[2] Christian, *Biography* (1994). This meticulous account of Grant's life and thought
was carefully edited and authorized by Grant's wife and co-writer, Sheila Grant.

charting the overlap between Weil and Grant in their doctrines.
Grant's biographical material is critical to understanding his work. Why? Because contextualizing Grant's thought reveals (or at least suggests) *why* and *how* it emerged and developed. Specifically, we will see,

- the relationships and events that provoke the questions which occasion Grant's revelations;

- the intellectual-emotional birthplace of his initial doctrinal content and how it grew;

- some positive and negative influences that acted to shape his theology and philosophy. That is, what he was reacting to (and why), and what he sought to replace it with (and why).

To Grant, an opponent of Heidegger's radical historicism, ultimate truth is not contingent on or relative to biographical context. It is not created by history—but it is unconcealed within history ("Time is the moving image of eternity"[3]). Even if Grant is right in pointing to a Reality that transcends subjectivity, as a critical realist I would argue that the Real is nevertheless experienced and necessarily discovered through personal and historical grids that influence our perception, understanding, and interpretation of the Real. In other words, ultimate truth may not be relative, but our experience and knowledge of truth tends to be, even when encountered directly (mystically).

At the same time, biographical factors can also serve to ground one's thought in reality, verifying (or falsifying) ideas in real life settings. Grant and Weil insisted on the Socratic test of every theory or truth-claim by its fruit: could it produce a just person?[4] A just city? A just society?[5]

Grant's biography will demonstrate and confirm my principal argument:

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[3] Grant, "Course Lectures at McMaster," *CW* 3: 704. Referring to Plato's *Timaeus* 37d.

[4] GPG to Rod Crook, 07/19/1965: "Plato differs from Aristotle in believing that theory can never be detached from the moral life ... I do not think it is comprehensible that one could come to understand the ultimate purpose of things except in this way; otherwise is one not shallow about evil?" (Christian, *SL*, 232). Weil: "Human nature is so constituted that any desire of the soul in so far as it has not passed through the flesh by means of actions and attitudes which correspond to it, has no reality in the soul." (Weil, *G-G*, 65).

[5] GPG to Sheila Grant, 08/07/1957: "[Hegel] failed to show how those who accepted his philosophy should act in the world ... This is where Marx comes in with great force and cogency. He accepts the ... progressivist philosophy of history and says I can take it and make it ... a livable social policy." (Christian, *SL*, 195).

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that Grant is foundationally a contemplative theologian and prophetic visionary, whose seminal doctrines were established at his conversion, and these drive his political (ethical) activism. But more than that, his biography is suggestive of:

- questions that Grant might help us answer;
- contexts where we might apply his doctrines;
- events that might require his wisdom;
- political and social crises to which he may yet speak;
- hurts that might have distorted his perspectives.

More importantly, using Plato's Cave as our outline, Grant's biography may yet open our eyes, by way of illustration, diagnosis, and application, to:

- delusions in which we may still be caught (in the cave);
- thinking we must attempt in order to break free (out of the cave);
- reality we might (re)discover (outside the cave);
- justice we might restore (back in the cave).

2.2   Grant Prior to Conversion

George Grant was raised in a family of origin and historical context he would eventually identify with the matrix of modernity, an intellectual inheritance he would later disavow and from which he would struggle to extract himself.[6] In other words, Grant's story begins with his birth, chained within the Platonic cave of Hegelian liberal progressivism, just at the point when that optimistic world was about to implode in two world wars. Seeing the nature of these shackles and how they are broken prepares us to understand Grant's conversion and the earliest version of his first doctrine: naming the darkness (of modernity) as darkness.

2.2.1   Progressive liberal pedigree

George Grant was born into one of Canada's leading liberal progressive families. Politically, their generations were raised in the conviction and calling (indeed, obligation) that they could and would create a great, enlightened nation. As United Empire loyalists, they envisioned themselves standing alongside Britain to

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[6] Contra Michael Ignatieff's claim that the real purpose Grant's *Lament* "was to reappropriate the family tradition as a defence of a conservative Christian Canada." (Ignatieff, *True Patriot Love* (2009), 144).

administer a worldwide reign of peace and justice[7]—liberal freedom established through the benevolent might of *Pax Britannica*. Vocationally, Grant's clan was everywhere embedded in the politics of the kingdom and worked for the establishment and growth of Canada's finest educational institutions. Thoroughgoing nationalists, Grant's family indoctrinated him from childhood with the expectation that he should live 'for king [George] and country.'[8]

Grant's grandfathers were Sir George Parkin (1846–1922) and George Monroe Grant (1835–1902), both leading proponents of Imperial Federation. Having toured for six years as missionary for imperialism, Parkin was chosen to head up Upper Canada College from 1895–1902, after which he was the founding secretary for Oxford's Rhodes Scholarships. Meanwhile George M. Grant, a childhood friend of Sir John A. MacDonald,[9] began as a liberal Protestant rector of St. Matthew's Church in Halifax. He was eventually involved in the revival of two struggling universities: Dalhousie in Halifax, then Queens in Kingston, where he presided until his death in 1902, having transformed it into an important university.[10]

The generation to follow was no less impressive. Grant's parents were William Grant and Maude Parkin. After active service and a life-threatening injury in the First World War, 'Willie' returned home in 1917 to become headmaster of Upper Canada College. UCC had suffered a period of demise following Parkin's departure, but his son-in-law managed to revitalize it into the leading private boys' school in Ontario. William Grant was a man of reasoned but vital faith, modeling Christian belief for George at home and in the school's daily chapel sessions. Motivated by his experience of 'an absolutely senseless war,' he was also president of the League of Nations society—an influence that he and history master, Nicholas Ignatieff, propagated among the students.[11]

George Grant's family tree extends to include uncles (Maude's brothers-in-law) Jim MacDonnell (president of the National Trust in Toronto) and Vincent Massey (Canada's High Commissioner to London; first Canadian-born Governor

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[7] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 9.

[8] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 10. Cf. William Christian, *Parkin: Canada's Most Famous Forgotten Man* (2008).

[9] Cayley, *GC*, 46.

[10] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 11.

[11] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 29–30.

General of the nation, and namesake of the Massey Commission and lectures).
We also find branches to brother-in-law George Ignatieff, Prime Minister
Pierson's 'left hand peacemaker,'[12] and nephew, Michael Ignatieff, former leader
the Liberal Party of Canada. Such connections made for interesting houseguests
throughout George's childhood, ranging from family friend and humourist,
Stephen Leacock,[13] to Prime Minister Mackenzie King.[14]

One could go on name-dropping *ad nauseum*, but the point is made:
George P. Grant was raised in the rich soil of the Canadian political and
educational elite, fertilized by the optimistic Hegelian progressivism of that
era[15]—an illusion from which Grant fought to free his thought for decades. With
such a heritage comes unimaginable pressure. One's personal worth was
measured by public success for the broader good,[16] whether that meant the
heights of political office or the trenches of military service. Failing meant risking
ridicule and accusations regarding one's courage and patriotism.[17] On the other
hand, any achievements were repeatedly suspect of nepotism.[18] Only in Grant's
wife, Sheila, was he finally assured that someone truly loved him for himself.

The ghosts of the Parkin-Grant lineage were finely concentrated on
George most profoundly through his formidable mother, Maude.[19] In her
Victorian ways of devotion to George, he endured a life-long struggle for her
approval and affection in the face of frequent physical absences and emotional
distance. This is evident through Grant's myriad of Oedipal letters to 'dearest
mummy'[20] and Michael Ignatieff's agonizing account of Grant's "unresolved love

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[12] George Ignatieff, *The Making of a Peacemonger: The Memoirs of George Ignatieff* (1985).

[13] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 379–80.

[14] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 26.

[15] Robert C. Sibley, *Northern Spirits: John Watson, George Grant, and Charles Taylor—Appropriations of Hegelian Political Thought* (2008), 130–1. Grant came to see Grandfather Parkin's faith as a "secularized religion of progress." (Christian, *Biography* (1994), 38).

[16] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 40.

[17] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 74, 77, 82. His heroism with the Air Raid Precautions in WWII London didn't count for some family members who thought he ought to enlist.

[18] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 41, 52, 122.

[19] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 12.

[20] GPG to Dearest, dearest Mummy, 1950 (Christian, *SL*, 163).

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for his mother."[21] Yet even in his sense of unworthiness and indebtedness to her, he could say to her, "… you have been since I was a child the person through whom I have known something of what God's love must be like."[22] We will clearly see this reflected in his theology of God's simultaneous presence and absence.[23] His *Lament* for Canada in the wake of PM Diefenbaker's overthrow was no less a lament for his mother, who had died just two days prior.[24] It appears that after courageously bucking mainstream societal, philosophical, and familial trends for decades, with Grant's perceived death of Canada and the passing of his mother, he had nothing to lose. The last traces of ancestral progressive expectations were finally exorcised and, with Sheila at his side, he was authentically released in his own voice to be Canada's 'lone wolf' on a national scale.[25]

2.2.2 Modernist disillusionment and deprival

The dawning of the twentieth century was to be humanity's coming of age—the fulfillment of our hope in progress, reason, and freedom. Hegel's voice echoed,

> That world history is governed by an ultimate design, that it is a rational process … this is a proposition whose truth we must assume; its proof lies in the study of world history itself, which is the image and enactment of reason.[26]

> Universal history—as already demonstrated—shews the development of the consciousness of Freedom on the part of Spirit, and of the consequent realization of that Freedom.[27]

i. The Great War

World War I knocked the wind out of many a confident Hegelian, except, I

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[21] Ignatieff, *True Patriot Love* (2009), 152–3.

[22] GPG to Dearest, dearest Ould, 09/1949 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.3).

[23] "In Christianity there is always not only the presence of God but also the absence of God. … the very substance of what I have thought about anything would go if I couldn't believe in the absence of God." (Cayley, *GC*, 128–9).

[24] Grant, *Lament*, 4; Christian, *Biography* (1994), 246.

[25] Christian, "A Lone Wolf," *Biography* (1994), 254–70.

[26] Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1975), 28.

[27] Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (2001), 26.

suppose, for those who could spin the carnage into the progressivist dialectic, in which the so-called 'war to end all wars' is credited with ushering in a new era of peace. With this bloody antithesis to enlightenment freedom under humanity's belt, the world thought it had learned its ultimate lesson in the futility of war. Bolstered by the Roaring Twenties, we could now will and work to synthesize universal history into an epoch of peace led by a League of Nations or enlightened regimes such as the British Empire.[28]

As for a 'war baby' like George Grant (born two days after the armistice), the cost of the conflict was experienced through the terrible toll he saw manifest in his father, who was 'ruined by the First World War.' Grant clarifies, "I mean, he was ruined physically—he was terribly wounded. I don't mean ruined as a human being, but I think the war was terrible for people who had grown up in the great era of progress."[29] Nevertheless, the senselessness of war only intensified William Grant's liberal optimism and he channeled that into reform until his early death caused by persistent battle injuries.

For young George, the mind-boggling cost of WWI[30] was encapsulated by his father's trauma and in the works of Wilfred Owen, a poet who died in the trenches, aged twenty-three, one week before the war's end. His gruesome images dressed in beautiful phrases touched Grant deeply,[31] inciting the rhetorical question, "Was it for this the clay grew tall?"[32] The answer, "No!" was finally sealed in Grant's heart as a teenager when he read Beverly Nichols' pacifist apologetic, *Cry Havoc!* Thus began Grant's life-long, evolving commitment as a convinced pacifist—whether political, Christian, or internationalist.[33] As a university student moving to Oxford, his convictions would be sorely tested as Britain faced the inevitability of World War II.

> I am finding that my whole convictions about everything are changing with recurrent crises. ... War is becoming more supreme. Evil is

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[28] Cf. Cayley, *GC*, 47.

[29] Christian, *Biography* (1994), ix.

[30] Grant, *TE*, 69–71.

[31] Christian, *Biography* (1994), ix–xx, 72, 91.

[32] Wilfred Owen, "Futility," *Poems* (2008).

[33] Grant's father and his teacher, A. D. Lindsay, were internationalist. That is, they condoned force as a last resort to defend international law. Cf. Christian, *Biography* (1994), 59–60.

completely predominant if you look anywhere. Force is being used on every side and everyone is hopelessly lost... If one is a Christian one must be forced back without doubt that one can never fight. Force cannot vie with force.[34]

ii. World War II

As rooted as the Ontario establishment was to loyalism,[35] when Grant took his stand as a conscientious objector, he bucked the accepted tradition. Healthy young non-combatants' reputations were sullied and the gossip about them could bring shame to a family. This also likely disqualified him later from being posted as Warden of Hart House at the University of Toronto.[36]

Nevertheless, when he refused military service, Grant did not shrink from the fray. Rather, as the bombings began, he volunteered as warden for Air Raid Precautions in Bermondsey, one of London's poorest areas. This experience was to be formative for the life-long content and practice of his theology and political philosophy.

> He had been far more severely tested by his war service than had been most of the members of the armed forces. The same moral imperative that determined his wartime choices would operate strongly in his later philosophical writings that were to have such profound influence on a new generation.[37]

Grant was responsible for shepherding people into shelters during raids and providing emergency rescue services to the injured.[38] He knew the hell of war first-hand—cringing through the nightly cacophony of air sirens, bombers, and explosions; digging desperately through rubble for survivors; providing emergency first aid; and having to discover and drag out hundreds of mangled

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[34] GPG to Maude Grant, 1939 (Christian, *SL*, 36–7). Christian, *Biography* (1994), ix, 28, 53–4, 59, 63, 65, 67.

[35] For example, in its celebration of soldier-bishop Rev. John Strachen of Toronto, who led troops in 1812: Charles Mockridge, "The Hon. and Right Rev. John Strachen: First Bishop of Toronto," *The Bishops of the Church of England in Canada* (1896), 78–93.

[36] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 126.

[37] Claude Bissell. *The Imperial Canadian: Vincent Massey in Office* (1986), 118.

[38] J. B. Bickersteth to Comptroller, 02/17–24/1941 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.4).

corpses. In his words,

> I helped wounded people—I carried out the dead—I evacuated shelters—I
> lost some good friends—I told people their relatives were in hospital when
> I had just seen them taken to the morgue. I told others the truth. For
> myself I was up 36 hours on end and while it lasted was very near death. I
> put out innumerable incendiaries.[39]

The climax came February 17, 1941, when Stayner, an area in Grant's care,
suffered a direct hit and over 300 were killed—people whom he loved, possibly
including a girlfriend.[40] In retrospect, we recognize in Grant's subsequent
depression the symptoms of post-traumatic stress (or what his uncle J. M.
Macdonnell described as "shell-shock"), ranging from strong suicidal feelings to
the urge to run to unbearable dullness.[41] Incredibly, the pressure to enlist did not
abate. His experience was minimized next to the 'heroism' of cousins (Hart and
Lionel) who fought on the continent. He finally gave in and tried to join the navy.

> I am going to try to get into the navy or the merchant marine next week
> even though I think it is one of the stupidest, most useless, basest actions I
> have done. But people expect it so there one goes ... As to "spiritual
> integrity" that is a thing that just doesn't count—one should have realised
> it ceased to count when the war started.[42]

But the medical entry exam diagnosed tuberculosis[43] and Grant was pronounced
unfit for service. What followed has been described as a nervous breakdown.[44] He
meandered his way into a farm labour job in Buckinghamshire. At this point
Japan attacked Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941). George went from shock to
hopelessness to three days on the brink of taking his life. Though America's entry
into the war contributed to Hitler's end, all he could think of was the escalation of

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[39] GPG to Mother, 1941 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.5).
[40] Journal entry, 10/21/1942; journal entry, 11/02/1942 (Christian, *SL*, 99, 102).
[41] Alan Mendelson, *Exiles from Nowhere: The Jews and the Canadian Elite* (2008),
188–91; GPG to Mother, 1941 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.6); GPG to Mother, 07/25/1941
(Jersak, *MSO* 14.7).
[42] GPG to Mum, 08/21/1941 (Christian, *SL*, 79–82).
[43] Later re-diagnosed as pleurisy. Mendelson, *Exiles from Nowhere* (2008), 188.
[44] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 84–5.

hatred and the millions of new participants involved.

2.3   Grant's Conversion

> I've mentioned the great, sane secular liberalism on which I was brought
> up and I'm sure the second war, the violence of it, just broke that for me.
>
> The second war to me—I'm just talking about my experience—
> was an unqualified disaster. This led me, to use the old-fashioned
> language, to be converted.[45]

In that headspace, at the dawn hour of December 11 or 12, 1941, Grant found
himself riding his bicycle to work along a quiet rural road. What happened that
morning defined the man. Whatever soil his family, his temperament, and his
childhood influences and experiences provided; however the war trauma had
churned and turned the soil of his heart, the epiphany of that day was a seed
planted from which George Grant's life work would sprout, grow, blossom, and
bear much fruit. His entire theology, philosophy, political science, and activism,
his every critique, analysis, and proposal were all present within that seminal
moment. The following are five accounts that Grant gave of the event. Emphases
in italics are mine.

2.3.1   Grant's conversion accounts

i.   1973 account

> You know, through the bombing and later, I saw a great deal of violent
> things and found the war pretty unsupportable. But I think I was
> *converted*. I would only say that I was *converted*. I was totally brought up
> at the centre of a certain—not the centre, but it was a very dominant thing
> in the eastern seaboard of the United States and certain parts of Canada
> and in England—a certain kind of liberalism and for a vast variety of
> reasons, some totally private and others—the war, I think—that I came to
> realize that this … had come to … this was coming to an end, this could
> no longer be believed.[46]

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[45] Cayley, *GC*, 48.
[46] Grant, "Ramsay Cook Interviews George Grant," *CW* 3: 150.

ii. 1978 account

I had been brought up in Toronto in a species of what I would call secular
liberalism—by fine and well-educated people who found themselves in
the destiny of not being able to see the Christianity of their pioneering
ancestors as true. As a substitute they had taken on the Canadian form best
labeled English-speaking liberalism. At its shallowest one finds this in
American eastern seaboard liberalism. The great experience for me was
the war of 1939. The liberalism of my youth simply could not come to
terms with it. At the worst stage of the war for me in 1942,[47] I found
myself ill, and deserted from the merchant navy, and went into the English
countryside to work on a farm. I went to work at five o'clock in the
morning on a bicycle. I got off the bicycle to open a gate and when I got
back on *I accepted God.*

　　Obviously, there is much to think about in such experiences. All
the Freudian and Marxian questions (indeed, most: the Nietzschean
questions) can be asked. But I have never finally doubted the truth of that
experience since that moment thirty-six years ago. If I try to put it into
words, I would say that it was *the recognition that I am not my own.* In
more academic terms, if modern liberalism is the affirmation that our
essence is our freedom, then this experience was the denial of that
definition, before the fact that we are not our own.[48]

iii. 1980 account

You used to have to set out about five in the morning to ride to the farm.
You know in England there are these gates across the road—and all I can
say is I got off the bike, opened the gate, went through it, shut the gate,
and *it just came to me* that I thought, "*God is.*" It never left me. I wasn't
thinking much at the time. *It came to me* later that I was not my own. In
other words, beyond space and time there was order. All I can say is that it

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[47] These events, including Grant's conversion, occurred in 1941, but it is true that
1942 still saw him suffering the darkness of PTSD.
[48] Grant, *GP*, 62-3.

happened at that moment and it has always sustained me.[49]

iv. 1985 account

GRANT: I just remember walking through a gate; I got off my bicycle and walked through a gate, and *I believed in God*. I can't tell you more, I *just knew* that was it for me. And *that came to me* very suddenly. I don't mean that in any very dramatic sense; I just mean it as the case, because I'd come from a world where the idea of, I don't like to call it "the idea of God," but where God had not been taken terribly seriously. Religion was something that was good for a society and kept people in order, but really, if you explored it intellectually, it was B.S., it was nonsense. This was a prodigious moment for me.

CAYLEY: This experience of going through the gate and knowing—can you say what it was that you knew?

GRANT: I think it was a kind of affirmation that beyond time and space *there is order*. Now, all the psychologists and psychiatrists could just say that I was looking for order, but for me it was an affirmation about what is, an affirmation that ultimately *there is order*. And that is what one means by *God*, isn't it? That ultimately the world is not a maniacal chaos—I think that's what the affirmation was.[50]

v. 1987 account

The greatest event in my life was my conversion to Christianity. It was a prodigious moment as I passed through a farm gate in England and realized *that all was finally well. I believed in God*.[51]

To these explicit accounts, we might add three immediate, poignant, but more oblique testimonies. The first two came within forty-eight hours and then two weeks by way of letters to Maude (his mother), the third as a journal entry eleven months later.

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[49] Vincent Tovell (prod.), "The Owl and the Dynamo: The Vision of George Grant," 1980.

[50] Cayley, *GC*, 48–9.

[51] Martin Flewwelling, "Profile: George Grant," *Atlantic Advocate* 12 (1987): 5.

vi. Dec. 13, 1941 to Mum [re: the two months he had gone missing]

It is just not a journey that one could call up or down. It is merely to a different plane of existence. Spiritually it has been so far that it is as if it wasn't the same person who started out ... there is no fear for my mental health as just recently I feel as if I have been *born again*. Gradually I am learning there are unpredictable tremendous forces—mysterious forces within man that are beyond man's understanding driving him—taking him along courses and over which he has no or little control ...[52]

vii. Dec. 25, 1941 to Mother [re: Christmas day]

So many Christmases one does not have the time to think of Christ & though we are crucifying him now—more and more I understand the glory of him... I feel like a stick being carried by the strength of the current.[53]

viii. Nov. 5, 1942 journal entry: [thoughts on "God Sees the Truth but Waits," a short story by Lev Tolstoy]

'God sees the truth but waits'—what a phrase that is. The whole tragic futile benighted sublime ridiculous grandeur of our lives is there. We sow & sow & sow without heed and not caring—&, God, in his infinite wisdom & perfect power just damn well waits & then with that irony of all ironies we reap what we have sown. So many people will say 'but, but what nonsense.' A poor person does not reap what he or she has sown— yes they do—reap of all that they have been & everybody has been. So many have taken 'as you sow, so shall you reap' as a moral warning—it is not moral in the sense of right and wrong—it is the pitiable & wonderful truth—& that is the point. God sees the truth and waits. Personally, it is a great emotional discovery—*the discovery of God—the first glimpse of that reality*—not amateurish or kind—not sentimental or moral, but so beyond our comprehension that the mere glimpse is more than we can bear. God, not as the optimist—not as the non-mover, but, God, *who sees the truth but waits*. God waited through the selfish nationalism & ignorant self-

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[52] GPG to Mum, 12/13/1941 (Christian, *SL*, 91–4).
[53] GPG to Mother, 12/25/1941 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.8).

seeking of the nineteenth century. God waited through the struggle of the first war, & through the continuance of our sloth and greed & our ignorance from 1918–1939, he saw the truth—he saw what the policies that we were following would mean. He saw that each individual sin multiplied in countries & continents would bring us down to this—yet *he did not intervene*, he waited.

Of course, the approach to God is, I know not how. For me it must always be *Credo ut intelligam*;[54] the opposite of that is incomprehensible.[55]

Within this brief journal entry, ten months after his conversion, we discover the foundations of Grant's theology of God, human suffering, and the primacy of revelation over reason.

Here, Grant is in the first stages of working out his approach to the theodicy question, addressing the paradox (or contradiction) of necessity and the Good in the world. He has experienced the insane tragedy of World War II up close in his work with the victims of the London bombings. He had connected the dots of what Western liberalism had sown and inevitably reaped across Europe. In that context, he had known the silence and absence of a God who did not miraculously intervene to prevent injustice and evil.

However, Grant had also glimpsed the reality of God in his conversion less than a year earlier—transcendent, ineffable deity—and discovered that God is not merely an impassive or idle 'non-mover.' Tolstoy's little tale acknowledges harsh human realities without denial, but also hints at what it is God awaits: our consent. Somehow, when we (re)turn to God, the God who suffers us and suffers with us then also transforms the suffering or transforms us through our suffering. Redemption comes, but not finally through a deferred vengeance or miraculous rescue. It comes as we plant God's forgiveness, peacemaking, and mercy—and thereby harvest God's internal-eternal peace and freedom in our hearts and relationships. As with Plato, the transcendent image of the Good in the world is located in the just, but persecuted man, and fulfilled supremely in the enemy-

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[54] Latin for "I believe that I might understand" (Anselm of Canterbury, following Augustine).
[55] Journal entry, 11/05/1942 (Christian, *SL*, 104–5).

forgiving love of Christ.

Also, in his reflection, Grant sees that faith in (or a revelation of) God precedes and informs understanding. The opposite—reasoning our way into the transcendent—is impossible. Philosophical inquiry does not lead to revelation (though it may position one to receive it). Rather, the divine discovery or glimpse funds the quest to understand. This establishes Grant as a true contemplative.

Finally, one more allusion to Grant's faith comes decades later. Grant reflected on his tumultuous conversion in light of Nietzsche's scathing charges against Christianity, "O you dolts, you presumptuous, pitying dolts, what have you done? Was that work for your hands? How have you bungled and botched my beautiful stone! What presumption!"[56] Grant, highly conscious of the brokenness in which the kernel of faith found purchase in his own heart, nevertheless affirms its essential truth.

ix. 1972 account

Oh the botched and the bungled, am I entirely that? Because I am the botched and the bungled I nevertheless do not want to live as N. says—by sheer instinctive will—nor do I think morality and religion is for me simply the desire to put off my botched and bungled self into another world—it is rather that even if I am botched and bungled I still want to *give myself*—as I feel Mozart does—to the forces of the world—be they just nature or be they God's—*give myself, take part* in them.

What Nietzsche has made me really admit is that I am one of the botched and the bungled.[57]

2.3.2 Grant's conversion premise and corollary doctrines

Innate in Grant's moment of 'rebirth' are the four premises or doctrines that I connected earlier to the four stages of Plato's cave analogy, as follows.

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[56] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1989), §62.
[57] Grant, "Technique(s) and Good," *CW* 4: 127.

Grant's Conversion	Grant's Doctrine
i. Repentance: Disillusionment with and denial of modern liberalism where our essence is freedom and the result has been maniacal chaos.	*i. Naming the darkness as darkness— Grant's deconstruction:* The matrix of modernity.
ii. Experience: A sudden realization and affirmation of truth that sustained him. An experience of heart-knowledge that comes to him and sponsors belief that seeks understanding (*Credo ut intelligam*).	*ii. The intellect illumined by love— Grant's epistemology:* A contemplative understanding of *noetic* knowledge and the *vita contempletiva*.
iii. Content: That God is. Beyond space and time, there is order, carrying us along. I am not my own. This God neither intervenes nor is he idle. He sees and waits, but also carries, reveals.	*iii. The perfection of God and the affliction of man—Grant's theology:* a. Plato's distance between necessity and the Good b. Theodicy of the Cross c. Cosmology of Consent
iv. Call: To give ourselves to God and to participate in the forces of order in this world.	*iv. The love of justice as light in the darkness—Grant's ethics:* His politics of justice and consent, rooted in an obligation of love for the Good and the other.

Central to all four doctrines is his most basic premise, the affirmation that "God is." He describes his essential theism in Platonic terms:

> ... one can put this in Platonic language and speak about the idea of the good. The word *good* for me is just a synonym for the word *God.* As Plato said, the idea of the good is just the idea of final purpose. The whole is opened to one when one asks the question of final purpose.[58]

The rest are corollaries: If *God is* our ultimate good and ultimate purpose, then:

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[58] Cayley, *GC*, 59.

i. Doctrine 1 – Grant's deconstruction

Modernity is tragically mistaken in displacing God (and willing consent to the Good) with human freedom (willing, making, mastery) as the ultimate reality around which our existence and the whole universe finds its orbit.

ii. Doctrine 2 – Grant's epistemology

Second, if *God is*, then reason, so recently enthroned as the narrow but final authority of knowing, is deposed and subordinated. Ultimate truth can be known as Grant came to know it: the intellect (*nous*) is enlightened by love.[59] The eye of the soul is graciously awakened to perceive that which the rational mind could not access independently.

iii. Doctrine 3 – Grant's theology

Third, if *God is*, then beyond space and time, there is a good greater than our own self-willing freedom. "We are not our own." There is a claim on our lives: a call to love of God and love of neighbour, which is perfect justice. For Grant, the supreme manifestation of God's love and justice came finally through Christ in Gethsemane ("Not my will, but thy will be done")[60] and Golgotha ("Father, forgive them").[61]

Further, what are we to make of the abyss between the perfection of this God (order, the Good) and the affliction of this world (tragedy, necessity)? "The puzzle that continually recurred was that, when he compared the answers to the two … questions—What is true about God? What is the character of the modern world?—they seemed incompatible."[62] For Grant, God is neither the triumphant intervener nor the passive non-mover. He sees and he waits. In the sowing and reaping of our own sin and violence, but nowhere more than at the Cross. Grant locates the only adequate theodicy in contemplative astonishment before the Cross of Christ.

iv. Doctrine 4 – Grant's ethics

This opens up the question of justice: if *God is*, then justice cannot be reduced to self-willed values and self-preserving social contracts that ultimately lead to tyranny. Rather, there is a standard of goodness beyond Self that proceeds from

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[59] Cayley, *GC*, 178.

[60] Grant, "Course Lectures at McMaster," *CW* 3: 736; Grant, *TJ*, 113; Cayley, *GC*, 8.

[61] Cayley, *GC*, 179.

[62] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 194.

the love, beauty and goodness of God—a truth that demands engagement in this world by those willing to give their lives for co-suffering love. On the Cross, "Christ declares the price of goodness in the face of evil."[63]

Grant's epiphany came when he was so traumatized and suicidal that to say it quite literally saved him might not be an overstatement. Certainly when he claims that he felt 'born again' and that the realization that *God is* (and its corollaries)—'sustained' him—we can see how the conversion somehow recalibrated his life. But surely 'sustained' is too weak a descriptor for the generative power of this revelation, so deeply planted in the furrows of his war-plowed soul. In truth, from this moment, *God is* and all that means for Grant become absolutes, non-negotiable criteria of truth before which everything else is judged. From these postulates, Grant's questions also begin to sprout. In Augustine's words, *credo ut intelligam*: Grant's newly begotten belief gave him understanding; thenceforth, *fides quaerens intellectum*[64]—his faith seeks understanding. Biographer William Christian explains:

> [Grant's philosophy] grew out of his direct encounters with life. He did not ask the authors he read what they thought was true. Rather, he looked in their works for intimations of experiences they both shared, and then asked if their writings could help him understand the world better.[65]

This is why Grant can give genuine enthusiastic praise to the greatness of a Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, or Heidegger and then presume to resist them so forcefully on specific fronts. He authentically asks them his burning questions, and then watches for which of their answers survive the flames of [his] twentieth century experience.

2.3.3   Critical Analysis of Grant's Conversion

Beyond identifying the foundation of Grant's doctrines in seminal form, what else might we glean from the conversion accounts themselves and the situations in which he discusses them?

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[63] Grant, *TJ*, 42.

[64] Latin for "Faith seeking understanding" (Anselm of Canterbury).

[65] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 93.

i.   The development of Grant's accounts

First, we note that the earliest reflections were only shared privately to mother and journal, without a description of the event itself. Grant was aware of God in a completely new and unexpected way that flew in the face of—completely negated—the secular liberal Christianity he had known. He also saw that this awareness was given, unsought and unearned, as a transforming grace-gift. God had not and would not prevent Grant from experiencing the fullness of what he suffered. There was no instant miracle-fix. But neither had God forsaken him. God's watching and waiting is not to be mistaken for idleness or indifference. Rather, God's goodness is experienced as we find our suffering and our hearts somehow transformed for the Good.

We will see that after his experience, Grant immediately began to think, study, write, and teach *from* his epiphany. But he did not publicly write or talk *about* it for decades. All five descriptions of the event were only volunteered or drawn out through interviews in the last fifteen years of his life, none earlier than thirty years after the fact. By then, he was finally established in the academy with a decade at McMaster already under his belt. Perhaps Grant now saw himself beyond the reach and ridicule of those whose opinions he no longer cared to answer or needed to appease. Not that he was embarrassed of his faith, but the conversion itself was a private and precious encounter, pearls not to be cast before swine that might tread upon it (Matt. 7:6).

ii.   The significance of Grant's mental state

Second, we might question what Grant's mental state implies for his conversion. Does his depression and trauma invalidate the event or his conclusions? Is this merely a necessary delusion for a broken mind? Does the admission of being 'botched and bungled' quash the integrity of the doctrines he inferred from it? Hardly. One might caution, "Consider the state of the source." Our rejoinder: "Consider the fruit of the tree." Grant's faith-claims cannot be verified or falsified—his experience is his experience. As for his truth-claims for the absolute—philosophic inquiry aside—we can at least ponder how they sustained a real man in real life. Where he was in chaos and despair, there appeared clarity, order, and hope. What Grant glimpsed was the first step towards recovery. His meditations on what he saw lifted him from his personal abyss into a long-term stability that held firm through the trials of life and the pressure of the academy.

Chapter Two: George Grant's Biography

Before the pillars of modernity, Grant saw to the heart of things, had a relevant word to speak, and the boldness to speak it.

Of course, to the modern and postmodern grid, this 'proves' nothing on a grand scale. Grant's trajectory towards a healthy, productive life of influence can be relativized to 'what worked for him.' It may have had as much to do with the invigoration of personal confidence and conviction as with the content of his insight. The point here is simply that, as with so many of history's great teachers, Grant's brokenness does not preclude or disqualify what he saw. Just as likely, it created the receptivity prerequisite to illumination and it grounded his understanding in the existential reality of life in the world. That is, Grant's disillusionment, trauma, and despair opened a path in his heart that led him to a contemplative gate (!) through which his insight about God and human nature could enter. This event marks a beginning without which I cannot see the possibility of his life work, much less the trajectory it ultimately took. That is, he became George Grant as we know him—the contemplative theologian and social prophet of this study—in that moment.

iii. Contradictions and tensions

Third, we see some interesting apparent contradictions—or better, tensions and paradoxes—between his conversion accounts and/or between these accounts and his doctrine. In fact, Grant, like few others, sees 'the whole' with its dilemmas, so most critiques of this type don't give sufficient credit to his capacity to 'live in the tension.'

On the one hand, the accounts feature Grant's intense dissatisfaction with modern liberalism and the insanity of war. These are connected in his mind and provide backstory to his conversion—what he is converted from, the cave from which he emerges. On the other hand, at the moment of his conversion, he confesses to have been thinking about very little. He was not mulling over his issues with modernity, nor was he attempting to calculate a solution. But the answer, for it was an answer, just came to him all of a sudden.

Further, what came to him was a simple, positive awareness about God ('God is'), the universe ('there is order'), and/or about himself ('I am not my own'). We can account for the variation in his accounts by understanding that a contemplative insight can come as an entire symphony of truth conveyed in an instant, unspoken 'sense.' The contemplative or 'intellectual' (to use Plato's term

from *the Republic*) or mystic is one who has beheld the light of the ultimate, but must struggle through ineffability to find and give words to what has been sensed or seen. The words for what is experienced begin as a pure trickle, like 'God is,' [and therefore?] 'There is order,' [and therefore?] 'I am not my own.' With time, the trickle becomes a broadening and deepening stream. I do not regard what Grant says later as merely growing commentary on the seed message. Rather, we may use analogy of the seed to say it continues to sprout, grow, and produce fruit. The implanted sense carries with it a revelation that keeps speaking and takes time to be heard. Thirty and forty years after 'it' came to him, Grant in all his verbosity had not exhausted its wealth.

Another tension concerns what happened to Grant personally. Some of his language describes a unilateral grace given to him: 'It came to me'—'*it*' referring to a truth given or 'unconcealed'[66] for him. A veil was pulled back such that he 'glimpsed,' 'discovered,' and had 'a recognition.' He was given spiritual eyes to see *what is*—but it's not that he 'figured it out.' We see in this process the formation of Grant's understanding of Plato regarding the intellect and contemplation as a faculty beyond rational calculation. The insight is received (not 'worked out' or self-generated). We ought quite literally to term this a 'revelation.' Grant has been shown something and enabled to see it, the dynamic described in Plato's sun analogy. Moreover, something has happened *to him* or acted *upon him*: he is 'born again,' 'was converted,' was not 'the same person.'

Grant can also use language that Protestants often associate with choosing or willing. But he is describing a contemplative encounter, *not* a revivalist altar call. For example, when Grant says, 'I accepted Christ' or 'I believed in God,' the modern evangelical may identify this with Billy Graham's 'Hour of Decision,' a western model of conversion founded on the individual, volitional commitment.[67] Instead ponder the subtle difference between willing and responding. Grant objects to accounts of freedom as our essence—'the final account of who we are'[68]—from which we make ourselves and our world. But we can read Grant's early conversion experience between the lines of the freedom he does affirm (in 1986, two years before his death):

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[66] Cf. truth (*aletheia*) in Martin Heidegger's *Early Greek Thinking* (1984), 104.

[67] Cf. Grant, "The Paradox of Democratic Education," *CW* 2: 177.

[68] Grant, "Faith and the Multiversity," *TJ*, 75.

> What is *given us* and *draws from us* our loving is goodness itself; the
> perfection of all purposes which has been called God. We are hungry for
> the bread of eternity. In a way which is almost impossible to affirm, let
> alone describe, we can trust that *we are offered* such bread.[69]

This understanding of freedom includes the capacity to turn away: "It is simply the liberty of indifference; the ability to turn away from the light we have sighted."[70]

So too Grant's resolute, 'I *want* to *give myself*,' or to 'take part.' We might paradoxically call this 'willful surrender' but again, the issue is what we mean by 'will.' To moderns, 'willing' increasingly came to mean mastery, 'making something happen' and emphasizes the power of the Self, prioritizing *activa*. But Grant embraces the Platonic sense of will as 'wanting' or 'desire' (*eros*): "When we use the erotic language of wanting or desiring, we express our dependence on that which we need—be it food, another person, or God. The language of God is always the language of dependence."[71]

The freedom and desire Grant applied to his conversion was primarily a heart response to a belief birthed in a spontaneous experience. Think too in terms of the call to return to the cave from which one has been graciously delivered.[72] To summarize, for Grant, freedom may not be our essence, but we *are* free to respond (or not) to a light that has been given (not self-generated). In hindsight, he claims never to have doubted that *experience* (where others might have said 'that *choice*').

iv. Platonic symbolism of the conversion event

Finally, a word about symbolism. Grant was a lover of symbols in their fullest sense. For him, objects, creatures, places, people, and events became images laden with deeper meaning. That passing through the gate represents his conversion is obvious, but beyond that, he is not explicit. Even so, hints in his language permit us to probe particular elements of his story for symbols, just as

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[69] Grant, "Faith and the Multiversity," *TJ*, 74.
[70] Grant, "Faith and the Multiversity," *TJ*, 75.
[71] Grant, *TH*, 23.
[72] "What liberates the prisoner who escapes? – grace and free will – one of the greatest arguments of history. How Plato comes out. Conversion." (Grant, "Dalhousie Classnotes on Plato," *MSO*, 206–7).

Grant did by consciously self-identifying with Plato's Cave. To contemplate the literal event as a contemplative allegory *is* to be 'Grantean' (as we will see especially in his *Lament*).

Grant was on a bicycle on a road (parallel to 'a journey,' 'a stick being carried along by a current,' 'driving him,' 'taking him along courses') and came to a gate. The gate was at first a *closed* gate, perhaps representing how his liberal pedigree and personal journey had come to an impasse. He then *passes through* the gate and *closes* it behind him. 'Passed through the gate' and 'born again' signify for him the before and after of belief. He 'wasn't the same person who started out' on the road (of life *or* that morning). He had 'shut the gate' on what his history and culture had become and what they offered ('liberal modernism' and 'maniacal chaos'). Before the gate was human-generated self-destruction; after the gate, divine order, a 'different plane of existence,' which is to say, God. Before the gate was liberalism as our essential freedom, after the gate, 'I am not my own' but can participate in something ultimate. What is given at the gate is a belief, an affirmation, a recognition. Passing through the gate for Grant is what emerging from the cave is for Plato. Lastly, we might think of Grant's flight from London into the countryside alongside Leo Strauss's comparison of life in the city (*polis*) to the shadows of the cave. The philosopher leaves the city (transcends the *polis*) to the island of the blessed but must pay his debt and return to the cave with the light he has received.[73] This is Grant's direction as well. He escapes the darkness of bombed out London (and his bombed out soul, in the spirit of *The Republic*) into the serenity of 'dawn' (revelation and new hope) beyond the city. Yet the revelation that we are not our own puts a claim on him ('possessed' in Weil's terms)—this is not the modern-style 'conversion' of the tourist-consumer who chooses beliefs from the religious smorgasbord. He is truly *converted*— transformed—and *called* vocationally back to the city (or cave) to give himself away in the love of the Good and service of justice.

2.4   Finding His Voice: from Conversion to *Lament*

Grant's vocational journey from conversion to his emergence as Canada's top philosopher (with *Lament for a Nation* in 1965) shows us how he began to

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[73] Seth Benardete, *Leo Strauss on Plato's Symposium* (2001), 171, 244.

construct his central doctrines as a contemplative Platonic Christian and theologian of the Cross.[74]

Post-conversion, Grant would emerge as a man of faith in search of understanding. After a recovery period, he took his first teaching post at Dalhousie, then returned to Oxford to pursue a theology degree. Oxford provided Grant with a chance to read and study the great minds who could give words and content to his experience.

2.4.1   Oxford: Touchstones of faith and philosophy

Oxford also gave Grant access to the best English-speaking thinkers of the day. He communed directly with C. S. Lewis and his Socratic Club, Austin Farrer, and A. D. Lindsay. In 1945, Lindsay recommended writing a thesis[75] on John Oman, a Scottish theologian (1860–1939). Grant agreed, seeing it as an opportunity to dive into reading Plato, Aristotle, Thomas, Luther, Calvin, Descartes, Marx, Freud, and Pascal for several years.[76] Although he later downplayed the importance of his thesis, it provided a case study through which to ask his questions and develop his doctrine. It also allows us to overhear him working out the earliest version of his theodicy of the Cross in his affirmations and critiques of Oman.

Over the course of Grant's lifelong struggle with modernity, he would discern elements of modernity that he still held unawares in these early days. His thesis was only a modest beginning in the effort to extricate himself from Hegel, to move beyond Kant, and eventually see Nietzsche behind the language of values. He already knew by experience what Oman was about in challenging the adequacy of scientific rationalism, and preaching our dependence on, and immediate experience of, the supernatural.[77]

Thus, Grant's greatest and enduring convictions—those of his conversion—already permeate the pages of his thesis. For example:

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[74] Cf. Jersak, "Finding His Voice: Conversion to Lament," *Red Tory, Red Virgin* (2012), 83 – 105).

[75] Grant, "The Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 157–419.

[76] GPG to Mother, 11/03/1945 (Christian, *SL*, 122).

[77] Forbes, *Guide to His Thought*, 172; Grant, "The Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 222.

Grant's Thesis	Grant's Doctrine
i. Critique of modernity. Bacon and Locke's empiricism, Hegel's historicism, control over nature, and the failure of liberalism in the face of war.[78]	*i. Naming the darkness as darkness— Grant's deconstruction:* The matrix of modernity.
ii. Illumination of the soul by the Good. God speaks to us through nature: in contemplation / awareness / apprehension (vs. science's comprehension / explanation for human utility). "Intellectual intuition."[79]	*ii. The intellect illumined by love— Grant's epistemology:* A contemplative understanding of *noetic* knowledge and the *vita contempletiva*.
iii. Christian Platonism. The platonic Good is fulfilled universally in a vision of the cross. *Theologia crucis*[80] (a la Luther) as a response to the problem of evil.	*iii. The perfection of God and the affliction of man—Grant's theology:* a. Plato's distance between necessity and the Good b. Theodicy of the Cross c. Cosmology of Consent
iv. Ethical test of a philosophy. Oman's [and Lindsay's] liberal-Calvinist politics in the face of moral crisis (WWI). "A practical theologian can be judged by his theology of politics."[81]	*iv. The love of justice as light in the darkness—Grant's ethics:* His politics of justice and consent, rooted in an obligation of love for the Good and the other.

A summary example of how Grant—as contemplative theologian—embeds his conversion-truths within the thesis comes in his discussion of man's nature:

> As we try to understand man's nature, we find it is of his very essence to
> be gripped by Something Other than himself. The essence of that Other

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[78] Grant, "The Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 161–2, 170, 188.

[79] Grant, "The Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 170, 213, 220.

[80] Grant, "The Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 171, 175, 220, 299, 301, 367.

[81] Grant, "The Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 171, 188, 345. On the Calvinist-Puritan roots of liberal political triumphalism, see Grant, "The Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 346; Grant, *Technology and Empire* (1969), 21, 37.

we find to be Love. In the consciousness of being enfolded by Love is man's peace. Yet in no sense is that enfolding something that destroys our autonomy. Freely, in our contemplation, we must reach out to that embrace.... Oman's attempt in *Grace and Personality* is that through three hundred pages he ponders upon the implication of the experience.[82]

Grant's thinly veiled autobiography, to say the least. We will revisit Grant's use of Oman later.

2.4.2 Finding his voice

One of Grant's criticisms of Oman was that in trying to communicate his faith to a *scientia*-minded culture, Oman could have made a stronger case by being more explicit in stating his premises. Upon graduating (1950), Grant's re-engagement with the philosophical community in Canada would provide some hard lessons on this front. For the next fifteen years (1950–65), he earned many battle scars in his confrontations with Canada's philosophical Sanhedrin, centralized at the University of Toronto and directed by his nemesis, Dr. Fulton Anderson (1895–1968). Grant's unabashed Christian Platonism was derided. While he learned to speak the 'language of Athens,'[83] his unwillingness to 'play the game' kept him sharp (and tactless) enough to accumulate powerful enemies. Throughout this era of Grant's life, he struggles forward, faithfully developing his conversion convictions in the forge of experience and opposition until he finally comes out on top. In my essay, "Finding His Voice,"[84] I describe this drama as it plays out in six acts:

- 1948: Book review of Fulton Anderson
- 1951: The Massey Commission
- 1950–59: Philosophy in the Mass Age
- 1960: The York Clash (or Fulton's Revenge)
- 1961: McMaster and the Interfaith Connection
- 1965: University of Toronto 'Teach-in' and *Lament*

By 1965, Grant's persistence as an educator and his willingness to participate

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[82] Grant, "The Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 267.
[83] Grant, "Two Theological Languages," *Two Theological Languages* (1990), 6–19.
[84] Jersak, "Finding His Voice," *Red Tory, Red Virgin* (2012), 83–105.

directly in political discourse ensured his place as Canada's preeminent political philosopher.

2.4.3 *Lament* and 'Teach-in'

On this last point, two events signal 1965 as George Grant's ascent to preeminence as Canada's national philosopher: the release of his most influential book, *Lament for a Nation*, and his part in the International Teach-in at the University of Toronto (Oct. 1965).

Lament for a Nation: the Defeat of Canadian Nationalism has been hailed as a "passionate defense of our Canadian identity ... of enduring importance ... [to] be respected as a masterpiece of political meditation."[85] The book was a best-seller in Canada, propelling Grant to national prominence. Politician James Laxer writes, "*Lament for a Nation* is the most important book I have ever read in my life. Here was a crazy old philosopher of religion at McMaster and he woke up half our generation. He was saying Canada is dead, and by saying it he was creating the country."[86] Journalist David Cayley testifies, "*Lament for a Nation* had a curious, even paradoxical effect. You presented it as a lament, but among younger people like me, it helped to galvanize a new nationalism."[87]

Others could not see it. For example, Robin Mathews, "Crown Prince of Canadian Political Poets," wrote a poetic response to *Lament* entitled "The Wave of the Future."[88] He assaults *Lament's* theorizing from the perspective of the activists, accusing Grant of abandoning them in the political trenches. Grant replied,

> Thank you for your letter and poem. The poem is indeed insulting, as it accuses me of lack of courage, and what is worse, valetudinarianism. I do not think I lack hope, because in the Christian sense I interpret hope as a supernatural virtue, and courage is what is necessary in the world.[89]

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[85] Peter C. Emberley, "Foreword to the Carleton Library Edition," *Lament*, lxxvii–lxxviii.

[86] Charles Taylor, *Radical Tories* (1982), 148.

[87] Cayley, *GC*, 107.

[88] Robin Mathews, "Wave of the Future," *This Time, This Place* (1965). Ron Dart, *Robin Mathews: Crown Prince of Canadian Political Poets* (2002), 34.

[89] GPG to Robin Mathews, 07/14/1965 (Christian, *SL*, 229).

Grant's diagnosis, bleak as it sounded, functioned with specific aims and did so effectively.

As a political statement indicting American interventionist foreign policy, *Lament* caught the interest of the anti-Vietnam War movement and Canada's 'New Left.' University students were holding campus 'teach-ins' combining sit-in protest and lectures across North America. When Charles Hanly (of U of T) presented the idea of an international teach-in during a University of Michigan meeting, Toronto was proposed as a neutral venue where they could focus on the theme of 'Revolution.' Grant was invited because of his "new left, conservative, nationalist, anti-American views."[90] He spoke to a large crowd on 'Protest and Technology,' denouncing those who "believe that by some dialectical process of history there should suddenly spring out of this technological system a free and humane society."[91] By now a master of formulating questions, Grant concludes with this sequel to *Lament*:

> We must not delude ourselves and we must not throw up our hands. Where in this mammoth system can we use our intelligence and our love to open up areas where human excellence can exist? How can we use the most effective pressure to see that the empire of which we are a satellite uses moderation and restraint in its relations with the rest of the world? … Our greatest obligation as Canadian citizens is to work for a country which is not simply a satellite of any empire.[92]

Grant's nephew, Michael Ignatieff, was involved in the sit-in and present for the speech. Recalling Grant's lament in both the book and the speech, he recalls,

> The Canadians who heard him that day believed he was actually calling for a revival of Canadian nationalism, and they took him at his word. He may have counseled fatalism [?] but, happily, Canadians did not listen. Ironically, he played his part in reviving a political debate about Canada

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[90] Charles Hanly to Ron Dart, personal correspondence, 06/21/2009; Charles Hanly (ed.), *Revolution and Response: Selections from the Toronto International Teach-in* (1966), vii–xvii.

[91] Grant, "Protest and Technology," *Revolution and Response* (1996), 124.

[92] Grant, "Protest and Technology," *Revolution and Response* (1996), 128.

and its relation to the United States that endures to this day.[93]

Grant's previous considerable political interest and activity now found a popular national stage. He would use that stage over the coming decades as a noted political scientist and philosopher. Sometimes his courage and notoriety in that role obscures the animating core that generated the *what* and the *why* of his vocation: he was a contemplative theologian and thus, more than a political philosopher and activist. He engaged the arena of justice and peace as a prophet of lament like Jeremiah and as a faithful follower of Christ, whose Passion comprised the core of Grant's ethical vision.[94]

2.5   Grant's Guides in the Contemplative Journey

As suggested, Grant's contemplative journey and prophetic call can be likened to a tour of Plato's cave, with each of its four stages analogous to the four doctrines ascribed to him herein. In such a construct viewed through Christian lenses, God might be equated with the Sun, Christ as the illuminating 'light of the world,' and also the 'just man' who, compelled by love, re-enters the perilous darkness of the cave with good news.

Grant frequently spoke of his life in these terms—as one who had been set free and dragged from the dark malaise of modernity. The question that frequently recurs is, "Who then are his guides?" The answers vary. For example, Frank Flinn suggests:

> As he had taken *Hegel* as his guide during his first phase, so now he found in *Jacques Ellul* and *Leo Strauss intimations of the darkness* that comes with the copenetration of North American continentalism and technological mastery. ... In [the third phase], Grant takes for *his guides into the darkness* both *Nietzsche* and *Heidegger*, two thinkers who have thought *the darkness of modernity* to its depths.[95]
>
> ... Grant has often described his own life in terms of *Plato's cave.*

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[93] Ignatieff, *True Patriot Love* (2009), 147. Note Ignatieff's failure to perceive Grant's self-aware employment of lament as a powerful rhetorical device. Lament is purposely ironic by definition, for when it works, what sounds like a dirge actually triggers an awakening.

[94] Dart, *Spiders and Bees* (2008), 171.

[95] Flinn, "Bibliographic Introduction," *GP*, 198–9.

The cave from which he felt himself dragged is the *cave of modernity.* ...
In his emergence from the cave of forgetfulness, Grant has many guides—
Hegel, the existentialists [Sartre, Dostoyevsky], *Ellul, Strauss, Nietzsche,*
Heidegger—but only two thinkers have proven to be the true compasses
to the lodestar of his thinking: *Plato* and *Weil,* the modern Diotima.

The question remains: what is the lodestar? An answer attempted:
the *beauty of the Gospel* [Jesus].[96]

Hugh Donald Forbes writes:

To whom did George Grant look? ... he called himself a *Platonist* and
clearly felt a particular affinity with three contemporary thinkers of first
rank. [*Martin Heidegger, Leo Strauss, and Simone Weil*].[97]

... The keys to understanding the overall character and direction of
[Grant's] thought can be found ... in the writings of *Martin Heidegger*
and Simone Weil.[98]

... the elements of the [Platonic] puzzle that he faced are clear
enough—*Plato, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Strauss, and Weil.* These names
can be considered convenient labels for an ancient understanding of the
good, radical modern historicism, that historicism thought
comprehensively, a classically rationalist response to historicism or
relativism, and a contemporary Christian Platonism that may circumvent
the difficulties of the long history of Christian Platonism stemming from
Augustine.[99]

William Christian thinks:

His admiration was reserved for those who penetrated deeply into the
nature of the modern and laid bare its essence. *Sartre* was the first of these
guides, then *Jacques Ellul, and Nietzsche.* ... *Heidegger* ... George's
interest in apparently contradictory philosophies such as those of *Plato*
and Hegel, or Simone Weil and Heidegger, is perfectly intelligible once it

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[96] Flinn, "Bibliographic Introduction," *GP,* 199.
[97] Forbes, *A Guide* (2007), 84.
[98] Forbes, *A Guide* (2007), 174.
[99] Forbes, *A Guide* (2007), 226.

is understood that he was turning to different thinkers for answers to different questions.[100]

In the 1950s he encountered the French philosophers, *Simone Weil* and *Jean Paul Sartre*, and the Germans, *Leo Strauss* and *Martin Heidegger. Heidegger and Weil* exerted an influence on him throughout his life.[101]

The purpose of this study is not to explore Grant's engagement with all of these guides, though we shall run into them as we unveil his four doctrines in greater detail. I shall be focusing primarily on Grant's sojourn as a contemplative theologian as it relates to Plato, Christ, and Weil. For the moment, a brief and broad perspective of Grant's guides may be of some use.

Any historian who examines past philosophers and theologians must be sensitive, as I believe Grant was, to the complexity of what names come to evoke. What do we mean by 'Plato' or 'Nietzsche'? Invoking their names includes recalling:

- the person of history;
- their written body of work and ideas therein;
- the interpretations and caricatures of their ideas by disciples, scholars, and critics; and
- the reputations they accrued and legacy of influences they left—fair or not, earned or not.

George Grant's use and interpretation of Plato, Weil, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and others includes additional features:

- he tested the veracity of their teaching by how it worked out in their personal lives;
- he tested the fruit of their ideas' influence on society as to whether it produced justice;
- he affirmed or critiqued them concerning very specific questions he asked of them;
- he employed their names as symbols according to meanings he attributed

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[100] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 194.

[101] William Christian, "George Grant: Introduction to His Life and Philosophy," *Gandhi and Grant* (2010), 4.

to them.[102]

With these intricacies on the table, I understand Grant's main long-term guides as follows:

2.5.1 Plato's Socrates fulfilled in Jesus Christ

For Grant, Plato's Socrates established a philosophy of the Good or God that expressed our core longing for perfection. This perfection carried the ideas of love, beauty, and justice that could be perceived contemplatively and enacted ethically in the world. Grant believed that Jesus of Nazareth most perfectly became the earthly Platonic image of this invisible God.[103] He held that Plato's philosophy and Christ's revelation "together constitute the criterion by which we can properly judge modernity."[104] Plato's Socrates foreshadows Christ (in his revelation of God and love through their respective lives and deaths) and is a forerunner of Christ (in the sense of promise-fulfillment). At the end of the day, Grant was a lover of Plato but a worshiper of Christ.

2.5.2 Nietzsche and Heidegger—yes and no

Grant listened to Nietzsche and Heidegger at a time when English-speaking philosophers still considered them pariahs.[105] As early as 1939, Grant rejected as absurd claims that Nietzsche was a forerunner of the Nazis.[106] Grant's 1969 CBC radio series, *Time as History*, may have been the first time "that any Canadian thinker had seriously engaged with ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche in a public forum."[107] He found Nietzsche and Heidegger to be powerful allies in judging the Enlightenment project (esp. liberal progressivism, scientific rationalism, technological science, and its effects on justice[108]) and in promoting a return to Greek contemplative openness. Their deconstruction of modernity was so

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[102] "Grant pigeon-holed almost everyone he knew this way." (Christian, *Biography* (1994), 246–7). Cf. 25, 43, 308–9, 326, 346.

[103] Colossians 1:15 seems to make this directly Platonic claim.

[104] Zylstra, "Philosophy, Revelation and Modernity," *GP*, 149.

[105] Canadians were reticent because they were German; because of the Nazi's use of *ubermensch*; and because of Heidegger's brief involvement in early National Socialism.

[106] GPG to Mother, 11/22/1939 (Christian, *SL*, 42–3).

[107] Christian, "Introduction," *Gandhi and Grant* (2010), 7.

[108] Schmidt, *GP*, 145.

devastating as to be irreparable and they mark themselves as true postmoderns. Their resurrection of Greek philosophy and suprarational knowing creates a clearing for Grant's contemplative theology, although he sees the need to further 'clear the clearing.'

In tracking the unfolding of modernity, "Grant, like Heidegger, arrives at the supremacy of the will in modern thought and action."[109] They perceive and reject modernity's self-certainty and technique as the rule of human will over history. He sees Heidegger "out of the night of Being ... prophetically summoning man to the recollecting of Being, ... to conceive man's proper relation to himself and his world as receptive rather than wilful."[110] But Grant disagrees with Heidegger's identification of receptive openness with self-constitutive freedom, creative act, authentic resolve, and resolute projection of his own future. Thus, Heidegger's critique of modernism retains its basic assumptions.[111] Grant refuses these assumptions. Namely,

> That man creates himself; that he takes responsibility for his essence; that there is no eternal, transcendent, and unchangeable good for which man is fitted; that there is no justice in things to which man must conform; that there is no eternal law by which man must be measured; that all is radically contingent; that the meaning of beings is exhausted by their finite (historical possibilities).[112]

As for Nietzsche, Grant locates him at the core of his enucleation, for "he thought the conception of time as history more comprehensively than any other modern thinker before or since."[113] He acknowledges Nietzsche as the seer-conscience of the age who most helps us know ourselves as moderns: who we are, how we got here, and where we are inevitably heading. Grant says,

> [Nietzsche's] thought does not invent the situation of our contemporary existence, it unfolds it. He carries the crisis of modern thought further only in the sense that by the accuracy and explicitness of his unfolding, he

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[109] O'Donovan, *Twilight of Justice* (1984), 117.

[110] O'Donovan, *Twilight of Justice* (1984), 118.

[111] Grant, "Conversation with George Grant," *GP*, 67.

[112] O'Donovan, *Twilight of Justice* (1984), 119.

[113] Grant, *TH*, 66.

makes it more possible for others to understand the situation of which they are inheritors.[114]

For Grant, Nietzsche self-consciously rends the whole fabric of progressive liberalism in Europe. He exposes its doomed historical hope as vapid and its liberal morality—untethered secular Christian rationalism—as stupid, to be put away with the Christian God.[115]

Where Grant can disagree with Heidegger and Nietzsche, he asserts that we cannot, must not, ignore them. He rejects: their particular use of the pre-Socratics;[116] the rationalism they posit in Plato to the neglect of his mystical side; Nietzsche's hyper-individualism, will to power, and self-created values; and Heidegger's historicism and self-focused contemplation. In their assertion that men are wills,[117] Grant charges them with continuing to establish, occupy, and steward entire wings of the modernist maze—postmodernism is actually super-modern.

2.5.3   Strauss the teacher but Weil the flame

Grant often paid tribute to the Jewish-American philosopher, Leo Strauss, acknowledging his exceedingly great debt for showing him what makes up modernity; for illuminating the political philosophy of Plato; and for helping him escape the gravity of Hegel.[118] While this study focuses on Grant's doctrines and how they relate to Simone Weil, the reader ought not underestimate Strauss's impact on Grant's Platonism and dependence on classical philosophy. Nor should one mistake my emphasis on Weil for overlooking Strauss's voice, which permeates much of Grant's thought. To read Strauss's class notes on Plato's *Symposium* informs us on much of Grant's mind on the Platonic Good, the beautiful, and the eternal.[119]

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[114] Grant, *TH*, 24–5.

[115] O'Donovan, *Twilight of Justice* (1984), 121; Grant, *TH*, 28.

[116] Nietzsche uses the pre-Socratics as sources for his will to power; and Heidegger uses them for his unspecified notion of Being.

[117] Grant, *TH*, 34.

[118] Cf. Christian, *Biography* (1994), 268–9; Forbes, *A Guide* (2007), ch. 10; Grant Havers, "George Grant and Leo Strauss: Modernist and Postmodernist Conservatisms," *Topia* 8 (2002): 91–106.

[119] Benardete, *Leo Strauss on Plato's Symposium* (2001).

But Grant's 'yes' to Strauss is accompanied by some nos: he felt that Strauss fed into the Heidegger / Nietzsche problem by reading rationalism into the classics; he disagreed with Strauss's appropriation of Plato's 'noble lie'; he challenged Strauss and the Straussians' right wing politics as backers of Reagan Republicanism; and of course, Grant saw the final word as residing in the Christian faith.

He often contrasted Strauss's brilliance to Weil's inspiration, which had greater authority for him:

> Let me say that although my debt to Strauss is great as a teacher of what makes up modernity; Simone Weil is the being whose thought is to me the enrapturing … her thought is next to the Gospels the highest authority for me. Quite a different level of authority from Strauss. I can imagine being capable of writing something as perceptive & lucid as Strauss, but I cannot imagine loving God and being possessed by Christ as S.W. was.[120]

Grant adds, "Beside Strauss, Simone Weil is a flame."[121] Thus, the "major influences on Grant's thinking all lead back to Plato and Christianity, but the Plato of Simone Weil rather than the Plato of Leo Strauss."[122]

2.6   Simone Weil: Grant's Diotima

Overall, I am contending that Grant's doctrines (contemplative and prophetic) grew from his conversion experience and from his subsequent reflections upon it, a claim supported by and reflected in his attraction to Weil's work, partly because Weil's work can likewise be regarded as having developed out her own wartime suffering and a religious conversion. Indeed, to understand Grant's sustained spiritual center, Weil's great trials, afflictions, and radical conversion are indispensable.

> His witness during World War II of unlimited innocent suffering (the problem of theodicy) and the atrocities exposed after the War made a lasting impression on him, an impression which found expression in the

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[120] Grant, "Simone Weil," *GGR*, 237.

[121] Heaven, "Some Influences of Simone Weil," *GP*, 75. Cf. Cayley, *GC*, 35, 173.

[122] Whillier, "Introduction," *Two Theological Languages* (1990), iv.

thought of Weil and her powerful understanding of the afflicted Christ. ...
Grant regarded Weil a saint because she thought the inevitability of
Providence and the inevitability of human suffering together and
profoundly.[123]

Grant's sustained meditation of Weil's works involved such an internalization of her thought that when expressing his own doctrines, he would often borrow liberally from her language. These echoes of Weil should not be mistaken for dependence in terms of discovery, since Grant had already apprehended his core truths. However, the correlation of their shared ideas is very strong, more so because the highlights of her conversion journey stirred Grant in ways that would recall his own enlightenment.

Elsewhere, I have written on Grant's retelling of Weil's conversion, where I compare and contrast their experiences.[124] For our purposes here, I will restrict my comparison to their theology as it pertains to Grant's four doctrines. These two Christian converts' experiences and reflections led them to a profundity of similar convictions. They were convinced that modernity had failed miserably. They saw that project come to a dead end in the bloodbath of two world wars and industrial-technological tyranny. They also came independently to parallel doctrines in their contemplative Christian Platonism, their theodicy of the Cross, their prophetic call to social justice, and applied peacemaking in their own contexts. I close this section on Weil and Grant with this self-explanatory chart of their overlapping doctrine.

Weil's Doctrine	Grant's Doctrine
i. Weil names the darkness: a. Disillusionment with French liberalism. b. The tyranny of factory technology. c. Disillusionment with Marxism.[125]	*i. Naming the darkness as darkness— Grant's deconstruction:* The matrix of modernity.

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[123] Whillier, "Introduction," *Two Theological Languages* (1990), v.

[124] Jersak, "Simone Weil: George Grant's Diotima," *Red Tory, Red Virgin* (2012), 5–17.

[125] Weil, *G&G*, 181.

ii. Faith is the experience of the intellect illumined by love: a. Weil's 'attention': her embrace of Christian-Platonism. "The wisdom of Plato is not a philosophy, a search for God through human reason. ... It is nothing short of a turning of the soul towards grace."[126] "Universal love belongs only to the contemplative faculty of the soul."[127] b. Weil's encounters with Christ.	*ii. The intellect illumined by love— Grant's epistemology:* A contemplative understanding of *noetic* knowledge and the *vita contempletiva.*
iii. Torn between the perfection of God and the affliction of man: a. Weil's *malheur* (affliction). b. The distance between the Good and necessity, convening only on the Cross.[128] c. "It is what it is."	*iii. The perfection of God and the affliction of man—Grant's theology:* a. Plato's distance between necessity and the Good b. Theodicy of the Cross c. Cosmology of Consent
iv. Love as self-giving consent: a. Not Gnostic (in the anti-materialist sense). "The wise have to return to the cave, and act there."[129] b. Engagement: in the labour movement, Syndicalism, teaching the poor, Spanish Civil War, factory work, and the French Resistance.	*iv. The love of justice as light in the darkness—Grant's ethics:* His politics of justice and consent, rooted in an obligation of love for the Good and the other.

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[126] Weil, *IC*, 85.
[127] Weil, *IC*, 194.
[128] Grant, *TJ*, 44.
[129] Weil, *LP*, 221.

Chapter Two: George Grant's Biography

2.7   Summary: After Grant

Two senses and two arenas 'after Grant' complete this biographical section as it relates to his contemplative theology and prophetic call: the temporal and territorial. Of the former, 'after Grant' pertains to his influence subsequent to his national lament in 1965 and again, after his death in 1988. On the latter, I refer to his impact on both the Canadian scene and on the international stage.

2.7.1   After *Lament*

As described earlier, Grant left his most dramatic impression on Canada through the 1965 publication of *Lament for a Nation* and his impassioned speech at the University of Toronto sit-in. His role in the resurgence of a persistent Canadian nationalism and our resistance to American imperialism survives even while many of his underlying concerns went unheeded. Of Grant's four doctrines, in Canada: (i) we have not followed him out of the delusional cave of late modernity; (ii) our minds have drifted further from contemplative openness into technique; (iii) the Christian God and Platonic Good are more deeply subordinated to selfish 'freedom' and individualist isolation; and (iv) his Red Tory version of public justice has been largely marginalized, its proponents in political exile and their Conservative Party co-opted by Republican-style neocons. Grant would no doubt continue his lament today.

2.7.2   Since death

Beyond Canada, Grant gets an occasional nod where his disciples have carried his thought (e.g., in India, via his McMaster friends[130]). However, within just a few years of Grant's death, 'Radical Orthodoxy'[131] arose in the UK and by extension, its political counterpart, a revived Red Toryism.[132] Two of the major players, John Milbank and Phillip Blond, acknowledge the inspiration and influence of George Grant on their thought.[133] Innovative as it may be, the Radical Orthodoxy

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[130] Cf. Arati Barua (ed.), *Grant and Gandhi* (2010).

[131] Radical Orthodoxy was first associated with John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward.

[132] Modern Red Toryism was spearheaded by Phillip Blond and his *Respublica* think-tank.

[133] John Milbank to Brad Jersak, personal correspondence 07/28/2010; Phillip Blond to Brad Jersak 07/28/2010.

and Red Tory movements stand within Grant's lineage, advancing his four major doctrines, even while arguably distorting them.[134] That is, since 1990 they have shared Grant's central commitments to (i) disavowing late modernity,[135] (ii) contemplative ways of knowing,[136] (iii) refiguring Plato as fulfilled in Christ,[137] and (iv) the prophetic call to an ethos of virtue and public justice for the common good (revived Red Toryism).[138] My point here is that following Grant's prolonged, theo-prophetic stand in Canada, a lonely and unpopular battle, this Cambridge/Nottingham crowd has been influential in echoing some major Grantean positions described in this thesis. I believe Grant should be given his due for breaking that ground.

I have proposed that Grant's Christian Platonism is rooted in his conversion from whence came four major doctrines that would define and direct his lifework. These doctrines are represented metaphorically by the staged enlightenment of Plato's cave analogy through which Simone Weil serves as Grant's foremost guide. Now to the task of establishing this proposal in detail.

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[134] Ron Dart, "Political Ressourcement: Anabaptist Inaccuracies, Radical Orthodoxy, Red Toryism, and George Grant," *Clarion Journal of Spirituality and Justice* (Oct. 16, 2010).

[135] Phillip Blond (ed.), *Post-Secular Philosophy* (1998).

[136] John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, Graham Ward (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy* (1999).

[137] Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing* (1998).

[138] Phillip Blond, *Red Tory* (2010).

Chapter 3
Out of the Shadows and Imaginings: Naming the Darkness as Darkness /
Grantean Deconstruction

3.1   Introduction

"Out of the Shadows and Imaginings into the Truth"

(George Grant's grave marker in Terence Bay, Nova Scotia)

This chapter will lay out in detail Grant's first doctrine: his deconstruction of modernity. Grant and Weil both employ Plato's shadowy cavern as a metaphor for the failed illusory worldview of modernity. This is *not* to say this usage represents their exhaustive *interpretation* of what Plato meant—think more in terms of application. Grant and Weil both apply the cave analogy to modern conceptions of society (the political) and the soul (the personal). For Grant (by way of deconstruction) and Weil (by way of remedy) the virus in modernity is *the primacy of will* or "the emancipation of the passions."[1] In a phrase, *I choose, therefore I am.* To preface the direction of this chapter, I quote Grant:

> This is the attempt to articulate that primal western affirmation which stands shaping our whole civilization, before modern science and technology, before liberalism and capitalism, before our philosophies and theologies. It is present in all of us, and yet hidden to all of us; it originates somewhere and sometime which nobody seems quite to know. Nobody has been able to bring it into the full light of understanding. In all its unfathomedness, the closest I can come to it is the affirmation of human beings as "will," the content of which word has something to do with how westerners took the Bible as a certain kind of exclusivity.[2]

In reality, Grant's first doctrine, his deconstruction of modernity, does effectively trace the origins and evolution of modern civilization. This chapter will unpack Grant's account by critically examining the following elements of his work:

- How does Grant identify the language of 'darkness' and the Platonic cave with modernity?

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[1] GPG to David Bovenizer, 09/30/1986 (Christian, *SL*, 359).
[2] Grant, *ESJ*, 63–4.

- How do Grant and his dialogue partners define modernity and what are its primary embodiments? I will give special attention to Grant's sense of modernity's essence, i.e., primacy of the will.

- Whence came modernity, according to Grant and his interlocutors? For Grant and Weil, what dilemma lies at the heart of modernity (from the headwaters of western civilization)?

The most important original contribution of this chapter will be to give special attention to Grant's account of the seeds of modernism in Biblical religion itself, especially in the competing images of God as Good/Love and God as Will/Freedom. I will unpack and critique Grant's movement with and beyond Weil's material into competing images of God in the actual texts of Hebrew and Christian Scripture.

3.2   Plato's Dark Cave of Delusion

3.2.1   Listening from the cave

From the beginning, George Grant forsook sterile 'museum culture' of 'objective' humanities research.[3] Instead, he practiced active listening for the insights of history's great teachers; he drew dialogue partners from across the centuries.[4] He was attentive to how thinkers such as Plato, Kant, or Nietzsche continue to speak to us today. As early as 1948, Grant taught Plato's cave (from *Republic* 514a–515c), identifying his generation with the prisoners chained inside it. Note especially his final sentence:

> Plato asks us to imagine an underground cave which has an opening towards the light.
>
> In this cave are living human beings with their legs and necks chained from childhood in such a way that they face the inside wall of the cave and have never seen the light of the sun. ... The prisoners facing the

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[3] Grant, *TJ*, 97–8; cf. Nita Graham, "Teaching Against the Spirit of the Age: George Grant and Museum Culture," *George Grant and the Subversion of Modernity* (1996), 285–303.

[4] Grant said, "We don't really look at the past for antiquarian reasons, we look at the past to see ... things that have been lost and that we need for this very present moment of our existing." (Cayley, *GC*, 137–8).

inside wall of the cave cannot see one another nor the objects carried behind them, but they see the shadows on the wall and this is all.

These prisoners represent the majority of mankind – that multitude of people who remain all their lives in a state of only beholding shadows of reality and hearing only echoes of the truth.

But though they are in this state they cling to their distorted views with all the tenacity they have and have no wish to escape their prison house. They enjoy being prisoners. This is us.[5]

"This is us." Thus Grant resists objectifying an author or text. He plays neither the dispassionate historian nor the critical master. Rather, he listens. He allows Plato (along with Nietzsche, Strauss, Heidegger, or Weil) to speak to our situation—to diagnose our malaise where the symptoms are evident. When Plato says 'imagine a cave,' Grant does so. He assumes we may be the prisoners whom Plato addresses from afar.

3.2.2 The Weilian 'world' of the cave: Nature or culture?

Grant followed Weil's belief that modern Western civilization is a willing prisoner of our own distorted perception of reality—our 'world' as we have conceived it. In my view, neither Plato nor Grant (nor Weil) simplistically regarded the world of the cave as the *material realm* from which to escape (via death or special *gnosis*) as if they were stereotypical Gnostics[6] with a distaste for matter. All three were political activists. Weil once said, "The world is beautiful. God has composed the world whilst thinking on himself ... there is no more manifest proof of God than the beauty of the world."[7] "The object of my search is not the supernatural, but *this world*. The supernatural is the light"[8] [that illuminates *this* world with truth].

Whatever dualism Grant and Weil see in Plato's analogy is not the crass anti-materialism of earth versus heaven or body versus spirit. Rather, *the cave is a*

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[5] Grant, "Dalhousie Classnotes on Plato," *MSO*, 202.

[6] With apologies from Grant, who cringes when the label is used as an automatic pejorative. Cf. GPG to David Dodds, 03/06/1988 (Christian, *SL*, 380–1).

[7] Weil, *NB* 2: 412.

[8] Weil, *NB* 1: 173. Cf. Larry Schmidt and Patrick Patterson, "The Christian Materialism of Simone Weil," *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil* (2004).

way of seeing and being marked by opinion and delusion (leading to injustice) versus a way of understanding and enlightenment (leading to justice). In Socrates' words, the whole of *The Republic* is a discussion in which the philosopher *desires and apprehends what is eternal and unchanging*[9] (the Good, the true and the beautiful) for the *purpose of discerning between the just and unjust life* together (here and now).[10]

Rather than signifying the 'world' as the created order (i.e., nature), the cavern depicts our 'attachments'[11] to the world associated with established lies, toxic mindsets, and destructive practices so dominant in our 'society.'[12] We veritably breathe them. What we see as shadows and hear as echoes are mistaken for reality—collective, illusory ways of knowing and being to which we are chained (by attachment) in darkness.[13] Thus, the bondage we hope to escape is not temporal life in the realm of necessity. It is about waking up from a dream-like existence ('reverie') of fatal perspectives and allegiances ('loves'). Weil, describing the cave, says,

> To escape from the errors of a false perspective the only way is to choose one's treasure and to carry one's heart beyond space, and beyond the world, to God. ... The unreality of things, which Plato so powerfully depicts in the metaphor of the cave, has no connection with the things as

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[9] "ἐπειδὴ φιλόσοφοι μὲν οἱ τοῦ ἀεὶ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὡσαύτως ἔχοντος δυνάμενοι ἐφάπτεσθαι." (Plato, *The Republic* (1903), 6.484b).

[10] "καὶ μὴ πολλὰ τὰ λοιπὰ διελθεῖν μέλλοντι κατόψεσθαι τί διαφέρει βίος δίκαιος ἀδίκου." (Plato, *The Republic* (1903), 6.484a–b).

[11] The reality of the world is the result of our *attachment*. It is the reality of the self which we transfer into things. It has nothing to do with independent reality. ... Attachment is a manufacturer of illusions and whoever wants reality ought to be detached. ... Attachment is no more nor less than the insufficiency in our sense of reality. (Weil, *G&G*, 14).
"*To come out of the cave, to be detached*, means to cease to make the future our objective." (Weil, *G&G*, 40).

[12] Simone Weil distinguishes between the 'social', which she associates with the cave and the domain of the 'prince of this world' (the 'devil')—and the 'city' (*polis*) that she regards as potentially holy (Weil, *NB* 1: 286, 296).

[13] Weil plays with this ambiguity between *necessity*—the good world God created and loves—versus *force*—the fallen world order of oppressive societies (Weil, *NB* 1: 148–50). This ambiguity is also typical of the NT. Cp. *cosmos* in John 3:16 versus 1 Jn. 2:15. At the personal level, the NT also uses the term 'flesh' (*sarx*) for one's God-given humanity (esp. 1 Jn. 4:2) *or* one's self-serving, self-destructive ego (e.g., Rom. 8:6). "To give one's flesh for the life of the world" versus the 'I' we should deprive of light (attention) until it disappears (Weil, *NB* 1: 179).

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such; the things in themselves have the fullness of reality in that they exist. It is a question of things as the object for love. In this reference they are like shadows cast by puppets.[14]

Having said that, Weil distinguishes the cave per se (as necessity or reality) from the darkness and chains therein (as existence or shadow). If one were to 'touch impossibility' (behold the light), that person would wake up.[15] In this interpretation, she identifies the cave with our lives in time (personal and social, external and internal) while the darkness *qua* darkness describes our deceived perceptions and incapacitated discernment. Therefore, 'cave' is often used as a synecdoche for the whole darkened existence within the cave, while the cave itself—if it refers to the *polis* or the person—is a reality to be transformed rather than abandoned.

Similarly, Pam McCarroll interprets Grant (and Weil's) cave (and even the darkness) as the realm of necessity in which we live but where God's light leaks in.

How the Good/God's love is experienced and is faithfully given over to knowledge and language in the realm of necessity is of central concern for both Weil and Grant. A mitigating aspect of Grant's thought, however … is his self-conscious imbeddedness in the realm of necessity, the darkness of which is never fully illuminated by the light of God. In Weil he perceives one who experiences moments of utter illumination from outside this realm and whose knowing, consequently, is incisively clear about the depth of the darkness of necessity. For Grant, in contrast, the shadows cast in necessity by the illumination of the Good are always shadows, whose changing shape and depth point *via negativa* to the truth of the light, unknowable in its full splendour. God is the background lighting of Grants' thought, ever behind him, casting shadows at each turn. The language of the Whole enables a way for him to speak about truth as

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[14] Weil, *IC*, 134.

[15] Existence is but a shadow of reality. Necessity is a solid reality. Impossibility is a manifest reality. Necessity is a slightly degraded image of impossibility; and existence, of necessity. We must touch impossibility in order to emerge from the dream state. (Weil, *NB* 2: 410).

it is both perceived in the shadows of necessity and intuited in the background lighting of the Good.[16]

True, this interpretation accounts for Grant and Weil's ongoing wrestle with the relationship of the order of Good (grace) to the order of Necessity (gravity).[17] But for Weil, while the two orders stand as contraries, both are ultimately rooted (mysteriously) in the perfection of God. The divine and the necessary, for Weil, are the two great causes, both to be obeyed and both to be loved.[18]

In her *Notebooks* she often pictures the cave as the venue where we erect idols[19] of the self (ego), the social (our -isms), or even 'god.'[20]

> The problem is idolatry 'we humiliate ourselves before false gods.' Weil adds 'Idolatry is a vital necessity in the cave' this reference to the flickering shadows in Plato's cave resonates in this time of new technologies and multiple distractions. For Weil 'The self and the social are the two great idols,' if we escape self-obsession, we are swept away by the social. Weil refers here to the forces of nationalism, fascism and communism that overtook the world in her time.[21]

For Weil, this is the true darkness: rather than living in alignment with grace (by attention) and necessity (by obedience), we fall into complicity with force and deprivation (by willfulness).[22] To be in the cave is to grasp the 'key of absolute license' for incoherent behaviors that harm others: e.g. "collective feelings, war, national rivalries, class hatreds, loyalty to a party, to a church, etc."[23] Only by throwing away this key do we make our way (blindly, painfully) out of the cave:

> So long as the key remains in one's hands one is in the Cave, and to imagine that one is outside is a ridiculous and dangerous illusion.

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[16] McCarroll, "The Whole as Love," *Athens and Jerusalem* (2006), 271.
[17] Weil, *NB* 1: 114.
[18] Weil, *NB* 1: 96–9.
[19] Weil, *NB* 1: 150.
[20] Weil, *NB* 1: 126, 238.
[21] Rod Mackenzie, "Education and the Journey of the Soul: From Paranoia to Metanoia," 5.
[22] Weil, *NB* 1: 121.
[23] Weil, *NB* 2: 347.

That is where I am myself.

My faults can, unfortunately, cause harm to others, but they are very useful to me personally as furnishing clear, indubitable proof that *I am in the Cave.*[24]

Grant saw this. When he refers to the shadowy cave, he consistently describes something more sinister than material, temporal existence. Weil showed him this something is our 'willing' (freedom through mastery)—something to be named as darkness.

3.3   Naming the Darkness as Darkness

3.3.1   What is this darkness? Grant's cave

For George Grant, what is the particular cavern in which we have been bound and blindered? He uses a variety of overlapping labels, but the catchall is most commonly *modernity*. Author Frank Flinn says:

> Grant has often described his own life in terms of Plato's cave ... The cave from which he felt himself dragged is the cave of modernity. Philosophically, modernity is a belief in progress. Theologically, it is a naïve trust in radical revelation which can consort easily with a scientific positivism that separates "facts" from "values." Politically, it is the dream of liberalism and its scientific mistress—"neutral" technology.[25]

Notice the sampling of sub-movements beneath modernity's umbrella: progressivism, liberalism, positivism, and technology.

Yet Grant understood the darkness as more than a collection of -isms. It enfolds an entire civilization and the whole of our current epoch. In this darkness, to borrow St. Paul's language, "we live and breathe and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Grant says, "There appears *around us* and *in us* the *presence* that Western men have made—modern technical society."[26] Modernity cannot be reduced to an era when we live, a creed we affirm, or a method we use. *We* are modernity.

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[24] Weil, *NB* 2: 348.
[25] Flinn, "Bibliographical Introduction," *GP*, 199.
[26] Grant, *TH*, 14.

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Thus Grant cannot simply *describe* the modern vision from above or outside. He must 'enucleate the seed' of modern society—'partake in the soul of modernity'—to its 'animating source,' the "seed from which the tree of manifestations," and "multiform predictable behaviours of modern technical society has come forth."[27] Grant's purpose is to *know* modernity from within—as one born into the dark cave—and from there "to clarify what the modern world is in relation to the human as such, namely, *not* a new and higher stage of the human spirit, but a specific and limiting modification of the human as such."[28]

3.3.2 The Darkening of the Good

What a *dark era* this appears to me, what a *dark era*! That the *age of progress* has ended up in *this*, do you see what I mean? And that it's deeply tied to what I call the science that issues from the conquest of human and non-human nature ... it seems to me that this is particularly serious for the Western world. ... the essence of the Eastern world [is] tied up with the idea that everything proceeds from the Idea of the Good and that Being is therefore good. *That has gone.*[29]

Grant explains above what has been eclipsed: to recall Plato's analogy of the sun (*The Republic*, 507b–509c) it is the 'Idea of the Good' (τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν[30])— where the heart is oriented towards "the domain of truth and reality" as opposed to "the region mingled with the darkness of being and passing away."[31] Not merely the reality of an unintelligible, transcendent Good (or 'God'), but also how the Good is manifest, perceived, and spoken about *in time*—the Good known in this world existentially and lived publicly—i.e., *grace*.[32] For Grant, this conception of the Good cannot even be thought in this present darkness.

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[27] Grant, *TH*, 14. Cf. O'Donovan, *Twilight of Justice* (1984), 108–9.

[28] Laurence Lampert, "The Uses of Philosophy in George Grant," *GP*, 192.

[29] Grant, "George Grant and Religion: Conversation with William Christian," *CW* 4: 752.

[30] Plato, *The Republic*, 6.508d–e.

[31] Plato, *The Republic*, 6.508d. Cf. Matt. 6:19 and Col. 3:1–5 where the focus of our attention and allegiance results in two ways of life (self-centered versus just).

[32] Weil, *NB* 1: 98, 221.

The first fact [hence, Grant's first doctrine] seems to me the *enormous darkness* which surrounds the question: how is *the good* to be brought down into our existences, in so far as those existences attempt to be more than private?

In asserting the language of good at the core of thought, I am clearly not speaking entirely from within the *modern darkness*. It is the claim of the modern, at its height and in its most wonderful self-consciousness [i.e., Nietzsche], to say that *the language of good* has been destroyed, and that therefore men at their greatest must live beyond the limits of good and evil. ... Redemption for him is the will's acceptance of all existence as not including such limits.[33]

Grant counters, "To live beyond good and evil *in total darkness* is madness ... It is still *darkness when one denies the denial* of good and evil, and yet cannot even begin to think of them, let alone give specification of them in the world."[34]

While Grant regards life in the darkness—life oblivious to the Good—as madness, so too is denial of that fact. This is Nietzsche's brilliance. No one has exegeted the nature and destiny of modernity and its assumptions so explicitly. The one chained to the cave walls is none other than the 'last man' (*der letzte Mensch*) of Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Nietzsche breaks through our denial and energizes Grant for his task:

There have been many descriptions of our time as essentially characterized by a *darkening or even disappearance of any conception of good* ... my purpose is to state the profundity with which technological civilization enfolds us as our destiny ... the *darkness which envelops* the Western world because of its long dedication to the overcoming of chance is just a fact. Thinkers who deny the fact of that *darkness* are no help in illuminating a finely tempered practice for the public realm. The job of thought at our time is to *bring into the light that darkness as darkness*.[35]

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[33] Grant, "Revolution and Tradition," *CW* 4: 82–3.

[34] Grant, "Revolution and Tradition," *CW* 4: 83.

[35] Grant, "'The computer does not impose on us the ways it should be used,'" *CW* 4: 291, 294, 296–7.

3.3.3 The Darkness that enshrouds justice

Grant's concern and experience was that the darkening of the Good leads to the darkening of justice, for justice *is* what the 'form of the Good' *in*forms.[36] The Platonic forms are not ethereal ideals to be pondered. They manifest in our world by design, imaging or reflecting the eternal in time. For example, justice (as a Platonic form) should *show up* in particular people, cities, and actions.[37]

But if we can no longer think within the horizons of the Good—when we live beyond good and evil by self-made and self-serving values—Grant foresees an inevitable result: an ethic perched on the shifting sands of self-interest finally leads us to exploit and tyrannize the weakest among us because we cannot remember why we shouldn't. More simply, if there is no Good, why be good? Answer: we won't be. We aren't. If freedom is absolute, why should goodness restrain us? Answer: it won't. It doesn't. Weil refers to this imaginary paradise of total emancipation as the 'real hell' or 'the cave.'[38] Grant finds this unfolding darkness terrifying:

> Our situation is rather that the assumptions underlying contractual liberalism and underlying technology both come from the same matrix of modern thought, from which can arise *no reason why the justice of liberty is due* to all human beings, irrespective of convenience. ... How, in modern thought, can we find positive answers to the questions: (i) what is it about human beings that makes liberty and equality their due? (ii) why is justice what we are fitted for, when it is not convenient? Why is it our good? The inability of contractual liberals (or indeed Marxists) to answer these questions is the *terrifying darkness which has fallen upon modern*

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[36] Thus, Plato's universals are not separate from particulars, but participative. In the Grantean tradition, Phillip Blond says, "Forms are not full self-sufficient ontic presences but rather participatory attendances of the highest shapes that beings can fulfil." (Phillip Blond, "Introduction," *Post-Secular Philosophy* (1998), 42). Blond adds, "Even Aristotle ... acknowledges that Plato's teacher Socrates 'did not treat universals as separate' (*Met* 1078b30)," 63n60.

[37] Plato, *The Republic*, 2.

[38] Weil, *NB* 1:321.

justice. ... The darkness is fearful, because what is at stake is whether anything is good.[39]

For Grant, the modern account (or lack of account) of goodness and justice obscures the ancient accounts he continues to hold as true. These, he says, find their height in Plato and in the NT Gospels.

> [The pre-technological] account of justice was written down most carefully and most beautifully in "The Republic" of Plato. For those of us who are Christians, the substance of our belief is that the perfect living out of that justice is unfolded in the Gospels. Why *the darkness which enshrouds justice* is so dense—even for those who think that what is given in "The Republic" concerning good stands forth as true—is because that truth cannot be thought in unity with what is given in modern science concerning necessity and chance. ... This is a *great darkness*, because it appears certain that rational beings *cannot get out of the darkness* by accepting either truth and rejecting the other.[40]

Grant admits it would be folly to return to the ancients as if the modern discoveries of science had never been made. But so too is it folly to proceed without a definition of justice as 'what we are fitted for' or as 'self-giving love for neighbour.' Without those foundations, Grant believes we are heading into "the future with a 'justice' that is terrifying in its potentialities for mad inhumanity of action."[41] Indeed, his fourth doctrine (Grantean ethics) includes modernity's catalogue of shocking and shameful crimes supposedly necessary to our freedom. Oddly, when prophets like Socrates, Jesus, or Grant prophetically point the light of truth into the darkness, they are castigated for shocking and shaming, just as Plato foresaw.[42]

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[39] Grant, *ESJ*, 85–7; cf. William Christian, "George Grant and the Terrifying Darkness," *GP*, 177.
[40] Grant, *ESJ*, 87–8.
[41] Grant, *ESJ*, 88.
[42] Plato, *The Republic*, 2.

3.3.4 Experiencing the darkness as hunger

For Grant, the reality of the Good and the radiance of justice may be veiled, but the darkness of modernity cannot eradicate the truth any more than a dark cloud or shutting our eyes can blink the sun out of existence. The Good appears to have disappeared—but has it? We may *experience* the absence of justice in our era, but that sense of absence also may also incite longing—a hunger and thirst for justice—that for Grant, suggests its reality and its possibility in practice for those open to it.

> In George's view Heidegger, the greatest modern philosopher, fails because his philosophy does not understand the happiness that arises from the hunger and thirst for justice. His failure is in part intelligible if we recognize that in the world today we experience justice mostly in absence. We are often most aware of the claims of justice when we ourselves, or someone we love, is treated unjustly. Yet justice, George affirms, is always there, and we need to remain open to it, even if we sense its presence only dimly and indirectly. For now, and for most people, the *darkness of modern technology conceals the radiance of justice.*[43]

This is very close to what Grant and Weil repeatedly mean by knowing the presence of God by God's absence—of meeting God in the experience of God's eternal distance.[44] Weil frequently cites Christ saying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Mark 15:34), recalling the dark skies of Good [!] Friday as our own story. God abandons Jesus of Nazareth to humanity's quintessential injustice but in so doing, we discover God-with-us in the perfected justice of Christ's self-emptying (*kenosis*) radical forgiveness. We come to love God the 'all-powerless.'[45] Just when God and justice seem forever swallowed in darkness, whether in the Gospels, in Nazi-occupied France, or in our era, despair may awaken desire and with it, faith in the 'unmanifest truth.'[46]

Grant hoped and believed that by facing into the darkness and lamenting the loss of the Good, we might begin to *experience* the void as a first step out. By

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[43] Christian, *Biography* (1994), 354–5.
[44] Weil, *NB* 1: 240.
[45] Weil, *NB* 1: 284.
[46] Weil, *NB* 1: 220. "Faith in what we cannot grasp but is now real."

voicing his lament, Grant hopes to evoke 'intimations of deprival' and in a backhanded way, rediscovery of the Good. In his striking article, "A Platitude," Grant unveils his *modus operandi*:

> Any intimations of authentic deprival are precious, because they are the ways through which intimations of good, unthinkable in public terms, may yet appear to us. The affirmation stands: how can we think deprivation unless the good which we lack is somehow remembered? To reverse the platitude, we are never more sure that air is good for animals than when we are gasping for breath. ... Listening or watching or simply waiting for intimations of deprival might lead us to see the beautiful as the image, in the world, of the good.[47]

As a waypoint summary, we have seen how Grant consciously utilizes the language of Plato's cave analogy to diagnose his culture. He associates the darkening of the Good and the resultant injustice with the development of Western modernity. He forecasts this shadow growing even darker and finally enveloping the world. But Grant also hopes that in naming this darkness, a recollection of what we've lost might shimmer across our awareness.

Our next task is to determine in detail what Grant meant by 'modernity' and its synonyms. What exactly is he enucleating and deconstructing?

3.4   Defining the Darkness: Modernity

By its progressive and polyphonic nature, modernism cannot easily be reduced to a simple definition. Grant recognized its long-term development in multiple waves and along manifold streams. Moreover, he both absorbed and challenged others' versions of the history of modern thought. Beyond that, Grant realized he too was in process and wrote retractions in reprints of his work.[48] Various Grant scholars have also traced distinct phases in his thought.[49] The complexity can be

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[47] Grant, *TE*, 141. Cf. Cayley, *GC*, 141.

[48] Especially his 1966 revision of *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, where he exposes his own Hegelian assumptions in the 1958–9 version.

[49] E.g., 1. Liberal-synthesizing phase; 2. Polemical-conservative phase; 3. Tragical-paradoxical phase (O'Donovan, *Twilight of Justice* (1984), 10). Another e.g., 1. The Time of Chastened Hope; 2. An Era of Retractions: *la memoria di quel bene*; 3. The

dizzying, but we must not overlook the fact that Grant's deconstruction of modernity is *not* a simple rejection. We will discover in Grant's polemic an awareness of the nuances of modernity and the true dilemmas embedded in premodern civilizations that gave rise to it.

3.4.1 Grant's 'modernism': Working definitions

We begin by laying down Grant's basic working definitions of modernism, following him to the heart of the matter: What is its essence? What are its embodiments? What are its seeds? However, we need not read far before Grant 'lays the axe to the root of the tree.'

An early definition of Grant's modernity comes from his first book, *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (1959), when the insights of his conversion were sufficiently distilled to see the core issue.

> The fundamental difference between our modern society and the old is not only, or even primarily, the external difference shown by our mastery over nature through science and technology, but a profound difference in man's very view of himself. We no longer consider ourselves as part of a natural order and as subordinate to a divine law. We see ourselves rather as the makers of history, the makers of our own laws. We are authentically free since nothing beyond us limits what we should do.[50]

Here Grant takes us to the crux of his distinction between ancient and modern. What is the ultimate reality and highest moral imperative for each? According to Grant, the ancients' (i.e., the Greeks and the Gospels) bedrock is a conception of the Good (or God); for the moderns it is absolute freedom. The former implies obligations and obedience to an order higher than oneself; the latter implies rights to be secured and a destiny to be willed.

> It is the very signature of modern man to deny reality to any conception of good that imposes limits on human freedom. To modern political theory,

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Face of Moloch: Intimations of Deprival (Flinn, "Bibliographical Introduction," *GP*, 195–9).

[50] Grant, *PMA*, 39. Cf. Grant, *Lament*, 52: "In what follows I use 'modern' to describe the civilization of the *age of progress*."

man's essence is his freedom. Nothing must stand in the way of our absolute freedom to create the world as we want it. There must be no conceptions that put limitations on human action. The definition of man as freedom constitutes the heart of the age of progress.[51]

While the ancients saw freedom as a byproduct of living by *virtues* prescribed by the Good (whether divine or natural law), the moderns prioritized freedom as following *values* created by the Self (the autonomous individual) or by society (a contract chosen by the collective of selves). The ancients believed that truth—to the degree we follow it—sets us free as we follow a *given* path or way.[52] Moderns believe freedom is making one's own path, willing one's own destiny. This doctrine is everywhere explicit in modern culture. To quote the 2010 screenplay of Alice in Wonderland:[53]

> **Alice**: From the moment I fell down that rabbit hole I've been told what I must do and who I must be. I've been shrunk, stretched, scratched, and stuffed into a teapot. I've been accused of being Alice and of not being Alice but this is *my* dream. *I'll decide* where it goes from here.
> **Bayard**: If you diverge from the path …
> **Alice**: I *make* the path!

Or take a typical line from any American presidential address (Republican or Democrat): "Nobody gets to write your destiny but you. Your future is in your hands. Your life is what you make of it. And nothing—*absolutely nothing*—is beyond your reach."[54]

The modern rhetoric of autonomy makes for an inspiring screenplay or rousing State of the Union address. It promises freedom from abusive authorities and corrupt hierarchies. It offers a shining future and limitless destiny. We make

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[51] Grant, *Lament*, 55.

[52] Grant often quotes Jesus in John 14:6, "The truth shall set you free."

[53] Linda Woolverton, *Screenplay: Alice in Wonderland* (film 2010). Ironically, Alice escapes the tyranny of Victorian classism/sexism only to embark upon the adventures of colonial capitalist conquest.

[54] Tanya Brothen, "Obama Gives Second Annual Back-to-School Speech," *Obama Today* (2010).

our world, declare our independence, and choose our destiny. We are free! We will defend our freedom, die for our freedom, and kill for our freedom.

Grant states the modernist assertion: "We are authentically free because what happens in the world depends on us, not on some providence beyond our control. We and not God are the creators of history."[55] Whether right or wrong, is this not exactly how we live? The stubborn fact is that we do what we want to do—by my conscience, my desires, my convictions, my passions—myself, my way. Socially, whatever concessions I make to a greater good define the Good by what best secures and preserves my freedom.[56] Is this not exactly what I desire? Is it not good?

Grant, ever the gadfly (like Socrates), doesn't buy it. Why not? He harkens back to his first irreducible given: "We are *not* our own." When we believe we *are* our own, we are not only deluded; we are exceedingly dangerous and manifestly unjust. Quoting George MacDonald, Grant declares, "The first principle of hell is 'I am my own.'"[57] The Enlightenment announced our escape from projected gods, superstitious rituals, and ominous laws. Grant suggests the contrary: by shaking off any good higher than freedom (as moderns define it) we have entrapped ourselves within an intoxicating, self-destructive matrix.

Grant's problem was that even if he 'knew' this as *a priori* truth via illumination, he must still make a reasoned case for what he had seen, even to himself.[58]

3.4.2   Grant and the modern 'will'

I have shown that modernism's defining feature, for George Grant, is *the primacy of the will*—voluntarism—and its dangerous flaw. But I must clarify. When Grant and Weil use the language of 'will,' 'willing,' or 'freedom' negatively—e.g. 'not my will' or 'decreation of the will'—we must underscore four critical features: their *definition* of modern will; their understanding of *primacy of the will*; their

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[55] Grant, *PMA*, 37.

[56] Note how this language permeates George W. Bush's Iraq War speeches.

[57] Grant, *PMA*, 36–7.

[58] Accomplishing this would require powerful dialogue partners, including Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Strauss, and of course, Weil. Cf. Jersak, "Grant and the Matrix: Dialogue Partners," *Red Tory, Red Virgin* (2012), 75–81.

confusion between surrender and negation of the will; and Grant's particular use of 'the *will to power*.'

i. Definition of the modern will

Grant felt that moderns had turned the ancient language of 'will' on its head and thereby redefined human nature:

> Indeed from the changes in the use of the word 'will' can be seen the changes in what men thought they were. In its beginnings the word 'will' is most often used synonymously with wishing or wanting or desiring, and yet also it is used in the sense of determining or making happen. When we use the erotic language of wanting or desiring, we express our dependence on what we need—be it food, another person, or God. The language of desire is always the language of dependence. ... Yet as we enter the modern era the language of will comes more and more to be used about making happen what happens. Here it becomes the assertion of the power of the self over something other than the self, and indeed of the self over its dependencies. The dependence of desire passes over into the mastery. ... [Kant] made the modern use clear when he maintained that we cannot will a purpose without willing means to bring it about. ... 'To will' is to legislate ... the expression of the responsible and independent self, distinguished from the dependent self who desires.[59]

One could still insist that 'will' as autonomy, responsibility, and independence is not necessarily suspect. Will stands alongside initiative, ingenuity, and creativity as part of the life-affirming spirit we (including God) envision and desire for our children as whole people. Yes, the will can degrade itself to unpleasant willfulness: stubbornness, arrogance, and pride. But must it? That depends, according to Grant and Weil (and Socrates), on what place it takes within the soul and society.

ii. Primacy of the modern will

When Grant and Weil indict the will, 'will' or 'willing' is generally short for *the primacy* or *ultimacy* or *priority* of will. But primacy relative to what? So too, when they talk about 'freedom as essence' or 'the emancipation of passions' or

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[59] Grant, *TH*, 22–3.

'unhindered freedom,' from what restraints does the will find release? A relationship between the will and other *faculties* or *agents* is implied. What are these?

a. *Other faculties:* Weil includes among the natural human faculties the *intellect* (contemplative knowing), the *will* (wanting, exerting), and *love* (desiring).[60] These can be sharpened to serve our desire for the 'void above' or diminished to fall into the 'void below.' The faculties are fashioned for the soul's ascent towards the 'impossible transcendent correlation of corollaries,' (i.e., the Good). But by nature, they cannot attain the impossible. Yet awareness of this impossibility nevertheless postures us in attentive openness to a grace-given encounter. "Impossibility—that is, radical possibility clearly perceived, absurdity—is the gate leading to the supernatural. All we can do is knock on it. It is another who answers."[61] Or, the intellect, will, and love only take us to the door of the cave where we must then wait for the sun to shine on our hearts.

Thus, the will is not evil in and of itself. It is one among the natural faculties and capable of service in the journey to enlightenment.

The question is, which faculty should get priority and which one actually does? We shall see how Grant identifies these three faculties as 'primals' within civilizations. He uses the priority of the primals to trace the earliest seeds of modernity. For now, note that Grant saw the height of the Greeks as contemplation (the intellect), the height of Christianity as charity (love), and the height of modernity as freedom (the will).[62] We shall see some surprising errors in this generalization. My point here is that the primacy of the will over the intellect and love—not the will per se—defines modernity and its dangers. When

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[60] Weil, *NB* 2: 412. Her model differs slightly from Plato's 'chariot analogy' in *Phaedrus* (246a–254e) but the conclusions align. In *Phaedrus* the faculties of the soul (ψυχ ψυχῆς) include (i) the charioteer of the *intellect* (νῷ), or contemplative mind, capable of beholding truth and reality; and the two winged horses (interpreted in 237–238d); (ii) the fair horse—*rational opinion* (λόγου δόξης) that loves honour, modesty, and temperance, guided by the word and by reason; and, (iii) the dark horse—the *desire* (ἐπιθυμία) *of pleasure* that can be insolent, requiring whip and spur. Socrates neither frees nor destroys the horse of desire. Having ascended to gaze on the heavenly vision, the pilot returns both horses to the barn where he feeds them ambrosia and nectar (247d–e). Thus, the true lover is the one whose priority is the contemplative vision of the beautiful, after which the secondary needs of opinion and pleasure can be sated.

[61] Weil, *NB* 2: 412–3.

[62] As expounded in Grant, *TE*, 15–40.

individuals, societies, and especially leaders exert their will to power with the intent of mastery (meant ironically to increase freedom), *if that will trumps* the voices of rational wisdom and charitability, the predictable result is tyranny rather than freedom. We find ourselves in Plato's cave.

b. *Other agents*: For Grant and Weil, justice requires more than prioritizing our faculties aright. All three faculties of the soul and/or the society should harmonize in their desire and dependence upon a higher Good. We must not only put love and intellect ahead of will, for example, but bring all three faculties into the obedience of God. The irony here is that the soul's downward mobility propels one lever-like (a favourite Weilian analogy[63]) in ascent to the vision of God (after the pattern of Plato in *Phaedrus* and Christ in Phil. 2). By subordinating *all* the faculties of the soul to God, we enter the reverse economy of Jesus' Kingdom of God: giving we receive; humbling ourselves we are exalted; and taking the form of slaves we become free.

c. *Willful or willing*: To review, the will is not bad. It is a faculty, along with the heart (desire, love, charity) and mind (reverie, reason, contemplation). When we prioritize the will ahead of love and contemplation, injustice is inevitable. When the will is formed and informed by contemplation and love, it acts effectively and creatively to serve justice. The will can operate in only two ways: willingly (following the path, dependent on a higher power) or willfully (independently forging its own path in its own power).

To act willingly implies surrender. To act willfully implies stubbornness. The 'willful will' degrades the mind into calculation. The 'willing will' raises the mind to contemplation.

Far from signaling a mature child's happy send off to pursue life, modernity's exaltation of the willful self as the zenith is best expressed in the prodigal son's haughty demand for the soon-squandored inheritance of freedom. Hubris leads to hedonism that lands the pigheaded lad in the parabolic pigsty. Thus, Grant's plea for restraint on the unreined will is not the life-repressing religious moralism that offended Nietzsche. Rather, in surveying the prodigal planet's plight, Grant trumpets the true freedom of life where 'my will' is supplanted by God's will, which is to say, by love.

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[63] Cf. Weil, *G&G*, 92–3.

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iii. Critique: Surrender versus negation of the will

The question is what is in the Gospels and this is what I find. At the height Christ surrenders his will. We certainly seem to see that the saints have no love of their own, and what is more one's own than one's will? People such as myself have no direct experience of that. But we see it in the saints, and all of us have dim intimations of what it is to give ourselves away.[64]

It would be otiose to cite how frequently Grant counters will with love, … Nevertheless, Grant's most ardent supporters are embarrassed by *his will not to will*.[65]

With Grant's conversion revelation ('We are not our own') and spiritual sonship to Simone Weil, 'surrender' was central to his convictions and his understanding of the Gospel. But let us examine Weil's negation of the will and Grant's resistance to following her path to its terminus.

With Grant,[66] I believe many critics of Weil fail to perceive the unity of her genius and her integrity. She lived a 'moral grandeur and spiritual audacity'[67] that exposes the folly of her judges. Nevertheless, I will presume to address difficulties with what she *seems* to say about the will.

a. *Weil's negation of the will:* Weil's greatest epiphany was the surrender of Christ's will for the sake of love. For her, this key truth is vital to the Gospel, to Christ's revelation of the true God, and to real justice in history. But she seems to err immediately in extrapolating from Christ's *surrender* ("Not my will but thine by done," Luke 22:42) and *kenosis* ("he emptied himself," Phil. 2) an absolute *negation* of the will or 'I.' Christ's *surrendered will*, emptied of selfishness and offered in the service of love, differs enormously from Weil's intention to eradicate the will. Ironically, rather than relinquishing willfulness for willingness, she appears to *willfully pursue will-lessness.*

In Gethsemene, Christ sincerely and sorrowfully pleads with the Father to deliver him from the cup of death, while Weil expresses jealousy for it. Christ's

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[64] Grant, "Conversation," *GC*, 108.

[65] E. D. Blodgett, "George Grant, the Uncertain Nation and Diversity of Being," *Canadian Literature*, 152/153 (Spring/Summer 1997): 113–4.

[66] Grant, "In Defence of Simone Weil," *CW* 4: 855–66.

[67] To borrow a phrase from Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays* (1997), vii.

will is to do the will of the Father, in spite of affliction. Weil's decreation of the will stubbornly idolizes affliction itself. This attachment was limited only by her belief that redemptive suffering must be *unsolicited*—though she had an uncanny knack and obsessive desire for planting herself in life-threatening scenarios.

Moreover, her interpretation of Matthew 27:46 ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") demands such suffering to be *unconsoled*, an idea that brings understandable comfort during a period when her comrades experienced unrelieved abandonment by God. Christ's cruciform solidarity with the afflicted masses was precious to her and I believe also critical for us to understand atonement. Still, according to the Scriptures, Weil overstates her case. The Messianic Psalms prophesy the lonely darkness of Gethsemene and Calvary, but also foretell consolation and offer hope.[68] Weil seems to refuse such hope as beneath her will not to will. As friend and editor, Gustave Thibon summarized her:

> She was passionate even about her disdain for passions, she sought for a sign even in her refusal of all signs. This being, who wanted to be flexible to all the movements of divine will, would not allow the course of events or the benevolence of her friends to move by one inch the limits of her self-imposed immolation. Detached to the core from her tastes and needs, she was not detached from her own detachment. And the way she would guard her own emptiness revealed a tremendous self-concern. In the great book of the universe she put before her eyes, *her self was a word that she perhaps succeeded in erasing, but it remained underlined.*[69]

Without judging Weil's relationship to food as an eating disorder or ascetic saintliness, I will only say it demonstrates perfectly how she held renunciation and control as life-long contraries of the will. Perhaps they are one and the same

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[68] On the Cross, Christ quotes two Psalms that assure the afflicted of consolation and presence:

Ps. 22:23–24: "You who fear the LORD, praise him! ... For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help." (NIV)

Ps. 31:5, 22: "Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, LORD, my faithful God. ... In my alarm I said, 'I am cut off from your sight!' Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help." (NIV)

[69] Weil, *Oeuvres*, 1257. Trans. by Benjamin Bergery in Weil, *TG*.

after all.

b. *Weil's judgment of power:* Weil impacted Grant by associating will with power, force, and violence, especially in her assessments of ancient Rome and pre-exilic Israel. The connections were also self-evident in her experience with industrial factories and European battlefields.[70] She witnessed corporations and states exalting the will to power above love of the Good through force and violence.

Weil does sometimes distinguish between right and wrong uses of power. Here she delineates between individual self-interest, power as the means to an end, and the evil type of power-seeking as an end in itself:

> The common run of moralists complain that man is moved by his private self-interest: would to heaven it were so! *Private interest is a self-centered principle* of action, but at the same time restricted, reasonable and incapable of giving rise to unlimited evils. ... *Power*, by definition, is only a means; or to put it better, to possess a power is simply to possess means of action which exceed the very limited force that a single individual has at his disposal. But *power-seeking*, owing to its essential incapacity to seize hold of its object, rules out all consideration of an end, and finally comes, through an inevitable reversal, to take the place of all ends. It is this reversal of the relationship between means and end, it is this fundamental folly that accounts for all that is senseless and bloody right through history. Human history is simply the history of the servitude which makes men—oppressed and oppressors alike—the plaything of the instruments of domination they themselves have manufactured, and thus reduces living humanity to being the chattel of inanimate chattels.[71]

Many other times, she conflates will, power, and force as entirely within the dominion of the 'Great Beast' or the 'Prince of This World.' For an example, Weil recalls the church's capacity to marry itself to violent nationalism through patriotism—illustrated in the bishops of the Third Reich or in Joan of Arc in France. She warns, "It would be salutary for us to ponder the devil's terrible

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[70] Weil, "Uprootedness and Nationhood," *SWR*, 184–257.
[71] Weil, *OL*, 68–9.

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words with reference to the kingdoms of this world, as he showed them all to Christ, 'All this power ... is delivered unto me ...' Not a single kingdom is excepted."[72]

Thus, for Weil, the use of force is contrary to love, as dangerous for the one wielding it as it is for those undergoing it. Here she follows Plato: "Love in *Phaedrus*. It neither exercises nor suffers force. This constitutes the only purity. Contact with the sword causes the same defilement whether it be through the hilt or the point."[73]

By conflating the will with willfulness and thereby renouncing both, Weil also seems to reject right uses of power or force—if such exist—along with their abuse, her tireless work for the unions and French resistance notwithstanding.[74] By associating will and power as near synonyms, she appears in theory (though arguably not in practice) to miss the possibility that power can be brought into the unselfish service of love.

I would argue that to love and serve is not simply to be will-less and power-less, a fact confirmed by Weil's life. Even in Christ's *willing* self-sacrifice, co-suffering love, and radical forgiveness on the Cross, we see a God-em*power*ed resolve—*the will*—to fulfil his mission, enduring even death.[75] Weil chooses to overlook the fact that Christ did not renounce the will; he surrendered, and thereby aligned his will to God's. In going 'like a sheep to the slaughter,' Jesus of Nazareth appears to renounce power and force as evil, but in reality, he employs sacrificial love as the force more powerful than evil.[76]

In other words, the will that wants the Good and serves love will be just, and this is where Weil and Grant finally come out, thankfully. Weil calls this *the will to good*—the Platonic idea of the will as desire and dependence (want, wanting).

What we really *want* is the good. *The good is nothing else but the desire of*

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[72] Weil, "Uprootedness and Nationhood," *SWR*, 213. Cf. Weil, *NB* 1: 55.
[73] Weil, *NB* 2: 497.
[74] Her book, *The Need for Roots*, was after all written for de Gaulle as a road map for post-war restructuring and ethical governance of France.
[75] E.g., "I will set my face like flint" (Isa. 50:7); "He set his face toward Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51).
[76] As St. Paul said, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." (Col. 2:15).

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our will. ... Let us posit then: the good = the desirable.

... The only thing which doesn't ever become exhausted is my *will to good.* Pure and inexhaustible good resides only in this will itself. ... We must want the good solely and unconditionally, ... We must only want particular objects subject to conditions. ... We must want life if it is to be for us a good, death if, etc. ..., joy if, etc. ..., pain if, etc. ...; and that while knowing all the time that we don't actually know what the good is.

In all our acts of willing, whatever they may be, over and beyond the particular object, we must want gratuitously, want the void. ... If we manage to reach this point, we are out of trouble for it is God who fills the void.[77]

Thus, Weil reveals that just as willing can be reduced to force, so also it can ascend to love. Weil and Grant insist that loving contemplation (*vita contemplativa*) of the Good must *precede* volition (*vita activa*) to be just, but it must also *produce* action to be just. They held pacifist convictions and a certain political realism in constant tension, but neither shied away from giving themselves to the 'muck of the fray.'

c. *Weil's reluctance on the resurrection:* Grant travels the path of the subordinated will with Weil, but hesitates for three reasons. First, he felt that her extreme renunciation of the will for love is possible, but only for the few, the saints, and certainly not for himself.

Second, as much as he struggles with the dilemmas of will, force, power, and violent nationalism in the OT God, Grant never seems to directly deny Yahweh the way Weil does. For Grant, the God of conquest is problematic, an imperfect and immature revelation of the God of Christ. For Weil, identifying divinity with power at all is the essence of idolatry. Thus she rejects the pre-exilic God of the Tetragrammaton as "*un faux dieu*" (a false god),[78] though we will see that her stance is more complex than that. Still, Grant agreed with Weil's assertion that God's essential attribute is goodness, not omnipotence.[79]

Third, with Weil, Grant sees the dangers of triumphalism (a theology of

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[77] Weil, *NB* 2: 490–1.
[78] Weil, *LR*, 72.
[79] Weil, *Pensées*, 48.

glory) connected with the resurrection. But in her desire to avoid a victorious God's power over death, Weil contends "*la Croix seule me suffit*" ("the cross alone is enough for me"). That ambivalence around the resurrection troubled Grant sufficiently to enquire after Weil's friend. Simone Pétrement, on the matter:

> Simone Weil's account of Christianity appears to me true and yet I am unable to think together clearly that account with the Resurrection. I would be unable to put aside what is given us on this matter in the Gospels. Nevertheless I have little sympathy for the major interpretations of this doctrine in the West since Augustine. ... I would be grateful if you could suggest some other writing which is basically in unity with Simone Weil's teaching on the Resurrection.[80]

He knew by then that she did believe in some form of the Resurrection, however mythical, from her New York notebooks. There she opens with her personal experience with the living Christ, followed by this affirmation of Gospel history: "The resurrection is Christ's pardon to those who killed him, the evidence that in doing him the greatest possible harm they did not harm him."[81]

In the same way theologians who sought to defend God's freedom and omnipotence established voluntarism, so Weil runs into trouble (with Yahweh or the Resurrection) by absolutizing her opposition to God's power in order to defend His goodness. Grant sympathized with Plato and Weil, insisting that God is first of all good (following Plato)—so would I—but such are the perils of 'defending' God.

With these critiques acknowledged, we return to Grant's assessment of the modern will. Having concluded that the dark heart of modernity was in fact *primacy of the will*,[82] Grant set his sights on tracing its roots.[83] Inspired by Weil,

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[80] GPG to Simone Pétrement, 04/03/1975 (Christian, *SL*, 283).

[81] Weil, *FLN*, 69.

[82] Cf. Grant, "The Triumph of the Will," *CW* 4: 726; Grant, *TH*, 45–6. Cf. Jersak, "Grant, Weil and Nietzsche: The Darkness of Modernity," *George P. Grant: Canada's Lone Wolf* (2011), 73–106. There I compare, distinguish, and critique Grant's 'triumph of the will' alongside Nietzsche's 'will to power.'

[83] Under Leo Strauss's sway, he would also ponder the embodiments or phases of modernity from their first appearances in the late fifteenth century (with Machiavelli). With Eric Voegelin, he also became aware of the Reformers' role in instigating the modern worldview. For full treatments on these themes, see Brad

he retraces the path of voluntarism into the prehistory of modernity, back to its seminal origins in biblical religion (in the Jewish and Christian scriptures). This next section will follow Grant down this trail.

3.5 Whence Came Modernity: Origins and Evolution

George Grant's goal was to enucleate modernity from kernel to fruit, examining how it unfolded. As Augustine said, "The tree is hidden in the seed."[84] With that metaphor, I will analyze Grant's account of the *seeds* of modernity in biblical religion that would finally *bear fruit* through the liberal progressivism of the Enlightenment period up until today.[85] As a Canadian, he was particularly concerned with the English-speaking branch that grew from English Puritanism into the American Empire.

3.5.1 Grant's interlocutors on origins

Grant's premier guides—Nietzsche, Heidegger, Strauss, and Weil—agreed that modernity, as each defined it, had discernable roots in biblical religion. How each envisaged the connection and replied varied in the extreme. My reduction of their analysis of the Christian-Modern relation follows.

i. Nietzsche's Christianity as 'Platonism for the people'

Nietzsche and Heidegger both targeted Christianity's complicity in our downward spiral to modernity.[86] Both felt that Christian metaphysics had lost the boldness of *becoming* found in the pre-Socratic philosophers. For Nietzsche, Christianity was a slave revolt against the aristocracy—a resentful, pity-ridden disease of compassion, repression, and guilt that overtook the noble heroism of Greek tragedy through its stifling moralism. Its life-draining "Platonism for the people"[87] overthrew the grand gods of old and in its final stage, Christianity put

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Jersak, "Grant, Strauss and Voegelin: Modernist Embodiments," *George P. Grant: Canada's Lone Wolf* (2011), 107–20; Brad Jersak, "Blooms of Modernity in the Reformation and Calvinist Puritanism," *MSO*, 37–48.

[84] Cf. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis, Vol. 1* (1982), 174 (§5.23.44).

[85] I expound on how these seeds of modernity *sprouted* in medieval theology and *bloomed* during the Protestant Reformation in Jersak, *MSO*, 23–48.

[86] These summary paragraphs on Nietzsche and Heidegger reflect a Grantean read that I find in David B. Hart, to whom I must give credit. Cf. David B. Hart, "Nihilism and Freedom: Is There a Difference?" (2007); "Christ and Nothing," *First Things* (10/2003).

[87] E.g., Friedrich Nietzsche, "Preface," *Beyond Good and Evil* (1990).

its own God to death and dug its own grave. What remains is the flaccid, secularized Christian liberalism of mass culture.

ii. Heidegger's Christianity as 'onto-theology'

Heidegger tracks modernity back to *any* form of transcendent philosophy, lumping Christianity together with the Stoic and Platonic ontologies of Being.[88] Instead of waiting in open attentiveness (*gelassenheit*) for the world to 'unconceal' itself in event, these meta-theologies have in common the desire to contain mystery and master reality. By bringing the world before us as an object to be mastered, subject to the will, Christianity especially gave rise to the scientific revolution and the modern age of technology. When its attempt to ground all Being in the metaphysical God collapsed, what remained was the secularized Christianity of liberal progressivism.

iii. Strauss's Christianity as 'goodness against sovereign will'

While Grant consistently traces modernity to the priority of the will over the Good, even in our doctrine of God, Leo Strauss argued exactly the opposite. Strauss believed that the Enlightenment was initially an expression of a Christian theology that placed *the goodness of God ahead of his sovereign will*:

> The whole of the Enlightenment, insofar as it implicitly or explicitly preserves a relationship with the tradition rooted in the Bible, is characterized by the fact that it combats the traditional doctrines and convictions by having recourse to the goodness of God. More precisely, proper to the Enlightenment is the unequivocal priority it accords to God's goodness over his power, his honour and his punishing wrath; for the Enlightenment, God is not primarily the demanding, summoning God, but rather the benevolent God.[89]

In his critique of Moses Mendelssohn's natural theology, Strauss claimed, "the unconditional goodness of God is given priority because it is in accord with the claims of the autonomous Ego."[90]

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[88] Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (2000).
[89] Leo Strauss, "Eineitung zu *Phadon*," *Gesammelte Schriften* (1996), 2: 491. Cf. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 44.
[90] Strauss, "Einleitung zu *Morgenstunden*," *Gesammelte Schriften* (1996), 2: 585.

iv. Simone Weil's Christianity as 'polluted by power'

In Weil's version, modernity arose through the double-divorce of Christianity and Greek thought. First, Western Christianity was polluted by a theology of power through the influence of Judaism and Rome, giving it a lust for conquest. Meanwhile, anti-Christian Renaissance thinkers sought to restore Greek culture sans Christianity. In her words,

> The part [the Jews] played in Christianity turned Christendom into something uprooted with respect to its own past. The Renaissance attempt at a re-rooting failed, because it was of an anti-Christian inspiration. The trend of 'enlightenment' ... increased this uprooting to a still infinitely greater extent with the lie about progress. And uprooted Europe went about uprooting the rest of the world by colonial conquest. Capitalism and totalitarianism form part of this progressive development of uprooting.[91]

She believed that, "We shall only remedy this evil by recognizing in Greek thought the whole of the Christian faith."[92] More than any other, Weil convinced Grant of the competing images of God—as will versus good—in the sacred texts.[93]

- She compared the 'willing God' of the conquest texts to 'the Great Beast' in Plato's *Republic* and the NT book of Revelation.
- She contrasted the violence of OT Jehovah with the nonviolence of the NT Jesus.
- She reformatted our categories into the Hebrew-Roman tradition versus the Greek-Gospel tradition.
- She set God as powerless creator over against God as mighty conqueror.
- She introduced two faces of God through the dual causality of love and necessity.
- She rejected bare monotheism for Trinitarian or polytheistic religions that proclaim the need for a mediator.

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[91] Weil, *NB* 2: 575.
[92] Weil, *NB* 2: 465.
[93] On the following points, cf. Jersak, "Competing Conceptions of God in Biblical Religion," *Red Tory, Red Virgin* (2012), 49–67.

v. Grant's reconstruction

Though exceedingly diverse, these four philosophers direct Grant to reflect honestly on which elements of Judeo-Christian belief inevitably birth its own nemesis. Grant ruminated on these divergent histories, digested what he could, and set about composing his unique reconstruction of the backstory of modernity from its conception, even in the sacred texts of biblical religion. In Grantean scholar Ron Dart's words,

> Unlike many who see the origins of liberalism in the secular enlightenment, protestant reformation, late medieval thought or the high middle ages, the genius of Grant was to locate the origin of modernity at the very source and headwaters of western civilization itself. The clash between power and goodness can be found in a view of God as found in the Hebrew canon. Plato grappled with this tension in the *Republic* and *Gorgias*. The tension between a God who is pure will and a God who is Just is at the core of the complex nature of the Hebrew canon. Grant saw this most clearly and its implications for the unfolding of western thought and civilization.[94]

3.5.2   George Grant: Seeds of modernity in the OT

To this point, I've argued that for Grant, the essence of modernity is primacy of the will. He contends that Western Christianity articulated the will as primal prior to the Enlightenment.[95] How so, when Christ clearly revealed love as the height? Had the church been infected by pagan religion or philosophy? Not at all. Grant followed Weil in finding the seeds of modernity latent even in the OT—the competing images of God unveiled by Weil "reveal a fundamental ambiguity as to what is primal: love or will."[96]

Weil made this much clear to Grant:

- The Bible itself presents genuinely contradictory images of God.
- The Western Church had chosen to worship *and embody* the willful and triumphalistic God.

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[94] Ron Dart, "Political Ressourcement," *Clarion Journal* (Oct. 16, 2010).
[95] Zylstra, "Philosophy, Revelation and Modernity," *GP*, 155
[96] Zylstra, "Philosophy, Revelation and Modernity," *GP*, 155.

- In its liberation from the Church, the West nevertheless became the willful and triumphalistic society of modernity.

- Such a society will implode ethically because its foundations are built on the sand of self-will.

For Grant's part, he documents three modernist -isms that develop directly from the ambiguity of will as primary to love: voluntarism, providence, and election.

i.   Voluntarism: Primacy of God's sovereign will over God's goodness

Voluntarism defined is primacy of the will. First it describes God's nature in some portions of Scripture, a theology articulated explicitly in scholastic theology. Voluntarism then morphs into the triumph of the individual human will (against institutional will) through the Reformation before blooming fully in absolute autonomy of the modern will (against divine and natural law). Freedom as the chief value thus trumps every other good, as seen in this conversation.

> **Comment:** There is no doubt that our modern emphasis on *will* arose through a thinking about *will* that took place within the western Christian tradition. It is only in the early Middle Ages that voluntarism begins. A lot of this reflection on *will* was influenced by the *scriptural accounts*. The medieval reflection on *will* had to do with *God's will*, and with man's conformity to it. Then somehow thought about *God's will* got transferred to thought about *man's will*, and so you come to the emphasis on *autonomy*. For the medievals, *God's will created the good*, whereas modern men began to talk of their *will as created values*.
>
> **Grant:** I agree with you entirely, ... Do you think it is wise these days to attribute "will" to Deity? I prefer the word "love." Indeed in the modern world the word "love" has been sentimentalized, but the word "will" has been brutalized. How much is it necessary to use the word "will" about Deity?[97]

One pastoral point is missed consistently here. When Grant critiques the primacy of God's will in Scripture, he sets it over against God's goodness or love. The concern is that if God's will is greater than his goodness, then God is free to act as

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[97] Grant, "Conversation," *GP*, 108.

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he wills without regard to morality. Their examples always relate to violence inflicted or commanded by God. Even evil is good if God wills it. I see the problem and concur so far.

However, some of the scholastics, like Duns Scotus,[98] were not defending God's freedom to exterminate people vis-à-vis the limitations divine goodness—quite the reverse. Rather, his Franciscans upheld God's freedom to forgive against a divine law to punish. The classic case comes from the book of Hosea: by the perfect standards of divine law, the injustices of Israel warranted her destruction. But as Father, God remembers them in their infancy, his heart is turned, and he freely wills to forgive and restore them. Or as Spouse, God sacrificially forgives his adulterous Israel rather than being obliged to stone her. Grant's tight categories—willing/freedom versus good/loving—are made ambiguous by the pastoral question. Does God's willing freedom to forgive preempt his love and goodness? Or does it serve it? Again, the *will* is not problematic so long as it is *willing* rather than *willful*, or selfless rather than selfish.

ii.   Providence: God's intervention in history and the scrutability of God

The doctrine of providence is a second pervasive seed of modernity found throughout the OT. The Hebrew story narrates God's direct interventions, directing the flow of history. The epochs of history roll out in succession like a scroll in God's hand (cf. Daniel and the Apocalypse). God's kingdom comes on earth through divine judgments and miracles, as if his ways were scrutable. To Grant, if this were so, the tragedies of his century make God seem incompetent and arbitrary.

> One thing I am sure about is that if you carry the language of "will" about Deity too far, you are led into all the language of miracle which has plagued and confused the West. You use language which implies that God interferes with secondary causes in an arbitrary way. Then any sane person asks, why is the torture not stopped that is going on this minute? I do not mean by this that events which we call miracles have not happened. ... All I am saying is that these events should not be talked about in the

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[98] Richard Rohr, "The Franciscan Opinion," *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ* (2007).

arbitrary language of power. On the other hand, one can get into a kind of shallow rationalism which is just the modern attempt to try to make the ways of God scrutable.[99]

Divine providence secularized becomes human progressivism—man, not God, stands as the engineer of history. Without God, Hegel's progressive dialectic becomes the modern dynamo's drive to utopia. The universal Kingdom of Man—the Marxist and American dreams of freedom—is to come, our will be done, on earth as in theory.[100]

Grant's response to this humanist (per)version of providence was disillusionment and pessimism. His experience of actual history had largely debunked such schemes. The reality was our values-free technological dependency and its unjust collateral side effects. Grant could appreciate the freedoms afforded by a new vacuum cleaner or modern hospital, but the ambitions of the masters of history are a pipedream, and a dangerous one at that.

Just as religious voluntarism and providence had been transposed into the modern secular context, so too, even the Judeo-Augustinian doctrine of election would find a home in modern nationalism and exceptionalism.

iii. Election: God's chosen people in the OT as agents of God's intervention Religion in which God's will in time is scrutable and who by providence directs history naturally attracts a third doctrine: election. The OT proclaims Yahweh's powerful acts in time, especially among and *through* those who feel uniquely chosen. 'Through,' because the elect are called to be the agents of the divine will. Grant says,

> Whatever else the biblical faith involved, it was a belief that God acted in history and that as a consequence history was a series of meaningful unique events, and that men were called upon to act so as to bring in God's kingdom on earth. In contrast to the Greek exaltation of thought, the biblical view turned men to reformist action. As against the Greek theology in which the finite was quite swallowed up in the infinite,

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[99] Grant, "Conversation," *GP*, 108–9; "Excerpts from Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 822–3. Cf. Weil, *LP*, 30–6; Cayley, *GC*, 83.

[100] Grant, *PMA*, 44–5.

Hebraic thought attempted to give the finite a fuller independence.[101]

In a national religion, this extends to one's foreign policies. In the case of ancient Israel (and others ever since), divine agency is married to nationalism and militarism. The modern version may or may not invoke the name of God, but election is still everywhere present in the language of the Third Reich, 'Eternal France,' or American exceptionalism. In the era where nations like France, Britain, Russia, and Germany fought in the name of the gods of national destiny, Simone Weil confronts national election:

> Unless I am mistaken, it has never been suggested that Christ died to save nations. The idea of a nation being chosen by God for itself simply belongs to the old Mosaic law.
>
> So-called pagan antiquity would never have blundered into so gross a confusion. The Romans regarded themselves as specially chosen, but solely for world dominion. They were not concerned with the next world. Nowhere does it appear that any city or people should have thought itself chosen for a supernatural destiny. ... Plato describes how Man, assisted by the power of grace, passes out of the cavern of this world; but he doesn't say that a whole city can pass out of it. On the contrary, he depicts the collectivity as something animal, which hinders the soul's salvation.[102]

Ironically, Weil does not question Israel's election, but specifies two paradoxical purposes for the divine call:

First, Israel's election to give birth to Christ: *"Israël a été élu seulement en un sens, c'est que le Christ y est né."*[103] *"Israel has only been elected in one sense, namely that Christ was born therein."* This is ironic because Jesus becomes the negation of "Israel's prevalent self-understanding as a people elected by a God of Power."[104]

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[101] Grant, "The Uses of Freedom—A Word and Our World," *CW* 2: 194.

[102] Weil, "Uprootedness and Nationhood," *SWR*, 212; Weil, *NFR*, 128.

[103] Weil, *Pensées*, 52.

[104] J. Edgar Bauer, "Simone Weil: Kenotic Thought and 'Sainteté Nouvelle,'" *Center for Studies on New Religions Conference* (2002).

And second, Israel's election to crucify Christ: After pages journaling the immoralities of Israel's heroes, she declares,

> Everything is of a polluted and atrocious character, as if designedly so, beginning with Abraham inclusive, right down through all his descendants (except in the case of some of the prophets: Daniel, Isaiah; any others???)—as though to indicate perfectly clearly: Beware! That way lies evil.
>
> A people chosen in order to be rendered blind, to be the executioner of Christ.
>
> The Jews where not allowed to be 'idolaters', because otherwise they would not have killed Christ.[105]

We see why Weil (and Grant by association) has been labeled a self-hating Jew or an anti-Semite, but a little disambiguation is in order. She did not regard herself as a Jew-hater. What she hated was the 'collective soul' that empowered political activity to uproot others from their native lands, cultures, and religions: in other words, any ideology driven by the spirit of conquest. She perceives this spirit in Assyria, Rome, the Crusades, and Hitler's blitzkrieg. But her provocations center on her own people:

> The Jew-haters, of course, spread Jewish influence. The Jews are the poison of uprooting personified. But before they began uprooting by spreading this poison, Assyria in the East and Rome in the West had already started doing so by the sword.[106]

The problem is that as a persecuted Jew, she traces the spirit that drove Hitler to the influence of the Jewish texts. Controversial and debatable, but less so when one reads the atrocities in Scripture as real events rather than graphic action novels. Both the injustices of Israel's pogroms *and* the prophetic condemnation of the same were canonized by the Jews without embarrassment. It is their story; it is what it is.

Grant does not use Weil to indict the Jews for Christianity's flaws or to

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[105] Weil, *NB* 2: 568.
[106] Weil, *NB* 2: 575–6.

blame their holy books for the rise of modernity. Rather, his interest is in identifying the 'philosophy of the will' that emerged from the springs our faiths and he asks, what would faith look like without that philosophy?

> For myself the interest of SW's thought is this prodigious turning around from the modern at just its central point. For clearly two things seem evident to me: (a) The Western world now meets in its life the full presence of *the philosophy of the will* (historicist existentialism) and in my opinion is dying of the philosophy of the will. (b) Those of us who are Christian must face that it was in Western Christendom that *the philosophy of will* came to be—in between classical civilization and modern above all, Christianity in its Western form. For all of us, not only those who are Christians, the death of Western Christianity in its becoming the pure philosophy of will is a prodigious event. The importance of Simone Weil is her attempt to express the truth of *Christianity outside the philosophy of will.*[107]

This is where Grant can exceed Weil. She sees Christianity's troubles as a result of the Jewish influence through our use and abuse of the Old Testament. Grant saw further seeds of modernity within the NT text as well. These doctrines are trickier, because some of them are indispensable to Christian faith.

3.5.3   George Grant: Seeds of modernity in the Christian NT

Grant's thesis is that beyond the OT elements, key aspects of modernity begin in the NT doctrines of Christian love, compassion, redemption, and belief. The shift from the Greek primal (contemplation/mind) to the Christian primal (charity/heart)—a move to which Grant was fully committed—creates new conditions that set in motion the long journey to modern liberalism.[108]

i.   Christian love > Modern equality

It is here that the profound connection can be seen between the age of progress and western Biblical religion—Judaism and Christianity. The

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[107] Grant, "Excerpts from Graduate Seminar Lectures, 1975–76," *CW* 4: 832–3.
[108] Grant, *TE*, 129n.

centre of these religions lay in revelation ... which made all men in some sense equal by their potential openness to it. ... Can the modern belief in equality be understood apart from the change of emphasis (concerning man's highest activity) from contemplation to charity, which came with the dominance of Christianity? As has so often been said, the beliefs of the age of progress are a form of secularised Christianity.[109]

Whereas Greek enlightenment was available to the few philosophers whose souls were postured for escape from the cave, in Christianity, ransom from the cave has already been won in Christ and is available to all by faith. "Faith is the experience of the intelligence being enlightened by love,"[110] open to all who believe the Good News that Christ has plundered the cave. Thus, equal standing is established by the egalitarian love of God and universal offer of grace.

In truth, there are tensions in the NT around this:

- Liberty is offered equally to all; but not all are equally free. Liberty is a gift to be received as prescribed, not an inherent right to be presumed.

- A tension exists between salvation by human choice (open invitation), by divine choice (election), and by enlightenment (illumination).

- There is the high egalitarian theology of Paul's gospel ("neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free," Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11) contrary to his ecclesial practice of Roman *pater familia* (God as head, husband as head, master as head).

- And the liberal justification for Reformation and revolution is inherent in Jesus' (as well as Peter, Paul, and Stephen's) prophetic rejection of the religious establishment.

The bottom line is that the universality of Christianity contributed greatly to egalitarian ideals of liberty and equality in the modern age.

ii.   Christian compassion > Modern technology

Second, Grant saw the link of Christian charity as a motive for technology: the "interference with chance imbedded in heart of modernity is linked to Christian compassion. The great contradiction of technology is not just about will to

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[109] Grant, *TE*, 129–30n.
[110] Weil, *NB* 2: 240.

mastery, but in the name of charity."[111] Mastery of human and non-human nature is not merely a matter of pride, but of pursuing the discoveries of science and medicine in order to help the other who suffers:

> There is one argument on the modern side which no writing about technological progress and the rightness of imposing limits upon it should avoid expressing the fact that the poor, the diseased, the hungry and the tired can hardly be expected to contemplate any such limitation with the equanimity of the philosopher.[112]

The problem is that when no good exists greater than freedom (to make and master), technology has no ground for ethics and no limitations beyond progress. Thus, Christian charity may motivate technology, but is not allowed to limit it.

iii. Christian redemption > Modern progressivism

When Grant refers to 'redemption in time,' he refers both to the NT story of God's past work of salvation in history (through the Incarnation and other interventions) and God's future work at the *eschaton*, when the Kingdom of God comes to its *telos*. The Christian Bible treats time and history as a progressive march towards God's perfected end (vs. Plato's time as the 'moving image of eternity'), whether by gradual growth or apocalyptic climax.

> If we are searching for the origins of our present, we would first try to state what was given to men in Judaism or Christianity, ... we would have to examine how it was that Christianity so opened men to a particular consciousness of time, by opening them to anxiety and charity; how willing was exalted through the stamping proclamations of the creating Will; how time was raised up by redemption in time, and the future by the exaltation of the *eschaton*.[113]

The Christian notion of history as progress continues, even more obviously, when exponential advances in science, industry, and technology replace God. Progress itself *seems* obviously good—indeed, *becomes* the Good that must be pursued at

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[111] Grant, *TE*, 103, 138.
[112] Grant, *TE*, 103.
[113] Grant, *TH*, 29. Cf. Grant, *PMA*, 40–5.

Chapter Three: Out of the Shadows and Imaginings

all costs. To Grant and Weil, the claims of progress are dubious, especially when the social cost of progress includes justice. Says Weil:

> There is no reason whatever to suppose that after so atrocious a crime as the murder of a perfect being humanity must needs have become better; and, in fact, taken in the mass, it does not appear to have done so. ... Christianity was responsible for bringing this notion of progress, previously unknown, into the world; and this notion, become the bane of the modern world, has de-Christianized it. We must abandon the notion.[114]

Progressivism assumes that humanity improves chronologically and presents technology as the evidence. The counter-argument in Grant's day was the madness of the war and those who engineered it. To use a medical particular as a social metaphor, modernity is blind to the fact that technology's attempts to master viruses create super-viruses.

iv. Christian belief > Modern individualism

Finally, Christian faith is presented in the NT as personal belief. The Jews' covenant was a national matter signified through circumcision at birth (though personal faith varied). Later Christians often mimicked the Jewish national faith by conjoining infant baptism to citizenship. But in the NT, individuals believe and are baptized. This unique expression of individualism—personal voluntarism— coupled with the disciples' sectarian faith, is another obvious seed from which modernity draws life.

In each of the four preceding Christian doctrines, what starts as charity, compassion, redemption, or faith seems to inevitably drift back into willing. The only brakes seem to be the selfless love and subordination of will at the centre: at Gethsemane and Golgotha.

v. Critique

Bernard Zylstra is a sympathetic Grant scholar, but his excellent summary of Grant's competing images of God critiques Grant's overly clear (and partly artificial) delineation/conflict between love and will:

> Grant's conception of the origins of the primacy of the will [is] "willing as

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[114] Weil, *LP*, 29.

exalted through the stamping proclamations of the creating Will." The primacy of the human will is founded on a conception of a God who wills—who wills in creation. The fundamental source of Grant's ambiguity in understanding the relation of philosophy, revelation, and modernity appears to be his discovery of two deities in the religion of the Bible. There is a God of perfection, who as the eternally lovable is the object of human contemplation and the end of man's desiring. And then there is also the God who wills, who creates, who commands. He accepts the God who is love while he hesitates before a God who *wills* love, and who has the sovereign right to command love because he is the maker and redeemer of man. ... He does not understand that *the will to love* must direct every dimension of the human hierarchy, and that therefore neither will nor love can be "located" at a particular level within that hierarchy.[115]

Zylstra's critique is right, as far as it goes, as a theology of the nature of God. Grant uses Plato's Good and the Gospels' Love interchangeably (as God's essential nature) but the former normally calls for contemplation (love of God) and the latter for charity (love of neighbour). The whole works as an interlocking puzzle of God's heart, mind, and will, so why de-combine and oppose them in any order? In the end, I believe Grant would answer: We *shouldn't* de-combine heart, mind, and will from love—Plato and Christ did not—but modernity has. Let us see why, how, and where.

Zylstra's critique does not account for Grant's criterion for testing any theology, philosophy, or sacred text: when applied, does it bear the fruit of justice? Grant's issues with the willing God are specific:

- when God's will is alleged to master by force and destroy;
- when God's alleged will is appropriated as a right for us to master by force and destroy; and
- when God is discarded altogether and the human will to master by force and destroy takes on a life of its own.

His theology and philosophy are not at all theoretical, so *will* for Grant was not merely the faculty of the soul for freely choosing.

"Willing," as Grant means it, "is that power of determining by which we

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[115] Zylstra, "Philosophy, Revelation and Modernity," *GP*, 156.

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put our stamp on events (including ourselves) and in which we do some violence to the world."[116] He specifically thought of the will-in-charge-without-love, the emancipation of the passions for the purpose of power by force. For him, the will-to-love is another matter; it is the will-ruled-by-love. These are his competing images of God and define the heart of the matter when enucleating modernity back to its biblical seeds.

That said, Grant does not always portray competing images of God in such stark relief. He traces attempted syntheses between the Greco-Platonic God of transcendence and natural law with the Judeo-Christian God who acts in history for righteousness and redemption (not just violence). The Jewish idea of God in history need not automatically imply arbitrary willfulness and injustice. The Hebrew prophets made history a venue for God's love, mercy, and justice just as Plato's Good could manifest as images of truth, beauty, and justice in this realm.

Nevertheless, Grant noted how this seed idea of God as primarily will developed through centuries of medieval, scholastic, and reformed theology (as 'theological voluntarism') until it fully blossomed among the Calvinist Puritans.[117] He proposed that this particular Christian tradition, once secularized, would ultimately form the fruit of modern liberalism (or 'secular voluntarism') as follows.

3.5.4 Fruits of modernity: Liberalism as secularized Christianity

We come finally to modernity's ripest fruit: secularized American faith, where freedom of the collective soul and individual self is re-deified in the state and its citizens. Secularization of the utopian experiment was thought to be necessary, allegedly because of the religious warring. Locke and Hobbes, coming after the Thirty Years War in the UK, conceived of privatizing faith, depriving it of political power because it had proven so destructive.[118] Secular America, Lockean

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[116] Grant, *TH*, 22.

[117] Cf. Jersak, *MSO*, 23–46.

[118] This is contestable in that these wars were not so much about religion, as they were about the rise of the nation state. Cf. William Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State and the Political Meaning of the Church* (2011). He goes further to say religious power and its violence migrated from the Church into sacred devotion to the nation state.

in its founding documents, did not abandon faith, but would keep it private for safety's sake, or perhaps created the new religion of secular America, complete with inspired documents and sacred pledges. Thus secular liberalism emerges from religious liberalism. Says Grant,

> Despite obvious theoretical differences ... the practical interest of the liberal in reforming the world for man's sake and the Protestants desire to bring in the Kingdom of God brought them often into unexpected associations. The history of reform in the English-speaking world cannot be understood outside this relation. ... [Freedom] will increasingly come to mean a simple hedonism (the ability to get what one wants). It must be recognized that this hedonism stems not primarily from pure secularism, but also originates in the reformist Protestant spirit. It comes into existence as the reformist spirit loses any sense of the transcendent and begins to take the world ever more as an end in itself. The idea of freedom as the ability to change the world exists in our minds as dependent in part upon an attenuated altruism – the last remnant of the Protestant vision of the Kingdom of God on earth – and in part upon a growing self-centered hedonism.[119]

Unfortunately, secular liberalism in Grant's experience proved as violent as any crusade. The sickness is not in religion or secularism per se, but in any human heart or culture ruled by willfulness. Formation of character and ordering of desires (a la Plato and even Nietzsche)—not unhinged freedom—must undergird the political. To Grant, the principles of North American culture are antithetical to character. Liberty of desires are bereft of any hierarchy of values. No standard exists except what I want.

Where we arrive is:

- *Secularized (sometimes) election:* ("sometimes" because God's name is still invoked) Puritan election > American exceptionalism > Imperial globalization of capitalist/democratic ideology.

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[119] Grant, "The Uses of Freedom," *CW* 2: 195.

- *Secularized providence:* Puritan providentialism > modern progressivism > mastery over human and nonhuman nature through technology, sociology, and psychology.

- *Secularized liberty:* Christian liberalism unbound from ecclesial authority > secular liberalism unbound from eternals.

- *Secularized activism:* Christian activism in serving God > Puritan activism confirming election > secular activism for personal gain and social engineering.[120]

- *Universal homogenized state:* With the triumph of the will in America, freedom is embraced as the highest good. Why does this so trouble Grant? Following Strauss, he sees liberalism relentlessly co-opting the powers of government, education, commerce, technology, and brute force towards a *'universal homogenous state'*—and thereby, tyranny.[121] Here, nationalism's resurgence would challenge Grant, at least on this point.

Certainly we do observe elements of extensive 'liberal' globalization: (i) politically, through UN internationalism or American imperial forays; (ii) commercially, through capitalist mega-corporations and global markets; (iii) or culturally, as media empires and advertising firms plant franchises on street corners, billboards, and flat-screens across the world. No doubt, this does have a homogenizing and tyrannizing impact. What Grant's prophetic vision missed is how these factors, rather than introducing the homogenous state (so far), provoke the resurgence of nationalism and religious fundamentalism, even within America.

Nor is it merely a reaction. This too—nationalism, patriotism, militarism—are also the natural, if unexpected and ironic fruits of liberalism, for they remain rooted in the primacy of the will. That is, no global state is necessary for the universal triumph of the will. Perhaps in that sense, the biblical mustard seeds have already covered the globe—even Islam—with its philosophy of will: *My* kingdom come, *my* will be done on earth. Not thy will, but *mine* be done. *Freedom* now means I am *not* my brother's keeper, nor will I love my neighbour

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[120] Grant, *PMA*, 81.

[121] Cf. Grant, *TE*, 79–109; Louis Greenspan, "The Unravelling of Liberalism," *George Grant and the Subversion of Modernity* (1996), 201–19.

as myself. If such is even partly true, what hope is there? Is an exit from the dark cave even possible?

3.6   Summary: Grant's Despair and Hope

3.6.1   Reflection

In this summary we must briefly reconstruct George Grant's deconstruction of modernity, highlighting and reflecting on the key points, then anticipating the chapter to follow. In this chapter, we have focused on the following:

i.   Grant's account of the modern darkening of the Good and justice

He describes this present darkness as a veil or shroud and in so doing, draws deliberate parallels to the shadows of Plato's cave. Rather than speaking from the ivory tower of philosophical theory, he was addressing the historical chaos of successive world wars and a world on the brink of nuclear obliteration. Grant experienced the wind of Hegelian optimism being knocked out of him. His deconstruction begins with how modernity failed to explain his reality and how it contributed to the twilight of justice. In short, how is this fresh outbreak of apocalypse possible as we are supposedly coming of age—'enlightened'? I believe Grant rightly asks, "What the hell is happening? And why is it happening?"

ii.   Grant's definition of modernity

In my opinion, Grant enucleates modernity's essence such that one's eyes are opened to the driving mechanism enfolded within modern thought and action. Namely, that "man's essence is his freedom" and that it "is the very signature of modern man to deny reality to any conception of good that imposes limits on human freedom. ... The definition of man as freedom constitutes the heart of the age of progress.[122]

Reflecting on this definition, who could deny it? In the West, our highest moral imperative is our own freedom—a popular, passionate, and seemingly noble rallying cry. But when freedom (which is to Grant, '*my* will be done') asserts its primacy over the Good of Plato or the Love of Christ, what of justice? Grant is convinced that the unrestrained prioritizing of the individual or national will ultimately leads to tyranny, where every threat, hindrance, or inconvenience to my freedom must be eradicated. To me, this account is undeniable, except to say that

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[122] Grant, *Lament*, 55.

the problem is obviously rooted deeper than modernism—or any -ism; it resides in our very flesh (in every ancient sense of that word).

iii. Grant's critique of primacy of the will

Grant's dialogue partners led him to see clearly the modern triumph of the will (over the mind/contemplation and heart/charity) with its multitudinous expressions. He demonstrated primacy of the will as the common thread woven through many centuries and across conflicting movements. Grant had a unique capacity to step back and to see the shared willfulness of mutual opponents—even violent enemies—from the Reformation and Counter-Reformation to our current culture wars between so-called Left and Right. While the great ideological streams have competing ideas about how freedom should manifest, in the end, Grant convinces me that they all derive from the same spring of freedom-as-willing. By saying so, he illuminates history, piercing the darkness so we might behold the abiding specter of the willful self, even to its more primitive origins.

iv. Grant's relentless search for truth

Goaded forward by Weil's example, Grant demonstrates an unusual openness to critique his own faith and its Bible. Once he saw how injustice derives from a willful version of freedom, this perspective enabled him to see the originary dynamic of willfulness at work in competing images of God in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Lord who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness stands in stark contrast with the Deity whose anger burns and whose wrath is poured out through human agents in repeated conquests and genocides. Enlightenment modernists would transpose (secularize) this assertive God of sovereign will, providence, and election into political movements for progressivist social engineering, expansionism, and exceptionalism. Grant's theory is in step with thinkers like Strauss, Voegelin, and Weber, but he retraced our steps much further back into the sacred texts.

v. Grant's connections between modernity and the NT

Grant works independently of Weil (or anyone that I have discovered) in perceiving the difficult connections between the NT and modernity, for he finds some of the same modern values he critiques rooted in Christian essentials he affirms. I admire his ability to see these bridges and his willingness to suspend black and white judgments. One must ask oneself how it is possible to plant an

apple seed and reap a thorn bush. Yet the examples I have discovered in Grant include:

- Christian love has led to the modern commitment to equality.
- Christian compassion has accelerated and motivated modern technology.
- Christian redemption has been secularized into modern progressivism.
- Christian belief instigated the rise of modern individualism.

Supposing this, we see that Grant neither accepts early Christian faith credulously as pure goodness, nor does he demonize modernity as pure evil. That is not his task. To repeat, he is trying to account for what is and where it came from. He knew that the journey from the NT to modern thought reflects the complexity of human involvement; the truth is never as simple as good versus evil. We are not innocents choosing between two trees in Paradise. Grant honours the real mess and mixture of our journey.

vi. Grant's identification of liberalism as secularized Christianity

Finally, Grant has also filled in the gap between the biblical text and our modern situation, from seed to sprouts (medieval theology) to blooms (Reformation theology) to its fruit in modernity, encapsulated by the emergence of liberalism as secularized Christianity.

Overall, the strength of Grant's deconstruction is his ability to account for primacy of the will (willfulness) throughout as the culprit that led to a host of modern injustices. His weakness in my opinion is where he virtually demonizes the will itself by this effort. Grant and Weil at times give the impression (in spite of objections) that the human ideal would and should be the utter eradication of the will—what I've called willessness vis-à-vis willingness. What I see in Christ's Passion is surrender of the will: the will offered in service of love. What I suspect in Grant and Weil are hints of an alternative surrender wherein will is suspended altogether. Thankfully, they rally on this point by moving beyond decreation as the last word. Instead, after decreation of the self-centered ego, as with Plato and Christ, there is a re-creation or incarnation of the self to the new life of love. Self-giving exceeds selflessness. With that caveat, much misunderstanding around Weil and Grant's anthropology can be averted.

Drawing together these themes, I now conclude with Grant's singular dance of hope and despair to segue to the next chapter.

3.6.2 Despair

Grant juggled hope and despair as he grappled with the matrix of modernity. In *Time as History* (1969), he attempts to think what it means for time to be conceived as history, what that implies for how we think of ourselves, and what that means for how we ought to live.[123] His intense meditations on Nietzsche affected Grant deeply, and he seems to abandon hope for the West in this period. According to Joan O'Donovan,

> During the sixties the vision of what we ought to be has dimmed and receded in Grant's writings before the spectre of what we are. He has come to perceive the actualities of the present as a darkness fallen on the matter of 'ought'.
>
> The darkness is thickest, is most impenetrable, in *Time as History*, because here Grant is most deeply within modernity; he has taken on those minds that have thought modernity most lucidly and most powerfully. These are the minds of Nietzsche and Heidegger.[124]

3.6.3 Hope

But Grant's dissatisfaction is not pure despair—there is no paralysis of thought or action. His vocation as a contemplative theologian and Canadian prophet are invigorated for the task we've described in this chapter—his deconstruction of the darkness of modernity:

> The job of thought at our time is to *bring into the light that darkness as darkness.* ... What is also necessary for both types of life [thought and practice] is a continuing dissatisfaction with the fact that the *darkness of our era* leads to such a division between them. In this dissatisfaction lies the hope of taking a first step: *to bring the darkness into the light as darkness.*[125]

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[123] Grant, *TH*, 3.

[124] O'Donovan, *Twilight of Justice* (1984), 107.

[125] Grant, "The computer does not impose on us the ways it should be used," *CW* 4: 296–7.

This hope leads us to Grant's second task and doctrine. In the forthcoming chapter we will reflect on Grant's epistemology, the path out of the cave and into the light. He believes a way of knowing and being (contemplation) exists that rises above the modern labyrinth (rational empiricism)—what I call Weilian Christian Platonism: faith as the experience of the intelligence illumined by love.

Chapter 4
Into the Light: The Intelligence Illumined by Love /
Grantean Epistemology

4.1   Introduction

The most important part of teaching = to teach what it is to know.[1]
(Simone Weil, from her last words)

Faith is the experience that the intelligence is lighted up by love.[2]
(Simone Weil)

George Grant's attempt to retard, arrest and reverse the triumph of the
calculators lies at the heart of everything that he has written. He is, of our
contemporaries, the supreme lover, the consummate erotic man. As with
Mozart, love is not merely a theme in his work. It is *the* central subject.[3]
(William Christian)

4.1.1   Grant's dilemmas

How does a modern citizen progress from 'intimations of deprival' to the
possibility of experiencing Reality beyond modernity's cave? Although Grant's
path of discovery unfolds over time, his course was largely predetermined by his
conversion. Grant's epiphany—that God is, that there is finally order, that we are
not our own—leads him to traverse the great dilemmas of philosophy.

By 1950, we find Grant formulating these big questions while writing his
thesis. In "The Concept of Nature and Supernature in the Theology of John
Owen," he is already constructing the major doctrines discovered in his
conversion. His contemplative epistemology, his *theologia crucis*, and his moral-
political philosophy all shine through. He contrasts classical and modern answers
to these questions:

- How does time/the temporal relates to the eternal?
- How does nature relate to supernature?
- How does necessity (secondary causes) relate to the Good (first cause)?

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[1] Weil, *FLN*, 364.
[2] Weil, *NB* 1: 240.
[3] William Christian, "George Grant and Love," *Canadian Journal of Political
Studies* 16.2 (June 1983): 349.

- How does human freedom relate to divine sovereignty?

- How does human knowing relate to transcendent reality?

- How does human affliction relate to the perfection of God?

- How does human society relate to the kingdom of God?

Simplified, these great dilemmas of time and eternity are all pondered through the lens of Plato's cave. For Simone Weil, cavern existence is variously identified with time, necessity, society, and the domain of the will (the first half of each duality above). The sun outside the cave relates to God, the Good, transcendence, and the experience of enlightenment (the latter half of each equation). Following her lead, Grant sincerely wants to know how these two spheres inter-participate (hence, doctrines 2–4). Like every good Platonist, he resists dualism to enquire how they come together as a whole.[4]

Grant also seeks to respond to the epistemology of this 'bewildering age.' How had moderns come to segregate and finally dissolve all reality beyond the cave? Why did they finally throw up their chained hands in joy or despair and shout, 'This is all that is!'—labeling their conclusive reduction 'enlightenment'? What truly postmodern answer could give hope for existence beyond the matrix, and how could one 'know' it?

The first part of this chapter will focus on Grant's critique of the rationalist wing[5] of modern epistemology. I will present Bacon, Descartes, and Kant as Grant's 'pillars of technology' and show how he relates the modernist primacy of *will* (discussed above) to its theories of knowing as willing, freedom, and making. We will especially see Heidegger's influence on Grant's critique.

In the second section, I will develop in detail the pillars of Grant's contemplative epistemology (his Platonic escape from the cave)—including:

- His Weilian interpretation of Plato's epistemology: the intelligence (Platonic *nous*) illumined by love.

- His use of Heidegger's meditative '*gelassenheit*,' but his rejection of Heidegger's secularized contemplation.[6]

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[4] On this assertion, see Jersak, "Beyond Dualism: Correspondence with Radical Orthodoxy," *MSO*, 221–6.

[5] Bearing in mind the broader Enlightenment, consisting of three streams: rationalism, romanticism, and humanism.

[6] Cf. Jersak, "Heidegger's Eckhart," *MSO*, 81–4, where I argue the pros and cons of Heidegger's secularized Eckhartian contemplation.

- His resonance with Simone Weil's contemplative '*attention*' and her unique version of contemplative ascent through Plato-Christian mystical stages.

- His introduction of the life and teachings of Christ (especially the Beatitudes and Passion) as the *content* and *method* of contemplative knowing *and* being.

4.1.2   Contributions

The significant contributions of this chapter are not novel discoveries per se, but I do propose to 'look hard' at and into essential Grantean themes of contemplative epistemology beyond what he, Heidegger, or Weil made explicit. Namely,

- I will attend (with Heidegger) to the pivotal importance of correctly defining the Greek term, *nous*, in order to accurately interpret Plato's epistemology. I will trace the semantic drift of *nous* and so demonstrate the anachronistic error of modern commentators whenever they misinterpret *nous* or *noeisis* in Plato's analogies as discursive reason(ing). Following Weil, I will also show how Plato's use of *nous*, read in its historical and literary context, represents a contemplative epistemology that guides one out of the cave into enlightenment.

- I will assess the practical implications of Grant and Weil's insistence that love is a (the) crucial faculty for knowing. This conviction begins with their interpretation of Plato's higher 'knowing' as 'seeing,' as 'loving.' But it extends to their critique of modern science, education, health care, and modern theology, where love has often been treated as a sentimental pollutant, and where the ideal of 'objectivity' breeds a non-contemplative version of detachment. Grant and Weil's response fulfills Plato, to include an incarnational model in which a deeper knowledge of human nature necessitates a direct experience of loving-care for and among those with whom we work and help.

- I will draw together Weil's mystical epistemology and outline it in terms of five specific stages. I will relate these to her contemplative journey out of Plato's cave, suggesting Grant assumes and adopts her epistemology as his own understanding of his own experience.

4.1.3 Grant's epistemology

How might we make our escape from the shadows into the light? More personally
for Grant, what actually happened when he passed through his conversion gate?
How did it happen? And how could he articulate the experience? Simone Weil
answered that question for Grant when she wrote, "*Faith is the experience that
the intelligence is enlightened by love.*"[7] That statement would become his oft-
quoted epistemological metanarrative. In its original context, we see Weil's
interpretation of Plato summarized:

> Faith is the experience that the intelligence is lighted up by love. Truth as
> the light coming from good—the good which lies above essences. The
> organ in us through which we see truth is intelligence. The organ in us
> through which we see God is love.[8]

Epistemology is about knowing. Epistemology usually asks, "What is knowing?
What can be known? And how do we know what can be known?" To these
questions, we will see how Grant—the spontaneously reborn Christian
Platonist—also asserts that knowledge must not be cut off from *who* is knowing
(knowing's agent), *who is known* (knowing's focus), and *that for which* we know
(knowing's function). Grant's Plato saw this: our knowing has content (the
Good), purpose (transformation of the soul), and consequence (just persons and
societies). And for Grant's Jesus, the height of knowing is transfiguration into
love-union with God. The way of the Cross, internalized in Jesus' Beatitudes and
externalized in his Passion, signifies a contemplative knowing, being, and loving
where self-will comes to death and our true selves are resurrected to perfect love.

4.2 Modern Epistemology: Technological Pillars

Grant's Christian Platonism put him into direct conflict with five centuries of
Enlightenment thinking. Taking his place in the academy, Grant squared off
against Fulton Anderson's techno-rationalist ways of knowing and being that had

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[7] Grant, *TJ*, 38. Grant's translation from Weil, *PG*, 207. The original says, "*La foi,
c'est l'expérience que l'intelligence est éclairée par l'amour.*"
[8] Weil, *NB* 1: 240.

increasingly displaced and denied receptive ways of knowing. I will summarize Grant's critique of modern epistemology on four fronts:

(1) the reversal of *contempletiva* and *activa*;

(2) 'excluded knowledge';

(3) 'the autonomous subject' (or knowing as willing); all culminating in

(4) 'technological mastery' (knowing as making).

4.2.1   The reversal of *contempletiva* and *activa*

Beginning with his *Massey Commission Report* on the state of philosophy in Canada (1951), Grant is perpetually watchful of the reversal of contemplation and action in western life. He believed that when contemplative knowing and being are made secondary to action, our epistemology—modern epistemology— inevitably narrows knowledge to the utilitarian quest for power, for control. Eventually, science (read 'technology') knows all that needs to be known and all that can be known (read 'controlled'). The *Massey Report* is an early effort to summarize the evolution of epistemology along those themes.

> [Philosophy] is the contemplation of our own and others' activity, in the hope that by understanding it better we may make it less imperfect. At the centre of the traditional faith in the West has been the understanding that there are two approaches to reality, the contemplative and the active, and that only in the careful proportioning of these can individuals and societies find health. The contemplative life whether mystical, artistic, or philosophic has therefore been encouraged by societies not only for the good of the contemplative himself but because his influence upon more active members was considered of value.[9]

For Grant, the contemplative voice must be heard beyond the monastery, the art gallery, and the academy as a foundation for healthy people and just societies— 'preventing us from becoming beasts.'[10] But as contemplative thought and life was leap-frogged by aggressive technological action in Western civilization, the political-scientific pioneers had harnessed their knowing for power and the results

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[9] Grant, "Philosophy—Massey Commission Report," *CW* 2: 4.
[10] Grant, "Massey Commission," *CW* 2: 7.

in our time have been tragic. Our optimism about scientific advances for the purpose of charitable action and reason unguided by faith has been consistently matched (and beaten) by technological and political expertise in destruction.[11]

Even the philosophers, one-time guardians of rational contemplation, were complicit:

> Philosophers in Western society have joined in the aspirations of the scientific age. The lie that knowledge exists only to provide power has been as much in the soul of philosophers as in the rest of society ... pragmatism and positivism. ... Along with Marxism ... they tend towards the position that all men's problems may be solved by scientific technique."[12]

Grant's experience exposed the lie. We have not become less medieval (in the vulgar sense)—just better armed and equipped for it. So he takes the stand for which the academy will first crucify him, but later acknowledge him:

> The tragic split between the men of action and the men of contemplation must be overcome; the philosophers must recognize the relation of philosophy to the problem of society, and the spirit of philosophy must be infused into those who must act. Such an end is clearly an ideal impossible of achievement but a move towards it is the only hope of reviving the contemplative life.[13]

Grant's account of the tragic reversal of *contemplativa* and *activa* foreshadows the work of Heideggerian scholar, Hannah Arendt, who would write in 1958,

> Perhaps the most momentous of the spiritual consequences of the discoveries of the modern age and, at the same time, the only one that could not have been avoided, since it followed closely upon the discovery of the Archimedean point[14] and the concomitant rise of Cartesian doubt,

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[11] Grant, "Massey Commission," *CW* 2: 8, 12.
[12] Grant, "Massey Commission," *CW* 2: 7.
[13] Grant, "Massey Commission," *CW* 2: 15.
[14] I.e., "The Cartesian removal of the Archimedean point into the mind of man ... enabled man to carry it, as it were, within himself wherever he went and thus freed

has been the reversal of the hierarchical order between the *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*.[15]

Grant and then Arendt saw that such a reversal does not merely make contemplation secondary to action as sort of a handmaid. Rather, "Contemplation itself becomes altogether meaningless."[16] As knowledge, contemplation withers from secondary in importance to irrelevant, and finally, to impossible. With Arendt (and Heidegger, below), Grant reverse-engineered the meltdown of justice in our technological age, in large part, to this great reversal. With the loss of contemplation (Heidegger's 'thinking') comes the exclusion of a vast element of human knowledge (and reality) available only via contemplation.

4.2.2 Excluded knowledge

The 'Enlightenment' or 'age of reason' typically traces its origins to Francis Bacon's empiricism, Rene Descartes' rationalism, and Immanuel Kant's agnosticism.[17] Secondhand pop-versions give the impression that they deliberately sought to oppose Christian faith, disprove the existence of God, and exalt scientific materialism as the only worldview. With this reductionist history in mind, primary reading in Descartes, Bacon, and Kant comes with some significant surprises.[18] These fathers of the Enlightenment repeatedly and unabashedly affirm the following Christian tenets:

- belief in the existence of God/universals;
- belief in limits of scientistic ways of knowing God/universals; and,
- belief in faith and/or contemplative ways of knowing God/universals.

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him from given reality altogether." (Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958), 285).

[15] Arendt, *Human Condition* (1958), 289.

[16] Arendt, *Human Condition* (1958), 292.

[17] I have observed precursors to modern thinking in Aristotelean–Thomist scholasticism in Jersak, "Sprouts of Modernity in Medieval Theology," *MSO*, 23–35. But even Aquinas knew that *all* thinking was but a pointer, and not to be confused with Reality itself. Cf. John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (1982).

[18] Cf. Rene Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, (1971); Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations* (1968); Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Pure Reason," *Basic Writings* (2001); Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning* (2004).

At least initially, the early modern thinkers were surveying the *limits* of science and philosophy in the face of pride—defending faith where rationalism or empiricism overstepped their bounds.

For example, Descartes' skepticism is not directed towards Christian faith, but at the unreliability of human perception when observing phenomenon. He argues as strenuously for God's existence as he does for his own, revisiting Anselm's ontological proof from God's perfection[19] (i.e., God is that which none greater can be conceived).

Conversely, Bacon's doubt does not concern God, but the way scholastic reason can be infected with distortions to create untold conflicting opinions.[20] He argues for the primacy of God as first cause, and the priority of pursuing God in the quest for knowledge.[21] He names contemplation of God as the height, and charity as the 'necessary spice' in the pursuit of knowledge, attending to both God's word (revelation) and God's works (nature), then calls readers to apply them to charity.

Kant too was a believer, who nevertheless felt philosophic efforts to 'prove' God breeched the capabilities of pure and practical reason, and thereby amounted to presumption. Along with his critique of uncritical dogmatism, Kant intended to root out "materialism, fatalism, atheism, free-thinking unbelief, fanaticism, and superstition ... idealism and skepticism."[22]

They did not see themselves as destroyers of religion. Rather, they variously taught that the *reality of God* cannot be confined to a laboratory or exhausted in a court of reason. Where their impact becomes problematic is when *knowledge* is reduced and confined to the lab or the court (wherein only reason and experiment count). In that model, contemplation, faith, and revelation are inevitably excluded as witnesses (and are no longer considered 'knowledge'), and therefore, by those standards, God cannot be known.

Some call this 'excluded knowledge.'[23] That is, Bacon reduced what is knowable to inductive experimentation, and Descartes to what is knowable by rational deduction. Kant drew the boundaries of what is knowable to 'pure and

[19] Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (2009), meditations 3–4.
[20] Bacon, *Advancement of Learning* (2004), 1.IV.5–7.
[21] Bacon, *Advancement of Learning* (2004), 1.I.3.
[22] Kant, "Pure Reason," *Basic Writings* (2001), 21.
[23] E.g., Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* (1982), 86–9.

practical reason.' In each case, 'knowledge' is reduced to what can be proved rationally or observed empirically. Whatever may exist beyond those fences cannot be 'known.' We may have *faith* in God or *believe* that some 'noumenal realm' exists, but they are completely inaccessible to-authorized categories of knowing.

Others, like David Hume (nominalism), or Auguste Compte (positivism), introduced irreligious skepticism to the Enlightenment mix. Hume rejected all philosophical claims that God's attributes or operations can be perceived, experienced, or justified by evidence.[24] And for positivists from Compte to Bertrand Russell, scientific method finally circumscribes all knowledge. Thus, over time, the inexorable domino effect follows:

- The eternal is definitively divorced from the temporal (Enlightenment dualism).
- The eternal is cut off from 'real knowledge' (Enlightenment epistemology).
- The eternal is irrelevant to 'real life' (Enlightenment ethics).
- Finally, the eternal is simply 'not real' (Enlightenment materialism).

In other words, in the wake of the Enlightenment, only what is known (scientifically) is real. Nature becomes the *only scientifically* accessible sphere of knowledge; then the *only* sphere of knowledge; then the *only sphere*. Or to use Plato's cave analogy, if the sun outside is forever inaccessible, its existence becomes immaterial (pun) and finally illusory, while the shadows are made absolute. Divinity becomes so transcendent to reason and experience (epistemology) that God's very existence (ontology) is blinked away. The Platonic questions of how eternity manifests in time and how particulars partake of eternals are answered in black and white by the modern children of the Enlightenment as follows: it can't, they don't, period.

Nor is God the sole exile from the cramped knowledge defined by science. What does science have to say about any of Plato's great forms: goodness, truth, beauty, justice and love? What does it 'know' of standards (right and wrong), quality (better or worse), purpose, or meaning? If such forms exist at all, they are

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[24] Cf. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (2006); *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (2009).

derived arbitrarily from public opinion, the 'eye of the beholder,' or the whims of my will (if science allows for such a beast).

Early on, poets and philosophers from William Blake[25] to Blaise Pascal to Coleridge[26] to Jonathan Swift[27] foresaw and opposed where this was heading. Later thinkers (from Kierkegaard to Nietzsche to Heidegger[28]) ridiculed the small-minded pride of the 'calculators' and their shrunken heads. But our immediate task is George Grant's contribution, his gaze into the heart of the matter. What did he see behind and beyond modern 'knowing'?

4.2.3   The autonomous subject: Knowing as willing

George Grant saw that excluded knowledge enthrones the ego—the autonomous subject—as god of its own (tiny) domain. From this perch, science claims to make us 'objective'—that is, everything relates to me as an object, summoned before my scrutiny to give its answers. In a lecture from 1977–78, Grant says,

> What was the primal affirmation from which both Descartes and Bacon arose? Suffice it to say here that the subject (human beings as subject) became that before which must be led everything which is, and through which everything that is is justified for what it is. The human being ... *based on his own authority becomes the foundation and the measure of all that is* ... The world is represented to us as an object that we as subjects interrogate and over which we have jurisdiction. ...
>
> Modern science and morality came out of this new view of the *sovereignty of man as subject.* ... the unfolding of all this, man as subject, the world as object, is the liberation of man for a new liberty. ...
>
> But what can be seen with clarity is that the account of reason so brilliantly expounded in [Kant's] *Critique of Pure Reason*, which holds the world before itself, representing it to itself as object, which is the basis of truth – positive truth – is the basis of the new liberty which is going to establish its *domination* over the whole earth. *Man establishes himself as*

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[25] Grant, "Céline's Trilogy," *CW* 4: 461.
[26] Grant, "Céline's Trilogy," *CW* 4: 462.
[27] Cf. Jonathan Swift, *Battle of the Books* (2009); Grant, "Technology and Empire," *CW* 3: 523.
[28] Grant, "Céline's Trilogy," *CW* 4: 461.

sovereign over the totality of all that is. ... taking his fate into his own hands. Henceforth, man sets out from himself and for himself.[29]

Thus, Descartes, Bacon, and Kant share in resituating humanity in its quest for knowledge.[30] We promote ourselves from a grounded place of discovering what exists and aligning ourselves to it onto a precarious pedestal where we control and construct what is becoming. We become godlike in our freedom and dominion. Knowing is willing, and willing is making. By the twentieth century, knowing as willing as making would create a society in which technology dimmed our ability to think the Good, to think justice, to think—full stop. In fact, technology as the modern paradigm (or ontology) would envelop and finally become us. This critique would occupy more of Grant's writing (and writings about him) than any other element of his deconstruction.

4.2.4   Technological mastery: Knowing as making

Grant stands in the tradition of philosophers like Martin Heidegger, Jacques Ellul, Marshall McLuhan, and Neil Postman, who have called the West to mindfulness about the societal effects of technology, especially on justice. They challenge the assumption that technology is just a neutral tool in our hands, suggesting it is actually a 'new mode of being,' a paradigmatic pre-condition that 'imposes itself.'[31] Grant especially forewarned the ethical volatility of the computer when 'the web' was still a metaphor. Decades before Twitter could topple governments or Craig's List became an intercontinental brothel, Grant would shudder at how technology's 'can be done' becomes society's 'will be done, for better or for worse.' He recalls Robert Oppenheimer's infamous imperative: "If something is sweet, you have to go ahead with it."[32] Kant's great delay has lapsed. In his many essays and books, Grant is our Gandalf, warning of the potential and perils of the technological 'ring of power.'

The volume of literature about technology in and around Grant alone is overwhelming. His thought develops over time, evolving in leaps after he

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[29] Grant, "Lecture (1977/8)," *GGR*, 224–5.
[30] Cf. Jersak, "The Autonomous Subject: Knowing as Willing in Descartes, Bacon and Kant," *MSO*, 49–61.
[31] Grant, "Technology as Ontology," *GGR*, 417.
[32] Grant, "Knowing and Making," *GGR*, 415.

discovers Ellul[33] and then Heidegger. To sample Grant's essential teaching on modern knowing as technology, we shall briefly survey Martin Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology" (1955), and Grant's very Heideggerian reflections thereafter. Especially the essays "Knowing and Making" (1974)[34] and "The computer does not impose on us the ways it should be used." (1976).[35]

In 1967, Ed Alexander translated a copy of Heidegger's article and gave it to Grant. Grant then spent a year studying it with his graduate students.[36] Heidegger challenges the 'instrumental' definition of technology that sees it merely as a means to an end, something we can manipulate and master. He questions technology in order to identify our relationship with its very essence.

In his typical manner, Heidegger leads the reader through a series of etymologies (e.g., *poiesis* = bringing forth; *aletheia* = unconcealment/revealing; *techne* and *episteme* = two types of knowing) in order to unfold technology as a 'way of revealing.' And in modern technology, what is revealed is a challenging, a demand, a 'setting upon' nature to store and supply energy—a standing reserve ready to serve its ends. To serve 'man'? Not entirely, for humanity is itself challenged, ordered, claimed, and destined by technology, by industry—to take part in driving technology forward and to approach nature as an object. He names this challenging claim on us *Gestell* (enframing). Technology's enframing essence gathers us to set upon; it often destines us to danger; it 'holds complete sway over us' and frequently diminishes us, determining how we (cease to) think and act.[37]

At just this point, Heidegger states paradoxically,

> But that destining is never a fate that compels. For man becomes truly free only insofar as he belongs to the realm of destining and so becomes one who listens, though not one who simply obeys. The essence of freedom is originally not connected with the will or even with the causality of human

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[33] Grant, "Review of *Technological Society*, by Jacques Ellul" (1961), *CW* 3: 413–18. Cf. John Badertscher, "George P. Grant and Jacques Ellul: On Freedom in Technological Society," *GP*, 79–89.

[34] Grant, "Knowing and Making," *CW* 4: 269–79.

[35] Grant, "'The computer does not impose on us the ways it should be used,'" *CW* 4: 280–98.

[36] Kaethler, *The Synthesis of Athens and Jerusalem* (2009), 27.

[37] Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" (2007).

willing. Freedom governs the free space in the sense of the cleared, that is to say, the revealed.[38]

Just at the brink of the precipice, threat and possibility co-exist—the enframing that enslaves stands beside the revealing truth that shines forth. The danger is not technology per se, but its enframing, destining essence. "But where the danger is," says Heidegger, "grows the saving power also" by looking "with yet clearer eyes into the danger."[39] Whereas the destining essence of technology would enframe and endanger us, keeping contemplative watch over the *eidos* (essence, idea) of whatever is being unconcealed, even technology, "gives man entry into something which, of himself, he can neither invent nor in any way make."[40]

> It is precisely in enframing, which threatens man into the danger of the surrender of his free essence—it is precisely in this extreme danger that the innermost indestructible belongingness of man within granting may come to light, provided that we, for our part, begin to pay heed to the essence of technology ... instead of merely gaping at the technological ... as an instrument.[41]

In the final pages, Heidegger illustrates these two ways of seeing technology—the calculative versus the contemplative, or simply gaping versus gazing—by contrasting the ancient word *techne* with our modern word, *technology*. He says that to the Greeks, the semantic range of *techne* was much broader than *technology*. "There was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called *techne*. The *poieisis* of fine arts was also called *techne* [because art too was a] single, manifold revealing."[42]

George Grant picked up on this distinction with a fury, often teaching the history of the Greek word *techne* in contrast to the modern neologism, *technology*, because they represent and generate two ways of knowing. With Heidegger, he remembers *techne* as one kind of *poiesis* (production, leading forth). "*Techne* (call it if you will art) is the leading forth of something [and

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[38] Heidegger, "Concerning Technology" (2007).
[39] Heidegger, "Concerning Technology" (2007).
[40] Heidegger, "Concerning Technology" (2007).
[41] Heidegger, "Concerning Technology" (2007).
[42] Heidegger, "Concerning Technology" (2007).

everything] that requires the work of human beings."[43] *Techne* enveloped the full range of fine arts and the practical trades, treating everything from music to medicine to carpentry to the royal *techne* of politics[44] as a type of art and its practitioners as artisans. These 'arts' were treated as a kind of knowledge. But *techne* as art was distinguished from theoretical knowledge—*theoretike episteme* —or 'science' (via the Latin). According to Grant, what made them distinct was that *techne* signified what *might or might not be* while science concerned what *must* be. Apparently "this distinction led to a firm separation between the arts and the sciences."[45]

In modern times, our world has experienced the birth of an entirely new development where science and art have co-penetrated as a third entity: *technology*.[46] Think in terms of *techne* as making plus *logos* as knowledge (knowing-as-making) or "That which is made by human hands (*techne*) must be (science) brought forth."[47] According to Grant, "the single word 'technology' brings out that the very horizons of making have been transformed by the discoveries of modern science."[48] A new relationship is forged between knowing and making, one that imposes technology upon us as *the* modern epistemology, ontology, and ethic—because technology is how we must know, who we must be, and what we must do. "[It is] a way of apprehending the world, it is a mode of existence that transforms the way we know, think, and will ... in which the world [including man] is set before man to be questioned, interrogated, and exploited."[49]

So what? Grant names these implications of the modern epistemology of knowing-as-making:

- In our university curriculum and in public life, knowledge is reduced to 'applied science' for the expansion of corporate demands. "In our world

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[43] Grant, "Knowing and Making," *CW* 4: 272.

[44] Plato called the "practical wisdom of politics [the] royal *techne*—that art which is higher than all particular arts because it is called to put the others in a proper order of subordination and superordination." Grant, "The computer does not impose" (*CW* 4: 281–2).

[45] Grant, "Knowing and Making," *CW* 4: 272.

[46] Grant, "Knowing and Making," *CW* 4: 273.

[47] Kaethler, *The Synthesis of Athens and Jerusalem* (2009), 35.

[48] Grant, "Knowing and Making," *CW* 4: 273

[49] Andrew Potter, "Introduction to the 40th Anniversary Edition," *Lament for a Nation* (2005), xliv.

only those arts which can be turned into technologies can publicly be taken seriously."[50]

- The 'other' arts ('fine' arts or 'liberal' arts) outside the scope of technology have shriveled from the *poietic* expression of beauty and truth to whatever will satisfy the market. "They have above all been turned into entertainment, decoration, and expressions of subjective fantasy."[51]

- Knowledge of the Good is cut off (an emptying of meaning). Grant says, "For the ancients 'good' meant what something was fitted for. Our modern science does not understand nature in those teleological terms. Knowledge of good cannot be derived from knowledge of nature as objects."[52] When we objectify nature, we no longer relate to it as students who might discover what is 'good,' but rather, as inquisitors who judge nature by how we can *make it useful*. "When the word 'good' was castrated by being cut off from our knowledge of nature, the word 'value' took its place, as something we added to nature."[53] For Grant, the existentialists' great contribution was to expose the emptiness of that substitution.

- Modern knowing puts morality into question:

Technological civilization has put in question every horizon in which we can think about all the central requirements of human life ... sexuality, art, religion, thought, politics, economics. The meaning of these activities has become ambiguous and from that ambiguity more than from anything else the restlessness, the chaos, the disasters of this era arise. The only way to overcome ambiguity is the re-possession in thought of what these activities are fitted for.[54]

At one time morality drew "the frontiers and limits of making ... [it was] an attempt to gain knowledge of the proper hierarchy among the arts."[55] Modern epistemology has long disregarded the ancient standards of morality as 'mythical

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[50] Grant, "Knowing and Making," *CW* 4: 274.
[51] Grant, "Knowing and Making," *CW* 4: 274.
[52] Grant, "Knowing and Making," *CW* 4: 276.
[53] Grant, "Knowing and Making," *CW* 4: 276.
[54] Grant, "The George C. Nowlan Lectures," *CW* 3: 622.
[55] Grant, "Knowing and Making," *CW* 4: 276.

and irrelevant.' There now remains no positive knowledge of the moral limits of technology. In a kind of circular reasoning, morality is disqualified from speaking into technological ethics because any external limitations would hinder our freedom *to do whatever we can do*—the new technological imperative.[56] Without limits, beyond good and evil, technology cannot 'think justice lucidly'—it has been used to oppose justice, to imperialize and tyrannize.

4.2.5 Summary

In the end moderns do not contemplate—they utilize. They do not see reality— they claim to create it. The freedom to create one's reality is, for moderns, the highest good. Grant, by contrast, understood the ancient idea of goodness as "obedience to seeing—beholding and our practical life must be seen as obedience to that beholding—while in the modern there is nothing to behold about which we can be obedient."[57] For Grant, both the content and the practice of contemplative attention are steamrolled by technology as the singular epistemology for a narrow ontology and ad hoc ethic.

We have reviewed four of the pillars of modern epistemology as Grant saw them: the reversal of *contempletiva* with *activa*, excluded knowledge, the autonomous subject, and technological mastery. They build on one another so that knowing = willing = making = mastery = freedom. For Grant, this freedom is the very bondage of Plato's shackled cave-dwellers.

> At the least the coming to be of technical civilization has put in darkness the perspective by which men traditionally lived, including what it is to think the truth. To think anything in that darkness requires that we think the novelty which has enclosed everything in that darkness.[58]

In the tradition of Heidegger, he chose to think that novelty. That is, they chose to 'think'—a contemplative epistemology that for Grant rested on four very different pillars.

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[56] Grant, "Knowing and Making," *CW* 4: 276.
[57] Grant, "Miscellaneous Notes," *CW* 4: 316.
[58] Grant, "Technique(s) and Good," *CW* 4: 131.

4.3 Grantean Epistemology: Contemplative Pillars

George Grant's epistemology is essentially the Christian Platonism of a grace-escape from the cave of delusion into the love-illumined light of revealed truth. It is a received knowledge of Reality—the Good, God—accessed in loving contemplation and embodied in loving action. For our purposes, Grant's contemplative pillars can be represented by (1) the teaching of Socrates in Plato; (2) the practice of '*gelassenheit*' in Heidegger; (3) the ascent, arrest, attention, awakening, and activation of Weil's mystical stages; and (4) the transformative journey of discipleship focused on Christ's teaching and Passion.

4.3.1 Grant's Plato: The intelligence illumined by love

Largely because of his conversion, George Grant followed Plato's belief in a reality beyond the shadows of the cave. Dialectic's furthest reach is to establish its own limits, but for Plato, that is not the end. He believed that ultimate truth (the Good) was transcendent to the rational mind but nevertheless accessible to direct contact. As Simone Weil once journaled, "Experience of the transcendent: this seems a contradiction in terms, and yet the transcendent can only be known through contact, since our faculties are unable to construct it."[59] This begs the question: if Grant's 'intimations of deprival' signal the possibility of escape from the cave into direct contact with ultimate reality, and if his experience confirms it, how so? What processes contribute to our deliverance from the shadows into the light?

Plato's influence on Grant came via a variety of channels—his Oxford professors, his thesis subject (Oman), Dalhousie colleague James Doull, and of course Leo Strauss. We might even credit much of Grant's sharpness to the adversarial grindstone of Fulton Anderson, who staked his reputation as an elite philosopher on his own commentary on Plato. But far and away, Grant's mature contemplative epistemology must be uniquely attributed to Simone Weil. I have chosen to narrow my outline of Grant's Platonic grid using his favourite Weilian aphorism: "*Faith is the experience of the intelligence illumined by love.*"[60] We will cover specifics of Weil's mystical path below, but this one statement

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[59] Weil, *NB* 1: 242.
[60] Cf. Grant's use in Grant, *TJ*, 38–41; and, "Conversation: Theology and History," *GP*, 106–7.

becomes, for Grant, the supreme lens through which to read all of Plato's *Dialogues*. In its original context, Weil's *Notebooks*, the phrase encapsulates their highest epistemology:

> Faith is the experience of the intelligence that is lighted up by love. Truth as the light coming from good—the good which lies above essences. The organ in us through which we see truth is the intelligence; the organ in us through which we see God is love.
>
> 'The eyes of the soul—they are the demonstrations themselves.' In the case of truths. But the eye of the soul for the contemplation of the divine is love. [61]

In other words, Grant's Plato should not be mistaken for a rationalist; he was a mystic centered in love—perhaps the father of all western contemplative mysticism.[62] Let us now unpack each part of the Weilian aphorism.

i.   Faith:[63] Grant's synthesis (or "Two Theological Languages")

One of George Grant's lifelong meditations was to clarify the relationship between the 'languages of Athens and Jerusalem,'[64] especially as they relate to knowledge and freedom. We immediately face the difficulty of imported assumptions about what 'Athens' and 'Jerusalem' signify—in ways that may even revise history. For example, we get pairings assumed to be analogous: Athens and Jerusalem = philosophy and religion = reason and revelation (or faith). Unfortunately, this handy reduction caricatures the Greek philosophers

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[61] Weil, *NB* 1: 240.

[62] Cf. Simone Pétrement, *A Life* (1976), 370. Grant justifies this:
> I mentioned Simone Weil, but I don't think it will be outside what is true in Platonism and Christianity. And remember Socrates doesn't attack Delphi; he praises Delphi. ... He has this account of a theophany in the last days, in the *Crito* and the *Phaedo*, how God had come to him. (Grant, "George Grant and Religion," *CW* 4: 758).

[63] Reading Plato's greater epistemology through Weil's paradigm of 'faith,' as Grant does in "Faith and the Multiversity," is a little tricky. We need to distinguish Plato's uses the term *pistis* (beliefs, convictions about the sensible realm) from the later NT word *pistis* used for 'faith' in God. Weil's *pistis* is "discernment of the divine in us (divine inspiration) and around us." (Weil, *NB* 1: 219).

[64] Cf. Grant, "Two Theological Languages," *CW* 2: 49–65. 'Athens and Jerusalem' lingo through the centuries hearkens back to Tertullian's question, "But what Relation is there between *Athens* and *Jerusalem*? What Communion hath the *Academy* with the *Church*? or what part have *Hereticks* with *Christians*?" (Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics* (1722), vii). Cp. Weil, *NB* 1: 233.

(specifically Plato's Socrates) as rationalists. Even great minds like Nietzsche and Weil perceived Socrates totally differently:

> Nietzsche: "Socrates might be described as the very embodiment of the *non-mystic*, whose logical nature has developed through superfetation, just as excessively as has instinctive wisdom in the mystic."[65]

> Weil: "My interpretation: that Plato is an *authentic mystic* and even the father of Occidental mysticism."[66]

Nietzsche's critique of 'Socratism' is not without foundation when we consider the Platonic exaltation of 'the idea' over 'the idols' of the tragedian poets and their Homeric gods, or again, the Socratic proclamation of creative order (*nous*) and his rational attempts to define everything.[67] The dilemma of the dialogues is that they often present as exercises in tiresome formal logic. Where is the art, the poetry, the mystery? To Nietzsche, *The Republic's* devaluation of the poets and censorship of the tragedies appears as an ugly blend of Cartesian rationalism and Victorian repression. On the other hand, perhaps Nietzsche was also too quick to identify *nous* with reason and therefore, with rationalism.[68]

Heidegger too perceived Plato's metaphysics as an attempt to capture and control being with discursive reason. R. P. Peters summarizes:

> Heidegger uses this world 'onto-theology' in his book *Identity and Difference* to describe the effect calculative thinking has on the understanding of God. The onto-theological constitution of metaphysics means that God enters into philosophy but only on philosophy's terms. God becomes the *causa sui*, the logos, the prime ratio – all of which are totalizing projects of human thought. Even the act of 'placing' God at the top of all beings or declaring God to be the highest value is still part of the metaphysical language that sees the human as subject and all else as

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[65] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music* (1993), 66.
[66] Weil, *IC*, 77.
[67] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* (1993), 51–65.
[68] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* (1993), 63, 65.

objects to be controlled. Onto-theology, in short, is simply religion as technology.[69]

Whether we read Socrates/Plato as a mystic or anti-mystic hinges on the dialogues themselves. Questions: Whose reading of the dialogues? Which dialogues? For Grant, the great analogies and the late dialogues of love are decisive.

In spite of his respect for Nietzsche and Heidegger, Grant will follow Weil in taking up the burden of proof to show us how Socrates, for all his clever arguments, is not merely a calculating modernist. His 'contemplation' reaches far higher than logical gymnastics. Neither should we forget that Socrates and Plato—and even Aristotle[70]—practiced religion and consulted the oracles. All this to say, how we define Athens and Jerusalem predetermines if or how we synthesize them.

This was a critical issue from the point of Grant's conversion, for it included strong Platonic themes ('There is order' of Plato's Good) and a Christian core ('We are not our own' from Christ's 'Not my will'). Luckily, we have one of Grant's first attempts at defining and comparing Athens and Jerusalem in a speech from 1947, and his own critique of that speech from June 1988 (three months before his death). The original speech highlights the 'contradictions'; the latter emphasizes a greater synthesis. The shift in his thought clearly reveals the influence of Simone Weil's Christian Platonism and where Grant comes out on this problem of 'freedom' in the Bible. In précis form, I will outline how he modifies his position.

a. *Athens and Jerusalem in Early Grant*: In Grant's "Two Theological Languages," he first identifies 'Athens' as Greek rational theology, particularly in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. According to Grant, freedom in rational theology is the recognition, affirmation, and acceptance of necessity (i.e., our nature, truth, essence). He lists reason and desire as key words, for by reason we infer the highest Good (God) and we desire that Good. Greek freedom is the gift of truth, dependent on and inseparable from goodness and perfection of life.

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[69] Randy Pegg Peters, "Three Wise Men from the East: Eastern Orthodox Influences on George Grant," *Athens and Jerusalem* (2006), 240.

[70] Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1331a.

'Jerusalem,' for early Grant, represents biblical theology derived from the Old and New Testaments. In the Bible, he sees freedom as absolute, unfathomable, and experiential. Such freedom is prior to good and evil, in that the wicked are as free as the good. Their freedom is irrational, an encounter with decision, angst, and faith. Key words connected to biblical freedom are responsibility, guilt, sin, temptation, remorse, disobedience, and rebellion. Thus, the Bible's freedom is our existential reality, inseparable from responsibility.

While there are deep tensions in these two accounts, Grant cites some of the better attempts at synthesis: namely, Augustine and Tillich. He summarizes their bottom line agreeably with Augustine's statement, "Plato knew the whole truth of Christianity except the 'word became flesh.'"[71]

Grant then rejects the abandonment of either of the two accounts. Without rational theology, Biblicism can speak of abyss and mystery and tragedy, but becomes extremely irrational, unclear, and purely negative. He castigates modern biblical theologians as useless for any positive theology. Because they rend Christianity from reason, they retreat to positions of fideism and literalism impossible for moderns.

Conversely, without biblical language, rational theology inadequately explains the real and absolute moral responsibility of 'I should and could do other than I actually did.' It disregards or trivializes the problem of evil so that every rationalist theodicy ends up calling evil good. Grant defends a level of agnosticism without which we cannot adequately account for Christ's cry of dereliction (including the 'Why?' in our own hearts) as anything more than simple confusion.

He leaves off the speech with a call to theologians for a true synthesis of faith and reason. The post-war need is obvious to him, but he is doubtful that Canadian theologians will take up the task.

b. *Late Weilian Grant*: In the 1988 addendum to "Two Theological Languages," Grant expresses his sadness at making so many mistakes. His revisions greatly aid his synthesis. His first retraction is that his original definition of biblical faith was really just a description of modern existentialism. He believed he was mistaken in saying that biblical 'freedom' is *not* the gift of truth

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[71] Grant, "Two Theological Languages," *CW* 2: 56.

(as in Athens). After all, had not Christ said, 'The truth shall set you free.' He now sees that in both Socrates and Christ, freedom is given through truth. Therefore, biblical faith does not actually stand before good and evil as dual alternatives. With Augustine and Weil, Grant now understands evil as the absence of good, not the opposite of good. Therefore, freedom is redefined as the liberty to be indifferent to the Good. Again, this is both a Platonic and Christian truth, vis-à-vis the 'authentic freedom' of modern existentialism and heroic atheism.

Further, for Grant, 'grace' in both Christ and Plato means 'that the great things of our existing are given us, not made by us.' In this statement, we return to the heart of Grant's deconstruction of modernity, but we also see his complete revision of what 'Athens' and 'Jerusalem' mean to him. Athens is not simply philosophy or reason versus Jerusalem as religion or revelation or even the Bible. In an earlier work, Grant had said,

> Care must be taken that this truism is not turned into the idea that the origins of our 'rationality' are Greek, while we receive our 'religion' from the Bible. This is a distortion of our origins, because both among the Greeks and the Bible thought and reverence are sustained together.[72]

In fact, for Grant, Athens and Jerusalem are specifically Socrates and Christ, both heralds of the freedom-bringing truth of God's love—for which both are unjustly killed as just men. Yes, reason and revelation may be in tension, but ultimately share one truth. Grant's prescription for moderns is to rethink what we have been, are now, and will be. How? By looking to Socrates and Jesus.

Socrates asserts the transcendent distance between perfection and necessity, Creator and creation. The Cross of Christ *is* the distance and *bridges* that distance.[73]

All this is contra Heidegger and Nietzsche, who wish to go back beyond Socrates and renounce the Christian sense of revelation. The Socrates of Heidegger and Nietzsche could not abide the terror of the abyss and so imposed on it a rationalism of reason, virtue, and happiness. In their depiction, Plato founds the rationalism from which western technology came forth. They speak

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[72] Grant, *TH*, 29.
[73] See below in chapter 5, "Beholding the Sun." Cp. Weil, *NB* 1: 298.

contemptuously of the 'moral God of Christianity' and reject the revelation of the Gospel.

Grant rejects Heidegger's rejections of both the Gospels and the Dialogues, not only because Christ and Socrates were both contemplative thinkers (like Heidegger), but because they understood the necessity of love as a bridge from contemplation to ethics (unlike Heidegger and his pre-Socratics).

As for Socrates and Jesus of Nazareth, who is primary? In the end, Grant is a Christian. "Revelation is, after all, revelation. Either Christ is what he claims to be or is misguided to the point of lunacy. Existentially, Christ's death is closer to the heart of being. Take up your cross and follow me cuts to the heart of our existing and indeed to the heart of both being and goodness."[74]

Nevertheless, Weil helped Grant to see God in Plato, how Plato too taught faith—not the western faith of willful voluntarism or brittle confessionalism, but an experience of the sort Grant had stepped through personally. How does Plato illuminate Grant's experience?

ii. Experience: Grace–conversion–education

A careless read of *The Republic* may lead philosophy students to understand Plato's cave as a descriptive analogy of the painstaking course of education through which a rigorous mentor may take his students into rational enlightenment.

Truly, the cave provides a succinct glimpse into the deeper workings of Socratic education, but this 'education' is unfamiliar to moderns because its central features are conversion and grace. Its goal is a liberating encounter with the transcendent.

a. *Conversion: The soul's turning.* In early, unpublished classnotes on Plato's cave, Grant scrawls, "What liberates [from the cave] – grace and free will – one of the great arguments of history. How Plato comes out [of the cave] – *conversion.*"[75]

For Plato, education is not about possessing, producing, or imparting some vision of the truth. Rather, it is about turning (*converting* – μεταστρέφω[76]) the eye of the soul from the darkness towards the light of Reality. This turning of the eye

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[74] Grant, "Two Theological Languages," *CW* 2: 62.
[75] Grant, "Dalhousie Classnotes on Plato," *MSO*, 206.
[76] Plato, *Republic*, 518d.

is helpful or harmful depending on the direction of its *conversion* (περιαγωγή[77]). It is best of all (of divine quality) when we turn our whole lives, body and soul, to 'the vision of the soul' (τῆς ψυχῆς ὄψιν)—"a *conversion* (περιστρέφω) towards the things that are real and true."[78]

Socrates (as cited by Weil) says,

> Do not suppose that education is what some people proclaim it is, for they assert that they can put knowledge into a soul which does not possess it, as though they were putting sight into blind eyes. But our argument has shown that the faculty of learning and the organ of this faculty exist in every soul. But it exists there like an eye which cannot be turned towards the light and away from the shadows unless the whole body turns with it. In the same way it is with the whole soul that one must turn away from becoming (from the temporal) until it becomes able to bear the contemplation of reality (τὸ ὄν) and of what is most luminous in reality, namely the good. So what is required here is a method of conversion, providing the easiest and most effective way of changing the soul's direction. It is not at all a method for putting vision into the soul. For the soul already possesses vision but does not direct it rightly; it does not look in the right direction, and that is what has to be brought about.[79]

The cave analogy expands on this conversion. After our initial turn from the shadows, a journey ensues towards the cave door, where we finally escape into the light. Grant could relate to this. His conversion day was in some ways the immediate breaking of chains and initial turn. There was also a sudden epiphany akin to the prisoner's emergence into the light. Yet his long journey out of the barrenness of progressive liberalism also involved many years of contemplation. Speaking of Grant's conversion, Cayley reports, "This was the central experience of Grant's life, the pivot on which all his thinking would finally turn, but not all

[77] Plato, *Republic*, 518e.
[78] Plato, *Republic*, 519b. Note too that μετάνοια, 'conversion' is a changing of the *nous*. To modern commentators it is literally 'changing the mind,' as if this referred to a change of opinion or belief. But redirecting the gaze of the *nous* means much more in the Platonic model.
[79] Weil, *SNL*, 104 (citing Plato, *Republic*, 7.518b–d).

the consequences were immediately evident. He still had to learn, as he said, how to think about what had happened to him."[80]

Freedom from chains, a journey, and an escape—but conversion is also a kind of death. On this, naturally, Weil has much to say:

> Therefore, in order to turn the eyes towards God the entire soul has to turn away from the things which are born and perish, ... The entire soul—including therefore its sentient and carnal part which is rooted in the things of sense and draws life from them. It must be uprooted. And this is death. And this death is what conversion is.[81]

b. *Grace: The soul's awakening.* In the west, when conversion language is dominated by turning (repenting) and journeying (discipleship), we easily lapse back into voluntarism. After all, *I* turned, *I* changed, *I* chose, *I* converted—the language of will and of ego. But we must not miss the element of grace. *Charis* is not used in any of the three great analogies, but it also appears only rarely in the Gospels. Yet Grant and Weil make explicit the implicit grace of the cave parable. Athanasiadis writes,

> Plato's allegory of the cave, one that was pivotal for the thought of both Weil and Grant, relates how the soul is *awakened by divine grace* toward the good. It makes the painful journey (in the language of dying) out of the cave of shadows and illusions, which is the reality of life in the world, into the sunlight of the knowledge of and union with the good.[82]

In an interview with William Christian, Grant reflects on how grace breaks the chains:

> In a way, Platonism is a great language of *grace*, isn't it, and in that sense it is a two-way street. If Platonism is a matter of *grace*, and the breaking

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[80] Cayley, *GC*, 7. Cf. A. James Reimer, "Grant: Liberal, Socialist, Conservative?" *GP*, 51.

[81] Weil, *SNL*, 106.

[82] Athanasiadis, *Theology of the Cross* (2001), 250.

of the chains, [we must ask] who breaks the chains? This is the side that brings it close to Christianity, isn't it?[83]

Weil concurs. She refers to a '*violent grace*,' expressed in the breaking chains and the one dragging our prisoner through the cave. On the one hand, it is 'grace' because the prisoner was entirely unaware of the delusion, powerless to break the chains, and unwilling or unable to make the journey (hence, dragging). A third party is necessary to find and 'save' the prisoner and to bring him or her into the light. This is reminiscent of Christ's parable of the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine, searching for the lamb lost in the brambles *until he finds it*.

At the same time, it is 'violent' because the agent of grace is often not a kind teacher like Socrates or Alain. The breaking and dragging can take the form of life's (i.e., Weil's) afflictions and contradictions—perhaps war, persecution, or exile. Maybe the violence is demoralizing labour in a factory or a life-threatening illness. In the analogy, something wakes us up and gets us moving; in life, it is often that which arrests our frenetic ambling and forces us to become contemplative (e.g., Weil's migraines).

Finally, the sun and its sight-granting light are also grace. Vision (i.e., knowledge) is dependent on the gift of light (i.e., truth) from the sun (i.e., God) that grants sight (i.e., illumination) to our eyes (i.e., soul). Weil makes a straightforward correspondence: the sun = God = grace.[84] The "locus of Weil's Platonic experience of grace" is to behold the sun—that is, to receive the 'revelation' of truth that surpasses pure reason.[85] Thus, for Weil, the summit of all knowing is an experience of grace-given revelation. She says, "The wisdom of

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[83] Grant, "George Grant and Religion (Conversation with William Christian)," *CW* 4: 764. Cf. William Christian, "Waiting for Grace: Philosophy and Politics in Plato's *Republic*," *Canadian Journal of Political Studies* 21.1 (Mar. 1988): 57–82.

[84] Weil, *NB* 1: 184. Also,

> Although Plato expresses himself in strictly impersonal terms, this good which is the author of both intelligibility and of the being of truth is nothing other than God. But Plato uses the word *author* so as to indicate that God is a person. To act is to be a person. By using the expression 'the good' when he refers to God, Plato expresses as strongly as it is possible to do that for men God is the object to which love directs itself. (Weil, *SNL*, 104).

[85] Emmanuel Gabellieri, "Reconstructing Platonism: The Trinitarian Metaxology of Simone Weil," *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil* (2004), 138.

Plato is not a philosophy, a search for God through human reason. ... Plato's wisdom is nothing short of the turning of the soul towards grace."[86]

I would add that the grace in Grant and Weil's system surpasses that of Plato's, because Christian love makes knowledge of God accessible to anyone who gives themselves to love, and requires no special feats of intelligence.[87] True, Plato said that every soul has vision if it would but turn to the light (*Republic* 7.518b–d), but he seems to expect only a few philosophers to experience the sunshine of the Real. By contrast, Weil imagines factory workers who, through love, emerge from the cave while academy philosophers may remain trapped within it.[88]

c. *Education: the soul's freedom.* If Plato's epistemology is fulfilled in a grace conversion, then we need to recheck the Platonic role and definition of 'education' in this experience. Its major focus is freedom: not freedom as will-to-power, but as the mind freed to know the Good. According to Grant, for Plato:

- Education is defined as bringing distortions to consciousness. To move "*ex umbris et imaginibus in vertatem*"[89] involves continually bringing to consciousness all the distortions which are bound to be present from one's individual and social history.[90]

- Education is defined as truth leading us to freedom—the only end that education can ever have—to lead men as Augustine said, "*Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem,*" or, as Our Lord said, "The truth shall make you free."[91]

- Education is defined as freeing the finite mind chained by ignorance into the sunlight of knowledge, which is the radiance of God.

[86] Weil, *SG*, 89. Translated in Michel Narcy, "The Limits and Significance of Simone Weil's Platonism," *The Christian Platonism of Simone* Weil (2004), 30.

[87] Grant, "Conversation: Theology and History," *GP*, 106–7.

[88] Robert Chenavier, "Simone Weil: Completing Platonism through a Consistent Materialism," *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil* (2004), 65.

[89] On [Cardinal Newman's] epitaph we read: *Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem* (From shadows and symbols goes the truth); it is the doctrine of the Economy, which goes back to Plato's 'Republic' (bk. VII) and which passed thence by way of Christian Alexandria into the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, the poetry of the Florentine, and the schools of Oxford. (William Barry, "John Henry Newman." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1911).

[90] Grant, "Religion and the State," *CW* 3: 504.

[91] Grant, "Adult Education in the Expanding Economy," *CW* 2: 108. Quoting John 8:32.

As a lifelong educator and perennial critic of the western philosophy of education, Grant was consistent in defining classical education after the pattern of the cave analogy. That is, education is for the purpose of freedom. Three examples are notable:

> In all the great traditions of the world, both western and eastern, which arose about 500 BC, education was defined in the following way. It was the way that men became free—that is, the journey of the mind beyond all myths out of the shadows and imaginings into the truth. This freeing of finite mind from the chains of illusion was the purpose of life and by definition its goal was infinite.[92]

> The very word education comes, as you know, from an allegory of Plato's. He describes human beings as chained in a dark cave, and their lives as the struggle to free themselves by knowledge from the chains of ignorance which bind them, and to struggle up out of the cave into the sunlight of knowledge which is the radiance of God. *Educo*—to lead out. As Jesus put it brilliantly, 'The truth shall make you free.'[93]

> The very word education reminds us of Plato's archetypal allegory of the cave, wherein human existence is described as the movement out of the shadows and imaginings of ignorance into the sunlight of knowledge. I do not use the word knowledge, as is generally done in our pragmatic age, to mean the understanding's manipulation of the world for its own purposes. I use it rather as any means that brings the human spirit to self-consciousness.[94]

Modern education by contrast, according to Grant, can be critiqued in terms of the cave: "Now in the new capitalist democratic society dominated by the pursuit of economic success ... [w]here the end of the old education was to free men so that

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[92] Grant, "Adult Education in the Expanding Economy," *CW* 2: 102.

[93] Grant, "The Teaching Profession in an Expanding Economy," *CW* 2: 183. Cp. Grant, "On Education," *CW* 2: 432; *CW* 4: 937. Cf. Athanasiadis, *Theology of the Cross* (2001), 86.

[94] Grant, "Philosophy and Adult Education," *CW* 2: 68.

they were out of the cave; the purpose today is to equip them to be successes in the cave."[95]

iii. Intelligence: The history of *nous*

We have seen that for Grant (and Weil), Plato's idea of knowledge is more than the accumulation, analysis, and application of data. It is a grace-experience involving the conversion and education of the soul on its journey towards ultimate truth or the Good. The faculty of the soul designated for illumination and designed to perceive the Good in Plato is the *nous*—commonly translated 'intelligence.'

The disparity between classical, modern, and postmodern epistemology can be illustrated by the semantic history of the *nous/noein* word-group, and the morphing translations applied to it. The words we use to translate *nous* radically affect our understanding of Plato; they also expose the ideologies of the translators. Grant says,

> Most modern students of the philosopher start with the presupposition that since they came later than Plato in time they must be able to judge that thinker from a superior height. The result of such a standpoint is that instead of seeing what Plato thought, they say that he was really saying what he ought to have said if he was a modern intellectual.[96]

To see this, we can learn from Heidegger's etymological work (especially in *What is Called Thinking?*) and see how our definition of *nous* can alter our perception of Plato, knowledge and reality.[97] By Heidegger's account of *nous-noein*, the intellect-intelligence used to be the contemplative heart while now intelligence has been conflated with reason-rationality. What was 'intelligible' included all the higher forms *not* available to reason, while now it is synonymous with the reasonable.

Before, an 'intellectual' was the philosopher who had escaped the cave to behold the Good, while now it generally refers to the academic whose vocation is

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[95] Grant, "The Teaching Profession in an Expanding Economy," *CW* 2: 184.
[96] Grant, "Introduction to Simone Weil," *CW* 4: 797–8.
[97] For an extended etymology of *nous*, see Jersak, *MSO*, 65–79.

working with reason and abstraction—calculating, technologically mastering[98]—vis-à-vis the experiential and emotional.

Grant and Weil do typically translate Plato's *nous* as 'intelligence,' and although their ambiguity can annoy, they are consistent in assigning its ancient meaning on the condition that it is illumined by love.

To the ancients, *nous* was the faculty that surpassed reason. To moderns, *nous* is the faculty of reason. To the ancients, *nous* was synonymous to *kardia* (heart). Now they are typically treated as opposites. The modern *nous* becomes the very calculating tool of technology that the ancient *nous* could transcend.

To Heidegger, the semantic decomposition of *nous-noein* and *logos-legein* from meditative faculties and functions into calculation and control illustrates the modern deterioration for thinking qua thinking. If there is a 'decline of the West,' if there is a 'loss of center,'—if, as Nietzsche said, "The wasteland grows,"—it is that "in our thought-provoking time, we are still not thinking."[99]

Heidegger insists that when our translations thrust aside the original Greek meaning, it is neither harmless nor accidental, but rather, destroys the philosophical force of the Greek word.[100] By comparing originary words with current usage, Heidegger uncovers what has been deformed or excluded, in this case our capacity to think contemplatively. Rediscovering original meaning may call or direct us to recovering ways of thinking/thanking buried by technological culture.

Here I want to address two problems that Heidegger uncovers for Grant; the second Heidegger did not see clearly for himself.

First, *epistemology forms ontology*: Ancients, moderns, and postmoderns alike acknowledge *nous* as the height of knowing. The problem is that whatever meaning an era assigns to *nous* becomes the height of knowing. When *nous* is contemplation, contemplation is the height. When *nous* is reason, reason is king.

The problem, as we saw earlier, is that our epistemology defines our ontology. That is, excluding knowledge precludes reality. Or, the focus of our highest 'knowing' tends to set the limits of ultimate reality. When modernity

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[98] The whole modern misapprehension of *nous* is summarized in the drawing below of a supreme calculator, oddly titled by the artist, '*nous*.' Heidegger can rest his case.
[99] Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (1968), 28–30.
[100] Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1959), 13.

elevated rationalism to the status of *nous*, the height of knowing, then technology took the throne. That which we once contemplated vaporized. Or with Nietzsche, we would say, 'God is dead.'

The Modern Idea of *Nous*

Second, moderns seem guilty of *anachronism* pictured to the left, where the artist entitled the drawing "*Nous.*"[101] Even granting all the claims of modern materialism, accepting rationalism as our driving epistemology, Grant found it inexcusable that translators should impose the modern idea of *nous* as calculative reason upon ancient texts, thus misrepresenting what they taught.

This becomes most obvious if we recall Plato's analogy of the divided line. In the divided line, Plato describes the ascending spectrum of reality, along with the corresponding faculty for apprehending each object. Grant explains:

> The Divided Line: it is [Plato's] account of what it is to know, and what may be known in the long struggle of our lives from the shadows and imaginings of childhood into the highest knowledge of what fits us for what we are fitted for. A simple image for his epistemology – *episteme*, *logos*. To use other language, '*Itinerarum Mentis is Deum*'[102] from the 13th century. This is what the line is.[103]

As I chart Grant's interpretation of Plato's divided line, here is his epistemology:

Existence	Objects Known	Way of Knowing
Beyond Being	*agathon* – The Good	*noesis* / *epistêmê* (knowledge, understanding)
Intelligible world – *noêton* /	*eidos* – Forms	

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[101] "Nous," in Manolis Papathanassiou (ed.), *Γνωμικολογικον*, 2008–11.
[102] A reference to St. Bonaventure's *The Soul's (Mind's) Journey into God* (1259).
[103] Grant, "Five Lectures on Christianity," *CW* 4: 936–7.

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Eternal / Being	Abstract mathematical objects (numbers, lines)	*daianoia* (thought, reasoning)
Visible world – *horaton* Sensible / Temporal / Becoming	Perceived objects (physical things)	*pistis* (belief, confidence)
	eikones, homoiôtha (images, likeness, shadows, reflections)	*eikasia* (opinion, conjecture, illusion)

Various tweaks aside, the aggravating problem is how to translate the right column, because to err there throws off one's whole understanding of Plato's worldview.

Two simple exercises illustrate the problem. First, one need only compare translations of the *Republic* and note how translators render Plato's use of *nous* and *noein*. For example,

> And now, answering to these four sections, assume these four affections occurring in the soul: *intellection* [γιγνόμενα] or **reason** [νόησιν] for the highest, *understanding* [διάνοιαν] for the second; assign *belief* [πίστιν] to the third, and to the last picture – *thinking or conjecture* [εἰκασίαν].[104]

This standard translation reads *noeisis* as 'reason,' making reason the 'highest affection of the soul'! A domino effect begins: the higher forms become intelligible through discursive reason, and Plato's dialectic is now reduced to logical arguments through dialogue.

The same issue is illustrated by combing the many available tables[105] outlining Plato's divided line to see whether 'reason' is coupled with *noeisis* or with *daianoia* in the table. The results of a cursory survey are not encouraging. Happily, one such table takes both the ancient use of *nous* and the mystical elements in Plato seriously.[106]

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[104] Plato, *The Republic* (1969), 6.511d–e.

[105] The reader need only browse internet images for 'Plato' and 'Divided Line' for a comparison of popular renditions of *nous*.

[106] Andreas Mannal, *Wisdom Point: Plato–Divided Line*.

Nature of Knowledge
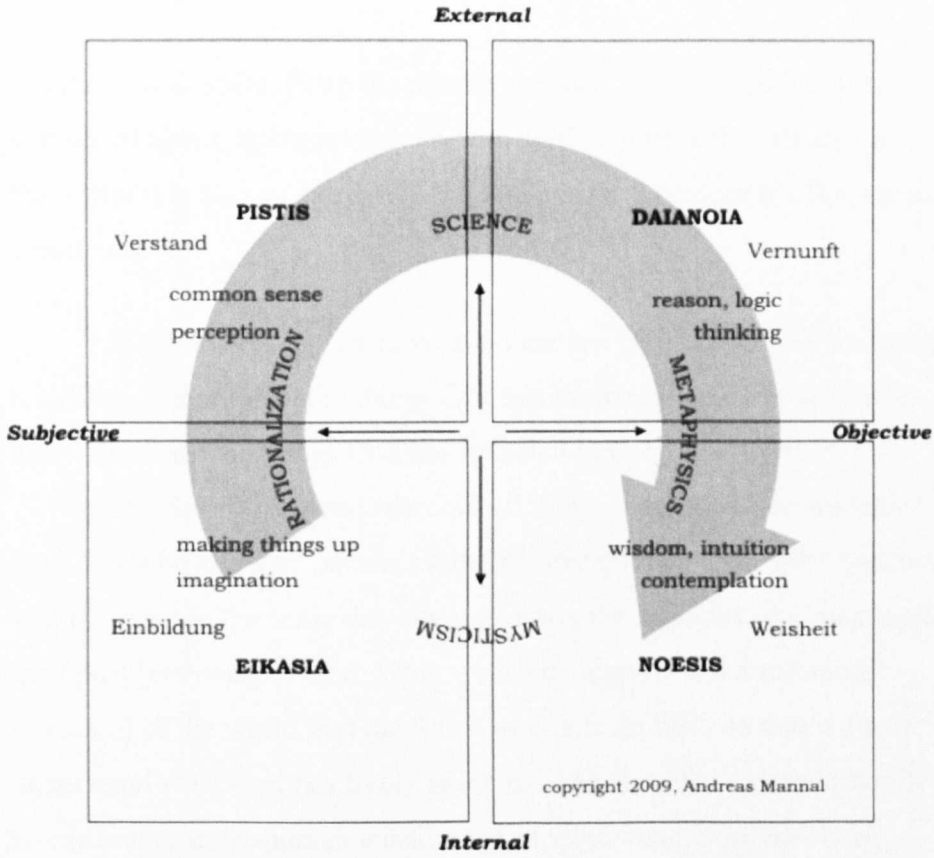
As in this figure, Grant's Plato consistently assigns reason/logic its penultimate place as *daianoia*, dealing with mathematical or deductive reasoning. *Nous* is reserved for direct knowledge (*episteme*) of the higher forms and first principles (*archai*), including the Good itself. In fact, the transcendence of the Good places it beyond the grasp of reason, beyond being itself, such that humankind only experiences the Good because humanity too is partly transcendent—that transcendent part of the soul is the *nous*. Thus, when Weil translates Plato directly in *On Science*, she does not use 'reason' or even 'intelligence' for *nous*, but 'spirit':

> Parentheses on νοῦς and νοντός:
> 'I called the sun the offspring of the good, engendered by the good as something analogous to itself. For in the spiritual (νοντός) [note 'spiritual' vs. 'intelligible'] world the good is to the spirit (νοῦς) [French: *esprit*] and

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to spiritual things (νοούμενα) what the sun is in the visible world to vision and visible objects.[107]

By translating *nous* as spirit, Plato the mystic becomes evident: spirit is that which partakes of Spirit, Spirit reveals itself to spirit, Spirit and spirit are one. This is Plato. But it is also an extremely Pauline notion. Consider his first epistle to the Corinthians:

> What 'no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived'—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.
>
> The Spirit [*pneuma*] searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit [*pneuma*] within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit [*pneuma*] of God. What we have received is not the spirit [*pneuma*] of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, "Who has known the mind [νοῦν] of the Lord so as to instruct him?"
>
> But we have the mind [νοῦν] of Christ.[108]
>
> But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.[109]

In this text, *pneuma* (spirit) and *nous* are used interchangeably. So it is for Grant or Weil: as Christian Platonists, whether Plato is a proto-Christian or Paul is a Platonist, one can easily see the 'wall of partition' between Greeks and Jews

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[107] Weil, *SNL*, 102.

[108] 1 Cor. 2:9–16 (NIV). Note: capitalization of Spirit/spirit is interpretative.

[109] 1 Cor. 6:17 (NASB).

being demolished (Eph. 2:14–17) to make way for a synthesis of Athens and Jerusalem.

iv. Illumined: The sun and the eyes that see it

Sun and sunlight have long been the universal language for the means and ends of epistemology. We talk of enlightenment and illumination. We say, 'I've seen the light!' Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Moslems, and Christians all appropriated enlightenment language long before modernity trademarked it. And if Plato teaches us anything about epistemology, it is that knowledge depends on the illumination of the eye of soul.

a. *The Sun that illumines*. To Plato, the most anti-modern fact is obvious: we do not illuminate ourselves. It is something that happens to us. Nor are we the source of our own light: we see something, some reality that he compares to the Sun—he calls it the Good, and describes it in ways that the religious know as 'God.'

Plato's analogy of the sun[110] in *The Republic* is just one of many examples he uses involving the sun or light to illustrate epistemic illumination. Grant summarizes:

> How do we come to have knowledge of God, or Goodness Itself? Clearly, what we mean by what fits us for what we are fitted for has been traditionally called 'God.' ...
>
> *The Sun*: to explain what he means by the Good, he uses a simple example from the world of sight. The sun is the cause of light and the cause of our eyes. (There could not be animals on this planet with eyes if there was not the sun.) The sun is the cause of our seeing, both as the cause of our eyes and of the light, and he says that it is a good image of what Goodness Itself is in the world of the mind. (Sight – love. Love and knowledge – their relation).[111]

So for Plato, the sun is the image of the highest form, the Good Itself. The Good is not only the highest focus of the soul's vision—of *nous*—but the source of vision itself. Grant found it fascinating that Plato regarded the sun as not only

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[110] Plato, *The Republic* (1969), 507b–509c.
[111] Grant, "Five Lectures on Christianity," *CW* 4: 936–7.

producing light, but indirectly, creating vision itself, as evolutionary science would affirm.

So too in the cave analogy, the sun represents for Plato the height of what is (the Good Itself) and what can be known (through contemplation):

> And if you assume that the ascent and the contemplation of the things above is the soul's ascension to the intelligible region, you will not miss my surmise, since that is what you desire to hear. But God knows whether it is true. But, at any rate, my dream as it appears to me is that in the region of the known the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of good, and that when seen it must needs point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason, and that anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this.[112]

For Grant, this is the *telos* of all contemplation, the unveiling of all truth: Plato is so clearly describing what we mean by 'God' in 'the Good' that to deny the identification voids either term of their meaning. Again, according to Grant,

> *The Republic* is a book in which Socrates discusses with some friends the question: What is justice? These passages [the sun and the cave] you are reading are the height of the book, in which he discusses the divine. Let me say when in these passages the Good or Goodness itself is talked about it is just another language for what we call God. Indeed the passages are the most famous philosophic writings on God in Western history.[113]

Grant is *not* squeezing Plato's 'Good' into his Christian theology, so much as saying that we all may do well to bring our ideas of God into conformity with Plato's model of finding our greatest happiness and deepest desire satisfied in the Good:

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[112] Plato, *The Republic* (1969), 517b–c.
[113] Grant, "Five Lectures on Christianity," *CW* 4: 936–7.

Happiness is that in which not this or that part of ourselves will be satisfied, but in which we as total beings will be satisfied. In terms of that distinction between pleasure and happiness, the Good Itself is both that which makes the world intelligible and the mind intelligent, that it is the cause of knowledge and also the highest end of desire.

This is indeed what the word, 'God' has meant in the Western world, – the cause of knowledge and the highest end of desire. And that is said most clearly in what he says about the sun.[114]

In other words, for both Grant and Weil, 'God' may *not* be many things that we see in religion, including certain texts in the Christian Scriptures; in the religion of Augustine, Aquinas, or Calvin; or in modern liberal 'faith.' But they do not doubt that God *is* the Good described by Plato: utterly righteous (just), holy, and wise,[115] the architect, maker, and father of the universe.[116] Plato's God is Good and all God does is goodness, including setting the *nous* within the creature and the cosmos with which to reflect God's goodness and beauty.[117] Few liturgies soar as high as this statement in Plato's *Timaeus*:

[29b] Let us now state the Cause wherefore He that constructed it [29e] constructed Becoming and the All. He was good, and in him that is good no envy ariseth ever concerning anything; and being devoid of envy He desired that all should be, so far as possible, like unto Himself. This principle, then, we shall be wholly right in accepting from men of wisdom as being above all the supreme originating principle of Becoming and the Cosmos.

[30a] For God desired that, so far as possible, all things should be good and nothing evil; wherefore, when He took over all that was visible, seeing that it was not in a state of rest but in a state of discordant and disorderly motion, He brought it into order out of disorder, deeming that the former state is in all ways better than the latter. For Him who is most

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[114] Grant, "Five Lectures on Christianity," *CW* 4: 939.
[115] Plato, *Theaetetus* (1921), 176a–c.
[116] Plato, *Timeaus* (1925), 28c–29a.
[117] Plato, *Timaeus* (1925), 29d–30b.

good it neither was nor is permissible to perform any action save what is most fair.

[30b] None that is irrational will be fairer, comparing wholes with wholes, than the [νοῦς]; and further, that [voῦv] cannot possibly belong to any apart from Soul. So because of this reflection He constructed [voῦv] within soul and soul within body as He fashioned the All, that so the work He was executing might be of its nature most fair and most good. Thus, then, in accordance with the likely account, we must declare that this Cosmos has verily come into existence as a Living Creature endowed with soul and reason owing to the providence of God.[118]

Moreover, this Good/God was for Grant and Weil, one and the same Reality they experienced firsthand in Bermondsey and Marseilles. Their 'enlightenment' was of the Good as God and God as the Good.[119]

b. *The eye that sees*. The Sun that shines must find an eye to see it. Plato refers frequently to the faculty that truly sees (the νοῦς) in terms of the 'eye of the soul'[120] (sometimes badly translated as 'intellectual vision'). For now, we will posit 'seeing' as a metaphor for knowing in Plato's levels. Indeed, the correspondence is imbedded in the language. Heidegger says,

> Plato in Book VI already distinguishes two basic types of knowledge, αἴσθησις and νοῦς, i.e., seeing (ὁρᾶν) in the usual sense (sensory perception), and voεῖv, comprehending perceiving (non-sensory seeing). To these two types of seeing there correspond two regions of the visible: ὁρώμενα, what is accessible to the eyes, the senses, and voούμενα, which is graspable in pure understanding.[121]

So Plato draws a correspondence between the physical eyes that see visible objects and the spiritual eyes that see the invisible forms/ideas. Further, a two-fold empowering (*dunamis*) must be present: the power to see and the power to be

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[118] Plato, *Timaeus* (1925), 29d–30b.

[119] Weil, *NB* 2: 515, 539; Weil, *FLN*, 89, 243, 248.

[120] On the turning of the eye of the soul as knowledge in Plato see *The Republic* 519b, 521c, 533c; *Symposium* 219a; *Theaetetus* 164a; *Sophist* 254a; *Phaedo* 66e.

[121] Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth: On Plato's Cave Allegory and Theaetetus*. (2004), 73.

seen. Moreover, these two faculties are not simply juxtaposed. One source empowers each of them, 'harnessing them under one yoke.' Heidegger explains,

> This yoke, which makes possible the reciprocal connectedness of each to the other, is φῶς, brightness, light. Only what lies in the light of the sun is visible; on the other hand, only the eye whose looking is illuminated by light (the illuminated view) sees the visible. The looking eye, however, is not the sun. Instead, in must be, as Plato says, like the sun, ἡλιοειδής ...
>
> ... Here also there must be a yoke between higher seeing (νοεῖν) and what is visible in it (νοούμενον), a yoke which gives the δύναμις to the perceiving.[122]

That yoke, that which enables the higher seeing, and corresponds to light for the eyes, is *aletheia*—truth. And the source of the light of truth is the Sun, the Good.[123]

Similarly, John's gospel opens with the announcement that in Christ, "The true light [φῶς τό ἀληθινόν] that gives light to everyone was coming into the world" (John 1:9). Those who 'see' recognize and receive him as 'the true light.' Thus in John 9, Jesus heals 'a man born blind,' who believes in him as the truth sent from God. But Jesus then rebukes the Pharisees, for the blind man had truly come to see, while those who claimed to see (i.e., know), were blind (failed to perceive and believe) to the light of truth.

Likewise, Paul prays for the Ephesians, that the 'eyes of their hearts would be opened' to 'a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God' (Eph. 1:15–23). He tells the Corinthians,

> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, *beholding as in a mirror* (contemplating) the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17–18, NASB).

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[122] Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth* (2004), 74.
[123] Cf. Plato, *The Republic*, 508–9.

So too, the Jesus of John's *Apocalypse* counsels the churches, "Get eye-salve so that you may see" (Rev. 3:18), then immediately issues the command to *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock"* (Rev. 3:20). John says (in 4:1–2), *"So I looked, and there was a door standing open"* into the throne room of God.

Nor is the NT alone in agreement with Plato's 'eye of the soul.' E. F. Schumacher gathers this helpful sampling in his *Guide to the Perplexed*:[124]

> As the Buddhists say, faith opens "the eye of truth," also called "the Eye of the Heart" or "the Eye of the Soul." Saint Augustine insisted that "our whole business in this life is to restore to health the eye of the heart whereby God may be seen." Persia's greatest Sufi poet, Rumi (1207–1273), speaks of "the eye of the heart, which is seventy-fold and of which these two sensible eyes are only the gleaners";[125] while John Smith the Platonist advises: "We must shut the eyes of sense, and open that brighter eye of our understandings, that other eye of the soul, as the philosopher calls our intellectual faculty, 'which indeed all have, but few make use of it.'"[126] The Scottish theologian, Richard of Saint Victor (d. 1173), says: "For the outer sense alone perceives visible things and the eye of the heart alone sees the invisible."[127]
>
> The power of "the Eye of the Heart," which produces *insight*, is vastly superior to the power of thought, which produces *opinions*. "Recognizing the poverty of philosophical opinions," says the Buddha, "not adhering to any of them, seeing the truth, *I saw.*"[128]

It is not that the 'eyes of the heart' are illumined to see God/Good alone. They are also enlightened to see beauty, truth, and justice here in the world. Whatever the sun can shine upon becomes an object for us to see it *in itself, in its reality*. The eye of the soul is opened to see to the heart of things and others—their essence,

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[124] E. F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (1977), 47.

[125] Note in Schumacher: Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Mathnawi,* Vol. 4 . Gibb Memorial Series (London, 1926–34).

[126] Note in Schumacher: John Smith the Platonist, *Select Discourses,* (London, 1821).

[127] Note in Schumacher: Richard of Saint-Victor, *Selected Writings on Contemplation* (London, 1957).

[128] Note in Schumacher: Suttanipata, IV, ix, 3.

their form, what they are in the mind of God. So far, so good, but here again, Grant and Weil may still surprise us.

v.   Love: Love as truly seeing and truly knowing

Grant and Weil were convinced that in Plato, it is not enough for the heart's eye (the *nous*) to behold the Sun (the Good). Just as without light the eye sees nothing, so without love the soul perceives nothing. They teach that the eye of the intellect must be illumined and directed by love. Says Grant,

> The close connection between Socrates and Christ lies in the fact that Socrates is the primal philosophic teacher of the dependence of what we know on what we love. ... In [the sun, the line and cave] sight is used as a metaphor for love. Our various journeys out of the shadows and imaginings of opinion into the truth depend on the movements of our minds through love into the loveable.[129]

In Weil's *On Science*, she describes the intelligence as vision and its right orientation as supernatural love. Elsewhere Grant and Weil make 'sight' a metaphor for love. At other times they take a further, and perhaps surprising, leap: love itself *is* a faculty higher than the *nous*. As cited from Weil earlier, Plato's oft-used expression, 'eye of the soul' *is* love that alone enables us to behold the Good:

> The organ in us through which we see truth is the intelligence; the organ in us through which we see God is love. ... In the case of truths. But the eye of the soul for the contemplation of the divine is love.[130]

For Weil, Plato's central idea is that Love reaches out in love and love alone receives Love:

> *The Republic, Phaedrus, The Symposium*. Plato uses images. The fundamental idea of these images is that love is the disposition of the soul to which grace is given, which alone is able to receive grace, love and

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[129] Grant, *TJ*, 73.
[130] Weil, *NB* 1: 240.

none other than love. Love of God is the root and foundation of Platonic philosophy.

> Fundamental idea: Love, oriented toward itself, as object that is to say, perfection, makes contact with the only absolutely real reality. Protagoras said: 'Man is the measure of all things.' Plato replies: 'Nothing imperfect is the measure of anything.' (*Rep.*, VI, 504a). And: 'God is the measure of all things.' (*Laws*, IV, 716c).[131]

Beyond that, the light coming from the Good is love—even Love incarnate sent by the Good to make and fill the eye of the soul with light (i.e., love). Thus, from beginning to end, love from God and for God is the key to and the aim of all knowing. We hear this mediatory love in Plato, especially in *The Symposium*, where after Socrates' friends have delivered a series of presentations on love, Socrates recounts his dialogue with Diotima on the nature of *eros*. We pick up the conversation with Diotima:

> [202d] "'But you have admitted that Love, from lack of good and beautiful things, desires these very things that he lacks.'
>
> "'Yes, I have.'
>
> "'How then can he be a god, if he is devoid of things beautiful and good?'
>
> "'By no means, it appears.'
>
> "'So you see,' she said, 'you are a person who does not consider Love to be a god.'
>
> "'What then,' I asked, 'can Love be? A mortal?'
>
> "'Anything but that.'
>
> [202e] "'Well what?'
>
> "'As I previously suggested, between a mortal and an immortal.'
>
> "'And what is that, Diotima?'
>
> "'A great spirit, Socrates: for the whole of the spiritual is between divine and mortal.'
>
> "'Possessing what power?' I asked.
>
> "'Interpreting and transporting human things to the gods and divine things to men; entreaties and sacrifices from below, and ordinances and requitals

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[131] Weil, *IC*, 88.

from above: being midway between, it makes each to supplement the other, so that the whole is combined in one. Through it are conveyed all divination and priestcraft concerning sacrifice and ritual [203a] and incantations, and all soothsaying and sorcery. *God with man does not mingle: but the spiritual is the means of all society and converse of men with gods and of gods with men*, whether waking or asleep ... """[132]

The basic argument summarized: if God and humans cannot co-mingle, how might divine revelation reach the world, and how might our prayers and worship penetrate the heavens? It requires a mediator that can cross the divide and bring them together. Diotima reveals that mediator as love. By love, God knows us and we know God. That is, love = truly seeing = truly knowing. No wonder Christian Platonists from Paul to Grant saw Socrates' love exegeted in the life of Christ. Jesus of Nazareth is taken as love incarnate and mediator between God and people. Faith is 'seeing-in-love' God and neighbour as Christ did (the true justice), and especially through the Passion narratives. Grant and Weil are of one mind here:

> Grant was deeply influenced here by the work of Simone Weil, who sought to read Plato in the light of the Gospels. According to Weil, "Faith is the experience that the intelligence is enlightened by love." ... For Grant, faith is about "seeing" the world in and through love. Love or Charity is the apprehension of otherness, not simply as otherness, but also as beautiful. It is in this apprehension that Justice is made beautiful and so takes one beyond recognition of the natural law to the actual affirmation of other natures as beautiful in their otherness. This, for Grant, is what is revealed in Plato's dialogues, but still more fully in the Gospels of Christ—and unsurpassably, in his crucifixion.[133]

Thus, for Grant and Weil, as for Socrates (esp. in *Symposium*) and Christ (esp. in Johannine literature) love is the heart of the matter. As it relates to epistemology, knowledge comes through *eros* (love of the good), rather than mastery (nature on

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[132] Plato, *Symposium* (1925), 202d–203a.
[133] Neil G. Robertson, "George Grant: intimations of deprival, intimations of beauty," *Modern Age* (2010): 77.

the rack). God/Goodness draws us into the light of knowledge by love and we respond to the light by love. So for Grant, love is the hermeneutical key to *The Republic* analogies:

> Plato uses the image of the sun, the line and the cave to write of the journey of the mind into knowledge. In those images *sight is used as a metaphor for love*. Our various journeys out of the shadows and imaginings of opinion into the truth depend on the movements of our minds through love into the lovable. ... What is given us and draws from us our loving is goodness itself; the perfection of all purposes which has been called God.[134]

Now this is precisely where Grant says 'no' to Heidegger and 'yes' to Weil. Grant explains what Heidegger has failed to see in Plato: he fails to see 'sight' as love; he fails to see the source of love (God) outside the cave; and he fails to see the dependence of justice on that source. That is, love is the key to ascent in all of Plato's epistemology. To miss this, according to Grant, throws Heidegger's vision of Plato back into the shadows.

> The extraordinarily powerful and pain-filled language used by Plato concerning the breaking of the chains, the climb out of the cave into the light of the sun and the return to the cave, are all related to the virtue of justice and its dependence upon the sun. This is absent from Heidegger's commentary. From his translation and commentary one would not understand that in the Sun, the Line and the Cave, the *metaphor of sight is to be taken as love*. That which we love and which is the source of our love is outside the cave, but it is the possibility of the fire in the cave and of the virtues which make possible the getting out of the cave.[135]

vi. Analysis: The impact of love on knowledge

Grant's total commitment to the Weilian Platonism of love brings us to the crux of his conflict with rationalist-empiricist epistemology. Namely, what is the impact of love on knowledge? Modern science sought to be 'objective,' which is

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[134] Grant, *TJ*, 73–4. Cf. Weil, *IC*, 134.
[135] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 533.

to say, the subject or observer must not pollute the object of study by 'subjective' interpretations. 'Pure' knowledge would require detached objectivity ('neutrality') around the study matter, whether collecting and recording scientific measurements; working with human subjects (or rather, 'objects'!) in psychology or sociology; or doing exegesis of the texts for biblical theology.[136] Subjective involvement—worst of all 'love'—would surely taint the data. The problem provides countless examples: results of medical studies manipulated by those biased with a cause, client transference in the counselor's office, or sentimentalism infecting our Bible hermeneutics. Love has no place in a laboratory, a psychiatrist's office, or a Hebrew word study—'rose-colored glasses' represent a distortion of knowledge.

According to Grant and his Plato, this will *not* do. And here I introduce my own voice: higher levels of reality *require* higher faculties of knowing suited to the task. This is not provable because proof as a rational-empirical method is neither necessary nor sufficient to know realities beyond that for which it is tooled. But anecdotal evidence for love as essential to knowledge is everywhere available. Love for beauty (wonder) and for humanity (compassion) is often the driving motivation for scientific and medical research and funding; high-end mental and physical disabilities respond better to or sometimes *only* to treatments that involve loving-care and presence; and negatively, biblical-theological studies, undertaken as sterile analyses of old manuscripts and dead people, makes for a comic-book read of OT genocide, moralistic interpretations around sex ethics, and spawns politically dangerous eschatological movements.

These are immensely practical questions, for as Plato taught, our knowledge of reality effects how we live in the world as ethical citizens and just communities. To what degree do we enter and re-enter the lives of those people we try to help or teach? Or must we be so professional that we shun emotional involvement in our area of expertise or of those it impacts? When does objectivity cross over to psychopathology? Certainly we can become so involved that love seems to blind us to reality, but with Grant's Plato, do we also see how the reverse can be far more dangerous religiously, ethically, and politically?

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[136] Grant, "Faith and the Multiversity," *CW* 4: 608, 621.

For example, in the Christian world, are violence-of-God texts *ever* to be studied and taught 'objectively' from sterile lecterns? Neither Weil nor Grant could do it. Love of people and experience of war enabled them to see these passages as jarring stories about real people, for real people. That is, love reveals reality in a way that objectivity cannot access. True, the Bible has been preached passionately to stir dangerous zeal in what amounted to lynch mobs, but that is not love. Is not reading about the slaughter and dismemberment of thousands coolly and without flinching just as dangerous? Do we imagine that our practice of religion and religious studies have no conditioning effect on how we see and treat people once we leave the university grounds or steepled building?

Here the Incarnation illustrates Plato. It informs us of 'God's model' of knowing and being: according to the NT, *God in Christ became part of the human problem.* Christ does not moralize from outside Plato's cave, but descends to share in our captivity. By and for love, God comes to *know* the human condition firsthand. Love incarnate sees to the heart of spiritual, psychological, and literal slavery, and thereby begins to unravel it. Even God can only know the fullness of what can be known by direct experience at the extremes of human experience—life and death—the Cross (Heb. 5:8). Grant shared in this seeing-knowing-loving through the Bermondsey trauma. This too is the why and wherefore of Weil's year in the factories. Their incarnational knowledge is why they have lasting credibility for us. It is also why their Plato is a 'contemplative pillar'—even a mystic—but in his this-worldly interest in justice, he returns to the cave.

4.3.2   Grant's Heidegger: *'Gelassenheit'*

Grant's resistance to Heidegger in part reflects his desire to make space for Heidegger's voice, and his commitment to distinguishing what he could embrace from what he must discard. In their epistemology, Grant perceived a common meditative thread through Nietzsche's 'instinct,' Heidegger's *'gelassenheit,'* and Weil's 'attention.' Their common belief in suprarational knowledge served his critique of modernist objectivism.

i.   Nietzschean segue

Grant makes less use of Nietzsche's 'instinct' because unlike Heidegger and Weil, the call to knowing-as-willing is so strong in Nietzsche. For Grant, Nietzsche is a romantic poet and preeminent harbinger of postmodernity. As

much as Nietzsche reinforces his deconstruction of modernist epistemology, Grant rejects his form of meditation for its subjectivity, historicism, and treatment of will (creativity) as our highest end: "For Nietzsche there is nothing eternal. There is no pure mind. All knowledge is perspectivity and belongs to a specific perspective. All knowledge is a function of life, i.e., of historically specified life. All truth is said to be subjective."[137]

Grant disagrees with Nietzsche whenever he plays Socrates/Plato as the rationalist villain against the instinct and impulses of the *Übermensch*.[138] Yet he does recognize Plato and Nietzsche as true opposites—the two great poles of philosophy: 'pure mind which perceives truth in itself' versus absolute perspectivity.[139]

Even so, where Grant's interpretation of Nietzsche moves beyond opposing historicism and willfulness, he hints at further epistemological bridges from Socrates to Nietzsche to Heidegger: for example, their various meditations on death.[140]

Ron Dart also applies Grantean epistemology to recognize that Nietzsche was trying to get past the collective egoism of Hegel and Kant[141] to deeper springs than rationalism. Nietzsche asks, how do we know that deeper life/spirit? According to Dart, as with Socrates, Christ, and Weil, Nietzsche preaches our need to die in this life. For Nietzsche, it is death to the *mensch* (the bourgeois last man of the upper middle class) and *Ütermensch* (the raw nihilist—the great coward unwilling to overcome and make himself). He uses the analogy of mountaineering where we come to levels of weariness and want to turn back. The *Übermensch* overcomes that tendency to mediocrity. The one who overcomes finds that inner spring of life, inaccessible to the logicians and theoreticians, but open to the artist and poet who can still attune to the Dionysian spirit.[142] To

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[137] Grant, "Nietzsche (1974–5)," *CW* 4: 1010–11.

[138] Kaethler, *The Synthesis of Athens and Jerusalem* (2009), 25.

[139] Grant, "Nietzsche (1974–5)," *CW* 4: 993. He gives a fair discussion of whether will-to-power is for Nietzsche also a perspective, an absolute, or the absolute perspective (993–5). Commenting on Zarathustra, "I found will to power... *I found* – this is not an invention or creation – but a discovery" (993).

[140] Grant, "Nietzsche (1974–5)," *CW* 4: 1006–7.

[141] Ron Dart to Brad Jersak, personal correspondence, 03/21/2011. Cf. Nietzsche's thought on Dionysius and Apollo, esp. in Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* (1993).

[142] Kaethler, *The Synthesis of Athens and Jerusalem* (2009), 25.

Nietzsche, the hope is that calculating Socratism and its modern offspring, scientism, will stall at the highest spheres and in the end, like Socrates, finally hearken to his *daimonion's* exhortation, 'Socrates, make music.'[143]

ii. *Gelassenheit*: Knowing sans willing

Heidegger's greatest contribution to Grants' contemplative epistemology may be summarized in the German term *gelassenheit*. *Gelassenheit*, literally 'letting be' or 'releasement,' originates in the 14th century German mysticism of Meister Eckhart, who used it in the sense of being still before God, waiting, and letting God be God without imposing our projections upon God. John Caputo describes Eckhart's contemplative agnosticism (or 'negative theology') in terms eerily similar to what we know of Weil:[144]

> Whatever we *know* about God is not God, for that is God *insofar as* he has been brought under the sway of human knowledge. Whatever we *want* of God is not God, for that is God *insofar as* he has been brought under the sway of human willing. The only way to God—that is, to the truly divine God, what Eckhart sometimes called the Godhead beyond all God—is to shut down the whole operation of knowing and willing, that is to say, to suspend the operations of subjectivity, to disconnect the *ego cogito*, and let God *be*, let *God be* God. And it was of course at that point that Eckhart invoked the word *Ge-lassen-heit*, letting-be. The highest rule which holds sway in that realm is Eckhart's prayer, "I pray God to rid me of God."[145]

Eckhart taught *detachment* as the key to mystical union with God because God himself is pure detachment from everything created—pure being, pure nothing— God beyond 'God,' so to speak.[146] The highest human virtue is thus detachment because in so being, we surrender self-will to make space for God's will and

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[143] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* (1993), 70–1. This exhortation to art, says Nietzsche, Plato reproduced by creating a new art form, the novel (69), in his dialogues.

[144] Cf. Eckhart in Weil, *WG*, 35. Also,
> He is our Father, who is in heaven. If we think to have a Father here below it is not he, it is a false God. We cannot take a single step toward him. We do not have to search for him, we only have to change the direction in which we are looking. It is for him to search for us. (Weil, "Concerning the Our Father," *WG*, 143).

[145] John Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (1986), xviii.

[146] Caputo, *The Mystical Element* (1986), 11.

presence to inhabit us, to unite with us, and to be all in us.[147] For Plato, God is *beyond* being; for Aquinas, God *is* being—but for Eckhart, being *is* God.[148]

Heidegger picks up Eckhart's language of *gelassenheit* to express the posture of contemplative thinking vis-à-vis calculative willing. Think of *gelassenheit* as the ideal contemplative 'zone' or 'thin place' of open attentiveness. On the one hand, we are open and receptive but not merely passive. And on the other, we exercise resolve and attention, but without striving or willfulness. "Releasement lies ... beyond the distinction between activity and passivity ... because releasement does *not* belong to the domain of the will."[149] More than simple openness to Being, there is a resolve for Being's disclosure and a dwelling *in* Being—not just an exercise in our own subjective powers.[150] But the bottom line is that, reminiscent of Eckhart, Heidegger wants contemplation to be 'non-willing,' meaning, "willingly to renounce willing. And ... further, what remains absolutely outside any kind of will."[151]

This is where Grant acknowledges Heidegger's similarities to Weil:

> Within the general philosophic tradition the place where I find writings very close to what [Weil] means by attention is in the late writings of Heidegger. ... [Heidegger] brings out that thinking is 'letting lie before you and taking to heart the 'to be' of beings.' Whatever that may mean, it seems to me to take one close to what SW means by attention. Or in Heidegger's writing about *Gelassenheit*, [*Discourse on Thinking*] when he points to a *thinking without willing*, one is again close to SW.[152]

Yet Heidegger goes to the nth degree in extracting '*being*' from Eckhart without any trace of the language of God. In his "Conversation on a Country Path," we overhear this dialogue from his three characters:

> *Scientist:* The transition from willing into releasement is what seems difficult to me. ...

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[147] Caputo, *The Mystical Element* (1986), 99. Cf. Gal. 2:20 and Weil's Decreation).
[148] Caputo, *The Mystical Element* (1986), 103.
[149] Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking* (1966), 61.
[150] John M. Anderson, "Introduction," *Discourse on Thinking* (1966), 25–6.
[151] Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking* (1966), 59.
[152] Grant, "Excepts from Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 827–8.

Scholar: Especially so because even releasement can still be thought of as within the domain of the will, as is the case with old masters of thought such as Meister Eckhart.

Teacher: From whom, all the same, much can be learned.

Scholar: Certainly; but what we have called releasement evidently does not mean casting off sinful selfishness and letting self-will go in favor of the divine will.

Teacher: No, not that.[153]

Why '*No, not that*'? Partially, I suppose, because "Not my will, but thine be done" still appears to operate in the domain of will through the willing surrender of will to God's will. Heidegger wants *gelassenheit* to function altogether beyond the will. It is a 'waiting upon' for being's disclosure that *precedes* any choice or action to surrender self-will (just as enlightenment is about *seeing* before *deciding* in Eastern theology). He is resisting voluntarism (and moralism along with it). And perhaps for these same reasons, he is also simply resisting God. But while Heidegger could fairly renounce the metaphysical or onto-theological 'God' of his Thomist training, secularizing Eckhart leaves in tact both too much and too little.

In retrospect, we may see Heidegger's error as shifting the contemplative gaze—our loving beholding of the eternal—from God (even poor images of God) to our own sense of the sublime, thinking of 'historical events of manifest Being' as transcendent. In his longing for rootedness, he would reverence as god whatever grand historical emergence was presenting itself in time—in his case, National Socialism. Grant detected Western society making the same mistake under different flags and logos.

iii. Analysis: Grant's mysticism—beyond Heidegger

I will close out Grant's Heidegger by highlighting the three major differences between Grant's contemplative way and Heidegger's. They share *gelassenheit* as a common 'posture' for contemplation, but differ strongly in content, function, and tone—all defined by Grant's Platonic Christianity.

a. *Content*: Their first major difference is the content of the contemplative. Let go. Yes, but let go of what? Jesus warned that one can sweep the house clean

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[153] Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking* (1966), 61–2.

but find one's soul infested seven-fold. Be still and know. But be still for whom? And who is doing the stilling? Be receptive. But to what? And what part is being receptive? Wait. Yes, Heidegger teaches us *how* to wait—but wait for what? Anything? David Cayley compares and contrasts the mysticism of Grant and Heidegger:

> The posture of desiring attention that Grant recommends is in some way reminiscent of Heidegger who says that in order to find our way again into "the Nearness of Being," we must "first learn to exist in the nameless." But in the end, Grant seems to me much closer to Christian mysticism. There is much in common, for example, between Grant's "Platitude" and T.S. Eliot's version of the "Dark Night of the Soul" in his *Four Quartets*:
>
> > I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
> >
> > For hope would be hope for the wrong thing;
> >
> > Wait without love
> >
> > For love would be love of the wrong thing;
> >
> > There is yet faith
> >
> > But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
>
> Heidegger listened for the stirrings of new gods; Grant sought a re-collection of "what was in the beginning, is now, and ever more shall be."[154]

b. *Function*: Second, for Grant, contemplative knowing must function to lead us into transformation—to create in us a new being-in-love. Contemplation is more than an epistemological method, heightened awareness, or trendy way to calm down. It must and will do something in us and to us. It asks: What is dying and what is being renewed (think Paul)? What is becoming reconciled within (think Jung and Nietzsche)? How does contemplation deal with the voice of the ego and welcome the deeper voice of the true and wise self (think Merton)? For Grant, higher than knowing is wisdom, and higher than wisdom is love. His contemplative journey was clearly focused on the presence of the 'transforming Good,' the core of which are Plato's virtues and Christ's Beatitudes, and the pinnacle of which is the revelation of the Cross: self-giving love. We are not

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[154] Cayley, "Introduction," *GC*, 28.

merely to 'think' on this love, but to be re-formed by contemplative submission into this love.[155] Weil, for all her openness, warns,

> The intelligence must recognize by those means which are proper to it, namely, verification and demonstration, the preeminence of love. It must only submit itself when it knows in a perfectly clear and precise manner why. Otherwise submission is an error, and that to which it submits itself, in spite of the label attached, is something other than supernatural love.[156]

c. *Tone*: According to Hugh Forbes, in spite of "some striking similarities between Heidegger's Being and the God of Christian theologians," and "something akin to prayer in Heidegger's description of meditative reflection,"[157] Grant's hesitations extend to what we may call tone. Whereas Heidegger and the existentialists are hyper-aware of mortality and focus their meditation on life as 'Being-toward-death,' Grant lifts his eyes to the blessedness of the order of the Good. This is dramatic because his epiphany of affirmation came during the crisis of depression and conflict. His explanation is really autobiographical, tying together his Christo-Platonic conversion:

> At the heart of the Platonic language is the affirmation – so incredible to nearly everyone at one time or another – that the ultimate cause of being is beneficence. This affirmation was made by people who, as much as anyone, were aware of suffering, war, torture, disease, starvation, madness and the cruel accidents of existing. But it was thought that these evils could only be recognized for what they were if they were seen as deprivations of good.'[158]

Faith, as we have learned, was the love-illumined intuition of this mysterious good—an experience of grace whereby the inscrutable love of God is revealed in both the Dialogues and the Gospels. This is contemplation *par excellence*. Grant adds,

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[155] Grant, "The Concept of Nature and Supernature in the Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 220.
[156] Weil, *NB* 1: 240.
[157] Forbes, *A Guide* (2007), 221–2.
[158] Grant, "Faith and the Multiversity," *CW* 4: 613.

Of course the metaphor of sight as the need of otherness is combined with the metaphor of light which allows us to see. The philosophy of the dialogues is impregnated with the idea of receptivity, or as we have said in the old theological language, grace. What is given us and draws from us our loving is goodness itself; the perfection of all purposes which has been called God.[159]

This is pure Weil, to whom we return for the underlying mystical well from which Grant drank—the contemplative way to which he looked most keenly.

4.3.3 Grant's Weil

i. 'Attention'

George Grant summarized and defined Simone Weil's contemplative way with her word for it: *attention* (contra will-power)—a mystical participation in God's love effected by the attentive 'seeing' of love. He says,

> [It] is clear that what [Weil] means by *attention* is certainly the means whereby human beings move to participate in supernatural love; it also has to do with the question concerning sight in the metaphor of the Sun, and the question of whether sight is to be taken as love or intelligence.[160]

As one gathers the strands of Weil's contemplative process from her journals, articles, and books, a 'Weilian contemplative path' emerges. Once discovered, it compares with and rivals the grand mystical paths of history, including ancients (Plato, the Buddha, Christ), pre-moderns (Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart), and contemporaries (Evelyn Underwood, Thomas Merton). Weil's 'attention' unfolds in five stages: (i) ascent, (ii) arrest, (iii) attention, (iv) awakening, and (v) activation.[161] This model emphasizes the epistemological impasse where the rational mind finds its limits and the love-illumined *nous* waits for the grace-gift of enlightenment.

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[159] Grant, "Faith and the Multiversity," *CW* 4: 637.

[160] Grant, "Excerpts from Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 826–7.

[161] For my commentary on these stages, see Jersak, "Weil's Mystical Ascent," *MSO*, 85–107 and "Stages of Weil's Mystical Ascent," *Red Tory, Red Virgin* (2012), 19–47.

Before analyzing the Grant and Weil's mystical Plato, I offer the following outline as it unfolds Weil's ascent in all its grandeur. I will also label without comment Weil's conscious parallels between Plato's cave and St. John of the Cross.[162]

Mystical Stage	Contemplative Practice	Objects of Attention
i. Ascent: Climb from the cave. (John of the Cross: Dark Night of the Soul)[163]	a. Ascent by **attention** to the limits of reason	Attention to affliction
		Attention to beauty
		Attention to math irrationals
	b. Ascent by **attention** to contradictories	Apparent contradictions
		Incommensurates
		Mysteries
	c. Ascent by **acceptance** (i.e., decreation of the ego)	Obedience to necessity (*amor fati*)
		Consent to affliction
		Allowing the void
	d. Ascent by **love** (of God)	Religious ritual
		Beauty (God's trap)
		Love of neighbour
		Friendship
ii. Arrest: Halted at the threshold. (John of the Cross: Dark Night of the Spirit)[164]	a. **Attention creates an** *impasse*: love, beauty and affliction arrests us with astonishment (blinded by the light)	The mystic ascends to the top of the noetic ladder, where she can only stop, watch, and wait for grace
	b. **Acceptance preserves a** *void*: consent creates a space for the divine and human other (otherness = presence)	
	c. **Implicit love** prepares us for *direct contact*	
iii. Attention: Waiting for the light.	Second ascent by **attention** (faculty of love)	Waiting for God
		Desiring, not willing
		Asking, seeking, knocking
iv. Awakening: Beholding the Sun. (John of the Cross: Mystical Union)	a. **Contact**	The same love that drew one up the ladder, brings God down to lift one up
	b. **Mediation** (*metaxu*)	
	c. **Possession**	

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[162] Weil, *NFR*, 264; Weil, *NB* 324, 336, 545.
[163] Weil, *FLN*, 242.
[164] Weil, *FLN*, 243.

v. Activation: Return to the cave.	a. **True vision** never leaves the world	Knowledge, even of God, is not reality until it 'passes through the flesh' by actions of charity
	b. **True attention** on the world is participation in God	
	c. **True knowledge** is charity	

In the imagery of Plato, Weil's stages take us to and through the cave's threshold. She extends his metaphor to include all the above themes in a profound little poem, in startling parallel to George Grant's 'gateway conversion.' Without a doubt, its poignancy would have gripped him.

The Threshold[165]

Open the door to us, and we will see the orchards,
We will drink their cold water where the moon
    has left its trace.
The long road burns, hostile to strangers.
We wander without knowing and find no place.

We want to see flowers. Here thirst grips us.
Waiting and suffering, we are here before the door.
If we must, we will break this door with our fists.
We press and push, but the barrier still holds.

One must weaken, must wait and look vainly.
We look at the door: it is closed, unbreachable.
We fix our eyes there; we weep under the torment;
We see it always; the weight of time crushes us.

Before us is the door; what use for us to wish?
Better to turn away, abandoning hope.
We will never enter. We are weary of seeing it …
The door, opening, let so much silence escape.

That neither the orchards appeared nor any flower;
Only the immense space where emptiness and
    light are
Was suddenly everywhere present, overflowed
    the heart,
And washed our eyes almost blind under the dust.

And so, the hinge point of Weil's mysticism is where we pause at the threshold of the cave to simply gaze—where Grace now causes us to emerge.[166] Her key

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[165] Weil, "Two Poems," *SWR*, 408–9.

point—the one Grant embraced—is that the contemplative who has truly been awakened is illumined by love. And that love, according to Grant and Weil, is only perfected in action (charity) in the world. By bringing the light of supernatural love into the world, the world truly becomes the real world. After a brief analysis, this will bring us to Grant's Christ.

ii. Analysis

Three ponderables present in the wake of Weil's stages:

a. *How well does Weil's epistemology reflect Plato?* It is debatable, for Weilian Platonism aggressively seeks 'intimations of Christianity' in Plato. To a degree this is fair if we see him as a forerunner whose ideas inform Christian doctrine in helpful ways, but she seems almost desperate to read Trinitarian faith back into Greeks who intended no such thing. At most we can concede that Trinitarian Christianity need not abandon Plato completely as incompatible to it, but many Christians have always largely believed that.

Still, I would argue that Weil's research and reflection should at the least make it impossible for another generation of scholars to conceive of Plato as a rationalist or his dialogues as logo-centric. Moreover, she has uniquely highlighted the centrality of love to the vision of the Good and its interdependence with knowledge in Plato's thought. Its inexplicable invisibility for thinkers like Heidegger is no longer excusable. That is, the more broadly read Weil becomes, the deeper her permanent impact will be for Plato scholarship. We may disagree with her mystical reading of Plato, but we ought not ignore it.

b. *Does Weil's epistemology accurately represent Grant's understanding?* Grant answers for himself: "There is a phrase of Simone Weil's that faith is the experience that the intelligence is enlightened by love. I am trying to think what this means. That's what all my thoughts are turned on now."[167] The later Grant became ever more explicit about his dependence on Weil—especially her Christian Platonism—until she is no longer a silent partner.[168]

> Simone Weil ... has been the greatest influence in my life of any thinker. She has shown me what it is to hold Christ and Plato together. She has

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[166] Weil, *NB* 2: 527.

[167] Grant, "The Moving Image of Eternity," *Ideas* (1986), 26–7.

[168] Cf. O'Donovan, *Twilight of Justice* (1984), 176; Heaven and Heaven, "Some Influences of Simone Weil," *GP*, 73; Sheppard, "The Suffering of Love" (1990), 21.

shown me how sanctity and philosophy can be at one. ... I take her writings as combining the staggering clarity of her French education with divine inspiration. I take them as perhaps occasionally mistaken in detail, and as sometimes beyond me, but as the great teaching concerning the eternal in this era.[169]

It is fair to say, to the degree Grant could follow her epistemology, Weil speaks for him. His one fleeting critique of her work on attention is her use of the language of 'object.'

One point where I think her language is less wise than Heidegger's is her constant use of the word 'object.' She was brought up in the French Cartesian language of subjects-objects; one has already entered the thinking with 'will' in German, and this clearly applies to English because of being forced to give its reasons. We summon it forth.[170]

We see here Grant's awareness of Descartes, Bacon, and Kant, lurking in the assumed language of 'object' that leads to mastery. In Weil's use of hard attention on an 'object' other than oneself in order to decreate oneself, Grant seems to think the language concedes too much to the origins of modern knowing.

Where I would question Weil's contemplative outline would be in the typical experiential shift from description to prescription—from 'this is what happened to me' to 'this is what we should do.' In fact, trying to recapitulate an experience of grace by mimicking the symptoms of grace sends one back into striving (e.g., God touched me, so I shook and wept. You should shake and weep so that God will touch you). In fact, Grant's (and even Weil's) actual experiences were more spontaneous and limited compared to the meticulously staged outline above. Their conversions were sudden and intrusive, certainly the result of decreation and arrest, but wholly undirected and unexpected. Their commitment to 'attention' must not be mistaken for monastic discipline. Their 'attentive openness' is probably more akin to a brooding temperament amidst the chaos of tragedy that led them to both let go and hang on. That is, they relinquished the assumptions of progressivism and abandoned the Enlightenment project. At the

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[169] Grant, "Conversation: Intellectual Background," *GP*, 65–6.
[170] Grant, "Excerpts from Graduate Seminar Lectures on Simone Weil," *CW* 4: 828.

same time, for all their openness, Grant and Weil were stubbornly convinced through their contemplations and experiences of Plato and Christ's God of love.

c. *To the degree that Grant's Platonism is expressed in Weil, what does Grant contribute? Or is he merely a derivative thinker?*[171] Hardly. While Grant's analysis of Plato keeps in lockstep with Weil, on one hand he is less wild in his speculations, and on the other, he can break new ground where she could or would not. Two examples:

First, unlike Weil, he was willing to face Nietzsche's genius head-on, pitting Plato's Good and Christ's love against Nietzsche's will to power. She was too repulsed by Nietzsche's supposed arrogance to take seriously his contributions and challenges.[172] Conversely, once Grant discovered Nietzsche, he never wrote another book without referencing his influence, with both kudos and critiques.

Second, while Weil only occasionally references the existentialists and *dasein*,[173] Grant will have decades to engage with the work of Sartre and Heidegger in a serious and expanded way. He contrasts and correlates their philosophical and contemplative insights with that of Weil and Plato, applying them to his own cultural and historical context.

4.3.4 Grant's Christ

i. Christ as our contemplative content

We close this chapter with Grant's sense that contemplation is more than an epistemology—it is the life of the disciple focused on Christ, inextricable from action and indistinguishable from petition. "Christ *is the content* of revelation for Grant because he is the image in this world of 'the perfection of all purposes which have been called God.'"[174] In an early fragment, very possibly within weeks of his conversion, Grant already anticipates the path upon which Plato and Weil will direct his journey.

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[171] Cf. George Woodcock, "Review of Joan E. O'Donovan's *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice*," *The Globe and Mail* (1985); Sheppard, "The Suffering of Love" (1990), 27.

[172] Weil to Andre Weil, 01–04/1940 (Weil, *7OL*, 122).

[173] Weil, *NB* 1: 199, 203, 429.

[174] Heaven, "George Grant on Socrates and Christ" (2006), 310. Cf. Grant, *TJ*, 74.

So we must turn to the life of Jesus, to find really what the life of contemplation means. And we find in him – as in every sense our redeemer – the perfect blend of action and *contemplation*. First the forty days in the wilderness – preparing for his work that is now at last – to begin. Those three temptations – to bread alone – to power – and to mumbo-jumbo. Then, the mount of transfiguration – where with his few friends – close at hand – he faces the glory and the wonder of what he is and what he must do.

Then, at the last, in Gethsemane he must go alone – to *contemplate* – to ask God – if the awfulness and the torture of the Cross must be His.

And out of that contemplation comes what surely must be the only and the unique time that answer is given in full.

Oh Father let *thy Will* be done,

for all things good thou doest.

and so on and so on.

After Gethsemane he is ready to face the Cross. (Pause.)

So we, in some sense, must spend our forty days in the wilderness – once again to decide whether we will believe that our hope is in bread alone – or in power or in mumbo-jumbo.

We too can have the glory of following him to the Mount of Transfiguration, when like the sunlight we know the truth of our destiny. To be the children of God.

But we must follow Him not only onto the Mount of Transfiguration – but on – on to Gethsemane.

And there alone, as in all the tragic moments of our life, we must be alone. There we too face the question – 'Oh Father, let thy will be done.'

Then, perhaps out of the contemplation of Gethsemane – out of its agony and aloneness – we might yet give that answer which we always shirk and always avoid – but which always awaits us.[175]

Through this entire fragment, Grant establishes the sacred correlation between Jesus' own contemplation (on the will of God and the suffering he must face) and

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[175] GPG sermon fragment, circa 12/1941 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.24).

the recapitulative path of his followers ('Take up your Cross and follow me'). To Grant, 'not my will but thine be done' had already become a reality in suffering and a point of *amor fati* that led to peace.

ii. Contemplation as waiting before the Cross

Grant's epistemology, in the end, is contemplative waiting at the foot of the Cross.[176] His spirituality is neither escapist (dualist Gnosticism) nor triumphalistic (liberal progressivism). With Weil, rather than fleeing from suffering, he finds the presence of God therein, among those so crushed by life that love and forgiveness cannot even be chosen. The light and love of God must come via revelation through the very wounds of Christ—symbolic of co-suffering, forgiving love—as we wait for and behold the crucified God (Zech. 12:10). Out of that patient waiting (*hypomene*) springs our Cross-regulated being and doing. Athanasiadis explains Grant's theology:

> The experience of the Good [must] be shaped critically and inspired constructively by a 'going' to and abiding at the foot of the cross.
>
> ... It is in Christ crucified that the sacred/Good that is God is most powerfully experienced, and it is in Christ crucified that the criteria for critical reflection on experience are derived.[177]

The Cross, for Grant, is therefore *the* epistemological template by which reality is known and experienced—it is "the central criterion of truth and the point of departure for any authentic form of thinking, being, and acting in the world."[178]

iii. The Beatitudes as the contemplative way

As with Weil, Grant's Christ calls us to a lifestyle of waiting-in-love and walking-the-Way-of-the-Cross, a 'spirit-natural' journey distilled to its essence in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–10). As the lynchpin of Jesus' teaching, the Beatitudes set out the contemplative *Via Delarosa* prescribed for his disciples. They outline a cycle of dying and rising that paradoxically, make us fully alive and human:

> Blessed are the poor in spirit [the void of decreation],

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[176] Cf. Athanasiadis, "Waiting at the Foot of the Cross" (2006), 256–69.

[177] Athanasiadis, "Waiting at the Foot of the Cross" (2006), 259.

[178] Athanasiadis, "Waiting at the Foot of the Cross" (2006), 263.

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [i.e., justice],

for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart [the eye of the soul],

for they will see God [the transformative gaze].

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs

is the kingdom of heaven.

On one level, these 'Beatitudes' function as a veiled autobiography of the character, the life, and ultimately the Passion of Christ.[179] They also serve to transpose Jesus' death and resurrection into a lifestyle of daily discipleship. Each 'blessed' contains a practical (this-worldly) experience of personal death (to the demands of ego) and resurrection (to the new life of love); they describe the human saga of ongoing decreation and recreation a la Weil; and they depict the spiritual 'respiration' of the contemplative who retreats inwardly for spiritual renewal, then proceeds outwardly in ethical action.

This contemplative cycle of knowing, being, and doing comes together in what the first Christians called, 'The Way' (Acts 9:2) or 'way of the Cross' (Francis of Assisi). For Grant, this Way is called 'blessed' (*makarios*) because it is the perfect union of happiness and justice ('love of neighbour'). The Beatitudes then unfold into Christ's 'Sermon on the Mount,' which Grant describes as the "perfect account of justice or righteousness."[180] Eventually, Christ lives out the Beatitudes in a three-year sojourn to Gethsemane and Calvary, the pinnacle of Grant's epistemology and ontology.

4.3.5 Summary Segue

This chapter has laid out in detail Grant's epistemology. We have shown that Grant's critique of modernity reads the modern account of knowing as willing and

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[179] Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (2007), 74.
[180] Grant, "Five Lectures on Christianity" (2006), 229.

making, freedom and mastery, and how it came to be through such pillars as Descartes, Bacon, and Kant. We've seen Grant's dependence on Heidegger's critique of modern technological (non-) thinking and his clarion call to recover contemplative thinking.

In Grant's reconstruction of a contemplative epistemology, we have seen his four primary guides in:

- Plato: particularly a Weilian read of Plato whereby the *nous* is a contemplative faculty beyond reason, graciously enlightened by love, able to behold and encounter the eternal goodness, beauty, truth, and justice of God.

- Heidegger: especially his understanding of *gelassenheit* as the posture of contemplation that combines resolve (not striving) and receptivity (not passivity). We also see the limits of Grant's use of Heidegger where the latter fails to see love as the key to Plato or God as the focus of contemplation.

- Weil: that insofar as Weil is Grant's primary contemplative authority, he assumes and accepts her mystical stages of contemplation through ascent, arrest, attention, awakening, and activation. Having said that, we know Grant despaired of following the length of this way, assessing it as beyond him in light of Weil's 'saintly' life.

- Christ: that Jesus of Nazareth fills and fulfills one's epistemology by first laying out (in the Sermon on the Mount) and living (especially through the Passion) the true contemplative path of love. And further, Christ both mediates and becomes the focal point of our contemplation, as the perfect image and revelation of the Good (God is love), truth/beauty (God sends his love), and justice (love of neighbour).

As far as one's epistemology establishes or at least perceives a metaphysics or ontology—or in this case, a theology—George Grant's version will contemplate:

- the Goodness of God, the affliction of man, and the distance between the two;

- the transcendence (absence) of God and the immanence (presence) of God, and the connection between the two;

- a theodicy of the Cross, learned from Weil, that responds to the problem of evil without artificially resolving the tensions therein; and,

- a cosmology of consent, whereby the Good is experienced impersonally through the consent of God and personally through the consent of humankind.

We proceed to these questions of theology in the next chapter.

Chapter 5
Beholding the Sun: The Perfection of God and the Affliction of Man /
Grantean Theology

5.1   Introduction

[Grant] genuinely needs to decipher the meaning of his experience of evil in a world supposedly created by a loving God—some truth to 'meet the cry of men bewildered by their period.'[1]

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.[2]

We have so far analyzed the development of two of Grant's conversion epiphanies: his deconstruction of modernity and his contemplative epistemology. These correspond to his Platonic vision of the dark cave of delusion and the soul's emergence into the light, illumined by love. Now we come to the very heart of Grant's theology—call it his ontology or metaphysics if you like (Grant prefers "the meaning or purpose of the whole"[3]). For Grant, faith—the intelligence illumined by love—sees the meaning of the whole by gazing on the Passion of the Christ. "The cross regulates all experience."[4] In Plato's analogy, we behold the Sun, which is to say, the Good or God. For Grant, the glory of the Platonic Sun is seen in the face of the crucified Christ.[5] By 1951, he wrote this Good Friday sonnet encapsulating the essence of his theology of the Cross:

Good Friday

O dearest word, the very Word indeed,

Breathes on our striving, for the cross is done;

All fate forgotten and from judgement freed,

Call Him then less – Who shows us this – Your Son?

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[1] Grant, "Editors' Introduction," *CW* 1: 158.
[2] Weil to Maurice Schumann, 1943(?) (Weil, *7OL*, 178). Cf. Grant, *CW*, 4: 796, 811.
[3] E.g., Grant, "Immanuel Kant," *GGR*, 219–22; Grant, *TJ*, 45; *GC*, 58–9.
[4] S. Grant, "Grant and the Theology of the Cross" (1996), 245. Cp. 255.
[5] Cp. St. Paul in 2 Cor. 3:16–4:6.

Look it is here, at death, not three days later,

The love that binds the granite into being.

Here the sea's blueness finds its true creator,

His glance on Golgotha our sun for seeing.

Nor say the choice is ours, what choice is left?

Forgiveness shows God's Will most fully done.

There on the cross the myth of hell is cleft,

And the black garden blazes with the sun.

Hold close the crown of thorns, the scourge, the rod,

For in His sweat, full front, the face of God.[6]

In this chapter, we will see how Grant wrestles with how the Platonic revelation[7]—God is good—can be held as true in light of the human experience of evil. What he beholds comes into focus as a threefold vision of reality:

- Grant's Platonic distance between the necessary and the Good;
- Grant's (anti)theodicy of the Cross; and,
- Grant's Weilian 'cosmology of consent.'

In this chapter, I shall contribute the following to Grantean studies:

- I will establish Grant-Weil's account of reality, including their unique understanding of the dual nature of God as powerful-powerless, personal-impersonal, and present-absent.

- I hope also to recover and further develop their *theology of the Cross* as an alternative to modern theodicies.

- In gathering Simone Weil's Pythagorean ideas from her notebooks and articles, I follow up on the work of scholars like George Grant, Eric Springsted, and Miklós Vetö by contributing a clear, charted expression of her Pythagorean *cosmology of consent* (my proposed label for tying together Weil's grand vision).

- I will highlight the centrality of *consent* in Grant's theology of the Cross.

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[6] S. Grant, "Grant and the Theology of the Cross" (1996), 248 (citing *United Church Observer* 13.6 (15/05/1951): 16).

[7] I use 'revelation' advisedly to emphasize that for Grant, the existence and goodness of God was neither verifiable nor falsifiable, but a noetic reality 'received' in spite of his experience of affliction of the world.

- I will also bring a number of constructive questions, critiques, and applications to Grant and Weil's doctrine.

Essential to understanding Grant's metaphysics is a realization of what he is doing and *not* doing. That is, the foundation of Grant's doctrine of the whole is *not* speculative or rationalistic, but contextual and contemplative. This idea bears explanation.

5.1.1 Contextual Theology

Grant ought not to be imagined as a *speculative* theologian or philosopher, tinkering with great ideas from the heights of his university chair. Rather, he is contextual and practical—a mind agonizing over the desperate need of 'the bewildered' in a period drowning in evil. Truth, for him, must 'pass through the flesh' of personal morality and political reality. "Theory can never be detached from the moral life."[8] Grant's wife, Sheila, confirms this commitment in him: "Grant's concentration on good, and on the problem of evil, was not a philosophic position, nor a stage in the process of reasoning. It was the result of the evident experience of living."[9]

Earlier, we heard Grant's cry of affliction from the bowels of Bermondsey. Yet after passing through the gate of his conversion, he *knows* God is good. He speaks from experience when he recalls:

> At the heart of the Platonic language is the affirmation – so incredible to nearly everyone at one time or another – that the ultimate cause of being is beneficence. This affirmation was made by people who, as much as anybody, were aware of suffering, war, torture, disease, starvation, madness and the cruel accidents of existing. But it was thought that these evils could only be recognised for what they were if they were seen as deprivations of good.[10]

Thus, in the context of real life *in extremis*, Grant's central question and calling becomes clear: how can the vast distance between his two irreducibles—the 'idea of the Good' and 'the affliction of man'—ever be spanned? Where do they

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[8] Grant, "Immanuel Kant," *GGR*, 221.
[9] S. Grant, "Grant and the Theology of the Cross" (1996), 259.
[10] Grant, *TJ*, 42–3.

intersect, if at all? He asks these questions in his private journals and letters, throughout his doctoral dissertation, and across a lifetime of articles, books, and lectures. But he refuses to figure out the inscrutable. Instead, he watches and listens. He contemplates. We shall see how, as Grant gazes into Plato's Sun, he beholds the Cross—and all that might mean.

5.1.2 Contemplative Theology

Thus, in George Grant's theology/philosophy, he speaks as a *contemplative* rather than as a *rationalist*. To be sure, he is seeking reasons for faith, but he is decidedly *not* attempting to construct airtight arguments for the existence of God[11] or calculating solutions for the problem of evil. In the last chapter, we noted how the contemplative way finds and transcends the limits of discursive thought to higher regions of knowing and *not* knowing—what Grant called 'the right agnosticism.'[12] The critically important reason for this, according to Grant, is that the problem of evil simply cannot be solved rationally without denying reality, belittling suffering, and calling evil good—in his language, without 'blaspheming the Cross.'[13] It requires the contemplative arrest and attention described earlier.

In practice, this means contemplatives like Grant or Weil must embrace, on the one hand, the robust agnosticism of the *via negativa* tradition. And yet, simultaneously, all their negations rest on a direct apprehension and affirmation of a transcendent Good.[14]

Still, these are all just grandiose phrasings for every 'Why?' howled in lament into the silence. *"If God is Good, then where is He?! Why hasn't He?!"* For Grant and Weil, Christ's cry of dereliction—"My God, my God!"—echoes through history, defining the infinite distance between the necessary and the Good, a distance blasphemed by theodicies and platitudes, but ultimately spanned

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[11] Grant references Weil's version of the argument from perfection, but not as an apologetic. Grant, "Introduction to the Reading of Simone Weil," *CW* 4: 812–3. He distinguishes between mysteries and problems. Problems evoke solutions while mysteries must be lived with. "The mystery on which Simone Weil dwells of the perfection of God and the misery of man – that's not a problem, that's a mystery." (Cayley, *GC*, 170–1).

[12] Grant, "Two Theological Languages," *CW* 2: 57.

[13] Cf. Grant, *TJ*, 44.

[14] Grant, "Excerpts from Graduate Lectures," *CW* 4: 816. Cf. Cayley, *GC*, 177.

by that same Cross.[15] But we must not rush there. We begin, as did Grant and Weil, with Plato's distance.

5.2   Plato's Distance: Dual Reality / Dual Causality

In this section I will comment on George Grant's understanding of the relationship between the 'Order of Necessity' and the 'Order of the Good,' a Platonism for which Grant acknowledges his debt to Weil and regards as the source of much of her thought.[16] This language derives from Plato's *Republic* 6.492e–493c, where Socrates debunks any providence in which the successful preservation and manipulation of the social beast is attributed to God, as if we could identify effective political force with the Good. To summarize Socrates' argument:

> If anything is saved and turns out well in the present condition of society and government, in saying that the providence of God preserves it … it is as if a man were acquiring the knowledge of the humors and desires of a great strong beast which he had in his keeping, how it is to be approached and touched, and when and by what things it is made most savage or gentle, … and after mastering this knowledge by living with the creature and by lapse of time should call it wisdom, and should construct thereof a system and art and turn to the teaching of it, knowing nothing in reality about which of these opinions and desires is honorable or base, good or evil, just or unjust, but should apply all these terms to the judgements of the great beast, calling the things that pleased it good, and the things that vexed it bad, having no other account to render of them, but should call

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[15] Cayley, *GC*, 176.

[16] Cayley, *GC*, 174–5. That said, Grant clarifies:
> I could not have even considered that what she said was true if I had not previously been concerned with Plato … It was only after I had seen that [the modern formulation] was inadequate – one had to look at the Greeks as if what they were saying was true – that I could move to really taking Simone Weil seriously." (Grant, "Course Lectures at McMaster," *CW* 4: 726).

what is necessary just and honorable, never having observed *how great is the real difference between the necessary and the good.*[17]

This tack is virtually identical to Grant's objection to the Hegelian versions of providence and progressivist visions of history, and for the same reasons. They confuse *what is* (the order of necessity) with *what should be* (the order of morality).[18] Grant revolts:

> I must dissociate myself from a common philosophic assumption. *I do not identify necessity and goodness.* This identification is widely assumed during an age of progress. ... From the assumption that God's purposes are unfolded in historical events, one may be led to view history as an ever-fuller manifestation of good. ... The doctrine of providence was given its best philosophical expression by Hegel: *"Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht"* – "World history is the world's judgement." Here the doctrines of progress and providence have been brought together. But if history is the final court of appeal, force is the final argument.[19]

Grant's point is as apropos to moderns as it was to Plato's ancients—his warning equally poignant for engineers of social Darwinism and Christian sloganeers. Consider those who preach that "righteousness exalteth a nation,"[20] as if American economic or military domination signals divine endorsement, or their waning suggests a curse requiring a scapegoat! Grant saw through this to the real idol:

> To take a progressive view of providence is to come close to worshipping force. Does this not make us cavalier about evil? The screams of the tortured child can be justified by the achievements of history. How pleasant for the achievers, but how meaningless for the child.

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[17] Plato, *The Republic* (1969), 492e–493c. Socrates speaks of "how *great* is the real difference," whereas we shall see how Grant and Weil both extend this to an 'infinite distance' to emphasize the extremes of transcendence and affliction.
[18] Grant, "Immanuel Kant," *GGR*, 219–22.
[19] Grant, *Lament*, 86.
[20] Prov. 14:34 (KJV).

As a believer, I must then reject these Western interpretations of providence. Belief is blasphemy if it rests on any easy identification of necessity and good. ... It must be possible within the doctrine of providence to distinguish between the necessity of certain happenings and their goodness.[21]

We see here how Grant broadens Plato's political commentary on the beast to encompass providence in world history in general. In fact, he will follow Weil in totalizing the language of the necessary and the Good as descriptions for the dual reality and dual causality of *all* that is. The *Good*, then, will refer to God and the whole eternal order as first cause. *Necessity* will include all that is 'here below'—whatever is not God, both beauty and affliction, as secondary cause. The *distance* between the two realms or orders represents the experience of God's presence or absence in the world. Thus, Grant and Weil do partake of a certain dualism in their Platonic theology, but one more basic and religious than mind/spirit versus matter or abstract/universal versus particular. Their dualism is the theism of an eternal Creator and a temporal creation, plus the age-old mystery of how these might meet, articulated from a Platonic foundation.

5.2.1   The Good

Grant and Weil's idea of the Good begs certain questions: What is the Good? Why specifically Plato's Good?[22] Why apply Plato's Good to the Christian God? Or why impose a Christian God on Plato's Good?

Grant believed that western Augustinian Christianity was an aberration—that it needed to be purged of its triumphalism, and *reformulated* into a fresh expression that "does not involve a progressive incarnation of divinity in the world."[23] While de-Hellenizing Christianity was (and is) in great vogue among biblical scholars, Grant and Weil proposed we adopt major aspects of Plato's Good—with its 'infinite distance' from the world of necessity—to reform our

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[21] Grant, *Lament*, 86–7. Cf. Grant, *Lament*, 91n36, 94; Sheila Grant, "Afterword," *Lament*, 97–8.

[22] For Grant, Plato's 'Good' starts with *The Republic* 502d–509d, and its best commentary is Plato's *Philebus*. Grant, "Excerpts from Graduate Lectures," *CW* 4: 817.

[23] Cayley, *GC*, 118–20, 140. Cf. Grant, *TJ*, 76–7.

idea of God. They sought to use Plato's Good to fund a theology of the Cross that mediates (rather than collapses) the great distance between divine perfection and human misery. So why do we need Plato? For Grant:

- *Plato upholds the primacy of Goodness.* We saw how Grant traced the conflict between 'Goodness itself' and 'the willing self' back to competing images of God. For him, Socrates and Christ co-confirm the primacy of Goodness that Christianity has forgotten. He explains, "However much Christ's life and death and resurrection were the events of divinity, human beings had to think their relation to other events. Because Platonism asserts the primacy of Goodness itself, it was considered the best language for the task."[24]

- *Plato's Good is the first cause of all that exists.* "The ultimate cause of being is beneficence."[25] In Plato, as the sun is the cause of both light and seeing, the Good is the cause of truth and knowledge.[26] As the ultimate cause and loving purpose of all that is, "The word *good*, in its completeness, would be ... an identical word with God."[27] By grace, such a God crosses the infinite distance with love, while maintaining space for the impersonal aspects of God through secondary causes.

- *Plato upholds the Good as Reality.*[28] Contra Hegel, for Plato, God is not subjectivity. "The good is there in supremacy whether we know it or not."[29] Our knowledge of the whole or the good measures and defines us, not visa versa.[30]

- *Plato upholds the distance of transcendence.* "In *The Republic*, it is said that Goodness itself is beyond being."[31] The Good as divine perfection is an inscrutable mystery, beyond our experience and understanding, especially when pondered from 'below.'

- *At the same time, Plato upholds 'purposiveness.'* For Plato, we are beings 'fitted for the good,' for the (noetic) knowledge, the vision, and the love of

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[24] Grant, *TJ*, 72.

[25] Grant, *TJ*, 42, 44.

[26] *Republic* 508e–509b.

[27] Cayley, *GC*, 175-8.

[28] *Republic* 508e.

[29] Cayley, *GC*, 88.

[30] Grant, *TJ*, 58-9.

[31] Grant, *TJ*, 75; Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 819.

God. We are 'beings towards good,'[32] fitted to encounter and manifest goodness, and so to bear the fruit of justice in the world.

- *Plato calls us to receptivity and love of goodness itself.* By grace, we are drawn into love of "the perfection of all purposes which has been called God."[33] Plato calls us to emerge from our collective cave, enlightened by love, to behold the Sun of the Good.

Although Grant intended his essay, "Faith and the Multiversity," to be the clearest articulation of his Christian faith—and it was—we can also see how he, like Simone Weil, sought for a Platonic revival of Christianity, a faith in the goodness of God that would not trivialize suffering. He complains that,

> Western Christianity simplified the divine love by identifying it too closely with immanent power in the world ... [It] became triumphalistic by failing to recognize the distance between the order of good and the order of necessity. So they became exclusivist and imperialist, arrogant and dynamic.[34]

Further, Weilian Platonism allows him faith in God without assenting that evil is good and good is evil. Thus, Grant finds in Plato an affirmation of the Good while maintaining a "recognition that the world is as it is."[35] Said another way:

> The great statement for me of all modern statements is Simone Weil's: "I'm ceaselessly torn between the perfection of God and the misery of man" – meaning that this tension always puts the idea of God in question.
>
> ... What Plato enabled me to do was to see some unity between thinking about ordinary things and my belief in God.[36]

Simply, Plato's Good enables Grant to declare that whatever 'God' is, he can make the faith statement, 'God is good,' even in the midst of the personal and political hell in which he found himself.

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[32] Grant, *TJ*, 42–3. Grant, "Five Lectures on Christianity," *CW* 4: 936–7.

[33] Grant, *TJ*, 74.

[34] Grant, *TJ*, 76.

[35] Grant, *TJ*, 44.

[36] Cayley, *GC*, 56–7. Cayley says Weil offered Grant a way to avoid the two great pitfalls of Western civilization: the split between science and religion and the notion of "time as history," with its consequent "oblivion of eternity" (35).

But such an affirmation creates its own dilemmas, even if one retains the distance between the perfection of God and the world at war. Fine, we avoid the worship of force implicit in doctrines of imminent providence. But then where is God? Absent? Dead? Completely? Moreover, if the Creator is perfect, how do we account for a creation that is imperfect? Whence comes tragedy? Whence comes evil? If a Good God creates a good order, but refrains from micromanaging creation, how might we best envision this realm of secondary causes? And under what conditions might God be involved in our lives and our world without being charged with arbitrariness?

To state the dilemma in Weilian terms (introduced earlier under 'contraries'), how do the statements, "God is the author and cause of ALL (the whole)," and, "God is *only* the author and cause of Good," co-exist?[37] Weil, and Grant in her wake, seek their answer in the dual causality of Plato. If there is a 'sovereign good,' it must contain all goods, even the conflicting goods we call the Good and necessity.[38] For God to be 'all in all,' God must encompass both realities.[39] Having touched on the Good, we turn to Grant's interpretation of 'necessity.'

5.2.2 Necessity

When Grant uses the terminology of the 'necessary' and the 'Good,' we know he was familiar with its Platonic source (from *The Republic* and *Timaeus*) and worked with these ideas prior to discovering Weil. But whenever we read Grant's mature thought on *necessity*, her ghost lurks very nearby. As a general principle, Grant was aware of two broad categories of necessity in Weil, delineated according to the human experience of necessity: beauty and affliction.[40]

Scouring Weil's notebooks and articles for what she means by *necessity* is like gathering hundreds of puzzle pieces, some of which were tentative, provisional, and contradictory. Some need to be discarded before she can assemble her Pythagorean cosmology of consent (see below). To give the reader an initial feel for how she uses *necessity* in relation to the Good and to suffering, I

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[37] Cf. Weil, *NB* 1: 207, 224, 254; 2: 616; *FLN* 93, 307.
[38] Weil, *FLN,* 94.
[39] Weil, *FLN,* 307.
[40] Cayley, *GC,* 186.

offer brief and disparate sample pieces from four different works, all from her later years as a believer:

> As Plato said, an infinite distance separates the good from necessity … 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.*[41]

> There can be no answer to the "Why?" of the afflicted, because *the world is necessity and not purpose.* If there were finality in the world, the place of the good would not be in the other world. Whenever we look for final causes in this world it refuses them.[42]

> God has entrusted *all phenomena*, without any exception, to the *mechanism of this world.*[43]

> In experiencing any event in the world, and no matter what state of soul in ourselves, we need hardly perceive them, but only see through them *a single, fixed and unchanging order of the world.* This order is not a mathematical form but a Person; and that Person is God.[44]

Were we to attempt a definition of Weil's necessity from these selections, we would be grossly mistaken. Adding another dozen or two, we would likely fare no better. Seeing them as a whole could require decades and volumes of complex analysis. I believe this is where Grant soars far above his peers. He saw to the heart of Weil's necessity such that he could understand it, internalize it, and integrate it into his *a priori* doctrines. Further, he was able to condense and organize its essence into a few pages of clear study notes and teach it to his graduate students.[45] In my opinion he does her justice without reductionism because he could keep the whole before his mind. Here is how he did it:

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[41] Weil, *OL*, 159.
[42] Weil, *SNL*, 197.
[43] Weil, *NB* 2: 361.
[44] Weil, *IC*, 200.
[45] Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 820–3.

Grant begins by directing his students to Weil's article, "The Pythagorean Doctrine," to familiarize them with the Greek roots of her teaching. He commences with his own word study of the Greek *ananke*, noting two aspects of Greek necessity up to and including Plato:

> Force in the practical life, and unavoidability in the intellectual life. Necessity in the practical sense – it is necessary that we are going to be destroyed because our enemies have the greater force – the Melian dialogue; and necessity in the mathematical sense of A = B, B = C therefore A = C.[46]

From this combination, Grant proceeds with the principle tenets of Weil's doctrine of necessity:

First, absolutely everything that exists is completely determined by necessity, including "human beings who in their bodies and mental faculties are perfectly submitted to the domination of necessity." Grant describes how foreign this is for moderns who "struggle to believe really that there is the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom."[47]

Second, irrespective of the example above, where Weil insisted order is more than a mathematical form, Grant maintains, "… necessity appears to her above all as mathematical. That is, a network of immaterial relations, without force and yet … harder than any diamond. Those abstract and pure relations are the essence of everything that is."[48]

Third, Grant notes that necessity so described is experienced in drastically different ways, depending on one's situation, perspective, and willingness to accept necessity for what it is. "Necessity to the eye of the contemplative or to the intelligence of the mathematician is a sublime spectacle of intelligibility in which intelligibility and reality can finally be known to coincide." By contrast, "… to the ordinary person this majestic impersonal destiny must appear as completely arbitrary and as cruel, as it is completely indifferent."[49] Grant and Weil

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[46] Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 820.
[47] Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 820.
[48] Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 820–1. He refers to "The Pythagorean Doctrine" (ch. 11 of Weil, *IC*, 151–201) and *The Need for Roots* here.
[49] Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 821.

summarize these two real experiences of necessity under the labels *beauty* (God holds all things together) and *affliction* (God allows my world to unravel).

Moreover, necessity can present itself to one and the same person as *both/either* a source of beautiful intelligibility *and/or* as terrible affliction. Even the great mystics, philosophers, and mathematicians experienced afflictions, including torture, enslavement, and ignominious deaths. Grant summarizes:

> Here below we have reasonable creatures whose lives are submitted to the mastery of necessity which is not only a principle of order but which distributes the afflictions to which we seem to be blindly abandoned.[50]

Thus, under the caption of *necessity*, Grant and Weil integrate *beauty*—defined as the "mathematical clarity, which our intelligences find in the structure of phenomena," a la Kant—and *afflictions*—defined as "the blind and dark events of our lives."[51] When contemplating the distance between the Good and the necessary, their usual focus is on the latter: the irreconcilability of our belief in the Good with our experience of affliction.

5.2.3   Affliction

Grant's great integrity involved a rigid refusal to escape the human situation into providential justifications of human misery when attempting to think of God. He consciously lived Weil's challenge: "When you contemplate God, you should have in your mind the seventy thousand slaves that Crassus crucified when he put down the slave rebellion in Rome as a symbol of the appalling affliction that has occupied human life."[52] When Weil says that she is "ceaselessly torn between the perfection of God and the misery of man," Grant interprets her to mean "this tension always puts the idea of God in question."[53] In other words, the 'distance' must be upheld in order to resist the temptation of platitudes and abstractions so common to theodicy, rendering the idea of a Good God ridiculous. Grant explains, "The fact that we see here below the affliction of human beings has

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[50] Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 821.
[51] Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 822.
[52] Cayley, *GC*, 178.
[53] Cayley, *GC*, 56.

always been the deepest traditional argument against God's being. How can you look at this world and say it comes forth from love?"[54]

Here we must recall exactly what Grant and Weil mean by affliction or *malheur*. Affliction is not just a catch-all noun that encompasses all our misfortunes. It becomes a technical moniker for the worst (but not uncommon) type of human misery. Grant takes pains to define it for his graduate students:

> Right at the beginning of *'L'amour de Dieu et le malheur'* she defines it. ... Physical pain an irreducible element. What is also present is a penetrating inner sense of the uselessness of the suffering. There is no purpose, no end, and above all the uprootedness of life is completed, in the sense that it is disgraceful socially to be so afflicted. What is indeed most terrible about affliction – or *le malheur* – is that those who are afflicted (*les malheureux*) come to hate themselves, and will find obscurely that they have been created exactly so that they can be made subject to these treatments by others. And it is this, which means (1) that those in it have no means of escaping or deliverance from it and means (2) that those outside it – their response is to hate the afflicted. ... Our attention turns away with violence from *les malheureux* because in them is ascribed to us our proper nothingness, in the fragility and vulnerability of another being. That is in the afflicted, the instinct of self-preservation, which survives, leads the afflicted to turn away from their condition by apathy and lying. It makes those who are not afflicted turn away from the afflicted because if they do not, they must say: see 'The Person and the Sacred,' *Ecrits de Londres*, 35. It is then necessary to pass over into the perspective of God to love the afflicted – and that perspective is another affliction.[55]

To give the reader a sense of the reality of affliction to which Grant and Weil clung, the question might be posed this way: how do you tell a parent whose child has been abducted and murdered, 'God is good'? How do you tell a man whose family has been swept away in a tsunami, 'there is order'? How do you tell a

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[54] Cayley, *GC*, 177.
[55] Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 838–9.

Chapter Five: Beholding the Sun

woman enslaved in the sex trade by her addiction to heroin, 'life is beautiful'? Weil asked these very questions:

> Let us suppose a man whose entire family has perished amidst tortures, and who himself was long exposed to torture in a concentration camp; or an American Indian of the sixteenth century who was the sole survivor of the massacre of his people. Such men as these, if they ever believed in God's mercy, either believe in it no longer, or else conceive it in an entirely different fashion from that in which they did before. ...
>
> I must desire to have, endeavour to have a conception of divine mercy such that it cannot become effaced or altered whatever situation Destiny may impose upon me or upon those around me, and which is able to be communicated ... without it being for him an insult.[56]

Grant writes,

> Weil wrote that she was ceaselessly torn by the contradiction between the perfection of God and the affliction of human beings. How is it possible that human beings are given over to the afflictions of necessity? What is it to contemplate Goodness itself in the light of the afflictions of necessity? She waited upon that contradiction with ceaseless attention.[57]

These points serve as a platform for Grant's big question: "*Is necessity to be charged to God?*"[58] 'Charged,' according to Grant, is a difficult word on two fronts. First, when we behold necessity as beauty or 'pure intelligibility,' there is no offence and no cry against heaven. But when we witness irredeemable affliction, especially of the innocent, charging God with injustice comes instinctively. Our atheism is typically one of anger rather than doubt—anger not about what God has done, but at our perceived abandonment when, *if God is good*, God should have 'been there' for us. *Allowing* affliction does not absolve God of responsibility for it. Grant knew the brutal truth firsthand that God appears to allow absolutely anything.

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[56] Weil, *NB* 2: 432.
[57] Grant, "Review Essay on *Simone Weil: A Modern Pilgrimage*," *CW* 4: 863.
[58] Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 821.

But 'charge' is difficult for another reason, because of translation ambiguities in Weil's usage:

> Her French word is *'importable.'* As she says, we have to think how necessity is *'importable* à Dieu'? Charged to God – but *'importable'* also means to be divided from God … we can see more what she means by necessity, and the relations between what she takes from Plato about the absolute distance which separates the order of necessity from the order of good.[59]

I take Grant's point to be that Weil awakens the afflicted (including himself) from the charge against God (If God is somehow here, God is not good) into an understanding of dual realms and causalities, and between them a vast abyss (God is good—but necessity, not goodness, governs this realm).[60] This prepares us for the next challenges: how God does *not* relate to necessity across the distance (critique of theodicy); how and why the distance came about (cosmology of consent); how the distance might be bridged or mediated (theology of the Cross); and how this radically impacts our image of God. I shall now discuss these in order.

5.2.4   Critique of theodicy

To describe how God does *not* relate to the realm of necessity, we must briefly revisit Grant and Weil's deconstruction of history as providence (chapter 3). Many versions of providence, 'the problem of evil,' and resultant theodicies have been floated throughout the history of ideas. We must pause to define these terms from Grant's point of view—that is, from his differentiation of God as primarily good (and thus, perfect love) versus God as willing (and thus, an all-powerful force). Grant's commitment to this watershed distinction determines two corresponding types of providence.

i.   Impersonal versus personal providence

Grant leaned heavily on Weil's conception of providence and mirrored what she felt it had become in the Church. For Weil, the succession of events in the world

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[59] Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 821.

[60] Even so, the good cause and the necessary cause are two 'faces' God presents to us. According to Grant, this is how Weil reads Plato's *Timaeus*.

is regulated by providence—but a providence that is impersonal[61] and impartial, invariable, and analogous to mechanism.

> On the plane of events, the notion of conformity to the will of God is identical with the notion of reality. ... Faith in Providence consists in being certain that the universe in its totality is in conformity to the will of God ... with no room for doubting that evil is present. Thus the object of certitude is an eternal and universal dispensation constituting the foundation of the invariable order in the world.[62]

She identifies this impersonal providence with God's impartial grace or unconditional love,[63] frequently reciting Jesus' words: "... that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:45, 48 NIV). She describes this providence as a *supernatural mechanism*—supernatural because God has created a reality marked by divine order, bathed in beauty, and seeded with grace,[64] but mechanical because pure goodness descends invariably and automatically wherever human desire and consent welcome it (Luke 18:5, 11). Christ's parable of the sower and the seed provides a picture. The seed falls gratuitously and indiscriminately on every kind of soil (human hearts). The condition of the soil (the busy heart, the shallow heart, the hard heart, and the open heart) determines the nature of the 'harvest.' Even what we call divine judgment is impersonal—it has nothing to do with God's personal punishment, but rather, denotes fixed consequences of natural law (she cites John 3:18–21; 5:30; 12:47–8 as proof-texts). So, for both Grant and Weil, providence is *not*

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[61] Providence is impersonal. But God is both personal and impersonal. See below. "God must be impersonal, to be innocent of evil, and personal, to be responsible for good." (Weil, *FLN*, 112). "Perhaps, to have a personal relationship with an impersonal God?" (Weil, *NB* 1: 173).

[62] Weil, *NFR*, 270–1. She sees this account "in the sacred texts of the Chinese, the Indians, and the Greeks, or in the Gospels."

[63] Weil, *FLN*, 127.

[64] Thus, grace is gratuitous but not arbitrary. (Weil, *NB* 1: 182).

God's intervention in history (personal or national), while it *is* an operation of grace.[65] If not by intervention, how does grace operate in time?

Weil offers *incarnation* over against *intervention* as the means of grace.[66] Incarnation, because grace *only* manifests in history through mediation—especially through the invitation of human intermediaries—rather than by 'sovereign' violations of the natural order.[67] Similarly, she carefully distinguishes the *supernatural* from *miracles*. The *supernatural* relates to the uncreated faculty of the soul—supernatural love—inviting and mediating supernatural grace in love of God (faith) and neighbour (justice).[68] Here she often speaks in absolutes: "The *only* connection between God and the world lies in the possibility that the supernatural exists in the world, in a human soul."[69] She even says that God is powerless in the world without human cooperation.[70]

Miracles, by contrast, are *extraordinary natural phenomena* that only occur through people who find themselves in particular states, such as sainthood, hysteria, or ascetic self-mastery.[71] As such, they are simply the effects of psycho-biological mechanism, whether we call it faith or suggestion.[72] Thus, they may not even be supernatural. That is, they can operate within laws of nature (not yet understood) without necessarily mediating the goodness, grace, or love of God as such.

Grant follows this line of thinking precisely.[73] His core complaint is that Christian providence had succumbed to an image of God marked by primacy of the will or power. The type of providence he rejected imagines God personally (micro-)managing history through particular interventions. One's personal or national history, so directed, is regarded as evidence of God's favour and rewards or God's displeasure and punishments. Weil's sardonic rebuttal in *The Need for Roots* gets to the heart of it. On the personal or private front, she took such

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[65] Weil, *NFR*, 263. She cites Mark 4: 26–8 as a picture of this.
[66] Weil, *NB* 1: 221.
[67] Weil, *NB* 1: 246, 272, 276.
[68] Weil, *FLN*, 131.
[69] Weil, *NB* 1: 281, 287; 2: 343–4.
[70] Weil, *NB* 1: 277.
[71] Weil, *NB* 1: 244.
[72] Weil, *NB* 1: 314–5.
[73] Grant, *GP*, 108. Grant thought much of this out in his thesis before finding Weil. For Strauss's influence here, cf. Forbes, *A Guide* (2007), 136–40.

providence to be a misread of Jesus' image of God as Father, as if he personally intervenes to cause or prevent every occurrence of good or evil for each individual.[74] In the public or political spheres, Weil blames the Church for adopting a Roman conception of God as our divine Emperor. 'Sovereignty' is degraded into a spirit of domination and imperialism;[75] a master-slave relationship where God does what God wills for God's ends. Such misrepresentations open a door to the charge: if God is sovereign to intervene in history to accomplish God's will, then history shows us that God is either utterly indifferent, arbitrary, or insanely wicked—even directly complicit with evil. For example, if God could intervene, why didn't God prevent the holocaust by removing Hitler (or Satan!) at the outset?[76] In Weil's language, behind this whole doctrine lurks none other than 'the great beast' (of *The Republic* and *Revelation*), hiding God's absence and teaching providence[77] for its socio-political agendas.

We come full circle to the two images of God (willful versus good) that correspond to these two conceptions of providence—and how each relates to evil: "The service of the false [all-powerful] God ... purifies evil by eliminating the horror of it. ... The service of the true [all-loving] God allows the horror of evil to subsist, and even renders it more intense."[78] This juxtaposition of denial and reality is exactly what Grant means with his Lutheran motto, "The theologian of glory says that evil is good and good evil; the theologian of the Cross says that the thing *is as it is*."[79]

This brings us to the problem of evil.

ii. The problem of evil and theodicy

Numerous and diverse formulations of 'the problem of evil' have existed from the time of Epicurus and Cleanthes.[80] George Grant and Simone Weil worked with David Hume's version of the problem of evil in *Dialogues Concerning Natural*

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[74] Weil, *NFR*, 282.

[75] Weil, *NFR*, 271, 279.

[76] Weil, *NFR*, 281. "One may not debase God to the point of making Him a partisan in a war ... In the Iliad, the gods are partisans, but Zeus takes up his golden scales." (Weil, *NB*, 55).

[77] Weil, *NB* 2: 380.

[78] Weil, *NB* 2: 504–5.

[79] Grant, *TE*, 21n2. Quoting Luther, *Werke*, Weimer edition, Vol. I (1883), 354. Italics mine.

[80] Cf. Gottfried W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil* (2009). Cf. Weil, *FLN*, 178.

Religion: "Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered. Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?"[81]

Even more simply put, if God is, by definition, all-good and all-powerful, then why is there evil in the world? Conversely, there is evil in the world. Therefore, God is either not all-good or God is not all-powerful, and therefore, not God at all.

We try to explain this with rational arguments we call 'theodicies.' And there are many explanations! Grant and Weil alike claim these explanations justify the goodness and the power of God by calling evil good. As we shall see, Grant and Weil propose instead a theology of the Cross, ultimately challenging the premise that God is all-powerful *in this world*.

Grant cites Voltaire's use of the Lisbon disaster as a fatal, historic blow to the immanent forms of providence and theodicies claiming to solve the problem of evil.

On Nov. 1, 1755 an earthquake shattered Lisbon, crushing worshippers who were attending All Saints' Day services beneath six huge cathedrals that collapsed upon them. Survivors fled the building areas to the harbor, only to face the wrath of a tsunami within the hour. The earthquake triggered fires that would last one week, destroying much of the city. Giant waves rolled north to Spain and south to Morocco, engulfing entire coastal towns. The death toll has been estimated from sixty to one hundred thousand souls.

The disaster demanded a response across the philosophical and theological spectrum: from John Wesley (1756), who called it divine retribution; to Immanuel Kant (in *Critique of Judgment*, 1790); to J. J. Rousseau ("Essay to Voltaire on Optimism," 1756).[82] Ultimately, the theological fallout matched the physical devastation—shaking faith, drowning optimism, and razing theodicies across Europe. Kant concluded,

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[81] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (2007), 74.

[82] Cf. John Wesley in 1756: "Serious thoughts occasioned by the earthquake at Lisbon" (2010); Immanuel Kant in 1755: *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*, (1981), who looks on the bright side: because of the earthquake, mineral springs were discovered in East Prussia. Cp. Immanuel Kant, "The Analytic of the Sublime," *Critique of Judgment* (*Basic Writings*, 2001), 306–8; Jean–Jacques Rousseau, "Letter to Voltaire on Optimism," *Candide and Related Texts* (2000), 108–22.

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> The result of this trial before the tribunal of philosophy is that no theodicy so far proposed has kept its promise; none has managed to justify the moral wisdom at work in the government of the world against the doubts which arise out of the experience of the world.[83]

Voltaire's logic was as simple as it was destructive: if God is actively involved in history, he is immoral and capricious. For many, therefore, there is no God. Says Grant,

> Voltaire's essay on the earthquake at Cadiz is mainly negative ... concerned with ridiculing belief in the providential ordering of the world. How can there be providential ordering of events when evil such as this occurs? The natural evil of an earthquake cannot be blamed on man, as can the moral evil of sin. Its cause is elsewhere. The works of God are condemned in the name of morality, so that the idea of God is killed in man's heart. Belief in God is attacked in the name of a pessimism that cannot reconcile the evil of the world with divine purpose.[84]

Grant's greatness is that he allows the twin calamities of Lisbon's tremors and Voltaire's critique to bring every notion of a scrutable providence to complete ruin,[85] and then he invokes the World Wars to leave Enlightenment progressivism equally desolate. Unlike so many panicky Christians, Grant would not rush prematurely to fortify a toppling faith without undergoing the severe truth of an opponent's argument. Rather than being dismissive or defensive, Grant relives the London bombings in the stanzas of Voltaire's poem.

> O unhappy mortals! O deplorable ground!
> O of all the mortals appalling assembly!

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[83] Immanuel Kant, "On the Failure of All Philosophical Theodicies," *Kant on History and Religion* (1973), 290.

[84] Grant, *PMA*, 46. Unfortunately, providential optimism was crushed and replaced by an equally naïve progressivism: redemption through the human spirit and scientific achievement. Two world wars would solve that.

[85] Yet Grant contends for a pre-progressive Judeo-Christian providence that was held as inscrutable to our intelligence (Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 830). Weil took this inscrutability to even greater lengths.

Useless pains eternal maintenance!

Misled philosophers who shout: 'All is well'.[86]

Run, contemplate these dreadful ruins

These remains, these scraps, these unhappy ashes

These piled up women, these children one on the other …

Lisbon is damaged, and one dances in Paris!

Will you, before this mass of victims, claim that

"God is revenged, their death repays their crimes"?[87]

Does the loss of rational theodicy leave Grant bereft? Absolutely! But this move is indispensable—first, because this was his reality, and second, only when the ground is scraped clear of delusional wish-dreams is there bedrock for Grant to discover the goodness of God and develop his theology of the Cross.

iii. All-powerful: The errant premise

The question is: what parts of providence/theodicy are scraped clear and what remains as bedrock? Returning to the key premises in the problem of evil, Grant and Weil respond to each as follows:

- *Evil exists.* For Grant and Weil, this is non-negotiable, irreducible. In the form of evil they call affliction, it also defies sense or purpose. Any attempt to justify evil beyond 'it is,' is offensive in its denial of the existential distance between any real conception of Good and the misery that enslaves, oppresses, and dehumanizes necessity's victims.[88] Evil is real. Period.[89]

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[86] Voltaire was responding to an axiom he called the '*tout est bien* philosophy,' which he found, for example, in Alexander Pope's "Essay on Man" (1733–4), in Leibniz, and in Lord Shaftesbury. Voltaire blasted their optimism in the face of a series of enormous earthquakes. Cf. Voltaire, "Preface to the 'Poem on the Lisbon Disaster,'" *Candide and Related Texts* (2000), 95–9; Voltaire, "*Tout es Bien*" (1972), 68–74. Theodor Adorno states, "The earthquake of Lisbon sufficed to cure Voltaire of the theodicy of Leibniz." (Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (1973), 361).

[87] Voltaire, "Poem on the Lisbon Disaster or Examination of this Axiom 'All is Well,'" *Selected Poems by Voltaire* (1911).

[88] Weil, *NB* 2: 363. Cf. also,

> Ivan's speech in the *Brother's Karamazov*. ... No reason, whatever it may be, that can be put forward to me to compensate for a child's tear can bring me to accept that tear. None, absolutely none which the intelligence is able to conceive. One only—but which is only intelligible to supernatural love: that it is God's will. And for this last reason, I would just as readily accept a world

- *God is all-good*. Grant and Weil never prove their way into this statement. While they follow Plato in giving themselves to articulating the Good rationally, from beginning to end they regard it as a revelation, an enlightenment, a true premise that one can either turn toward—and experience as true, even in tragedy—or turn from and finally despair (once one's progressivist anesthetic wears off). In accepting this premise, they find "God is good. Period," to be firm bedrock.[90]

- *God is all-powerful*. The problem of evil exposes popular providence as contradictory and the scrutability of theodicy as fallacious.[91] One of the premises must be false, at least in its unqualified shape. Grant and Weil regard this third premise—God as omnipotent, the God who is 'in control' of history and all-powerful *in time*—as impossible and even immoral in its implications (a la Voltaire). God, they say, must be both all-powerful in a limited sense (an oxymoron perhaps?) and *all-powerless*.

iv. God the all-powerful, all-powerless

Why does God allow this or that evil in the world? Why did God allow the mass deaths of Lisbon or Auschwitz? This is a trick question—even a cruel one—in that it implies that God sits as a cosmic regulator, giving or withholding permission for every temporal event, signing off on some and preventing others according to an eternal master plan. Where human freedom cannot be blamed for a particular evil, some theodicies retreat behind mystery to justify God's apparently arbitrary choices. But if choice is involved, Voltaire and Lisbon make the case that God's choices have been monstrous.[92]

Grant and Weil, by contrast, respond to 'why does God allow?' with 'God allows everything.' *If* God is all-powerful, this is not akin to *control*. That is the

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which was only evil and whose consequences could only be evil as a child's tear. (Weil, *NB* 2: 432–3).

[89] I.e., evil is a real experience, not an ontological reality. Evil is the absence of Good, not its opposite, as in Manichean dualism.

[90] "Even if God does no good for us, believe that he desires it and can do it. That is contradictory. It is faith. Humility brings about this marvel." (Weil, *FLN,* 259).

[91] "The problem is not really providence but scrutability." (Weil, *NB* 1: 302).

[92] Grant and Weil at times distinguish evil from suffering. But Voltaire's point is that if God (or anyone) *caused* or could have prevented the suffering of innocents, that would *make* it evil. They would agree.

point: God does not *do* control (power as force). Rather, God's omnipotence is two-fold:

- God is all-powerful as the Creator of all that is within a fixed order. God set the limits of the universe. Within those limits God sovereignly chose to grant the realm of necessity free play without interference.[93]
- God is all-powerful in the sense that God *voluntarily* refrains ('chains himself') from violating the order of necessity.

Conversely, God's two-fold power*less*ness is manifest in time:

- God's powerlessness in the cosmic Cross of Creation, relinquishing control to natural law, and
- God's powerlessness in the historic Cross of the crucifixion, relinquishing control to human autonomy (i.e., freedom as rebellion).

Thus, Grant can and must envision a God who is simultaneously:

- near (immanent) and distant (transcendent);
- present and absent;
- manifest and hidden;
- existent (theism) and nonexistent (atheism!);
- personal and impersonal.[94]

To admit these points functions to preserve the Goodness of God, the reality of affliction, and the distance between them. It also begs the question of how God bridges the distance: Grant and Weil seek to respond via the Cross and mediation.

v. Bridging the distance

We have made much of Grant and Weil's profound commitment to preserving the distance between the necessary and the Good, between affliction and perfection. When that gap is properly maintained, we can then ponder the bridges that might cross it. According to Weil, this quest was at the heart of Greek thought: "The contemplation of human misery in its truth implies a very high spirituality. All Greek civilization is a search for bridges to relate human misery and divine perfection."[95]

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[93] Weil, *NB* 1: 191. We can invite God's action—as love, not force—but then it is no longer interference.

[94] Cf. Jersak, "God the All-Powerful, All-Powerless," *MSO*, 111–21.

[95] Weil, *IC*, 75.

We also heard how this distance could only be bridged through the descent of Grace.[96] As Weil says, "The infinity of space and time separates us from God. ... We cannot take one step towards the heavens. God crosses the universe and comes to us."[97] But surprisingly, supernaturally, the gorge of affliction itself becomes a bridge where contact with God becomes a real possibility. Weil recalls,

> In my reasoning on the insolubility of the problem of God, I had not anticipated this possibility: a real contact, person-to-person, here below, between a human being and God. ... Moreover, in Christ's sudden possession of me, neither my senses nor my imagination had any part; through my suffering I only felt the presence of a love analogous to what one reads in the smile of a beloved face.[98]

As we have seen, in Grant and Weil's epistemology, the organ of supernatural love makes contact with God and with beauty, directly or indirectly, through contemplation.[99] We will also see in their ethics (next chapter) how compassion too "spans this abyss which creation has opened between God and the creature."[100] But most of all, Grant and Weil look to the Cross as their model of divine descent and human consent. The Cross—affliction *par excellence*—proclaims the vastness of God's distance, but also acts as the mediating bridge—the supreme *Metaxu*—to which we now turn.

5.3   Grant's Theodicy of the Cross

> *Only in terms of the* theologia crucis *is any adequate theodicy possible.* Only in the contemplation of the Cross in sincerity of feeling and the following of it in faithfulness in action can men affirm that God is Love, and make that affirmation without denying their own capacity for sin, or closing down their imaginations upon the suffering of the world.[101]

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[96] Weil, *NB* 1: 308.

[97] Weil, *SNL,* 181.

[98] My translation.

[99] Weil, *NB* 1: 308.

[100] Weil, *FLN,* 103.

[101] Grant, "The Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 281.

I have entitled this section "Grant's Theodicy of the Cross" advisedly, bearing in mind his resistance to rational theodicies of glory. Indeed, we might call the Cross itself an anti-theodicy. Others speak of Grant's 'theology of the Cross,'[102] which of course it is. And while even his wife, Sheila, would say that Grant rarely wrote or spoke of the crucifixion,[103] when one scours his dissertation, articles, lecture notes, and books, a consistent and cohesive theology of the Cross repeatedly surfaces from beginning to end. But Sheila's point is that her husband would rather counsel us to gaze contemplatively on the Cross than explain it for us. In Grant's response to Nietzsche's staggering attack on the Gethsemane and Golgotha, he says of "these events by which all other events are judged,"

> one rarely wants to speak, not only because it has been spoken of too often, too badly, but because what is there is there; and one does well to remember what the greatest Western account of the matter [Bach's *St Matthew Passion*] does at that point; the contralto simply says: 'see – look – rest.'[104]

Yet speak he does—if one picks up the catchphrases around which he centres his theology: 'it is what it is,' 'calling evil good,' 'the distance between necessity and the Good,' 'the cry of dereliction,' and so on. Moreover, the references multiply when we include Grant's romantic-contemplative-literary self: reading between the lines of his letters; a journal entry here; a sonnet there; an unpublished sermon; or a reflection on some novel (Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Celine) or classical composition (Mozart, Bach).

When all is said and done, it would be fair to call Grant 'Canada's theologian of the Cross.' I cannot think of his equal when we ponder how, for Grant:

- The Cross represents and responds to (not 'solves') the problem of evil.
- The Cross repudiates and replaces failed theodicies.
- The Cross reflects the true, kenotic nature of God.

Herein, I will focus on these themes. My unique contribution will be:

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[102] E.g., Athanasiadis, *Theology of the Cross* (2001); S. Grant, "George Grant and the Theology of the Cross" (1996).

[103] S. Grant, "George Grant and the Theology of the Cross" (1996), 255.

[104] Grant, "Course Lectures at McMaster: A Selection," *CW* 3: 670.

- To set Grant's theology of the Cross directly in it's Platonic context as a bridge between divine perfection and human affliction.

- To identify Grant's doctrine of the Crucified Christ as that Sun which the *nous* beholds after escaping from the Cave.

- To reframe Grant's theology of the Cross around a Weilian cosmology of divine and human consent.

I hope to show how these considerations taken together compose what Grant means by 'the Cross.'

5.3.1   Grant's pre-Weilan *theologia crucis*

My emphasis on Weil later in this section ought not be taken to imply that Grant's work is only a copy or commentary of her thought. Although he comes to use her language extensively and credits her influence, his theodicy of the Cross grows from his own conversion and independent reflection for nearly a decade before finding resonance in her work. While he borrows her language, these revelations are his own—two great thinkers tapping gold from the same rich vein. To demonstrate this, we begin with a review of (i) Grant's wartime thoughts; (ii) his use of Luther's Heidelberg Confession; (iii) a second look at his Oxford dissertation; and (iv) some influence from Dostoevsky.

i.   Grant's wartime Cross

In the biographical chapter, we noted some building blocks of Grant's thought, including the cornerstones of his theology of the Cross. Specifically, we saw the journal entry immediately following his conversion, where Grant recalls Tolstoy's phrase, "God sees the truth but waits," and applies it to the national sins that led to the Great War. His conclusion—"yet he [God] did not intervene, he waited"[105]—will be essential to his full-blown doctrine of the Cross as *consent*. He continues, "Of course, the approach to God is, I know not how. For me it must always be *Credo et intelligam*."[106] With these words, we see the seeds of his contemplative agnosticism and his rejection of rational theodicies, preparing him for Luther's *theologia crucis*.

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[105] Journal entry, 11/05/[1942] (Christian, *SL*, 104–5).
[106] Journal entry, 11/05/[1942] (Christian, *SL*, 104–5).

In chapter 4, we also cited a sermon on the Cross that Grant wrote within a month of his conversion.[107] There, we recognized his emphasis on *contemplation* of the Passion. The brief homily again establishes Grant's lifelong theme of Gethsemane's 'Not my will' as Christ's consent to the Father's will—to participate in our affliction. He also identifies our own experience of and consent to God's silence in Gethsemane: "And there alone, as in all the tragic moments of our life, we must be alone. There we too face the question – 'Oh Father, let thy will be done.'"[108]

Even before Grant's conversion, he knows something is askew—that perhaps a theology of glory is at work amidst the propaganda of war. In his descriptions of the drama around the London bombings, he clarifies, "It may sound exciting, but it is evil."[109] Then there is a biting journal entry about some enthusiastic Canadian visitors. Grant complains, "How much does Stanley Russell know about Christianity? His comparison of the cross to the commando's dagger, although carrying things just a little too far, even for our fat hearts."[110] He is progressively seeing how good and evil are confused. This wartime disillusionment with triumphalism and the progressivist philosophy of history come to a head in a written confrontation with his mother in the January following his conversion.

> The phrase [he was reacting to] was 'You will have been thrilled, despite yourself, by the entry of the USA into the war.' The only words to describe that it seems to me is that you must think I am a fool or else I must have turned my face away from God. If you want to know my sensations they were the following. For three days I really almost was on the point of suicide, certainly nearer than I have ever been or ever hope to be. ... It may (in fact it is almost certain) establish the Anglo-American *pax*, but will that be much nearer to God than the other alternatives? ... We have just presumed that our standards fit others, that ours are the best, that other people can find their God through our way of life. We have

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[107] GPG sermon fragment, circa 12/1941 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.24).
[108] GPG sermon fragment, circa 12/1941 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.24).
[109] GPG letter fragment, circa 05/1941 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.25).
[110] GPG journal entry, 10/28/1942 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.26).

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created God in the image of our own wills. As some great man said 'We have made him a tame confederate of our petty adventurings.'[111]

What has this quasi-rant to do with Grant's theology of the Cross? With supreme clarity, Grant recognizes how in the name of progress, providence, democracy, or Christianity, political necessity and the moral evil of war are called Good if they bring about the dictates of our collective will. He will soon be calling this the 'theology of glory' that blasphemes the Cross. By contrast, his theology of the Cross reveals the God who empties himself of every claim to hegemony, who experiences divine humiliation, who suffers affliction rather than inflicting vengeance. Sheila testifies to Grant's love of the Cross as 'strength through weakness' (1 Cor. 1:25) and how he frequently quoted Rabindranath Tagore's prayer:

> Give me the supreme faith of love, this is my prayer;
> The faith of the life in death, of the victory in defeat,
> Of the power hidden in the frailness of beauty,
> Of the dignity of pain that accepts hurt but disdains to return it.[112]

ii. Grant on Luther's *theologia crucis*

> Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. (Isa. 5:20)

Informed by face-to-face experiences with the evils of war and the goodness of God, Grant's feelings congeal into convictions condensed in a statement by Martin Luther in "Thesis 21" of his Heidelberg Disputation: "The theologian of glory says that evil is good and good evil; the theologian of the cross says that the thing is as it is."[113]

We need not reiterate the expansive work of H. Athanasiadis here,[114] but due diligence requires that we at least summarize highlights from Sheila Grant's

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[111] GPG to Maude Grant, 01/03/1942 (Christian, *SL*, 94–6).
[112] S. Grant, "Grant and the Theology of the Cross" (1996), 254–5.
[113] Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God* (1941), 192–3.
[114] Athanasiadis, *Theology of the Cross* (2001).

findings on Grant's use of that line.[115] Sheila's essay surveys the motto-like importance of Luther's statement for Grant. "Thesis 21" succinctly expresses Grant's refusal to turn his face from the reality of evil, his unwillingness to call good evil in the name of progress, and his resistance to the scrutability of Providence. Luther's words allow Grant to maintain the distance between the Good and necessity in our experience, and they hold up the Cross as the "only true illumination of the mystery" of evil.[116] Sheila's essay goes on to trace Grant's direct quotations of and subtle allusions to Luther's theses throughout his life, from his apparent discovery of it at Oxford[117] to the climax of his Christian articulation in "Faith and the Multiversity" (1986).[118] She demonstrates how Grant self-identifies as a theologian of the Cross in the specific sense that he ascribed to Luther's "Thesis 21."

That being said, Sheila makes some important qualifications. First, she is clear that Grant was neither a student of Luther nor taught on Luther.[119] Rather, he utilizes this particular phrase according to his own interpretation, without being confined to Luther's context or intent. The most obvious evidence comes with Grant's choice of translation. According to Sheila, the most accurate English translations of Luther's Latin theses state that the theologian of the Cross says 'what a thing is' or 'what is true' or 'what it actually is.' But Grant *always* quotes Luther as saying "the theologian of the cross says that the thing *is as it is*," apparently a version found in John Baillie's *Our Knowledge of God* (1939), which Grant would have used while at Oxford.[120] Why did Grant favour this more obscure and possibly less accurate translation? Because if, with Luther, we call a thing *what it [actually] is*, this implies a level of knowledge about what it is and what it means that Grant still finds too scrutable—too accessible to rational theology. Grant's agnosticism concerning mystery—especially evil and providence—limits itself to saying only, '*It is what it is.*'

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[115] S. Grant, "Grant and the Theology of the Cross" (1996), 243–62.
[116] Grant, *TE*, 20.
[117] Possibly around a time in 1945 when he wrote to his mother, "My overwhelming admiration at the moment is for Martin Luther." GPG to Maude Grant, 1945 (Christian, *SL*, 121).
[118] Cf. Jersak, "Grant's References to Luther's Thesis 21," *MSO*, 213–16.
[119] S. Grant, "Grant and the Theology of the Cross" (1996), 245.
[120] S. Grant, "Grant and the Theology of the Cross" (1996), 244.

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This brings Grant close to a statement he will later find in Simone Weil's *Gravity and Grace*: "Every attempt to justify evil by anything other than the fact that that which is *is*, is an offence against this truth."[121] Weil seems close to quoting Thesis 21, though she apparently thought little of Luther.[122]

This is not to say that Grant is unfaithful to Luther's intent. His rendering may even convey what Luther meant better than these supposedly tighter translations. Indeed, Sheila confirms that Grant is tracking with Luther when the latter claims we need a theology of the Cross "to cope with the problems of Providence without either hurt to ourselves or secret anger with God."[123] She cites Luther's commitment to inscrutable providence in the face of evil: "Behold, God governs the corporeal world in such a way that if one regards and follows the judgement of human reason, one is forced to say either that there is no God or that God is unjust."[124] And again, Luther previews Grant and Weil by offering the Cross as essential to a revelation of God: "... it suffices and profits nobody to know God in His glory and majesty unless he knows Him also in the humility and ignominy of the cross, where God is clothed in human nature."[125]

Beyond Grant's appropriation of Luther's "Thesis 21," we see his pre-Weilian *theologia crucis* take further shape as he interacts with John Oman in his dissertation.

iii. Grant on Oman's *theologia crucis*

George Grant's PhD dissertation focuses on John Oman. Grant's theology of the Cross actually bears many of the marks of Oman's *theologia crucis*. Both men hold the Cross as central to all Christian theology, that faith (not reason) is essential to one's knowledge of God's love and forgiveness, and that God's providence must ultimately remain a mystery. Both believed redemption was accomplished—consummated[126]—in Gethsemane and Golgotha. They believed

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[121] Weil, *G&G*, 105.

[122] We know little of Weil's familiarity with Luther—only Pétrement's testimony that Weil didn't like him (Pétrement, *A Life* (1976), 373) and Weil's brief mention in her "Spiritual Autobiography": "... although I know practically nothing of this business, I incline to think provisionally that [the Church] was right to punish Luther." (Weil, "Spiritual Autobiography," *SWR*, 24).

[123] Dillenberger (ed.), *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (1961), 32.

[124] Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought* (1970), 230.

[125] Timothy Lull (ed.), *Luther's Works* (1957), 31: 40.

[126] Grant, "Five Lectures on Christianity," *CW* 4: 944.

that Christ is risen, but that Easter Sunday did not reverse a Good Friday defeat. The Resurrection was not a fulfillment, but a consequence of the Cross.[127] Sheila illustrates Oman's lingering impact on Grant by comparing an analogy common to each.

> Oman: "The *theologia gloriae* sees on the cross 'the King in rags, who will soon tear off his disguise and show himself in triumph."
>
> Grant (1976 lectures at McMasters): "There is a ghastly way of speaking about the Resurrection in the modern world which I call the fairy-tale way. A prince is dressed in rags, and everybody scorns him. Suddenly the clothes are pulled off and he appears in his prince's costume, and everybody treats him well."[128]

But Grant also critiques Oman's theology as insufficient—too simple, triumphant, and voluntaristic for moderns whose faith is shattered by despair. Oman's vision is beautiful as far as it goes: Grant acknowledges Oman's Cross as a prophetic revelation of the Father's love, the Son's forgiveness, and the call to "find joy in the world by the knowledge that all can be redeemed."[129] It also reveals God's call to an ethic of forgiveness: "Oman's faith is that Our Lord on the Cross reveals the Father as Love, Who demands from men that they take up their crosses in forgiveness. The Father's Love and man's freedom to partake of it are the essence of Christianity."[130] But something is missing. By resisting Oman, Grant tells us his own story—how this simplicity is marred by the reality of doubt and despair that comes with extreme affliction. Here are two illustrations from Grant's thesis:

> In none of Oman's writings is there that note of despair of himself and the world ... which makes men parade unflinchingly the doubts that hold back from faith. Oman is always *able to believe* that the Love of God rules all

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[127] S. Grant, "Grant and the Theology of the Cross" (1996), 247–8, 255.
[128] S. Grant, "Grant and the Theology of the Cross" (1996), 247.
[129] Grant, "The Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 171.
[130] Grant, "The Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 168.

space and time, and to find in men *the capacity to follow* the destiny of the Cross.[131]

> Oman's [theology] is based on the faith that only in the theism of Calvary can men in honesty see the pain of the world and still be able to say that the Father is over all and in all. But of course it is possible for an imaginative and reasonable man to look at Calvary and despair. It cannot be said that suicide is by definition irrational.[132]

Grant had experienced the human limitations of our freedom to believe and our capacity to respond to the Cross. Athanasiadis' summarizes Grant's general critique of Oman:

> Grant criticizes [Oman's liberal] interpretation of the crucifixion of Christ as the experience of divine redemption. Grant accuses Oman of not appreciating the experience of the afflicted, the sceptic, and the defeated. To speak about Christ offering the forgiveness of God as something those at the foot of the cross can simply embrace by an act of the will, Grant believes, does violence to the truth of experience wherein a person becomes so crushed by circumstances that forgiveness or the larger love of God … cannot be touched in a way that heals and redeems.[133]

We see summarized in these few sentences Grant's attack on liberal progressivism, providence, and the theology of glory. We see his experiential attentiveness to affliction and to contemplative epistemology (versus willing belief). So, very early on one hears all the pertinent seed-themes of Grant's later, mature theology of the Cross—years before he reads Weil.

Thus, while Grant and Oman each hinge their entire theologies around a vision of the Cross, Grant's version encompasses not only Calvary's proffered redemption, but also reveals the agony of the journey that links Gethesemene and Calvary to our own faith/doubt experience. For Grant, the Cross does not so much

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[131] Grant, "The Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 287. Grant notes how Oman affirms his joyous faith in the face of the agonies and defeats of life by appealing to the universal rule of love and Divine Providence (286–7).

[132] Grant, "The Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 354–5.

[133] Athanasiadis, "Waiting at the Foot of the Cross" (2006), 258–9.

demand a choice (to believe and to forgive) that many cannot even make, as it summons us to simply wait at its foot, even in the astonishment of despair. The Cross beckons us to see and wait even as God sees and waits.[134] The Cross bears witness to the anguish of absence as much as to the consolation of presence. Harris Athanasiadis condenses this double-vision of the Cross perfectly:

> On the cross, Christ revealed both the agony of the darkness and the beauty of the light of love rising through and beyond the darkness. Any spirituality that is not nourished by the truth of engagement with the darkness as possibility and actuality, as well as by the light of love as disruptive and transfiguring grace, is not true to the revelation of God on the cross.[135]

In summary, for Grant, our real life experience of the Cross includes all three statements: "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (despair); "It is finished," (consummation, implying both completion and union); and "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," (surrender, trust).[136]

iv. Grant on Dostoevsky's *theologia crucis*

This line of thinking—or truth-telling—drew Grant to the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky, especially in the days from Bermondsey to his conversion.[137] Briefly, Dostoevsky's theology of the Cross serves as a bridge from Oman to Weil.

In his dissertation, Grant compares and contrasts Oman and Dostoevsky's faith, emphasizing how they share a powerfully simple gospel, but that Dostoevsky better illustrates the mystery of faith because he knows the aching difficulties through which moderns must wrestle towards belief. Quoting a letter by Dostoevsky to which Grant can relate:

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[134] Cf. Journal entry," 11/06/1942 (Christian, *SL*, 105).

[135] Athanasiadis, "Waiting at the Foot of the Cross" (2006), 267.

[136] He would also include the Gethsemane experience of "Father, take this cup" (affliction) and "Not my will, but yours" (acceptance).

[137] Cf. GPG to Mother, 09/11/1940 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.27); GPG to Mother, Autumn 1941 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.28); GPG to Professor Trotter, 12/26/1941 (Jersak, *MSO* 14.29); Grant said, "… only Dostoevsky has influenced me equally." GPG to Alice Boissonneau, Spring 1946 (Christian, *SL*, 128).

I want to say to you about myself, that I am a child of this age, a child of unbelief and skepticism, and probably – indeed I know it – shall remain so until the end of my life. How terribly it has tortured me (and tortures me even now) – this longing for faith, which is all the stronger for the proofs I have against it! And yet God gives me sometimes moments of perfect peace; in such moments I love and believe that I am loved; in such moments I have formulated my creed wherein all is dear and holy to me. This creed is extremely simple: here it is: I believe that there is nothing lovelier, deeper, and more sympathetic, more rational, more human and more perfect than the Saviour; I say to myself that not only is there no one else like Him, but that there could be no one. I would even say more: If anyone could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth really did exclude Christ, I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with the truth ...[138]

Grant's assessment is that Oman and Dostoevsky's gospels are akin, evident in the middle section of the above quote. But the beginning and end are a departure that Oman could not have written. Oman's strength is in preserving the note of joy in the act of faith. "But to say that the act of faith must always include this joy is to iron out Christian experience into one pattern."[139]

Years later (1958–9), Grant was asked to give a talk on Dostoevsky for CBC radio.[140] In truth, because of time pressure he delegated it to Sheila before adding his final tweaks and touches. The two had a long history of reading Dostoevsky and were of one mind on the subject. These were the years when Grant was combing the European existentialists—Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Marcel, Sartre, and Heidegger—attempting to sort through the relationship between a transcendent, eternal God and the phenomenon of subjective human freedom.[141] According to Grant, Dostoevsky's doctrine centres on absolute freedom of the will ("man's freedom is his very self"), but salvation *must* come

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[138] Grant, "Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 355 (citing John Middletone Murry, *Fyodor Dostoevsky* (1923), 77–8). Grant cites it again in 1958–9 in "Fyodor Dostoevsky," *CW* 2: 416, and in "Faith and the Multiversity," *CW* 4: 634.

[139] Grant, "Theology of John Oman," *CW* 1: 356.

[140] Cf. Grant, "Fyodor Dostoevsky," *CW* 2: 408–19.

[141] Christian, *A Biography* (1993), 177–8.

from beyond as a gift of grace (contra Pelagianism, Marxism, and Western liberalism). Apart from the grace of God, human freedom will inevitably either be crushed ("reducing him to a member of the ant heap") or will run wild in self-will to self-destruction.[142] While affirming the attack on liberal progressivism, Grant does not consider this the whole truth (i.e., the idea of freedom as our essence) but argues that Dostoevsky's greatest influence is his dialectic of faith and doubt:

> How overwhelmingly Dostoevsky sees the case against God. ... [L]ike the modern doubt, the agonizing struggle of the believer to reconcile the necessary and the good. This, rather than simply 'the problem of evil' seems to me the root of Dostoevsky's grief, his particular anguish and division. ...
>
> The dialectic starts from Dostoevsky's unwavering love and adoration of Jesus Christ. Always Christ is the good. But the terrible fear is that reality may after all be quite indifferent to the good, the good as we know it in Jesus Christ; that the cry of dereliction on the Cross was not answered.[143]

Dostoevsky utters this brand of doubt in all its force through the character of Ivan Karamazov.[144] Ivan, to Grant, is much more than a 'proud and irreligious atheist.' In his complexity, he verbalizes the genuine crisis of faith that assails the late moderns:

> He is consumed with desire for reconciliation, for divine universal harmony. He says, 'All the religions of the world are built on this longing, and I am a believer.' Nevertheless, because of the ghastly suffering that has been inflicted on the innocent, he cannot bring himself to accept any possible future harmony.[145]

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[142] Grant, "Dostoevsky," *CW* 2: 412–3.

[143] Grant, "Dostoevsky," *CW* 2: 414.

[144] Grant here references the chapters in *The Brothers Karamazov* entitled "Pro and Contra" and "The Grand Inquisitor" (*CW* 2: 414, 417–8).

[145] Grant, "Dostoevsky," *CW* 2: 414. At this point in the talk, Weil is already introduced to illustrate the same impasse from Weil, *NB* 1: 255.

Ivan would rather deny himself entrance to any future harmony if it "seems to deny love itself, by saying that suffering is unreal."[146] How does Dostoevsky move beyond Ivan's impasse? He must begin at the foot of the Cross, which at first exacerbates the problem. Grant recounts Dostoevsky's meditations on Hans Holbein's painting, *Descent from the Cross*,[147] which represents for him the vast distance between necessity and the Good, where even beyond our moral objections, at a cosmic level, nature itself crushes the innocent Christ with overwhelming force. Dostoevsky cannot reconcile this disunity between the claims of Goodness and the brutishness of creation, but while it is an agony for him, he *can* cling to the crucified Christ: "I should prefer to stay with Christ rather than with truth."[148] This is his theology of the Cross.

For his part, Grant concludes with a presentation of how the "Grand Inquisitor"[149] narrative might bring a tentative unity to Dostoevsky's torment— how grace might span the distance, even to perpetrators who torture the innocent.

> The terrible picture of Holbein can be seen in a triumphant setting. This is the Being of whom Alyosha spoke, who alone has the right to forgive everything, *all and for all*. But even with Ivan's eloquence, the reconciliation cannot be made explicit either for him or for us. Jesus speaks not a word to the Grand Inquisitor, but only kisses him. Here is the infinite weakness in which the Second Person of the Trinity crosses the void of separation.[150]

About a quarter century later, after repeating Dostoevsky's "I should prefer to stay with Christ rather than with truth" for a third time, Grant records Simone Weil's counter-statement:

> One can never wrestle enough with God if one does so out of pure regard for the truth. *Christ likes us to prefer truth to him* because, before being

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[146] Grant, "Dostoevsky," *CW* 2: 415.
[147] Grant, "Dostoevsky," *CW* 2: 415–6.
[148] Grant, "Dostoevsky," *CW* 2: 416.
[149] Cf. Grant's commentary on the Grand Inquisitor in "Five Lectures," *CW* 4: 946–50.
[150] Grant, "Dostoevsky," *CW* 2: 418.

Christ, he is truth. If one turns aside from him to go towards the truth, one will not go far before falling into his arms.[151]

Weil does not rescue Grant or us from the wrestle; in fact, she leaves him with even more questions. But she also offers hope that there is finally a unity between necessity and the Good, between our experience of reality and the Reality outside this world. However incomprehensible, she suggests such a reconciliation might be experienced at this same Cross.[152]

5.3.2   Grant's Weilian theodicy of the Cross

By referencing Weil I hope to show how extensively her work describes and confirms Grant's faith and thought, rather than supposing a prescriptive role. What does she *add* to Grant's revelation? First, she supplements Grant's vocabulary of distance and waiting with the language of affliction (absence, renunciation, abdication) and contemplation (openness, attention, consent). And she fortifies his convictions with the moral currency of her personal veracity. Also, when Grant teaches Weil's theology of the Cross, he is not objectively *describing* her as an indifferent scholar. He *incorporates* her—he publicly preaches his theology of the Cross using her language to support his own convictions (as we shall see shortly).

I will break down Grant's theodicy of the Cross into three foci: the Cross as Plato's *distance*; the Cross as *mediation* across the distance; and the Cross as God's, Christ's, and our *consent* through the distance.

5.3.3   The Cross and the Distance

i.   The Cross defines the distance

The Incarnation does not bring God closer to us. It increases the distance. He has placed the Cross between himself and us. The Cross is harder to bridge than the distance between heaven and earth. It is the distance.[153]

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[151] Grant, *TE*, 70 (citing Weil, *WG*, 27).
[152] Weil, *G-G*, 37.
[153] Weil, *NB* 1: 298.

Grant and Weil measure Plato's distance between the Good and necessity—between divine perfection and human affliction—with the Cross. The triple-distance of the crucifixion includes the distance (a) between God and humanity (God's goodness and humanity's injustice); (b) between God and God (the Father's abandonment of the Son to affliction); and again, (c) between humanity and God (humanity's experience of the Cross in our affliction).

a. *Between God and humanity*. First, beholding the Cross, we see the cruel extent of necessity—humanity's unfathomable descent into the dark cave of injustice. This form of necessity surpasses the beautiful mechanics of an ordered universe and "consists of all that appears to eclipse the perfection of God." It includes the violence of Plato's social beast, operating as "might, raw force, injustice, [and] ugliness."[154] The great beast found it *necessary* (expedient, according to John 18:14) to engage in the political-religious conspiracy to torture and crucify the Christ. In the name of God and justice, they murder God.

"Christianity's particular call," says Grant, is "to the fact that Christ declares the price of goodness in the face of evil."[155] The price is that in enduring injustice, perfect goodness not only consents to suffering profound injustice, but incarnates the Good by choosing the perfect righteousness of forgiveness over the pseudo-justice of vengeance.

> What Christianity added to the classical account of justice was not any change in its definition but an extension of what was due to others and an account of how to fulfil that due. Christ added to the two great commandments the words that the second is "like unto" the first. At the height of the Gospels we are shown the moment when a tortured being says of his torturers that their due is to be forgiven.[156]

Forgiveness fulfilling justice, rather than circumventing it? It sounds too easy. The crucifixion of Christ assures us there is nothing easy about it. There is no greater price for love than forgiveness, because it means the very death of all we

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[154] Patterson and Schmidt, "The Christian Materialism of Simone Weil," *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil* (2004), 79–80.

[155] Grant, *TJ*, 42.

[156] Grant, *TJ*, 54.

call 'self' or 'I.' Paradoxically, contra Nietzsche, Weil's Christ claims death of the old self is life-giving (Luke 9:24; 17:33).

b. *Between God and God.* Second, in beholding the Cross we see the distance between God the Father and the Son. Christ's cry of dereliction—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (the height of Grant and Weil's vision) echoes across eternity, measuring out an infinite distance between God and God. Grant says,

> Necessity is for Simone Weil that order which God must cross to love God. ... The highest love is that love which crosses an infinite distance.[157] This is what the crucifixion means to [Weil]: on the cross Christ expresses his love for his enemies, he expresses his desolation, the cry of dereliction in which he feels cut off from God's transcendence, and yet he crosses that infinite distance. ... *The infinite distance between God and God is necessity. The necessity which God has to cross to love God is the cross.*[158]

In Christ's cry we hear the climax of his *kenosis* into the form of a dying slave[159] and the complete absence of God from his 'sensibilities.'[160] The Psalm from which Jesus draws this phrase depicts the experience of utter dehumanization.

> My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest. ... But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. ... I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death (Ps. 22:1–2, 6–7, 14–15).

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[157] Cf. Weil, *NB* 2: 400. The distance is measures the height, width, and breadth of infinite love required to endure and to cross the distance.

[158] Cayley, *GC*, 176.

[159] Weil, *NB* 1: 208.

[160] Weil, *NB* 1: 223. Reminiscent, for Weil, of St. John of the Cross's 'dark night.'

Yet even across the great distance, we become privy to the foretold Christ's perfect trust in and desire for his God[161]—and to the redemptive power of his decreation.[162] Psalm 22 continues:

> I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! *For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him* but has listened to his cry for help. ... All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, ... They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: *He has done it!*[163] (Ps. 22:22–24, 27, 31)

Neither Weil nor Grant exegete Psalm 22 as the prophetic backdrop for Jesus' cry. In fact, the silence of God is so important to them in defining distance that they may have found this Psalm too triumphant, even though Christ consciously draws from it as his informing theology and experience. Grant and Weil put so much weight on the absence and distance of the Cross, while the testimony of the Psalm shows how the afflicted one becomes aware that God's face is, in the end, *not* hidden.[164] But there is more.

I regard the cry of dereliction as expressing the fullness of Christ's genuine astonishment and horror at the Father's hiddenness. It *does* define the distance between divine perfection and human affliction. But contra Weil and Grant, neither the text nor their theology of the Cross convince me that his cry was (nor needed to be) met with further silence. What did Christ hear, see, or experience that led him from the anguish of abandonment to the surrender and trust of "Father, into your hands I comment my spirit"? I believe the text reveals exactly what Christ heard, and from his own lips.[165] When we hear him say, "It is finished; it is accomplished; it is fulfilled," we are hearing—*he* is hearing—the voice of the Father's answer. We are hearing both sides of a conversation. We are

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[161] Weil, *NB* 1: 157.

[162] Weil, *NB* 2: 342.

[163] *He has done it!* = "It is finished" (John 19:30).

[164] Cp. Psalm 31 in its entirety, where Jesus quotes "Into your hands I commit my spirit" (Ps. 31:5 = Luke 23:46); Heb. 5:7–8.

[165] My thanks to Ryan Smyth for this insight.

witnessing the glorification and enthronement of the Son of Man to the place of all authority (cf. Dan. 7); and the throne is a Cross! This confirms Weil and Grant's theology, except that God's *answer*, not his *silence*, signals the lordship of perfect Love (1 John 3:16).

The Father's answer is the announcement to and through Jesus that he has accomplished his mission and is therefore being exalted. But the actual accomplishment is the transition from defining the distance to spanning the distance. The decisive act occurs when Christ asks the Father to forgive, and the Father replies, "[Yes,] it is accomplished." What is accomplished? The fullness of the Incarnation: the furthest descent into the depths of human misery (despair) and the final forgiveness to the depths of human depravity (deicide).

c. *Between humanity and God.* Third, "My God, my God" is also a cry of solidarity, as Jesus gives voice to our cries, to the anguish of every despairing soul.[166] In his insightful comparison of Weil and the Latin American father of liberation theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Alexander Nava ties together the Cross, solidarity, and theodicy:

> "Thus do the gods justify the life of man: they themselves live it—the only satisfactory theodicy!" Simone Weil would agree with this quote of Nietzsche; the only satisfactory theodicy is through a divine solidarity with the affliction of the world. "The Cross of Christ is the only source of light that is bright enough to illumine affliction" (*SNLG*, 194). This does not suggest that the mystery of evil has a theoretical solution, even in the cross of Christ. The cross is, rather, a divine *response* to evil and the model for our response to the presence of affliction. It is a response that is marked by solidarity without a why for suffering. It remains silent, void of explanatory whys.
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> ... Weil proposes that the cross of Christ is not merely a redemption of sin, but includes as its central meaning the embrace of affliction and the transformation of radical evil.[167]

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[166] Cf. Weil, *FLN*, 94, 136.

[167] Alexander Nava, *The Mystical and Prophetic Thought of Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutiérrez* (2001), 128.

In the final weeks before her death, Weil returns to this theme of a universal, collective lament in Jesus' ordeal of forsakenness:

> Christ on the cross had compassion for his own suffering, as being the suffering of humanity in him. His cry: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" was the cry of all men in him. When that cry rises in a man's heart, pain has awoken in the depths of his soul the part where there dwells, buried under sins, an innocence equal to Christ's own.[168]

Perhaps a year earlier, in New York, Weil reflected on this uncreated part of the soul—the faculty of supernatural love—that cannot be touched by affliction. She saw how the temporal part of the soul could be torn violently from this love, losing any sensation of its sweetness. From that tearing comes our own cry of dereliction.[169] Oddly, for Weil, the beauty of this cry is not found in some forthcoming answer, but in the way that such anguish might function as praise to God! She says,

> It is a cry in the void, an *eternally unanswered appeal*. It is this appeal which is the praise of the glory of God. Our cries of anguish praise Him. ... To cry like this throughout our brief and interminable, interminable and brief sojourn in this world, and then disappear into nothingness—it is enough; what more is there to ask? ... For that is completeness of fulfillment—if only, from now until the moment of my death, there could be no other word in my soul than this uninterrupted cry in the *eternal silence.*[170]

These sound like the words of a woman who is subconsciously numbering her days. Who but Weil herself could deny it? Worse, she has managed to glorify the cry itself so that our anguish and God's silence are preferable to redemption and life. The unheeded cry is supposedly more wonderful than salvation itself (whatever that entails). She says, "The very silence is something infinitely more

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[168] Weil, *FLN*, 337–8.
[169] Weil, *FLN*, 136.
[170] Weil, *FLN*, 137. Cf. Weil, *IC*, 198.

full of significance than any response, like God himself speaking."[171] Are we to believe the bleating of a lost and entangled sheep is favoured above the rejoicing of the Good Shepherd who finds and rescues her? Is this not tantamount to a rejection of grace? If this were the extent of Weil's vision, we could speak in terms of a triumphalism of anguish as the summit of holiness! And it would be exceedingly difficult to account for 'good news' in her gospel. Thankfully, both Grant and [even] Weil saw further. They see the true glory of mediation—how the Cross not only defines, but *spans* the distance.

ii. The Cross spans the distance

Weil summarizes the Greek tradition (with Egypt behind it) according to two (or three?) main subjects: "the wretchedness of man, the distance and transcendence of God."[172] She regards their contemplation of human misery as a high spirituality in search of bridges, proposing that the Greeks may have invented mediation. Weil sees all their art, poetry, philosophy, and science through the lens of mediation.[173] The Greeks, and especially Plato, are seen as precursors of the Cross in their quest to mediate the Good and necessity. Joan O'Donovan, whose work Grant affirmed, says:

> The compelling problem for Plato, as for his Stoic and Pythagorian ancestors, is *amor fati*, the question of Grant's later writings. And Plato's answer to this problem ... is his understanding of divine justice as one with divine love. Plato's answer, according to Weil, anticipates the cross of Christ; it calls forth the divine passion. For Plato in the *Republic* [2.360c, 367b], the *Gorgias* [523a], and especially the *Phaedo* [64a–67d] conceives divine justice as the divine revelation of truth in the moment of man's nakedness and death: the judgment of God which is also the deliverance of man. ... And the form of this revelation ... must be the perfectly just man (*IC*, 143).[174]

According to Weil, when the *Republic* describes the perfectly just man crucified as a criminal, and whose justice goes unrecognized, even by the gods, Plato

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[171] Weil, *IC*, 199. And yet she *did* apparently hear that voice respond.
[172] Weil, *IC*, 74.
[173] Weil, *IC*, 75.
[174] O'Donovan, *Twilight of Justice* (1984), 81.

reveals his "premonition of the most piercing words of the Gospel: 'My God, why has thou forsaken me?'"[175]

Weil describes that moment—that concentration of all affliction into the Cross event—as the "supreme mediation, the harmony between Christ's 'Why?' (ceaselessly repeated by every soul in affliction) and the silence of the Father's silence. The universe (ourselves included) is the vibration of this harmony."[176] Her eyes are opened to how *everything* is mediation and *God himself* is mediation. "God is mediation between God and God, between God and man, between man and man. Unique harmony."[177]

Weil's conception of mediation (i.e., the Cross) is so encompassing that terms and analogies multiply throughout her notebooks. For example, the Cross is divine *participation* in the world and the world in God, recalling Plato's *methexis*[178]—the mutual participation of universals and particulars—of beauty, justice, and truth in the world.[179] The crucified Christ is the ultimate *Metaxu* (intermediary),[180] the *mean proportion* (from geometry) and the *unity of incommensurables* (from logic),[181] linking divinity to humanity by partaking of both natures. Thus, Christ is harmony and mediation itself.[182] Further, the Cross of Christ *intersects* eternity and time, the Good and necessity, order and liberty— it acts as a lever, a fulcrum, and a balance.[183] Of all Weil's images of mediation, the following may be the most compelling in its vivid Trinitarian vision:

> The supreme mediation is that of the Holy Spirit uniting through infinite distance the divine Father to the equally divine Son, but emptied of His divinity and nailed to a point in space and time. The portion of space around us, bounded by the circle of the horizon, the portion of time between our birth and our death, which we live second after second, which is the stuff of our life, is a fragment of this infinite distance entirely

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[175] Weil, *IC*, 143.
[176] Weil, *FLN*, 91. Cf. Weil, *NB* 1: 246.
[177] Weil, *FLN*, 87.
[178] Cf. Jersak, "Beyond Dualism," *MSO*, 221–6; Algis Uždavinys, *The Golden Chain* (2004), 303.
[179] Weil, *NB* 1: 307; Weil, *FLN*, 292.
[180] Weil, *NB* 1: 22, 228.
[181] Weil, *IC*, 176.
[182] Weil, *IC*, 195.
[183] Weil, *NB*, 1: 41; 2: 433, 506–7, 539; Weil, *NFR*, 12–4.

pierced by divine love. The being and the life of each one of us are together a tiny segment of this line whose extremities are two Persons and a single God, this line where Love circulates is also that same God.[184]

We are to picture an infinitely long line. On one end of the line is God the Father, perfect Goodness, transcendence, eternity. At the other end of the line is God the Son, on the Cross, nailed down by necessity and affliction in space and time. The distance between the two ends of the line—between perfection and affliction, between Father and Son—is immeasurable. Two persons, Father and Son, but linked by this line, they are One God. The line that links them is the Holy Spirit or Love (for what is the Holy Spirit but the love of Father and Son for each other?). So the whole range of reality—from eternal Goodness to human tragedy—is encompassed by the Trinity. Weil continues:

> We are a point through which God's divine Love for self passes. In no case are we anything else. But if we know this, and if we consent to it, all our being, all that is in us appears to be ourselves, becomes infinitely more foreign, more indifferent, and more distant, than this uninterrupted passage of God's love.[185]

Now we picture a disc. This represents the horizons of my whole universe in space and time, from birth to death. The line of God's love, extending between Father and Son, passes through the very center of that disc, right through my life, and specifically, through the uncreated core of my heart, the faculty of my soul called 'supernatural love.' No matter how vast my life and my universe, where the line of God intersects the centre of the disc (my heart or *nous*) is just one small point on the line. The rest of my life is infinitely secondary and two-dimensional compared to this intersection of God's love and mine.

In this picture, we see both the cosmic dimensions and the historical reality of the Cross. That is, the crucifixion of history is like a keyhole through which the beholder is invited to see the whole nature of God and of reality. What we see—what Grant saw—was the dual mediation of the Cross as *creation* and as *crucifixion*.

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[184] Weil, *IC*, 197.
[185] Weil, *IC*, 197–8.

5.3.4 The Cross and dual mediation

We return to Grant's graduate lectures to condense Weil's dual mediation of the Cross to (i) the cosmic Cross of the creation of the world and (ii) the historical Cross in the crucifixion of Christ. The dual mediation can be summarized this way:

	Cosmic Cross	**Historical Cross**
Mediating Event:	Creation of the World	Crucifixion of Christ
Mediator:	Crucified Logos	Crucified Christ
Mediation via:	Beauty of the World	Affliction of Man

i. The cosmic Cross: Creation

Weil abbreviates her doctrine of the Cosmic Cross in this statement: "God not incarnate is not really God; he has been incarnate and sacrificed from the beginning; 'the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world.'"[186]

Grant, reflecting in a lecture on his personal experience and on Weil's thought,[187] explains how the metaphor of God as "the Lamb slain from the beginning" describes what we learned earlier: that *within the realm of necessity, God is all-powerless*. God is powerless in that God does not and cannot exercise omnipotence—defined as *sovereign interventions*—in time, 'here below,'[188] independently of human partners. If God is all-powerful at all, it is only in the sense that God *voluntarily* 'abdicated' omnipotence to being all-powerful *within* Creation.[189] From the very beginning, God *dies* to the use of force and *consents* to a world of chance (vis-à-vis either control OR chaos),[190] creating the risky

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[186] Weil, *NB* 1: 222. On her uses of this phrase, see also *NB* 1: 264; 2: 536, 564.
[187] Grant, "Excerpts from Graduate Lectures," *CW* 4: 821–2.
[188] Weil, *NB* 1: 191.
[189] Weil, *NB* 1: 191; Weil, *FLN,* 297, 300. This may sound like classic deism, but it differs in that God is immanent and active in time through human consent to and mediation of supernatural love. Consent and mediation are inherent and effective cogs within God's order. This is why personal human surrender is critical: it is the medium between the realm of the Good into the world of necessity.
[190] Grant, *GC*, 80–3. For Grant, true providence as we experience it is identical to necessity or chance (37). By way of analogy, history is a roll of the dice. 'Chance' is not 'chaos' in that God creates the dice and limits what numbers can appear. But it is not 'control' because God does not manipulate what numbers come up as the dice roll.

conditions for both supernatural love or superabundant affliction. In God's death to the primacy of will, God is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," (Rev. 13:8) who says to all of creation, "Nevertheless, not my will by thine be done."

Much of Weil's thought rests on her particular appropriation of this descriptor from the Book of Revelation. The majority reading of Rev. 13:8 is basic: Christ was slain from the foundation of the world in that his crucifixion was foreseen and redemption preplanned in God's mind. Weil counters: No, creation itself was an act of Passion on God's part as it required the aforesaid death of God's self-will and thus, we have the end of temporal omnipotence from the dawn of time.

As Grant taught his students:

'Before' (in quotation marks) creation, God was all in all. Now there is something other than God. How is it possible to think that with the ideas of divine perfection? ... 'Before creation' the Eternal was its own perfection; 'now' (in quotation marks) it is related to something other which we call the universe.

SW's answer is clear: creation was not expansion, but a renunciation, a retreat of God.[191] The creation as renunciation is an act of love as we see it in the Passion, not a means of expansion, but rather the form in which love clothes itself as renunciation. In some Christian theological speculation the Creation and the Passion are opposed to each other, but to SW they are finally one. Now clearly this fundamental humility is a radical contrast with the image of God as power: *Rex tremendae majestatis* (*Dies irae*).[192] How do we put together this humility of God with His power? His abdication with His power? Does not power conflict with love? According to SW the true sense of the metaphor of power is that when we understand it, we know that power as necessity.[193]

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[191] Cf. Weil, *WG*, 87–9; *IC*, 193.

[192] Latin for "King of tremendous majesty." A line from the medieval poem, *Dies Irae*, describing the final judgment and made beloved to Grant through Mozart's "Requiem Mass."

[193] Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 823. Bracketed comments are his.

This was an important truth for Grant, allowing for God to be known as Good, evil to be acknowledged as real, and the power of God to be reframed. God's power is 'reduced' from omnipotent control, arbitrary force, or personal intervention to a metaphor for secondary causes in the realm of necessity. God's abdication of power is not abandonment of the world by a divine 'deadbeat dad' who no longer cares to be involved. Quite the opposite: God's letting go, God's consent to the existence of autonomous beings, God's granting of space for the other—this withdrawal is perfect, albeit painful, love. Says Weil, "Love consents to all things and commands only those who are willing to obey. Love is abdication. God is abdication."[194] Elsewhere, Grant repeats:

> For Western Christians ... creation came to be thought of as an act of self-expansion. For Weil, creation is a withdrawal, an act of love, involved with all the suffering, renunciation, and willingness to let the other be, that are given in the idea of love. For her the passion of God is at one with the creation.[195]

Eric Springsted, in his *Christus Mediator*, rivals Grant's deep insight into Weil in his succinct summary of her complex 'Cross as creation':

> Weil did not see creation only in this sense where God simply withdraws to an inaccessible corner of the universe. At the same time that he withdraws and renounces the full exercise of his power there is also a crucifixion within God himself whereby the Son is separated from the Father and incarnated in the body of the world. When the Son is so crucified he then becomes the Λόγος, or order of the world, which is precisely necessity in Weil's second sense [the inflexible tissue of material relations]; "... God turns himself into Necessity."[196]

Thus, the *kenosis* is not merely Christ emptying himself *of* the divine nature (Phil. 2)—it *is* the divine nature—God *is* love *is* self-emptying grace. Grant and Weil believe and say so forcefully, but one wishes they did not depend so heavily on a

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[194] Weil, *FLN*, 300. Cf. 213, 296.

[195] Grant, "Review Essay on *Simone Weil: A Modern Pilgrimage*," *CW* 4: 863.

[196] Eric O. Springsted, *Christus Mediator: Platonic Mediation in the Thought of Simone Weil* (1980), 93. Cf. Weil, *NB*, 190.

novel interpretation of one phrase in Scripture (the lamb slain since the foundation). They would not need to, for the idea emerges powerfully in the apostle John's identification of the Incarnation and Crucifixion of Christ as a revelation of the '*glory* of God':

"The word became flesh and tented among us, and we've seen his *glory, glory* as of the unique one from the Father ... No one has ever seen God; God, the unique one who is in the Father's bosom, has *made him known*" (John 1:14, 18). We see this glory in the shock and awe of Christ's execution: Jesus said, "Now my soul is disturbed, and what should I say? 'Father, save me from this *hour*'? But I came to this *hour* for this very reason! Father, *glorify* your name" (John 12:27–28).[197] So the kenosis is the reversal of Adam's sin, *and* it is the imitation of God's self-giving love.

Unlike the synoptic Gospels and Pauline epistles, which associate glory with the resurrection, in John's Gospel, the '*hour*' of Christ's execution *is* the hour of his exaltation.[198] Jesus is the serpent 'exalted/lifted up' on the wooden stick (John 3:14). When he is 'exalted/lifted up' from the earth, he will draw all people(s) to himself (John 12:32). Thus, the language of glory and the exaltation/lifting-up of Christ are synonymous in John. For John, the Cross is the diadem of God's unprecedented self-revelation.

Could this be the essential 'contradiction' between John and the synoptic Gospels to which Weil often refers?[199] Maybe, but what seems certain is that Grant and Weil's theology of the Cross rests on a solid Johannine foundation, even beyond what they made explicit.

ii. The historical Cross: Crucifixion

Recalling the table above, the second element in Grant/Weil's dual mediation is the historical Passion of Jesus of Nazareth, including the self-emptying of his Gethsemane prayers and his willing powerlessness throughout his arrest, trial, crucifixion, and death. Whereas the *crucified logos* mediates God and creation via the beauty of the world, the *crucified Christ* mediates God and humanity via the affliction of his Passion (and ours). Grant's emphasis on the crucifixion was to our shared experience with Christ in undergoing absence and affliction.

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[197] Nathan Wall, 10/8/2011 (*Agora 2.0 newsgroup*). His translations.
[198] Cf. Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2007), 48.
[199] Weil, *NB*, 2: 416, 433, 538.

a. *Crucifixion as the absence of God.* I am beginning to see how for Grant (like Weil, but independently of her), the truth of Christianity was verified not by Christ's signs and wonders (including the Resurrection), nor by the profundity of Christ's words of wisdom, truth, and life (as beautiful and important as they were to him). Rather, Grant was gripped by the authenticity of Christ's experience of God's absence—an experience he shared and through which he *saw* God for himself. Anything less seemed like a shallow fairy tale, insufficient for true mediation, for only through God-forsakenness could Grant believe that God had spanned the infinite distance to his own reality. A God who cannot cry out our own anguished 'Why?' back to God would fall short of crossing the chasm.

> Doesn't this account of [Jesus'] death go more to the heart of what life is than Socrates – the fear, his sweat was these great drops of blood falling to the ground. All this is what convinces me of Christianity; it seems to me important. This is more what life is like. ... I mean the absolute absence of God from God, if you want to put it that way, in the crucifixion, is so complete. Didn't the absence have to be complete? I mean, it's strange; this is exactly what makes Christianity attractive and necessary, as well as Platonism. It so expresses the absence of God from God, the absence, the total forsaking of God by God. It is this that holds me to Christianity.[200]

For Grant, the crucifixion experience of absence is what makes Christianity true to life, true to *our lives*—to our familiarity with God's felt and practical absence, especially in our brushes with affliction.

b. *Crucifixion as the affliction of humanity.* The Cross, as Christ's this-worldly consent to our Platonic distance from the Good, binds him to the human reality of *malheur.* Through the crucifixion, Christ participates with our suffering and visa versa. Comparing Christ's death to Socrates', Grant says,

> Now the difference between those deaths is very great. Christ's: the fear, the sweating of blood, the cry of dereliction, etc., etc. And of course, for Christians it is the affirmation that his is the more archetypal death. That is the central way I would approach '*le malheur.*' Clearly what SW means

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[200] Grant, "George Grant and Religion," *CW* 4: 760–1. Cf. *CW* 4: 973 on the resurrection element, and Grant's connection of the crucifixion to Bermondsey.

by *malheur*, to speak of it positively, is that state in which human beings find themselves participating through redemptive suffering in the Cross of Christ.[201]

How does Grant imagine affliction as 'redemptive' when first, affliction is, by Weil's usage, normally non-redemptive and second, 'redemptive suffering' is typically an inanity of the triumphalists? Affliction is, for Grant, redemptive only in this way: when necessity generates affliction (our personal cross), if it drives the sufferer to bind one's heart to the Cross alone—to meet God in Christ's affliction—such affliction mediates the distance. Here we are at the heart of Weil's *theologia crucis*—another picture to hold alongside 'the line and the disc.' What Paul called 'the fellowship of sharing in Christ's suffering' (Phil. 3:10):

> When we strike the head of a nail with a hammer, all the shock received by the large head of the nail passes through it to the point in its entirety. If the hammer and the head of the nail were infinitely huge, this would all still happen in the same way. The nail would transmit that infinite shock through its point to that which it is nailed.
>
> Extreme affliction, which includes physical suffering, distress of the soul and social degradation, constitutes the nail. Its point is applied to the very center of the soul. The head of the nail is all necessity spread across the totality of space and time. ...
>
> He whose soul remains oriented toward God while he is pierced by the nail finds himself nailed to the very center of the universe. It is the true center – not in the middle – it is outside space and time, *it is God*. In a dimension beyond space and time, a completely different dimension, the nail pierces a hole through creation, through the thickness of the veil separating the soul and God.
>
> In this marvelous dimension, the soul can, without leaving the place or the instant to which the body finds itself linked, cross the totality of space and time to come before the very presence of God.
>
> It finds itself at the intersection of the creation and the Creator. This point of intersection is the crossing of branches of the Cross.[202]

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[201] Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 838.

Thus far, in Grant's theodicy of the Cross, we have seen how the Cross both defines and spans Plato's distance between the Good and the necessary. And we have seen the dual-mediation of the Cross in creation and in crucifixion—Christ's and ours. Finally, we come to the crescendo of Grant's conception of the Cross. For Grant, the Cross is synonymous with the *consent* of love—the perfection of Christ's consent to the Father's will in Gethesemene, his consent to our will in the crucifixion, and our consent to taking up the Cross through decreation and acceptance.

5.3.5   The Cross as consent

George Grant's Cross-as-consent reaches maturity by the 1960's in a Dalhousie lecture on "The Necessary and the Good in the Crucifixion"[203] that Grant taught five times, and in an unpublished sermon from McMaster in 1961.[204] Further, Grant's theodicy of consent shows a direct dependence on what I will call Weil's 'cosmology of consent,' ingeniously explicated in her "Pythagorean Doctrine,"[205] which Grant assigned students when introducing her thought.[206] In this section, I will analyze these three documents in order to chart and outline Weil's cosmology. I will then show how Grant's theology of the Cross, defined as 'the perfection of consent,' derives from (reflects and applies) her ideas and language of love-as-consent.

i.   Weil's cosmology of consent

Remembering that for Weil, a theology Cross is woven into the very structure of creation, then its themes of consent, acceptance, and obedience comprise the core of her cosmology. Consent by God and to God, to necessity and by necessity, *is love* in her thought.[207] The consent of love forms the foundation of her Pythagorean cosmology and reconstitutes the word *providence* in Platonic terms. I will address these in reverse order.

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[202] Weil, *AD*, 89–90. My translation.
[203] Part of a philosophy course on Augustine. Grant, "Augustine," *CW* 3: 483–90.
[204] Grant, "Grant's McMaster Sermon," *MSO* 17–19.
[205] Weil, *IC*, 151–201. Cf. "Divine Love in Creation," *IC*, 89–105.
[206] E.g., Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 820.
[207] Cf. Weil, *NB* 1: 38, 130, 242; *FLN*, 324; *IC*, 184.

a. *Weil's Platonic providence*. Weil has rejected a doctrine of providence that implies divine force or interference upon the natural order. Rather, she says the natural order itself *is* providence, and when God acts within the world, it is through 'wise persuasion,' not compulsion or intervention:

> What we call the design or designs, the plan or plans, of Providence, are only imaginings invented by ourselves. What is authentically providential, what is Providence itself, is the very order of the world itself, the stuff of which it is woven, the woof of all events, and which, beneath one of its aspects, is the pitiless and blind mechanism of necessity. Because once and for all, *necessity has been vanquished by the wise persuasion* of Love. This wise persuasion is Providence.[208]

This idea and the language for it stem directly from her interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus*, which she cites as follows:

> Now what happens by necessity must also be added to this exposition. For the creation of the world took place by a combination partly of necessity and partly of mind [νοῦς]. But *the mind* [νοῦς] *reigns over necessity by persuasion*. Mind [νοῦς] persuades necessity to move the greater part of things toward improvement. It is in this manner, according to this law, by means of a *necessity vanquished by a wise persuasion*, it is thus that from the beginning this universe was created.[209]

Timaeus holds that the creation of the world involves the dual orders of both the Good (here expressed as *nous*) and of blind necessity, but the *nous* (the mind of God) rules necessity by the wise persuasion of love, overcomes necessity by suffering it[210]—by consent. In other words, "This universe is a machine for making the salvation of those who consent to it."[211] Plato's wise persuasion—

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[208] Weil, *IC*, 104.
[209] Weil, *IC*, 96 (citing Plato, *Timaeus*, 47e–48a). But note the translation issues raised earlier. οὖν ἡ τοῦδε τοῦ κόσμου γένεσις ἐξ ἀνάγκης τε καὶ νοῦ συστάσεως ἐγεννήθη. Weil's translator (French to English) renders νοῦς as 'mind.'
[210] Cf. O'Donovan, *Twilight of Justice* (1984), 82–3; Weil, *IC*, 96, 104.
[211] Weil, *FLN*, 337. Cf. Weil, *NB* 2: 402.

Providence—for Weil as for Grant, evokes the cosmological *logos* and the historical Incarnation to make Plato's Sun and Christ's Cross synonymous.

b. *Weil's Pythagorean cosmology.* Weil and Grant equate love with consent and the perfection of love-as-consent with the Cross (cosmic, historical, and personal). Holding this thought prepares us to outline the cosmology she presents in "The Pythagorean Doctrine." With Grant, before any description of her article, I would say, 'take and read.'[212] The limitations of space and imagination require that I forego all but the briefest summation. It requires familiarity with that inspired essay to which I leave the reader. However, I have formulated the diagram below and the basic table further down from a critical examination of Weil's works. It will to prepare us for Grant's theology of consent, and the insights he glimpses from Weil's shoulders.

Simone Weil's Cosmology of Consent

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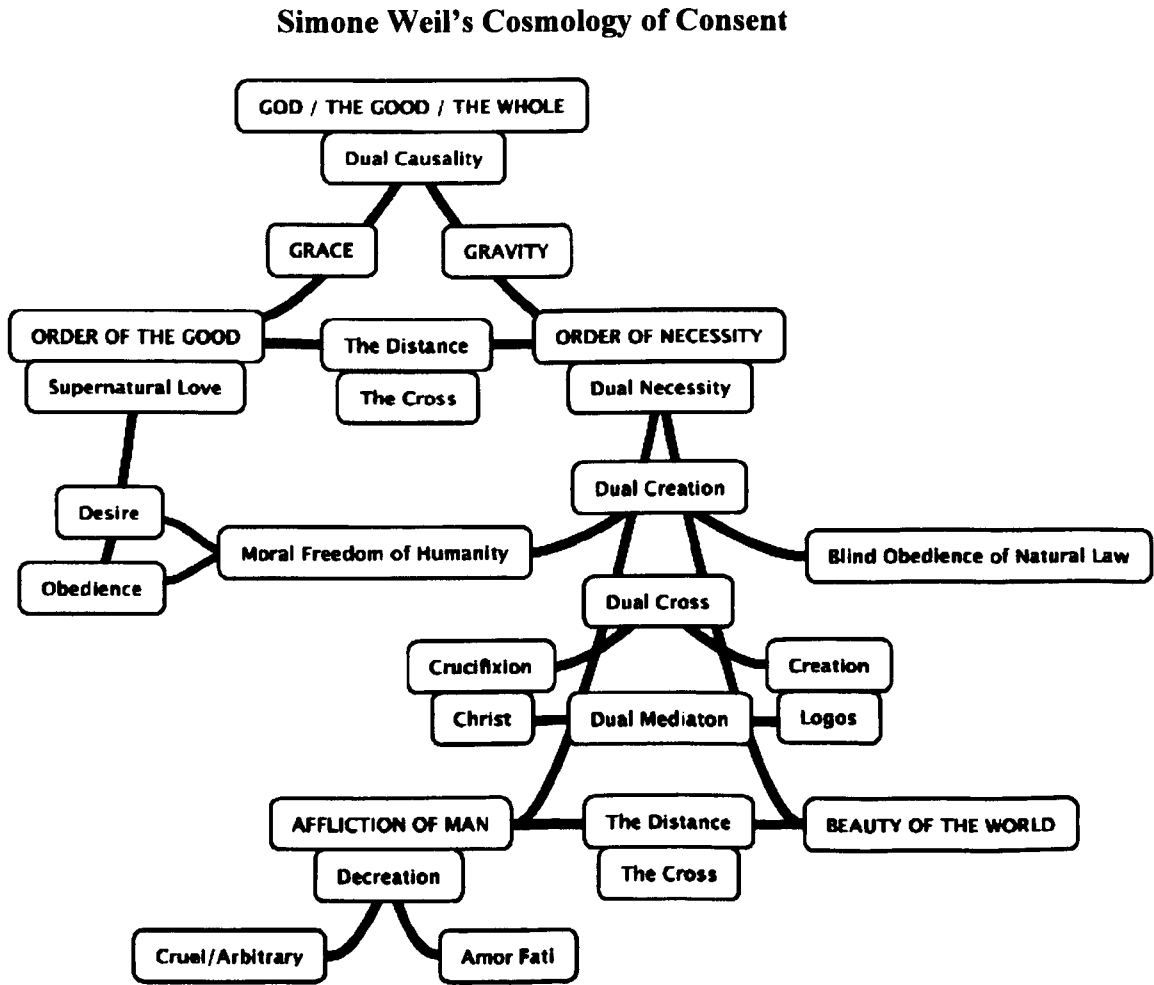
[212] Grant, "Introduction to the Reading of Simone Weil," *CW* 4: 810.

c. *Dual causality and the consent of love.* In Weil's cosmology, at the transcendent level, God is the primary cause of the whole. But as it touches creation, a dual causality rules the universe: grace and gravity,[213] or the order of goodness and the order of necessity, separated by the great Platonic distance. The order of the Good rules the order of necessity by the persuasion of consent rather than force. Conversely, the order of necessity is subject to grace when those who live under necessity consent to channeling supernatural love through fissures in the autonomous self, decreated by our consent to the order of necessity.[214]

Just as there is dual causality, the Good and the necessary, so there exists a dual necessity, a dual creation, a dual cross, and a dual mediation.[215] Note the parallels in the following two paragraphs.

On one side of necessity is the beauty of the world in the natural order. God consents (is crucified to self in the beginning) to the blind mechanism of this order. Conversely, nature too perfectly consents to obey the physical laws by which God orders it. So there exists an intractable operation of mutual consent between God and nature, mediated by the *logos*. People use science and technology in an attempt to willfully master nature, but Weil assures us that true mastery comes by honoring, loving, and consenting to the mechanics of natural law—mastery through submission.

On the other side of necessity is the affliction of humanity, often at the hands of one another. God consents to human freedom. God renounces control and consents to our vacillation between desire for the Good and our lust for autonomy, honoring human freedom even to the point of deicide. Conversely, where desire for the Good leads to the consent of obedience, God's transforming love gains entry into this world. So there exists a voluntary operation of mutual consent between God and people, mediated by the Christ. People attempt to willfully assert their freedom, especially in the language of rights and the politics

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[213] Weil, *G&G*, 1.

[214] Grant: "This takes us ... to the heart of Simone Weil and decreation. To be created is to think one is autonomous, creation is autonomy. Decreation is our end and it is overcoming our createdness – our creating. Autonomy is the evil which separates God from God." (Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 834.).

[215] The dualities in Weil's cosmology and their binding *metaxu* actually preserve her from the radical dualisms of Gnosticism and Manichaeism. Cf. Larry Schmidt, "George Grant on Simone Weil as Saint and Thinker," *George Grant and the Subversion of Modernity* (1996), 263–81.

of force. But Weil assures us that true freedom comes by honoring, loving, and consenting to the mechanics of supernatural love—that is, freedom is the good fruit of submission and surrender.

The Incarnation showcases the paradoxical power of God's sovereign rule through the weakness of consent of a perfectly just man. Christ willingly endures the Cross, which is to say he subjects himself to the beauty and brute force of the world of nature; to the violent freedom of autonomous humanity; and to the self-sacrificing love of the God he called *Abba*.

In other words, Jesus shows us how to live in the realm of necessity, desiring the primacy of the Good over the willing self. Weil summarizes elsewhere:

> We have to consent to be subject to necessity and to act only by handling it. ... We have to attain to receiving orders from God. ... Obedience is the supreme virtue. We have to love necessity. Necessity is what is lowest in relation to the individual (constraint, force, a 'hard fate'); universal necessity brings deliverance from this.[216]

In this model, the Cross of Christ is transposed into the life of the believer as *amor fati*: practicing[217] love of necessity and acceptance of affliction (when avoiding or opposing it proves impossible) because it decreases the ego and strips personal sovereignty. Rather than passivity to evil and affliction, we transfigure it within ourselves into redemptive suffering (expunging the evil through forgiveness) and we access the order of the Good to become indispensable intermediaries of eternity in time.[218]

Thus, Weil's cosmology and her more intricate doctrine of providence hang together (illustrated by the lines in the above diagram) entirely by consent. I have bundled these into the following table.

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[216] Weil, *G&G*, 43–4.

[217] By 'practicing' I do not mean exercising a choice or commitment so much as living in attention and openness. Cf. Grant, "Introduction to Simone Weil," *CW* 4: 799–80. Attention is not *will*ing but *being willing*—emptying oneself of willfulness. Cf. Grant, "Graduate Seminar Lectures," *CW* 4: 829.

[218] Cf. Weil, *WG*, 24; *NB* 1: 207, 212–3. Springsted, *Christus Mediator* (1983), 95.

Simone Weil's Cosmology of Consent

Primary Cause	Consent and Creation: the void that makes space for Creation	
	The Good as the perfection of Love's consent	"The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"

Secondary Causes	**Consent and natural law**	
	God's consent to natural law *and* Nature's consent to God's law (necessity)	Human willful mastery over natural law *versus* Human willing consent to natural law (necessity)
	Consent and human freedom	
	Impersonal wrath and blessing *and* Personal supernatural love	Human willful self-mastery *versus* Human willing consent to supernatural love
	Consent and the Cross: the void that makes space for God	
	The just man's consent to the Cross The just man's consent to God's will (*Gethsemane*) The just man's consent to human freedom (*Golgotha*) The just man's consent to affliction (*Abandonment*) God's consent to the just man's request (*Redemption*)	*Human consent to the Cross* Decreation *Amor fati* Supernatural love

Upon this Weilian foundation of cosmology, Grant builds his theology of consent.

ii. Grant's theology of consent

a. *Grant's Dalhousie lecture: "The Necessary and the Good in the Crucifixion."*[219] Grant's theology of the Cross is not a precise copy of Weil's. Indeed, he finds her work "swarming with contradictions, paradoxes, gaps"[220] into which he wades with a genius for how she thinks. In this lecture, he is (by

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[219] Grant, "St. Augustine," *CW*, 4: 483–90.
[220] Grant, "Excerpts from Graduate Lectures," *CW* 4:830.

the late 1950's) undeniably her disciple. He has saturated himself in her work and now moves on to excavate truth beyond what she had unearthed. Consent is everywhere in it (thirteen explicit occurrences in one three-page stretch). He discovers and articulates two major facets of the Cross—two questions—that are at best piecemeal in Weil's work.

Grant prepares the ground by observing a dilemma:

[The Cross] is an absolute persuasion because essentially non-active. It is clearly redemptive suffering – persuasive suffering – the completely innocent takes upon himself penal suffering, that is in the fullest form, persuades the necessary. ... Here is the difficulty – the redemptive or penal suffering must be the suffering of the just, but it also, if it is to be perfected (that is to be absolutely supernatural) must be an absolute surrender to the necessary. 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' That is, the persuader is absolutely stripped of help, even of the love of God, in so far as it can be felt. ... Dereliction has been extended to the very extreme limit beyond which the very possibility of good disappears. ... If we see necessity as that which imposes conditions, here we see Christ *consent* to the imposition of these conditions – just to be human material, and then (...the really and truly supernatural part of the whole story) he no longer *consents*, he passes beyond the point where there is any consolation.[221]

Grant's first question: "*How might we think of the Passion as the inner life of the Godhead?*"[222] Grant insists that the Passion is not just an image of the Trinity; it *is* the 'inner life of the Godhead.' For Grant, "The Trinity is no analogy. It is simply the clearest word to express what is seen directly in the Passion of Christ."[223] Most simply, to look at the Cross is to see God. That is, Christ's consent to suffering and his suffering beyond consent make explicit the supernatural mystery of the Trinity: divine consent to redemptive suffering will persuade the necessary and so inexorably redeem and restore all things.

Our response to God's love with love means taking up the Cross of

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[221] Grant, "St. Augustine," *CW*, 2: 483.
[222] Grant, "St. Augustine," *CW*, 2: 484.
[223] Grant, "St. Augustine," *CW*, 2: 484.

consent to our own decreation, and thereby becoming intermediaries of God's love. Grant quotes Weil, "God gave me being in order that I should give it back to him."[224]

We pause here to ask after the relationship of consent to decreation. First, one can't choose decreation or affliction. It simply comes. But we can consent to the inevitable rather than fighting the impossible—as a woman in labour might ease her contractions by 'rolling with them' instead of resisting them.

Second, what is being decreated? At one level, the 'I' or the ego, by which Weil means the autonomous self—equivalent to self-will, self-mastery— what Jesus meant by 'losing your life' and Paul meant by 'I am crucified with Christ.' The term *decreation* is used to identify how death to self-ishness is actually a process, a dismantling, a gradual demolition of the old self *so that* the new creation, the new self in Christ, can emerge. That is all fairly consistent with the New Testament.

But Weil makes an even stronger point. Life and affliction do in fact decreate us in a more violent sense where oppressive conditions decreate our very person—demoralizing us, dehumanizing us, humiliating us, and tearing holes in our souls. A void grows, an abyss inside. This is a stubborn fact of life for the afflicted. But this decreation of the soul, though often unjust and even evil in itself, can also become the very place where God's supernatural love breaks into the world—*if* we refuse to fill the void with false gods and *if* we refuse to renounce love. The crucifixion is the prime example. Christ willingly surrendered self-will in Gethsemane, but the Cross goes much further than that. Christ is stripped of everything, tortured, mocked, voided, and decreated. It's pure evil. But in the void of "My God, my God" Christ is glorified and enthroned. In this case, decreation is an ultimate evil that becomes the occasion for absolute good. *Felix culpa.*

Now to Grant's second question: "*How, if Christ is God (and yet man), are we to think of consent?*" From this question, Grant describes two ways of seeing redemption:

- *Ethical redemption*, which means *as a human* Jesus utterly consented, surrendered, and obeyed the Father's will on the Cross by taking up the

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[224] Weil, *G&G*, 28–34.

burden of human affliction. He bears our affliction as his own.

- *Sacramental redemption*, which means *as God*, Christ crossed the infinite distance, consenting to being stripped of power, afflicted, and crucified unjustly by God's own children. The perfection of justice becomes manifest in God's forgiveness.

But, Grant says, both versions break down.

Ethical redemption involves and depends on consent, but for affliction to be total, it must go beyond consent, beyond hope, beyond our will entirely until it makes no sense ... and we cry out, 'My God, my God ...' The cry of dereliction is beyond consent, so as long as you retain some level of consent from the human side, Jesus just becomes a courageous martyr, but that is far less than the blackness of despair of the Cross. What happens to Christ being 'very God'?

Sacramental redemption also breaks down because in its absolute grace from God's side, where is consent? If we completely eradicate all consent, Grant feels we somehow deny Christ's engagement as 'very man.'

Grant summons two responses: First, what we are seeing is the mystery of the Trinity—a real mystery involving a contradiction that cannot be solved here below but comes together somewhere in the realm of the ultimate. And while one can never reason a way through, the contradiction can be used as Weilian pincers to open oneself to *directly experience* the transcendent (God).

Second, somehow this mystery involves suffering within the Godhead itself—"the lamb slain before the foundations of the world." Grant even claims that beholding the Cross is the *only* avenue by which we arrive at a true doctrine of the Trinity. Specifically, if God's essence is love, then love must function within the Godhead like so: God is Love = Lover (Father), Love (Holy Spirit), and Beloved (Son).

Finally, Grant applies his theology of the Cross-as-consent to establish his theory or definition of justice. Moderns believe that necessity can create goodness. Grant uses the Marxists as an example, but he would actually include all the modern progressive movements. The Marxists believed violent revolution could set up the conditions for a peaceful society. One might as easily refer today to the Western military incursions into the Middle East, expecting violent regime change to create the conditions for democratic freedom. Grant says this is calling evil good.

Chapter Five: Beholding the Sun

By contrast, Grant reminds us of Plato's claim: "The Good rules necessity by persuasion." Not by force. How? It is a mystery. It has something to do with consent. Something to do with the Cross. Something to do with the power of forgiveness and mercy to produce justice by transformation where violence could not by coercion. This is no mere idealism: civil rights movements or truth and reconciliation commissions create justice by persuasion where military occupations from *Pax Romana* to *Pax Americana* have not and could not. Nor is this transformative persuasion simply passive acquiescence to oppression—Grant and Weil were politically engaged activists whose lifework included vocal resistance to liberal modernity's evils.

In any case, the Dalhousie lecture shows how, for Grant, the Good is finally identified with the Cross, not with the necessary.

b. *Grant's McMaster sermon: "The Cross as the perfection of consent."*[225] So far we've learned that Grant's *theologia crucis* can be distilled to this:

- First, the Cross defines the infinite distance between the Good (the perfection of God) and necessary (the affliction of man).

- Second, the Cross spans the distance because Perfection (God) is on the Cross, consenting perfectly to necessity/affliction.

- Third, the Cross spans the distance because man is on the Cross, in Christ, consenting to Perfection (God), even while suffering necessity/affliction.

- Fourth, the Cross is therefore defined as *the perfection of consent* (God as Love) by Perfection and the revelation of affliction within the Godhead itself.

- Finally, the Cross invites us to love God, even via consent to necessity, but is sufficient even for those who cannot make consent, but only gaze upon its perfection in the Crucified.

All these themes coalesce in a single unpublished sermon that Grant preached at McMaster circa 1961.[226] In it we hear the whispers of Plato, Luther, Dostoevsky, and Weil (including *contemplation* and *attention*). We hear of the *Perfect* or *perfection* six times and some derivative of *consent* no less than twenty times in just two pages.

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[225] My title for the untitled sermon.
[226] Grant, "Grant's McMaster Sermon," *MSO*, 17–19.

The sermon clarifies Grant's theology of consent. We see (again) that for Grant, the Cross is the perfection of consent that rules (persuades) necessity through love rather than force. So consent is far greater than merely allowing suffering. It is the great in-between thing, the mediating bridge, the act of love, the kiss. Specifically, the Cross is *consent-between* because:

- Consent is the divine act of love between Father and Son (the Spirit?).
- Consent is the divine act of mediation between God and the world (the Good and the necessary, eternity and time).

Consent, then, encompasses love, surrender, submission, invitation, hospitality, and receptivity to love. Christ consents to the Father, to *kenosis*, to humility, to servanthood, and to death (Phil. 2). Consent exalts him to the highest place and makes all things new. Consent is the active ingredient in creation and incarnation and *theosis*. Consent is his synonym for the Cross and for love, which guards the former from degrading into mere passivity and acquiescence.

Thus far we see Grant's theology of the Cross, his anti-theodicy to the problem of evil, and his refutation of progressivist providence. At this stage, I find Grant's account satisfactory for retaining the integrity of the tension between the idea of the Good and the reality of affliction, without conjuring platitudes that call evil good. Moreover, I am with Grant in his quasi-agnostic contemplation of the mystery of the Cross.

5.4   Sermonic Reflection: Wrath and love as divine consent

"God does no violence to secondary causes in the accomplishment of his ends."[227]

Having issued critiques along the way, I will now make a lateral move to creatively apply Grant's divine consent towards a metaphorical reading of *wrath* back into those Scriptures that so repulsed him and Weil. If God operates in the world by consent, they could have seen wrath, not as the retribution of a willful God, but as a metaphor (as they saw *power*) for the consequences of God's consent to our non-consent.

In this section, I intend to apply this cosmology of consent to the problem of how we read 'wrath' in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures—through

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[227] Weil, *IC*, 97.

demetaphorisation. The texts where God intervenes with smoldering vengeance were an offense to Grant and Weil as they portray a God of personal wrath through violent force—the willful *Über-Gott* (my term) they rejected. Grant and Weil warn us not to literalize metaphors or personalize anthropomorphisms, only to dismiss many of those passages for speaking metaphorically. Why not apply their theology of the Cross and cosmology of consent as a hermeneutical lens for demetaphorising the Bible's judgment narratives, and so retrieving them?[228] The following is a Grantean attempt to do so, specifically as I would address it sermonically to Evangelicals,[229] who tend to be most entangled in literalism, though it might also be beneficial to skeptics who, like Grant and Weil, find the Bible repulsive because they too read it overly literally. I will also apply Grantean consent to model how one might preach a love above and beyond wrath, where "mercy triumphs over judgement" (James 2:13).

God is good.

God is love.

God is not violent, because he never does violence directly.

In His love, God will not bring about his ends through directly violent means.

But in refusing to exercise such violence, God consents to our violence.

His love consents to our violence against each other. And against God.

God's consent is not complicity.

But God appears complicit in our violence because God allows it.

That is, when God refuses to apply force, might, and violence but instead, consents to our free rebellion and its bitter and violent fruit, God seems violent in His consent.

In love, God consents to our wrath on the Cross.

He consents to our wrath against 'Rome.'

He consents to Rome's wrath against us.

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[228] Reading the Old Testament violence texts is once again a going concern. I am not aware of any applications of Weil's approach to these texts, even in Grant or Weil.

[229] Hence the sermonic tone and format. For commentary on the sermon and an examination of the potential pitfall of 'consent as coercion,' see Jersak, *Red Tory, Red Virgin* (2012), 115–21.

His consent is wrath.

His consent is love.[230]

And so, in the Bible, where we see or hear of God's *wrath*, we are usually, actually seeing God's nonviolent consent to the natural and supernatural forces of the world and of human freedom. God's wrath is consent to allowing, and not sparing, the powerful consequences of these forces to take their course. We say natural *and supernatural*, because (a) God's order of secondary causes extends beyond our empirical or rational categories, and (b) the natural and supernatural interrelate beyond observation or comprehension. They also mysteriously inter-relate with our own power of consent to 'bind and loose' (Matt. 16:19) through love and prayer, to intercede in ways that might spare someone the consequences of these 'laws.'

What of God's wrath? Did God not slaughter Egypt's firstborn (Exod. 12)? Did God not massacre the Jewish grumblers in the wilderness (Num. 26)? Did God not incinerate Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19) or repeatedly reduce Jerusalem to smoking rubble (Jer. 52)? Did God not strike down Ananias and Sapphira at Peter's feet (Acts 5) or eat Herod alive with worms (Acts 12:23)?

No.

And Yes.

First, no. Were these acts of violent intervention by an angry and punitive God who was reacting to sin? No. The causes of death are ascribed to 'the Destroyer,' to angelic or human agents of violence, or to Satan (Exod. 12:23; Gen. 19:13; Jer. 4:7; 1 Cor. 10:9–10; Acts 5:3). God protects or ceases to harbour potential victims, depending on someone's *consent* (or not) through repentance, surrender, or intercession (cf. Abraham in Gen. 18, or Moses in Exod. 33).

Second, yes. These were acts of *God's wrath* in that God consented to allow natural and supernatural destruction to take its course through events set in motion by human decisions. In that sense, we read that God is seen to have 'sent' the destroyer and 'sent' the destruction—God is perceived as commissioning the destruction or even as the destroyer (Exod. 12:29; Gen. 19:14; Num. 21:6).

But in Romans 1 (as in Isa. 64:5–7), Paul clarifies: what had been described in the narrative metaphorically as a seemingly active wrath is in fact the

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[230] "Love is consent to authentic otherness." (Grant, *TJ*, 38).

'giving over' (God's consent) of rebellious people to their own self-destructive trajectories—even when the shrapnel of our actions accrues collateral damage on innocents! When in Romans 5 we read that God in Christ was saving us from 'the wrath,' we are not to believe that Jesus is saving us from God, but from the consequences of sin (death, according to Rom. 6:23) imbedded in the very order of the universe.

Still, what of those who challenge God: "How can you allow this? Is your permission—your giving over—not tantamount to complicity?"

And the answer is probably yes—if not complicity, ultimate responsibility as first cause—such that some biblical authors use the phrase 'wrath of God' to describe what are technically secondary consequences. Ultimately, this is God's good order and God is finally responsible for all that is.

This is the great and terrible price of choosing to save the world through love. Saving the world through love means allowing horrible things that make God look both wrathful and weak all at once.

God's nonviolent consent extends to the whole of natural and spiritual reality. It includes nonviolent consent to human freedom, for good or ill. It includes nonviolent consent to the laws of nature, for beauty or tragedy, creation or destruction. It includes nonviolent consent to spiritual laws of sowing and reaping, blessing and cursing. In this sense, God's consent means that God has renounced the exercise of his Almighty capacities in this world.

The Lamb already slain before the foundation of the world died to being all-powerful before Creation. This kenotic self-renunciation has made space for creation. For freedom and for violence. For genocide and hurricanes and car accidents and pedophiles.

But also for love.

God's nonviolent consent and self-emptying space makes room for God's love in the universe and in humankind.

God has sown supernatural love into the very fabric of the world; a love that not only consents to violence but also subverts and overcomes violence. Far from feeble in this nonviolent consent, God's love is powerful—the only conceivable power that can make all things right and new. God's love does not need to violate the freedom or the laws of that which exists through interventions that suspend natural and spiritual order, because *love is the ground* of all that

exists. Love is part of that order—its essential heart. At the top of that order is humanity, with the created capacity to be like God, that is, to consent to bear and seed God's supernatural love throughout all of creation.

Somehow, though, we know—we see with our own eyes and hear with our own ears—something is broken, has ruptured. All of creation and, most of all, humanity groans under an affliction whereby God's consent to violence seems to enslave us rather than free us. Or perhaps God's loving consent to our freedom has born the fruit of violence rather than love. Our very freedom has become the violent means of our slavery.

From that point of view, God seems cruel, whether through absence or complicity. God seems impotent, for how can God possibly mend a breach that God's love and our freedom ultimately created?

Thanks be to God, at the pinnacle of humanity stands Jesus Christ. His nonviolent consent to the Cross—the intersection of humanity's affliction (our freedom-to-violence) and God's radical forgiveness—becomes the occasion whereby supernatural love flows through God's own wounds into the world. That love, far from being weak or impotent, will eclipse violence, might, and force as the relentless catalyst for the renewal of the world.

The Lordship of Christ (or the Kingdom of God) over the world and the universe is not contradictory to God's nonviolent consent. In fact, consent is precisely (and only) how God's love is released in the world. One example: in the Gospels, Christ did not operate in the power of miraculous interventions (the magical suspension of laws), but in the authority of supernatural love (the application of God's highest law).

We have suggested that God's Kingdom does not advance through violence, freedom-violating force, or law-breaking interventions. God's kingdom reign is the advance of supernatural love in and through those who consent to being indwelt and transformed by Christ-mediated love. Here we are not just talking about enthusiastic activists performing good and loving works. But neither is this consent restricted to Christian churchgoers. Rather, this consent is defined in 1 John 4:7–8: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. *Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.* Whoever does not love does not know God, *because God is love.*"

Through their own nonviolent consent, such lovers may appear as torn

veils or cracked vessels (2 Cor. 4:7–18), but through their wounds, supernatural love pours its healing light into natural realm, permeating the world.

God consents to our reluctance to consent, resulting in this painfully slow but inexorable transfiguration of our violent world.

Love *will* have its way, because while it may look like passive consent to extreme violence, it is nevertheless "stronger than death, more jealous than the grave, more vehement than a flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor floods drown it" (Song of Songs 8:6–7). The death and resurrection of Christ are the firstfruits of the destiny God's love has arranged for the whole universe.

5.5   Summary/Segue: Shalomic Justice versus Liberal Hegemony

In this chapter, I have detailed Grant's theodicy of the Cross: that is, his ability to hold in tension the conviction that God is good with the human experience of evil and affliction. We saw how Grant conceives this cruciform paradox of reality by embracing:

- Plato's distance between the necessary and the Good, and the mediating bridges which span that chasm;
- an understanding of God that makes room for the binary attributes of personal-impersonal, power-weakness, and presence-absence;
- Weil's cosmology of consent as an alternative to interventionist doctrines of providence; and,
- Grant's own mystical theology of the Cross-as-consent as truer to life than rational theodicies.

As a unit, these discoveries form the essential core of Grant's metaphysics (or the meaning of the whole). In the broader structure of this thesis, this chapter has set forth Grant's third of four doctrines established in raw form at his conversion. Namely, his theodicy of consent follows logically from his deconstruction of modernity and his contemplative epistemology, and prepares us for the final doctrine, his political theology or prophetic ethics. Further, we have determined the third stage of Grant's journey from Plato's cave, identifying the Passion of the crucified Christ as corresponding to Plato's vision of the sun or ultimate Good.

This brings us to our segue into Grant's fourth conversion doctrine: *the love of justice as light in the darkness—Grantean ethics contra liberal hegemony.* From the beginning, Grant's public vision is of personal and social justice rooted

in love of the Good, self-giving and peacemaking. Emerging from the shadows of the cave into the radiance of the Cross, Grant says, "I would say the crucifixion is a supreme act of justice on Christ's part – not that he was crucified but that he submits to crucifixion. It's a supreme act of justice to love his enemies."[231]

From that ground, he stands as Canada's prophet against the political ethics of liberal hegemony. Corresponding to the willing-versus-willful and consent-versus-coercion binaries above, we might introduce Grant's political-ethical battle with liberalism under the rubric of the 'shalomic' versus 'hegemonic,' as defined by educational philosopher, Glenn Runnalls:

> I understand that at the human system level, people have two basic ways of relating to each other: *shalomic* or *hegemonic*. By hegemonic, I mean the ordered flow of capital (material and social) between the dominant center and the margins/frontiers. Hegemony assumes disparity and will use coercion to maintain order. By shalomic, I mean the practice of hospitality between people(s). Shalomic assumes invitation, receptivity, and generous acceptance. Shalomic uses mediation to maintain peace. Any given human system will tend toward the hegemonic or the shalomic. Most (all) large-scale systems tend towards the hegemonic.[232]

Grant's critique of modernity climaxes in his attack on liberal hegemony (as Runnalls defines it). Behind advertised ideals like freedom and tolerance, according to Grant, autonomy always pursues mastery and produces oppression. Liberal hegemony in practice creates disparity, economically enforcing an Orwellian society where some are more equal than others. The imagery of *Animal Farm*[233] thus applies as much to laissez-faire capitalism as it did to Stalinism. Liberal democracies talk rights and tout freedoms, but in truth, have become dominant and coercive hegemonies, both domestically and internationally.

Grant's politics-of-consent and shalomic justice are of another order, to which we now proceed.

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[231] Cayley, *GC*, 179.
[232] Glenn Runnalls, 11/17/11 (*Agora 2.0 newsgroup*).
[233] George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (1945).

Chapter 6
Return to the Cave: A Politics of Justice and Consent /
Grantean Ethics

6.1   Introduction

In the traditional teaching about justice it was recognised that human nature is so constituted that any desire which has not passed through the flesh by way of actions and settled dispositions appropriate to it is not finally real in the soul. The saints are those in whom the desire for justice has so passed through the flesh that it has become transparent to justice.[1] (George Grant)

Human nature is so arranged that a desire of the soul has no reality within the soul until is has passed through the body by means of actions, movements and attitudes. Until then it is like a ghost. It has no effect on the soul.[2] (Simone Weil)

We now come to Grant's fourth doctrine: his philosophy of justice and especially his political ethics. Grantean ethics is no mere afterthought-application of the philosophy we've studied to this point. For Grant, and he would say for Plato, it is the goal of his entire work. In some miscellaneous notes scribbled in 1973, he wrote to himself:

My concentration on justice as against epistemology and metaphysics is difficult for it meets people who live in an imperial age when ethics is almost out of the question (particularly ethics as politics). Therefore this is one reason why academics return to epistemology and metaphysics – as harmless but understandable problems.[3]

Grantean scholar, Barry Cooper, reminds us that philosophy at its origins was a public and political act "of resistance to that spiritual disorder whose most

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[1] Grant, *T&J*, 56.
[2] Weil, *G-G*, 65.
[3] Grant, "Miscellaneous Notes on Technology, Good, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Other Subjects," *CW* 4: 315.

obvious political manifestation was injustice."[4] He adds that Grant was a 'common sense philosopher' and public citizen who would leave the academic conclaves to address the public on CBC Radio, in popular journals, and with books meant for national digestion.[5]

So too, for all his theological insight and religious studies experience, Grant's reflections on God were not (and could not be) thought outside of the question of justice. He writes, "God is only to be grasped by similes – but justice is the supreme simile."[6] In this way, he sounds nothing like a modern systematic theologian and more reminiscent of the ancient prophets, for whom the 'prophetic' and 'justice' were indivisible.

In this chapter, we shall unpack the political ethics of justice and consent of Grant 'the prophet' with the following goals in mind.

6.1.1   Chapter goals

I will explore the following specific elements of George Grant's ethical-political thought:

- To complete my outline of Grant's journey through Plato's cave analogy, I will set Grantean political ethics in the context of the final stage: the philosopher's return to the cave. I will also note Simone Weil's explicit use of this metaphor in her declarations that the truly enlightened are compelled to do justice.

- I will show how Grant ultimately focuses his attack on modern liberalism as an ethics of willfulness (in *English-Speaking Justice*).

- Grant's deconstruction of liberalism is well known, deriving Red Toryism from English conservative forbearers such as Hooker, Coleridge, and Swift. But I will advance a theory of Grantean justice to which he alludes with the phrase, "a politics of justice and consent."[7] The reader will see how Weil's cosmology and Grant's *theology of consent* suggest a particular *politics of consent*, explicit in later Weil's *consent to*

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[4] Barry Cooper, "*A Imperio usque ad Imperium*: The Political Thought of George Grant," *GP*, 23.

[5] Cf. Graeme Nickelson, "Freedom and the Good," *Athens and Jerusalem* (2006), 323–40.

[6] Grant, "Miscellaneous Notes," *CW* 4: 315.

[7] Grant, *ESJ*, 12.

obligation. They provide a counter-schema to typical declarations of rights and independence common to French or American liberalism.

- Beyond Grant's justice of consent, I will close this chapter by suggesting a Grantean ethic for the individual based in Christ as the cruciform Way.

As a result of my research on this chapter, I have also published other pertinent discoveries elsewhere. Namely,

- I charted new ground in gathering a sampling of Grant's rhetorical methods within the cave and the oft-overlooked purposes behind their use. These include lament (triggering intimations of deprival); using the liberal language of freedom from within; opening mythopoetic doorways (bypassing rational defenses); and employing what Dennis Lee called 'Grant's impasse.'[8]
- Picking up on Grant's critique of modernity, I have noted elsewhere how he followed Leo Strauss (commonly known) and Eric Voegelin (usually unexplored) in tracing the staged and varied embodiments of modernity.[9]

6.1.2   Grant and justice

An excellent summary of George Grant's long-term political-ethical agenda comes to us in his essay, "Justice and Technology," revised and republished multiple times from the 1970s–90s.[10]

He begins with Christ's statement, "Happy are those who are hungry and thirsty for justice," alongside Socrates', "It is better to suffer injustice than to inflict it."[11] Grant says he is less concerned with the relation between the two statements than with what they say in common about justice. He confesses to having been "grasped by their truth."[12] He also acknowledges that access to this truth is dependent on the illumination of love (silently affirming Weil's premise), even if it is beyond one's own capacity for love.

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[8] Jersak, "Grant's Rhetorical Method," *MSO*, 131–40; Dennis Lee, "Grant's Impasse," *By Loving Our Own* (1990), 11–39.
[9] Jersak, "Grant, Strauss, and Voegelin," *GPG: Canada's Lone Wolf* (2011).
[10] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 525.
[11] Matt. 5:6; Plato, *Crito* 49b–e; *Gorgias* 474bff.
[12] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 525.

Grant then reveals his intention: "to discuss the relation between technology and the statements of Christ and Socrates."[13] By technology, Grant does not mean "the sum of all modern techniques" but rather, "that unique co-penetration of knowing and making" directed toward the modern Western activity of 'willing' (i.e., what I have called willfulness, as against willingness; what Grant called 'mastery').[14] He then lays out the problem:

> The ambiguity with which I am here concerned ... is that technology, which came into the world carrying in its heart a hope about justice, has in its realization dimmed the ability of those who live in it to think justice. Something has been lost. It is for this reason that I started with statements by Socrates and Christ.[15]

Grant's allegation runs contrary to the claims of modernity (whether one is a Marxist, an English liberal, or a Nietzschean), which sees 'progress'—the control of nature—as actually improving the conditions of justice, finding ways to free us from laborious tasks, from a host of diseases, and from necessity itself. In what sense, then, can Grant speak of a loss concerning justice? Without reprinting Grant's whole essay yet again, I will risk reducing his argument to its barest form in order to express the essence of Grantean justice.

First, Grant affirms the ancient definition that justice is what we are fitted for, intimated to us through ordinary experiences, through which we reach toward some knowledge of an unchanging Good, "which rules us in a way more pressing than the rule of any particular goods."[16]

Second, following Plato's *Phaedrus*, Grant affirms that the beauty of the world seduces us towards justice, which may seem less attractive to us because of its demands on us. We don't like the inconvenient responses it expects from us. But if we could see justice as it truly is—the perfection of harmony—"it would engulf us in loveliness."[17]

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[13] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 526.
[14] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 526.
[15] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 527.
[16] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 529.
[17] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 529.

Third, if we were realistic about 'our loves,' we would also see that justice in its unchanging otherness "has a cutting edge which often seems to be turned upon our very selves."[18] That is, what justice demands and what our 'wants' demand are deeply at odds. How then can we define justice in the liberal sense of individual rights and the freedom to pursue all our wants?

Fourth, if we were realistic about the conditions of the world itself, Grant cannot "imagine any condition in which some lack of harmony in some human being would not be putting claims upon us – the meeting of which would often carry us whither we would not."[19] This he calls 'justice-as-otherness,' corresponding to Simone Weil's 'obligations,' which we will encounter later.

Conversely, if justice includes an obligation to the unchanging Good and to the harmony of other human beings, it also affirms justice as our *need* (again, foreshadowing Weil), necessary to our own happiness and harmony. So Grant holds together 'our need and love of justice' with its simultaneous 'demanding otherness.'

Bringing these five points to a unified head, Grant concludes,

> Justice is an unchanging measure of all our times and places, and our love of it defines us. But our desiring need of an unchanging good which calls us to pay its price is theoretically incongruent with what is thought in 'technology.'[20]

In seeking to enter the heart of an unchanging justice, the ontology behind the particulars, Grant cautions us to avoid abstraction.

> If we are to speak about the essence of justice we must always start from where it meets us in an immediate way every day ... [ontology] must proceed from nerve-racking situations of justice. ... One must never turn away from the realities and immediacies of justice in the here and now.[21]

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[18] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 529.

[19] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 530.

[20] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 530.

[21] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 531. He then recites the words of Weil with which I opened this chapter.

In light of the practical need for a morality in the era of technology, Grant goes on to critique two of his mentoring voices, Austin Farrer and Martin Heidegger, for pursuing their respective ontologies while abandoning ethics and excluding justice in an epoch that requires them like no other. Grant retorts, "If we attempt as thinkers (even in fear and trembling) the great task of ontology, the necessary cutting edge is only maintained by being in the world of 'technology' in as full a consciousness as we are able."[22] For a scholar of Heidegger's stature to omit any discussion of *politeia* or the virtues in his commentary on the *Republic* analogies dumbfounds Grant. One simply should not abstract 'love of justice' from Plato's teaching on *idea* or 'being,' as if the former were separate or incidental. Says Grant,

> The extraordinarily powerful and pain-filled language used by Plato concerning the breaking of chains, the climb out of the cave into the light of the sun and the return to the cave, are all related to the virtue of justice and its dependence on the sun [defined by Grant as love—of the Good, and of justice].[23]

Grant finishes the essay by returning to his title point. Truly understanding 'technology' in the modern sense involves recognizing a loss of justice in our politics and ethics. Facing into this deficit honestly brings us full circle to the hunger of which Christ spoke. "The thought which is the task of most of us, and is indeed important, always waits upon something of a different order – that thought which has been transfigured by hungering and thirsting for justice."[24] This message is the light with which he would return to Plato's cave.

6.1.3   Return to the cave: Plato, Grant, and Weil

This dissertation has come to Grant's theology from a distinctive and overdue angle, suggesting we outline his life-doctrines through each stage of Plato's parable of the cave. In this final leg of the journey, I identify Grant's political ethics and philosophy of justice with the awakened one's return to the cave—to those still swallowed by (yet loyal to) the great beast. Grant follows Simone

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[22] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 532.
[23] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 533.
[24] Grant, "Justice and Technology," *CW* 4: 534.

Weil's explicit use of this metaphor, declaring and modeling the moral obligation of those who are truly enlightened to be emissaries of justice among the prisoners who remained chained in the cave. That is, what their eyes have seen must now pass through their flesh as justice.[25] For Weil, "The soul which has attained to seeing the light must lend its vision to God and turn it on the world."[26]

We start by refreshing our reading of Plato's original dialogue:[27]

The return: blindness

Socrates: And now, I responded, consider this: If this person who had gotten out of the cave were to go back down again and sit in the same place as before, would he not find in that case, coming suddenly out of the sunlight, that his eyes were filled with darkness?"

Glaucon: Yes, very much so.

The debate with the other prisoners

Socrates: Now if once again, along with those who had remained shackled there, the freed person had to engage in the business of asserting and maintaining opinions about the shadows – while his eyes are still weak and before they have readjusted, an adjustment that would require quite a bit of time – would he not then be exposed to ridicule down there? And would they not let him know that he had gone up but only in order to come back down into the cave with his eyes ruined – and thus it certainly does not pay to go up.

The final outcome

Socrates: And if they can get hold of this person who takes it in hand to free them from their chains and to lead them up, and if they could kill him, will they not actually kill him?

Glaucon: They certainly will.

As with their application of Socrates' just man to Jesus of Nazareth, Grant and Weil saw a connection between the Incarnation and the cave. In both cases, a light

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[25] See Grant, *T&J*, 56; Weil, *G-G*, 65.

[26] Weil, *FLN*, 269. Cf. Weil, *NB* 1:323–4; Eric O. Springsted, "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine...," *Christian Platonism* (2004), 221.

[27] Plato, "The Allegory of the Cave," *Republic*, 6.514a.2–517a.7, trans. Thomas Sheehan.

descends into the darkness where those in darkness reject the message.[28] Moreover, Grant and Weil were committed to interpreting justice as both a Platonic imperative and an obligation to emulate the Incarnation. Weil says,

> When the saint has torn the soul from the body ... he must incarnate himself in his body in order to shine the reflection of supernatural light on this world, and make this world and this earthly life a reality—because until now they have only been dreams. In this way he must finish creation. The perfect imitator of God first disincarnates himself, then incarnates himself.[29]

Weil and Grant were devoted to living through the analogy, though they would not directly presume to claim arrival. We need only say that their interpretation of Plato hinges on a firm belief that illumination of reality beyond this world (system) must lead to prophetic justice within this world (society)—an historically unpopular and dangerous calling.[30]

6.1.4 Grant's Method

Many have written about what Grant is *saying* but they do not necessarily see what he is *doing*. That is, we thoroughly analyze the *content* of his work but should take a closer look at its *function*. A simple example of this is how many commentators saw the message of *Lament* as pessimistic, unaware of how or why that work succeeded to inspire. Grantean commentaries ought always to ask, "What is he up to?"

Grant knew the difficulties facing a philosopher who returns to the cave. He saw the futility of launching a direct offensive against the liberal hegemony— never mind waving the Christian flag in a suicidal charge into its ranks. Nowhere is this truer than on the minefield of public ethics—Grant bore the scars to prove it. He saw that,

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[28] Weil, *NB* 2: 357. Cf. John 1.

[29] Robert Chenavier, "Simone Weil: Completing Platonism through a Consistent Materialism," *Christian Platonism* (2004), 73 (citing Weil, *SG*, 106). Cf. Weil, *NB* 2: 358.

[30] Cf. Weil, *NB* 2: 383–4, 436.

People who wish to justify certain moral positions are forced to pay lip service to modern liberalism if their arguments are to be convincing. The paying of lip service is always evidence of the dominance of a particular way of thought.[31]

Genius that he was, Grant saw ways to outflank his opponents—multiple, subtle methods for skirting the usual defenses and allowing his message to strike home. He learned and modeled how to speak in the cave, after the pattern of Plato or Christ. He practiced what he preached in that he found contemplative alternatives to the Enlightenment methodology he found lacking. In *Minerva's Snowy Owl*, I describe four of Grant's rhetorical models for being heard above the clash of the culture wars.[32] These include:

- Prophetic lament meant to trigger intimations of deprival.
- Liberal rhetoric from within, critiquing liberal hegemonic coercion.
- Mythopoetic doorways—using poetry, fiction, and music to convey truth.
- Grantean impasse, which arrests the mind to posture one for revelation.

I mention them now because they illustrate Grant's experience and awareness that his calling back to the cave required creative strategies for communicating his vision to a blind and often irritable culture that resents hearing the truth of their condition. After all, how do you tell a 'liberal nation' that their 'freedom' is really bondage?

6.2   Modernist Embodiments

As Grant had tracked modernity to it's roots, so he described its development by stages to its varied ripened fruits.[33] Leo Strauss's most significant influence on Grant may have been identifying these staged embodiments of modernity, beginning with Machiavelli in the late 15th century. Eric Voegelin also helped make Grant aware of how the Protestant Reformation instigated the modern worldview.[34] But while Strauss and Voegelin greatly served Grant's analysis,

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[31] Grant, *ESJ*, 6–7.

[32] Jersak, "Grant's Rhetorical Method," *MSO*, 131–48.

[33] Jersak, "Sprouts of Modernity in Medieval Theology," *MSO*, 23–35; "Blooms of Modernity in the Reformation and Calvinist Puritanism," *MSO*, 37–47.

[34] Cf. Jersak, "Grant, Strauss and Voegelin: Modernist Embodiments," *George P. Grant: Canada's Lone Wolf* (2011), 107–20.

their exile into the arms of America made it impossible for them to see dangers in western liberal democracy that appeared obvious to Grant. Indeed, they became fathers of American neoconservatism,[35] while Grant actively resisted the very willful imperialism that we now associate with Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz. In the end, Grant's guide remains Weil, who always tried to flesh out ideas, even if imperfectly, with an eye to the violence that lurks in our willfulness. Like the Hebrew prophets, Grant and Weil surpass Strauss and Voegelin in their capacity to be self-aware of what enfolds them, and self-critical where our most precious national and personal identities are complicit in injustice.

6.2.1   Grant: Defining 'conservative' and 'liberal'

Our understanding of Grant's attack on modern liberalism will be muddled if we fail to distinguish Grant's definitions of 'conservative' and 'liberal' from popular usage. First, when Grant says 'conservative,' he specifically refers to the 'natural law' conservatism of the Greeks, Aquinas, and Richard Hooker. This older conservatism is summed up by Grant as "*the conception of an eternal order by which human actions are measured and defined*," without which "conservatism becomes nothing but the defense of property rights and chauvinism."[36] By 'liberal' he means "a set of beliefs which proceed *from the central assumption that man's essence is his freedom and therefore that what chiefly concerns man in this life is to shape the world as we want it.*"[37] So for Grant, the classic conservative versus modern liberal question envisions two societies: one ordered by eternal standards for the common good versus one constructed by human willing for personal freedom. The question is where one locates mastery.

Today's left-right spectrum is therefore terribly narrow. For Grant, to be liberal does not equate to political or social 'left-ness': it encompasses the entire American experiment. From the fringes of Noam Chomsky's Anarchism to Sarah Palin's Tea Party, the entire range is rooted in the liberalism of American independence. America's claims to defending freedom and her simultaneous

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[35] Cf. Ted V. McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and the Search for Postliberal Order* (1995).

[36] Grant, *Lament*, 71.

[37] Grant, *TE*, 114n3.

imperial practices are *all* liberal in the Grantean sense. That is, a nation founded on the primacy of the will (will to power) will do what it takes to do what it wants to get what if wants. Grant saw such freedom, unhooked from divine or natural order, as a glorified license for tyranny. Freedom is killing.

Moreover, for Grant (and Weil), liberalism is broader than western democracy. It includes *every* modern political-economic theory based on human mastery to create a utopia—global capitalism, Marxist-totalitarian regimes, and fascist dictatorships alike. And socially, with Nietzsche, Grant includes the hedonist herd and the nihilist schemers within the same liberal matrix.

Using this broad brush, Grant equates liberalism with all of modernity. Indeed, he uses the terms interchangeably. Thus, what we now deem conservative (including the Straussian neocons) is almost always included within Grant's broader liberal swath. But what Grant deemed conservative is the conservation of the eternal—the loss of which he lamented.

6.2.2 Grant's modernity: Prime embodiments

That said, George Grant generally accepted Strauss's three waves of modern thought and Voegelin's notion of its Calvinist-Puritan origins. One final pass will suffice to cover the major –isms, or embodiments, included within Grant's sweep of modernity. I have charted these diverse thoughts beneath three umbrellas: logical positivism, progressivism/historicism, and liberalism.

Modernist Embodiments	Corollaries
i. Logical positivism: ■ Modern *epistemology* (see ch. 4) = 'Knowing as willing' (freedom from transcendence)	■ Excluded knowledge (Bacon/ Descartes/Kant) ■ Rationalism/Romanticism/ Humanism ■ Postmodern knowing (Nietzsche/ Heidegger): beyond calculation
ii. Progressivism/Historicism: ■ Modern *philosophy of history* = 'Time as history'	■ Hegel's dialectic of history ■ Providential progressivism ■ Scientific progressivism (Marx/Weber/Freud)

■ Modern *metaphysics* (see ch. 5) = Nominalism (freedom from universals)	■ Historicism: Grant's No to Heidegger ■ Technology: Freedom as *Techne* (Marx/Nietzsche): Grant's Yes to Heidegger
iii. Liberalism: ■ Modern *moral philosophy* (see this chapter) = 'Freedom as our essence' (unpremised eternal law).	■ Individualism (Luther to Nietzsche) ■ Egalitarianism (Marxism/Liberalism vs. Nietzsche) ■ Contractualism (Rousseau/Kant/ Rawls) ■ Pragmatism (Calvinist Puritans/ Dewey/American Empire)

Much of Grant's work addresses these –isms and the bulk of secondary material on Grant covers that territory. The above table is mainly self-explanatory, and the more cryptic elements become clear as one reads Grant, his commentators, and the corresponding chapters[38] herein. I include this brief overview now only to underscore the essential conflict I have been tracking—the competing priority of the *modern will* (freedom / rights / mastery) versus the *eternal Good* (divine / natural law / God). Or elsewhere in Grant, he expresses the liberal will as *freedom* against the conservative Good as *love*.

6.2.3 Liberalism (modern moral philosophy) = 'Freedom as our essence'

The language of freedom leads Grant to define modernity by its primary ideology or 'faith': *liberalism*. In fact, he uses the two labels nearly interchangeably. To Grant, generic liberalism is simply the belief that 'political liberty is a central human good,'[39] something both 'conservatives' and 'liberals' would affirm. Grant also nods to the liberal-conservative consensus that "constitutional government

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[38] Chapters 4–6 herein unfold doctrines 2–4 as Grant's epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.
[39] Grant, *ESJ*, 4.

and respect for legal rights of individuals" is a good.[40] So when Grant assails 'liberalism' as the modernistic faith, he needs to clarify: his fight is with the particular species of modernist liberalism that he calls 'progressivism.'[41] It claims to combine political liberty and technological mastery—an interdependence that Grant finds unsustainable. Here is a sampling of his explicit attempts to define and deconstruct this brand of liberalism over three decades:

i.   1965 (*Lament for a Nation*)

Liberalism is the fitting ideology for a society directed towards [the conquest of human and non-human nature]. It denies unequivocally that there are any given restraints that might hinder pursuit of dynamic dominance. ... This means that we must experiment in shaping society unhindered by any preconceived notions of good.[42]

ii.   1967 ("The University Curriculum")

I mean by liberalism a set of beliefs which proceed from the central assumption that *man's essence is his freedom* and therefore that what chiefly concerns man in this life is to shape the world as we want it.[43]

iii.   1974 (*English-speaking Justice*)

In [Roe v. Wade] one can hear what is being spoken about justice in such *modern liberalism* more clearly than in academic books ... the allocation of rights from within the constitution cannot be decided in terms of any knowledge of what is good. ... *rights are prior to any account of good.*[44]

iv.   1986 ("The Moving Image of Eternity"[45])

I mean by a liberal somebody who believes man's essence is his freedom. *Freedom* and *liberal* just mean the same thing, really. *Liberal* just means free, doesn't it? And this has been the dominating spirit of the English-speaking world. It is so deeply part of the English-speaking world, to

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[40] Grant, *Lament*, 62.
[41] Grant, *ESJ*, 4–5.
[42] Grant, *Lament*, 56.
[43] Grant, *TE*, 114n3.
[44] Grant, *ESJ*, 69.
[45] "The Moving Image of Eternity," *Ideas*, CBC Radio.

which Canada belongs, that people just take if for granted, in a certain sense, that man is free and is going to make the world as he wills.[46]

In Grant's parlance, the 'heresy of modernity' is liberalism, the notion that *'freedom is our essence.'* In the modern world, the freedom of 'human will is the dominant reality' and the 'primal apprehension of being.'[47] Defining modern liberal 'freedom,' Grant says, "Freedom for man is the ability to get what he wants. This vision of freedom finds in our society its ever fuller incarnation."[48] Such freedom transcends the good through a marriage of simple hedonism and aggressive domination, echoing Nietzsche's wry prophecies of last men and nihilists:

> As the presence of the infinite fades from our minds, a society which has concentrated its energies on changing the world will more and more demand the immediate motive for so doing, and thus our society will become increasingly ruled by pleasure and force. In the next years, if we are not destroyed by war, we will watch the domination of the elite by the pleasure of personal power and the domination of the more submissive by those less strenuous pleasures which alleviate boredom.[49]

With this clarity regarding Grant's use of 'liberalism,' we proceed in more detail to his deconstruction of liberalism in his 1975 work, *English-speaking Justice.*

6.2.4 *English-speaking Justice*

English-Speaking Justice is Grant's javelin to the bulls-eye in deconstructing liberalism, focusing especially on a contemporary liberal ethicist, John Rawls. Grant targets the foundations of modernity, looking at how liberals use the language of reason, power, freedom, and contract to craft a hegemonic hydra. He scans the culture wars to see the common premises in which we in the West are all enfolded. In *English-Speaking Justice*, Grant's specific task is to demonstrate

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[46] Cayley, *GC*, 47.
[47] Schmidt, *GP*, 144–5.
[48] Grant, "The Uses of Freedom: A Word and Our World," *CW* 2: 192–3.
[49] Grant, "The Uses of Freedom," *CW* 2: 201–2. Cf. Grant, *Lament*, 64n22, 65.

how English-speaking justice has capitulated to liberalism, and how that has played out in the examples of militarism and abortion.

As we saw in chapter 3, Grant enucleates the core of liberalism as primacy of the will. He identifies the essential content of liberalism: liberty to define human nature any way we want. After that, the rest is simple cause and effect—the implicit willfulness of liberalism has become explicit as a cultural norm or hegemony. In that climate, Grant asks where *power* and *goodness* come from.

Politically, the hegemon is that which is most powerful—the 'one ring to rule them all'—and is usually a negative term for imperial dominance. In early Greek thought, *hegemons* were states that held political predominance over the rest.[50] Today in the modern west, *culturally*, liberalism gradually displaced Christianity as the ruling hegemony to which we must pay homage.

Grant would also expose the illusion of modernity as multiple movements. He argues that this multiplicity only exists at the surface. Back of that rhetoric is a monomyth of the power of each person to act as they wish. Autonomous individuals can use their freedom to create identity and happiness, as they will—masters of their own domain. Pluralism is a descriptor for the various ways we pursue this freedom, and the language of diversity is the storefront. Yet underneath them is the imperial dogma of individual rights (will-to-power), which must not be challenged by notions of order or natural law lest one become branded a fossil, a fundamentalist, or a bigot.

To moderns, the opposite of liberalism seems to be fundamentalism, but to Grant, even Western fundamentalists still impose their particular notion of freedom on the other, enforcing it by religious, civil, or military coercion. Whether one is a secularist, a pluralist, or a fundamentalist, the entire spectrum is *liberal* in that all assert their freedom-as-self-mastery, and *hegemonic* in that they would squeeze others into conformity with their brand of freedom.

But, declares Grant, life is more than just a series of personal or social constructions of reality. In real life, you cannot actually do whatever you please without consequence to self and others. Real and natural reactions persist in nature, human nature, and perhaps supernature, and this speaks to ethics.

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[50] Applied to political or cultural dominance from the mythology of the Athenian Kharite, Hegemone, whose name is associated with mastery and sovereignty. Cf. "Karites," *Theoi Greek Mythology* (2000–11).

Grant directly dealt with a number of examples of the hegemony of liberal ethics. In *English-Speaking Justice*, he chose the American Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision for the rights of women versus the laws of the State regarding abortion. Elsewhere he applies this same template to militarism (the hegemony of imperial states) and multinationalism (the hegemony of globalizing economics). Each case is a trailhead to the single premise in which liberalism engulfs us. Namely, that human essence is our freedom. He then makes his foundational case: central to liberalism is of course liberty, but consistently, it is finally one individual or group's liberty trumping another's.

Grant's book raises this important dilemma within liberalism: if we follow Rawls' trail far enough, we are eventually confronted with the clash of individual wills at cross-purposes. Without any competing claims for the mutual respect of the other, we are back to the animal ethics of survival of the fittest. A good liberal will say, "But freedom *is* limited in that we should not hurt the other." Good, but what if it's a case of either I could be hurt, or you could be hurt, and it's one or another? What should I do when this other's rights and freedoms threaten my sense of being or identity? What if I have a very low tolerance for what constitutes hurt or threat?

At a social and political level, liberal society assures *me* of *my* rights over that of the other. Rawls' theory in practice implies that if and when my survival or even my lifestyle is threatened by the other, I have the moral right to kill that threat. In that case, the more powerful "I" will silence and snuff out the weaker brother, sister, nation, or child—and does so every day at home and abroad.

In Grant's mind, the military issue is empire over colony as abortion is woman over child (the fetal colonizer).[51] While the Supreme Court blocked the intrusion of the government on the rights of women, Grant challenges the intrusion of the liberal hegemony into the rights of children. In Canada during the 1970s, probably no one was as distinguished on the abortion question as George and Sheila Grant at a legal, political, and ecclesial level—and for the same philosophical reasons he opposed nuclear armament and globalization. At this point, the left began to turn on him, whereas they had lauded him for his denouncement of the multinationals and empire. But for Grant, his position is

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[51] Cf. Allan Bloom, "Justice: John Rawls versus the Tradition of Political Philosophy," *Giants and Dwarfs* (1990), 315–45.

Chapter Six: Return to the Cave

seamless: he is critiquing technology and will, linked together against the weakest among us. The liberal majority could not see his consistency, but to him the issues represent exactly the same injustice: the tyranny of the rights of the strong.

In the end, the language of rights is a child of liberalism. It comes in as an angel of light, but in its wake, Grant saw no real basis for ethical standards—no measure by which to judge anything as right or wrong at a deeper level. With Nietzsche, he saw how a society of *Übermen* and their 'last men' exercise their rights to pursue anything that momentarily slakes the thirst after the culture has been gutted of meaning. In the poignant lyrics made famous by Janice Joplin posthumously,[52] "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose."

Grant sought a better language and a higher ethic, while remaining more aware than most of the perils of Puritanical moralism. The current language of justice has been co-opted by retribution and rights, but Grant and Weil sought for a higher understanding of justice, what he calls the 'politics of consent and justice.'

6.2.5 Grant's politics of consent and justice

With Plato, Grant and Weil saw humanity's essence, not as freedom, but as 'desire for the Good.' From there, they could wrest the contractualist jargon of 'consent' away from liberal freedom-as-willing (i.e., control) and apply it, instead, to their own political theory of freedom as consent-to-the-Good (i.e., surrender). This is a classic example of how Grant attempts to subvert liberalism using its own values and terms—in this case, freedom and consent. This is most obvious in his *English-Speaking Justice*. In this section we shall see how Grant accomplishes the recapture of consent by: (i) assenting to the liberal axiom of justice through freedom and consent; (ii) exposing a liberal contradiction between control and consent; and (iii) hinting at a more rigorous form of justice through consent-to-the-Good. Then in the section following, we will see how Weil's politics of consent (to obligations before rights) aligns with and probably informs Grant's (and in fact, matches all four of his doctrines).

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[52] Kris Kristofferson and Fred Foster, "Me and Bobby McGee," (1969).

i. Grant's assent to liberal freedom and consent

In *English-Speaking Justice*, Grant first affirms the general liberal idea of *freedom* as something any sensible person should heartily avow. He says,

> Liberalism in its generic form is surely something that all decent men accept as good – 'conservatives' included. In so far as the word 'liberalism' is used to describe the belief that political liberty is a central human good, it is difficult for me to consider as sane those who would deny that they are liberals.[53]

Further, he identifies the aspect of *consent* in the contractual tradition from Kant to Rawls as essential to any just political regime. Contractualists bind consent to the autonomous will and self-interest, but even a conservative like Grant agrees and insists that consent is necessary to the social good. Describing Kant's model of the 'good will,' he says,

> From the side of *will* in the phrase 'the good will', the social contract represents the *consent* necessary in any regime proper to human beings whose essence is their autonomous freedom. Because the highest purpose of human life is to will autonomously, the best political regime must be such as could be willed rationally by all its members. In this sense, *consent* becomes the very substance of the best regime.[54]

Moving forward from Kant, Grant contrasts later liberalisms, favoring the contractarians over the libertarians and utilitarians[55] because the social contract tradition grappled with *why* a human individual should consent to any minimal social cooperation.

> It answers this question in terms of the interests of the free individual. 'Liber' and 'free' are after all synonymous at the literal level. Its answer is that the good society is composed of free individuals who agree to live

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[53] Grant, *ESJ*, 4.

[54] Grant, *ESJ*, 27.

[55] The utilitarians worked in the principle of 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number.' Cf. Grant, *ESJ*, 15. Or "*utilitarienne. Maximize* pleasure, minimize displeasure: result: what is Good. This is the U.S.A. of you." (David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (2009), 420).

together only on the condition that the rules of cooperation, necessary to that living together, serve the overall purposes of each member of that society.[56]

Self-interest may explain why someone might choose consent to moral self-regulation and social cooperation, but Grant digs deeper. Why *should* they? He wants to know what makes this *good*. "Why is it *good* that all human beings should live in a society to which they can give *consent* and in which they are guaranteed an equality of political liberties?"[57]

For Kant, the *good* side of 'good will' is that the autonomous individual consents to the moral imperative and so participates in the "very form of reason itself."[58] So Kant proposes autonomy, yes, but also autonomous consent to an 'ought' that is arguably higher and deeper than self-will or self-interest. Not so with later contractualism. In the case of Rawls, his justice-as-fairness depends on theorizing the optimum social situation for every individual's freedom if one could not predict their own position in that society (from a theoretical 'original position' of veiled ignorance). Consent to a mutually agreed-upon social contract imagines what system best serves oneself.

> His original position ... provides a first principle of justice because it comes to terms with the basic difficulty of any political thought. It shows how consent can be reconciled with the necessity for organized society. *Consent* is only possible when we know that the society is organized for the pursuit of individual interests in general.[59]

This is not unlike the impetus for the 'golden rule' (e.g., Matt. 7:12), where each individual imagines how s/he likes and does not like to be treated, then agrees reciprocally (consents to a contract) to treat others that way.

ii. Consent or control: The contractualist contradiction

So far, so good. Grant has established that consent is a necessary precondition for justice, and that contractarians acknowledge this need, even showing the strength

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[56] Grant, *ESJ*, 15.
[57] Grant, *ESJ*, 32.
[58] Grant, *ESJ*, 32.
[59] Grant, *ESJ*, 36.

of their position. He then asks the critical question: "Is a justice based on contract ever sufficient to support *a politics of consent and justice?*"[60] This line is vital to Grantean ethics, for it establishes the plumb line by which he judges any political system: it must function via consent (freedoms) and produce justice (obligations). Can a social contract meet that standard in practice? Why or why not?

We might ask Grant how his *politics of consent* are any different than liberalism's freedom-as-consent. But Grant sees a contradiction in liberalism at exactly this point. Liberalism, for Grant, is *not* founded in willing consent but in willful control. And how can consent be wed to control (whether technological control or the control of personal autonomy)? The contradiction in progressive liberalism is that it tries to marry technology and freedom—it butts *control* (mastery) up against *consent* (love).[61]

When the freedom of personal autonomy (i.e., the primacy of the will) is our essence, the reality of consent is broken—like so:

Liberalism: Freedom = primacy of the will.

Reality: Primacy of the will = mastery = control.

In practice, progressive liberalism (including contractualism) undermines consent, except for those at the hegemonic core of the society. Control will trump consent and contravene justice. That is, the consent of contractualism is a mask of pseudo-consent covering the true face of liberalism—the will to power. Grant, on the other hand, following Christ, maintains that true consent surrenders control and gives itself to the justice of neighbour-love.[62]

Thus, Grant has uncovered the liberal contradiction of freedom and control. Personal autonomy equates freedom and control. Justice becomes very difficult and contracts become unstable whenever the primacy of *my* will (or a corporation's will, or a government's will) resists the public good, which is supposed to protect the primacy of everyone's will. Mutual consent of the other's will (rights) with my own will (rights) is difficult to contract whenever they are in conflict. At that point, liberalism falters because the demand of the rights of the more powerful (i.e., richest, best lawyers, biggest guns, etc.) will tend to

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[60] Grant, *ESJ*, 12.
[61] Grant, *ESJ*, 9.
[62] Grant, *ESJ*, 27–9.

overpower one's obligation to the less powerful—those outside the controlling halls of the hegemony.

All this to say, control does not lead to freedom; consent does.

iii. Rawls' fatal flaws

a. Failure to account for imperial and corporate power. Speaking of the halls of hegemony, whether in Congress, the Supreme Court, or Wall Street, Grant sees glaring examples confirming his critique. "Rawls' theory of justice is enormously weakened by his failure to relate it to the facts of imperialism or of domestic corporate power."[63] The truth of Grant's assessment has become more apparent in the decades since his death—the Iraq Wars, the Patriot Act, and the financial collapse of 2008 are obvious examples.

b. Reduction of justice to desires. Grant also deconstructs Rawls' justice down to self-interest, self-interest down to goods, and finally goods down to desires.[64] But if personal desires are at the ground level of our society, he asks, "Within a contractualist belief, why should anyone care about the reign of justice more than their life?" That is, why should anyone choose to be a soldier or policeman or fireman?[65] More than that, why should I not have whatever I want— why not equate democratic justice with capitalist consumerism? And we do.

As I understand Grant, true justice involves mutual consent of otherness— *shalom*—while liberal justice focuses on demands of the self-interested "I." You cannot sow self-interest, project it onto the other, and hope to reap contractual justice. Why not? Because the final court of appeal will always be *my* personal autonomy and the primacy of *my* will over the Good of *ours*. Contractualism is a counterfeit consent because it is rooted in 'my will be done.'

By subtly positing the language of consent as a liberal cornerstone, Grant only needs to show their failure of consent to tip the whole structure. He out-liberals the liberals in terms of true freedom. Contractualism's tolerance-as-consent collapses because, based in the willful 'I,' it will rise up to label, exile, or crush those they deem intolerant. The liberal hegemony itself becomes fundamentalist.

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[63] Grant, *ESJ*, 42–3.
[64] Grant, *ESJ*, 44.
[65] Grant, *ESJ*, 62.

So if social contract—liberalism's best attempt at justice—finally fails, does Grant offer an alternative? Or is he merely a naysayer?

iv. Grantean justice through consent to the Good

Grant transposes his theology of the Cross into what he calls *"a politics of consent and justice"*[66]—what I referred to earlier as a *shalomic* politic. He challenges liberalism for seeking freedom in *control* (mastery, autonomy, self-will, etc.) over against the true freedom that comes as the fruit of *consent* (consent to the other in love, to the nature of things, and to the Good). His logic is tight: control (self-preservation) cannot reap liberty or justice for all. Justice must grow out of self-giving, willing consent (love for) to the Good, as expressed in our global neighbourhood where I am my 'brother's keeper.' But who is willing? What movements have embodied this?

Referring to the English conservative tradition, Grant says,

> The institutions and ideas of the English-speaking world at their best have been much more than a justification of progress in the mastery of human and non-human nature. They have affirmed that any regime to be called good, and any progress to be called good, must include *political liberty and consent*.[67]

Grant is referring to the High Tory tradition represented by English conservatives such as Hooker, Coleridge, and Jonathan Swift. To them the notion of consent is important—what more, though? Just as Grant critiqued the content (or lack) of Heidegger's contemplative thought, so too consent obviously only leads to meaningful freedom when focused in the right direction. We consent daily to all sorts of silly things, just as freedom can be wasted on a myriad of superficial endeavors. The question is, what is it that guides, mentors, and shepherds Grant's consent?

I have said that Grant calls us to consent to the Good (as in Plato), expressed in the justice of Christ's self-giving Passion. He says,

> The pretechnological era ... clarified why justice is to render each human

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[66] Cf. Grant, *ESJ*, 5, 12, 15, 27, 32, 36, 62–3.
[67] Grant, *ESJ*, 5.

being their due, and why what was due to all human beings was "beyond all bargains and without an alternative." That account of justice was written down most carefully and most beautifully in "The Republic" of Plato. For those of us who are Christians, the substance of our belief is that the perfect living out of that justice is unfolded in the Gospels.[68]

The goal of *English-speaking Justice* was to think this account in light of the discoveries of modernity,[69] and so to lighten the darkness (of the cave) that "surrounds justice in our era."[70]

However, Grant seems to identify the essence of the Good, of divine love, and of the Cross—all three—as consent itself. In other words, does he not slip into a circular consent-to-consent? What distinguishes this from Rawls' contractualism, which is also a form of consent-to-consent (-control)? I propose that the substance and focus of Grant's politics of consent—what guides it and gives it parameters—is made explicit in Weil's article, "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations," and in *Need for Roots*.

6.3   Weilian Justice

Simone was an activist from childhood, whether picketing in the streets, organizing factory workers, writing for the syndicalists, or conferring with Trotsky (in exile).[71] Volumes have been written by her and about her theories of justice. But E. Jane Doering summarizes her overriding premise this way:

> Only openness to God's love, accessible to all, provides sufficient courage to face heart-rending situations with the actions that stem from Christ's commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:35). This good force of supernatural origin can block the self-perpetuating spiral of devastating force.[72]

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[68] Grant, *ESJ*, 87.
[69] Grant, *ESJ*, 88.
[70] Grant, *ESJ*, 89.
[71] All of this is rehearsed in the many Weil biographies.
[72] E. Jane Doering, *Simone Weil and the Specter of Self-Perpetuating Force* (2010), ix.

Accepting this as the bedrock of later Weilian justice (and how Grant heard her), I will restrict my commentary to a few documents she wrote for the French resistance—proposals for a just society after the war, and especially how they shape and fill out Grant's politics of consent.

6.3.1   *The Need for Roots*

In contrast to the various declarations of rights and freedoms in the Western world, Weil's vision of a just society—her *Need for Roots*—starts with a universal obligation to human need: "The notion of obligations comes before that of rights, which is subordinate and relative to the former."[73] Rights are secondary, because rights are conditional on whether anyone feels obligated to recognize them, and because they are relative to one's historical and geographical circumstance. Obligations, by contrast, universally encompass all humanity by virtue of the needs of all humanity. J. P. Little summarizes the qualitative difference between Weil's justice (consent to obligation) and the liberal basis for rights:

> Justice is based on mutual consent, and the cry of someone suffering injustice is "Why am I being hurt?" The notion of rights, being based on property, produces a different cry: "Why has he got more than I have?" (*ELD*, 38). The notion of obligation is unconditional, since it is situated on a higher plane than rights.[74]

In *The Need for Roots*, Weil specifies a host of particulars to which one must offer this mutual consent. She believes deeply in individual liberty, but is much more than a libertarian. Examples of her consent-to-obligation (and obligation-to-consent) include:

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[73] Weil, *NFR*, 3. Cf. J. P. Little, *Simone Weil: Waiting on Truth* (1988), 85; Richard Bell, *Simone Weil: The Way of Justice as Compassion* (1998), 83.

[74] Little, *Waiting on Truth* (1988), 85. For the theoretical basis and practical expression of obligation, Little points to Weil's "Draft Statement of Human Obligations," where our obligation is to express the love of God through compassion.

- *Consent to obey.* Human souls have a real spiritual need to exercise consensual obedience to established rules and recognized leaders, according to conscience.[75]

- *Uncoerced consent* (is there another kind?) *to authority.* This consent is not held in subjection by force or cruelty, nor is it bribed through hope of gain. True obedience-by-consent cannot be bought or sold.[76]

- *Consent to just punishment.* By consenting to due penalties under the law, criminals could or should be restored to respect within society and reinstated within the law.[77]

- *Consent to national sovereignty.* She refers to free (versus forced) consent to national sovereignty, even to those who had first become citizens by force.[78]

- *Consent to the French movement in London.* She counseled consent to a movement that spoke in the name of the nation without any formal authority, thereby bearing a form of 'spiritual power.'[79]

- *Consent to suffering, physical labour, and even death.* Through disobedience, humankind found itself subjected to labour and death. But if undergone willingly, these constitute a path of transformation (via decreation) back into perfect obedience to the Good.[80] The model for this is Christ, who "learned obedience by the things which he suffered, and was made perfect" (Heb. 5:8–9).

The standards of consent listed above are of another order than contracts of self-interest made to will autonomously (Kant), avoid death (Locke), maximize goods (Rawls), or ensure rights.[81] In fact, the freedom of the individual is not guaranteed by establishing contracts to preserve one's own rights, but by calling individuals into a covenant with a higher and more beneficent Good. Consensual allegiance to that Good carries the promise that attending to the needs of others results in the highest quality of social justice.

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[75] Weil, *NFR*, 13–4.
[76] Weil, *NFR*, 14.
[77] Weil, *NFR*, 21.
[78] Weil, *NFR*, 110.
[79] Weil, *NFR*, 197–8.
[80] Weil, *NFR*, 302.
[81] Grant, *ESJ*, 13–47.

According to J. P. Little, "… the only difficulty lies in grasping the theoretical basis for the obligation towards ones' fellow-beings, and then finding practical expression for it."[82] Thankfully, Weil provides both in her "Draft Statement," to which we now turn.

6.3.2 "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations"[83]

In a letter written five weeks before she died,[84] Weil wrote,

> I too have a sort of growing inner certainty that there is within me a deposit of pure gold which must be handed on. Only I become more and more convinced, by experience and by observing my contemporaries, that there is no one to receive it.
>
> It is indivisible and whatever is added to it becomes part of it. And as it grows it becomes more compact. I cannot distribute it piecemeal.
>
> To receive it calls for an effort. And effort is so fatiguing! …
>
> What else can one expect? I am convinced that the most fervent Christians among them don't concentrate their attention much more when they are praying or reading the Gospel. …
>
> This does not distress me at all. The mine of gold is inexhaustible.[85]

In its compacted form, the golden deposit to which Weil refers is rendered to its purest state in Weil's "Draft Statement, beginning with consent to God's love.[86] Without apology, Weil's opens her preeminent political statement with a 'profession of faith.' It declares a straightforward Platonic Christianity, precisely in line with Grant's conversion revelation, and marries their theology of consent with their politics of consent. In this section, I will quote from Weil's profession of faith, then respond with a Grantean description corresponding to his four principle doctrines.

She opens,

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[82] Little, *Waiting on Truth* (1988), 85.
[83] Weil, *SE*, 219–27. On the three variants of this essay, see Weil, *SWW* (1998), 131.
[84] Signed 07/18/1943. She died 08/24/1943.
[85] Weil, *70L*, 196–7.
[86] Cf. Doering, *Specter of Self-Perpetuating Force* (2010), 238.

> There is a reality outside the world, that is to say, outside space and time, outside man's mental universe, outside any sphere whatsoever that is accessible to human faculties.[87]

How close this is to Grant's exact language! "'*God is.*' It never left me. I wasn't thinking much at the time. *It came to me* later that I was not my own. In other words, beyond space and time there was order."[88] Here we have Weil expressing the Good, God, the Order, the Reality Grant encountered at conversion and believed in. This encounter or belief is described as suprarational, inaccessible to the usual faculties of epistemology allowed by the Enlightenment (as per doctrine 2 – Grantean epistemology).

> Corresponding to this reality, at the centre of the human heart, is the longing for an absolute good, a longing which is always there and is never appeased by any object in this world.[89]

Here again we have Weil's *esprit*, or the *nous* of Plato, from Grant's epistemology. So too, the essence of humanity (Grant's phrase), not as freedom but as desire for the Good.

> Another terrestrial manifestation of this reality lies in the absurd and insoluble contradictions which are always the terminus of human thought when it moves exclusively in this world.[90]

And now she introduces those contraries of life and affliction that arrest the natural mind, throwing it into the contemplative state whereby encounter is made possible. Even prior to finding Weil, we saw Grant resisting the scrutability of providence in both his critique of modernity (doctrine 1) and his theology of the Cross (doctrine 3). Both Grant and Weil came to believe that accepting the insolvability of certain contraries is a prerequisite to escaping Plato's cave and seeing the Sun (doctrine 2).

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[87] Weil, *SE*, 219.
[88] Tovell (prod.), "Spectrum: The Owl and the Dynamo" (1980).
[89] Weil, *SE*, 219.
[90] Weil, *SE*, 219.

Chapter Six: Return to the Cave

> Just as the reality of this world is the sole foundation of facts, so that other reality is the sole foundation of good.
>
> That reality is the unique source of all the good that can exist in this world: that is to say, all beauty, all truth, all justice, all legitimacy, all order, and all human behaviour that is mindful of obligations. [91]

Having proclaimed the reality of the Good, Weil claims it as the foundation for everything we experience in this world as goodness. Here she introduces the political and ethical categories of justice, legitimacy, order, and obligation as manifestations of the transcendent Good (i.e., particulars of the ideal). Or in Grant's language, 'desire for the Good' as our essence and giving people their due ('what their fitted for') as justice (doctrine 4).

> Those minds whose attention and love are turned towards that reality are the sole intermediary through which good can descend from there and come among men.
>
> Although it is beyond the reach of any human faculties, man has the power of turning his attention and love towards it.
>
> Nothing can ever justify the assumption that any man, whoever he may be, has been deprived of this power.[92]

Weil now introduces the discipline of love-illumined attention, Grant's adopted epistemology, not only as a way of knowing, but as the conduit and *metaxu* through which eternal Good expresses itself as temporal justice. This potential, she says, is common to every human, because every human has the capacity to desire the Good (Grant's essence of human nature).

> It is a power which is only real in this world in so far as it is exercised. The sole condition of exercising it is consent. [93]

And now the climax of her profession: Weil identifies the activating event that opens the soul to the Good and welcomes justice into the world—*consent.*

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[91] Weil, *SE*, 219.
[92] Weil, *SE*, 219.
[93] Weil, *SE*, 219.

But again, we must insist: consent to what? Is Weil talking about the mutual consent of contractarian justice to live and let live? Or libertarian consent to defend the rights and freedoms of individuals from every hindering authority, obstacle, or inconvenience? Hardly. Those versions of freedom can and have plummeted into an extreme permissibility to unfettered willfulness, the end of which is injustice. What then?

6.3.3   Weil's Socratic consent

Weil's consent-to-obligation—that which Grant references with 'a politics of consent and justice'—is far more integrated, nuanced, and demanding than liberalism's tolerance-wed-to-rights. It is rooted in her, and Grant's, particular read of both Plato and Christ.

Weil gives us an important key in her *Notebooks*, where she had already called for "unconditional consent to absolute [or pure] Good."[94] For Grant and Weil, this means utter willingness to the Good rather than autonomy of the will (willfulness). Now she applies this to political ethics: "*Mutual consent is what constitutes perfect justice.*" She then references Agathon's speech from Plato's *Symposium*, §196.[95]

> Violence takes not hold of Love; nor is there violence in [Love's] dealings, since Love wins all men's *willing* service; and agreements on both sides *willingly* made are held to be *just* by "our city's sovereign, the law." Then, over and above his justice, [Love] is richly endowed with temperance. We all agree that temperance is a control of pleasures and desires, while no pleasure is stronger than Love: if they are the weaker, they must be under Love's control, and he is their controller; so that Love, by controlling pleasures and desires, must be eminently temperate.[96]

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[94] Weil, *NB* 2: 404, 413.
[95] Weil, *NB* 2: 538.
[96] Plato, *Symposium* (1925), 196c–d.

She speculates that ἑκὼν ἑκόντι ὁμολογήσῃ[97] (willing agreement) should be taken as *mutual consent*, which is authentic justice.[98] And this draws together multiple themes from throughout this work: the language of willing (versus willful) in Grant's critique of modernity (doctrine 1) and in his epistemology (doctrine 2) becomes synonymous with the language of consent in his cosmology and his theology (doctrine 3). Together, willingness and consent establish a foundation for his political and ethical vision (doctrine 4). This is important because, for Grant, unlike liberal freedom founded on mutual consent to personal pleasure and desires, and enforced through violence and coercion, true justice is agreed-upon consent to the more powerful and driving force of Love, 'conservative' because it is ultimately love of the Good. All of this is described with ingenious succinctness in *Symposium* 196 above.

Weil's consent, and Grant's politics of consent and justice, might be described as consent to a social order with obligations of love to the needs of humanity.[99] Thus, the 'order' to which Grant consents in not just the spiritual order of a transcendent God or the natural order of a mechanical universe. It must and does engage human order. Two statements from Weil highlight this, from her *Need for Roots*:

> The first of the soul's needs, the one which touches most nearly its eternal destiny, is *order*; that is to say, a texture of *social relationships* such that no one is compelled to violate imperative obligations in order to carry out other ones.[100]

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[97] ἑκών, ἑκοῦσα: willing, willingly, intentionally, of one's own will; ἑκόντι: willingly; ὁμολογήσῃ: agreed upon, allowed by consent. Georg Autenrieth. *A Homeric Dictionary for Schools and Colleges* (1891).

[98] See also: "Les Grecs definissaient admirablement la justice par le consentement mutual." ("The Greeks defined justice beautifully as mutual consent"); "La justice a pour objet l'exercice terrestre de la faculte de consentement." ("Justice is concerned with the earthly exercise of the faculty of free consent"). (Weil, *ELD*, 46, 51). My translation.

[99] We have already seen Weil's cosmology/theology of consent. Her politics/ethics of consent is no less rigorous. In *Need for Roots*, she calls for consent to obedience (13–14); to uncoerced authority (14); to just punishment (21); to national sovereignty (110); to the French resistance in London (197–8); to decreation (inertness, nothingness, slavery to God, 277); to suffering, physical labour, and death (300, 302).

[100] Weil, *NFR*, 10.

If we keep ever present in our minds the idea of a veritable *human order*, if we think of it as of something to which a total sacrifice is due should the need arise, we shall be in a similar position to that of a man traveling, without a guide, through the night, but continually thinking of the direction he wishes to follow. Such a traveler's way is lit by a great hope.

Order is the first need of all; it even stands above all needs properly so-called. To be able to conceive it, we must know what the other needs are.[101]

For Weil, then, true liberty is a byproduct of our freedom to consent to our social obligations to human needs. This only works if "the notion of obligations comes before that of rights, which is subordinate and relative to the former."[102] What exactly are these obligations and their corresponding needs?

6.3.4 Weil's paired obligations

According to Weil, the obligation of human society and indeed, every human, is to care for the needs of the body and soul of all humanity insofar as we are able. This obligation is eternal and universal; it is due to every human for no higher reason than that they are human.

The object of these obligations is to every human being for the sole reason that he or she *is* a human being, without any other condition requiring to be fulfilled, and even without any recognition of such obligation on the part of the individual concerned ...

This obligation is not based on any convention... This obligation is an eternal one... This obligation is an unconditional one...

This obligation has no foundation, but only verification in the common *consent* accorded by the universal conscience. ... And it is in relation to it that we measure our progress.[103]

To Weil, the needs of the body are fairly obvious: food, shelter, warmth, health, and personal property. But we are also obligated to care for the needs of the soul.

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[101] Weil, *NFR*, 10–11.
[102] Weil, *NFR*, 3.
[103] Weil, *NFR*, 4–5.

The needs of the soul include pairs in balance that complete each other. These are outlined and defined in Weil's "Draft for a Statement on Human Obligations"[104] as follows:

- Equality of freedoms *and* hierarchy of responsibilities
- Consented obedience *and* liberty
- Truth *and* freedom of expression
- Solitude/privacy *and* a social life
- Personal property *and* collective property
- Punishment that restores violators back into the order *and* full honor of those so restored
- Disciplined participation in a common task of public value *and* personal initiative within this participation
- Security *and* risk
- Rooting in natural environments (country, neighbourhood, family) *and* contact with the universe through them.

For Weil, consented obedience to such an order—to these obligations—would bear the fruit of a just society and legitimize the leadership of such a society.

6.3.5 Grantean obligation: "We are not our own."

Grant is not explicit about these paired obligations in his work, but I find the principle implicit in his frequently used phrase, "We are not our own"—a conclusion he came to at his conversion.[105] In Grant's view, our obligation to God is that since God loves us, we ought (are morally obligated to) love one another (1 John 4:11)—not by compulsion but in the genuine consent that arises from gratitude.

The implied response is 'charity.' Charity is a word cheapened (and often despised) today as moderns have diminished its meaning to disempowering 'handouts' and deflective ways of avoiding the root problems behind injustice. Capitalism has increasingly regarded charity with a sneer, associating it with those who abuse the welfare system or 'chasing good money after bad.'

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[104] Weil, *SE*, 224–6. An earlier and unpaired list had appeared in *The Need for Roots*.

[105] Grant, *GP*, 63. The phrase itself originates in 1 Cor. 6:19, but Grant credits his use to George MacDonald as cited in C. S. Lewis' *Surprised by Joy* (Grant, "Introduction to Volume 1," *CW* 1: xxiii, xxxvin4).

To Grant, 'charity' takes on its older English meaning: remembering "faith, hope, and charity" of the old King James Version (1 Cor. 13:13), where charity is used to translate the highest and most selfless love that mirrors Christ's Passion. For Grant, charity was to give one's very life away in love for the sake of the world. He saw this exemplified ultimately in Christ, and in a profound penultimate way through Weil.

> To proceed from what seems an indubitable fact: by whatever language one may choose to define Christianity, it is impossible to escape the statement that *charity* is at its centre.
>
> … it is unequivocally true that in asserting the truth of Christianity, one is asserting that the highest human life is to *give oneself away.*
>
> The assertion that this is not true implies the assertion that Christianity is nonsense. It also is a fact in my opinion that *Simone Weil lived such a life of charity.*[106]

Whereas Weil had argued for a justice based in our universal obligation to meet human needs, Grant sees realistically how rare this true charity really is, even among Christians who talk about it. Thus, he tends to hold up Weil as a saintly ideal rather than as an example he imagines others will follow. He says,

> It is also true that metaphysicians of [Kant's] genius are as rare (and perhaps even rarer) than those who *give themselves away* as did Simone Weil.[107]

> Some philosophers have obviously been more remarkable in their lives of charity than others. But there are none [like Weil] who have *given themselves* entirely to charity and this is of necessity. It is clear that people who *give themselves* away in charity from an early age have not any chance of long survival.[108]

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[106] Grant, "Reading Simone Weil," *MSO,* 198.
[107] Grant, "Reading Simone Weil," *MSO,* 199.
[108] Grant, "Reading Simone Weil," *MSO,* 200.

Nevertheless, Weil shines as an inspiring light in the darkness of modernity, one who had returned to the cave and suffered the ignorance of those still in chains. She describes this in one of her final letters, reminiscent of Plato's description:

> Some people feel in a confused way that there is something [to what I offer]. But once they have made a few polite remarks about my intelligence their conscience is clear. After which, they listen to me or read me with the same hurried attention which they give to everything, making up their minds definitely about each separate little hint of an idea as soon as it appears: 'I agree with this', 'I don't agree with that', 'this is marvelous', 'that is completely idiotic' (the latter antithesis comes from my chief) [De Gaulle]. In the end they say: 'Very interesting', and pass on to something else. They have avoided fatigue.[109]

Grant would not make such a mistake, taking her very seriously and disseminating her treasures over the long term wherever he could. Perhaps he would have done her a greater service by trumpeting her charity, not as a rare gem, but as the way every human being ought to live. He refrained for his own perceived inability to do so. Still, by exposing his students to her life and thought, Grant created an opportunity for Weil herself to extend her ministry of bringing light into the dark cave and perchance continuing to break chains and drag prisoners to the threshold.

6.4 Grant's Politics of the Cross: The Cruciform Way

In this chapter, I have emphasized how Grant's philosophy and theology provide a coherent basis for his ethics—especially his political ethics—but his ethics are no mere corollary or sidebar application. As with Plato, the Hebrew prophets (especially Jesus of Nazareth), and Simone Weil, whatever philosophical or theological insights Grant discovers serve the greater interest of public justice. Specifically, we saw how:

- Grant's ethics are the culmination of his passage back into the Platonic cave of modern liberalism, mirroring Simone Weil's express use of the same metaphor for enlightened justice.

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[109] Weil, *70L*, 66–7.

- Grant's methodology (lament, liberal rhetoric, mythopoesis, and impasse) enables him to circumvent the philosophical and practical barriers to the modern heart in order to deliver truth.

- Grant's critical enucleation of modernity, beyond Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, empowers him to aim his major volleys at the contradiction in liberalism between consent and control, leading to hegemony over any weaker other.

- Grantean justice—what he called "a politics of justice and consent"—is inextricably linked to Weil's cosmology and Grant's own theology of the Cross.

- Unlike Rawls' incongruous consent-and-control, Grant's particular *politics of consent-to-obligation* ("We are not our own") makes most sense when compared to Weil's London works, *The Need for Roots* and "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations."

Given these discoveries, especially the inseparable relation of Grantean justice to his theology of the Cross, I close this chapter by suggesting that Grant's political ethics could be called 'a politics of the Cross' or 'the Cruciform Way.' That is, his ethical agenda is for the political activation of the same self-giving love and consent-to-the-other that Christ modeled on the Cross. Said another way, if the Cross is indeed a picture of perfect justice, as he claims, then how might we clothe that truth with flesh in a public context and on a national scale?

The liberal protestation might be raised: a theology of the Cross that leads to willing selflessness must be voluntary, and ought to be reserved for the private convictions of individuals. The exercise of self-giving and putting others' interests first is a love of neighbour issue which cannot be enlarged to, or enforced as, public policy.

To these objections, I offer two responses. First, if individual rights can be enshrined as cultural dogma in our various Declarations of Rights, why not individual responsibilities, as in Weil's "Draft Statement"? Why is only one side of the coin defensible? Second, in fact, ethical responsibility for the other *is* retained *in part* by legal and political institutions. They carry elements of the older virtues as a 'hang-over' of loyalty (commitments and obligations), which are no longer supported by today's prevailing philosophy of self-interest. This is

Grant's argument in the final section of *English-Speaking Justice*.[110] A few examples come to mind:

- Police, military, and emergency institutions call for a commitment to a potentially ultimate self-sacrifice.
- Political leaders and public servants who place their economic and political self-interest ahead of the good of the national interest are indictable for corruption.
- Economic leaders and advisors who use their position to their own advantage can be charged with insider trading or tampering.
- Supreme courts were instituted to protect minorities from the tyranny of the self-interested majority through Bills of Rights.

In all that I have described of Grantean ethics in this chapter, two of his points linger for others to discuss. First, that generally, consent to the obligations above are conservative standards not consistently supported by liberal values. What is the best way to appeal to the *oughtness* of obligation to a culture where freedom still trumps love? Second, does any way remain for addressing Grant's concern that the Supreme Court rightly defended the rights of women over the more powerful arm of federal or state control, but failed to defend the rights of children over the more powerful arm of the Supreme Court? One reason we need to hear Grant afresh is that the liberal hegemony and their radical opponents have together ensured that any discussions required for a deeper justice (as harmony) are currently off the table.

As Isocrates (436–338 BC) is supposed to have written,

> Democracy destroys itself because it abuses its right to freedom and equality. Because it teaches its citizens to consider audacity as a right, lawlessness as a freedom, and anarchy as progress.[111]

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[110] E.g., Grant, *ESJ*, 89.

[111] Mis-cited in Michael Lewis, *Boomerang: Travels in the New Third World* (2011), 81. The quote may be an extreme paraphrase of Isocrates, *Areopagiticus* 7.20. But cp. also Plato, *The Republic* 8.560e; Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 82.3–4.

Chapter 7
Conclusion: Towards Just Peacemaking

7.1   Introduction

My conclusion will now bring together the various layers and strands of my argument into a coherent whole. I will review my principal questions concerning Grant's theology, the approach I took to pursue them, and what I found at each stage. I will summarize the key discussions and discoveries as the thesis unfolded, and offer a closing application that serves as a summary, but also points to further research.

Overall, this thesis sought to decoct the essence of Grant's contemplative theology, around which his political philosophy and lifework revolved. I followed Grant's trail through his personal and professional biography to his conversion experience, and from there, across what I called his four chief doctrines. These doctrines include:

- deconstruction (critique of modernity);
- epistemology (contemplative knowing);
- theology (anti-theodicy of the Cross);
- political ethics (just peacemaking).

I then outlined each doctrine according to a corresponding stage of Plato's cave analogy, expressed as:

- the dark cave of delusion;
- into the light, illumined by love;
- beholding the sun; and,
- return to the cave.

For each doctrine and each stage of the cave, I drew parallels to and dependence on Simone Weil as his guide. As I joined Grant's Weilian trail from the cave to the Cross and back again, I could see a consistent thread woven across the fabric of his thought.

7.2   Grant's Coherent Whole

Through critical engagement with the multi-faceted and voluminous works of Grant, I arrived at an original conception of Grant's coherent whole, which others have otherwise overlooked or stopped short of substantiating or articulating

effectively. Namely, at the heart of all this thought, beginning at the gate of Grant's conversion, I found the originary and abiding seed of willingness, surrender, or self-giving *love-as-consent* to the Good/God, to necessity, and to the other. Grant expressed this principle with Christ's words in Gethsemane, "Not my will, but thine be done,"[1] or in his own parlance, "I am not my own."[2] Moreover, although the secondary literature reveals it is not simply evident to everyone who reads his works, I deduced and demonstrated that *willingness* governs Grant's symbolic interpretation and experience of Plato's cave analogy, and ties each of its elements together. Further, he uses this standard as the measure by which to judge all truth claims, especially in his relentless assault on freedom-as-mastery (willfulness) wherever he uncovered it. Virtually everything he writes ultimately serves this key of willing consent to the Good, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly. Willingness, over against mastery, was the underlying answer to the major questions of my thesis.

7.3 The Main Questions

Before I review my specific discussions and findings, I must first recall the main questions that directed me to see *willing consent* as the heart of the matter for Grant.

7.3.1 Enucleating Grant's seminal doctrines

If I examined Grant as a contemplative theologian and social prophet, could I trace and identify a coherent profession of his seminal doctrines? How did his upbringing and education pave the way to his key beliefs? What role did his conversion play in establishing them? What were they? Were they identifiable throughout his life work? How were they expressed?

7.3.2 Outlining Grant's seminal doctrines

In identifying Grant's abiding doctrines, could I also chart them according to the stages of Plato's analogy of the cave, especially given Grant's use of the analogy as a descriptor for his life experience and calling as he saw it? How might such an outline aid us in organizing the direction of Grant's thought? What aspects of his

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[1] Luke 22:42.
[2] Grant, *GP*, 63.

worldview did each stage of the cave represent?

7.3.3 Specifying Grant's influences

Grant's primary interlocutors obviously include Nietzsche, Heidegger, Strauss, and Weil, but I sought to further explore their explicit impact in informing Grant's questions, insights, and rebuttals. What did these voices say to Grant on each of his four primal doctrines? Could I further magnify the special dependence Grant developed on Weil to articulate his own revelations?

7.3.4 Clarifying Grant on 'the Good' and 'the will'

Grant's Platonism comes out strongly in his language of "love of the Good," and his critique of modernity repeatedly focuses on the language of will that might usurp the Good. How does the battle of the Good and the will tie together his theology, philosophy, epistemology, and ethics? What is the significance of seeing them as competing suitors for our attention and loyalty? Where did this competition begin and how did it unfold in the history of ideas, especially as it informs notions of freedom and justice? How does willingness (love of the Good) versus willfulness (freedom as mastery) define the essential Grant? Although I did not know the half of it, it is surely his foremost concern.

7.3.5 Understanding Grant's contemplative epistemology

Grant's critique of modernity was aggressively anti-Enlightenment as he attacked the supremacy of rational-empirical ways of knowing. Clearly he was drawn to Heidegger's *gelassenheit* and Weil's *attention* to a higher epistemology. What comprises contemplation for Grant? What is the posture of the contemplative? How does this type of knowing exceed modernity's excluded knowledge? How does this knowledge derive from Grant's interpretation of Plato and the *nous*? How would these issues tie into his notion of the will?

7.3.6 Crystallizing Grant's theodicy of the Cross

How did Grant see the relationship of a loving God to a suffering world? How did he address the problem of pain in Platonic terms (the distance between the Good and the necessary)? Why did he turn to Luther's theology of the Cross for a response? How does his theology of the Cross tie into his overall doctrine? How

does it answer his need for answers in a bewildered age? What I did not foresee in the beginning was the vortex of Weil's 'cosmology of consent' into which Grant would lead me. What did they mean by 'consent'? How is the Cross a metaphor for that consent? And how does the Cross-as-consent reveal the very nature of God, and indeed the universe?

7.3.7 Unveiling Grant's political ethics

Given how much Grant wrote and taught as a political philosopher, unearthing the core of his own political ethics was surprisingly difficult. What he wrote was largely negative—an attack on the waywardness of modern ethics—so what was his explicit alternative? He hearkens back to Plato and the older virtues or loyalties maintained by some in the English conservative tradition. But his prophetic task was mainly to expose the dark underbelly of modern progressive liberalism. Beyond clarifying his critique, how might Grant's theology of the Cross produce a positive political ethic—a politics of the Cross? Once again, Weil's voice would be profound, even central. How so?

7.4 Summary of Discussions and Findings

My findings on these questions covered six chapters. The first two— "Introduction" and "George Grant's Biography"—revealed four abiding Grantean doctrines. Each of the four remaining chapters elucidated one of these doctrines, as follows.

7.4.1 Chapter 1 – Introduction

I introduced the thesis with the usual discussions on rationale, hypotheses, aims, objectives, and expected contributions. I proposed and previewed Grant's four contemplative-prophetic doctrines and purported to align each of these doctrines with a corresponding phase of Plato's cave.

7.4.2 Chapter 2 – Biographical journey: Grantean conversion

In chapter two, I explored the biographical exigencies that birthed Grant's conversion and subsequent contemplative-prophetic theology—especially how the crises of two world wars shattered his inherited progressive liberalism. I then analyzed Grant's journals, letters, and interviews relevant to an in-depth analysis

of his conversion, including many previously unpublished works, which I am among the first to collate for this purpose. I charted the four principle doctrines (and their upshots) conceived in that experience. I summarized these as:

- "Naming the darkness as darkness"—Grant's deconstruction: The matrix of modernity.

- "The intellect illumined by love"—Grant's epistemology: A contemplative understanding of *noetic* knowledge and the *vita contempletiva*.

- "The perfection of God and the affliction of man"—Grant's theology:

    a. Plato's distance between necessity and the Good.

    b. Theodicy of the Cross.

    c. Cosmology of Consent.

- "The love of justice as light in the darkness"—Grant's ethics: his politics of justice and consent, rooted in our obligations to the Good and the other.

This structure, discerned from Grant's testimonies and confirmed in his writings, enabled me to demonstrate the prime influences on Grant's worldview. It also showcases how these seminal doctrines continued to manifest across his career, from his studies at Oxford through his ascent as Canada's top thinker in the 1960s and beyond.

Using this template, I could search and match Grant's doctrines across his works (e.g., his dissertation, *Lament for a Nation*, etc.) and cross-reference them to his chief interlocutors. I was thus able to see their influence on Grant as he enfolded them into his thought by both receiving and resisting their voices. I especially focused on:

- Grant's interpretation of Plato's Socrates as fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth;

- his vigorous interaction with Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger;

- Grant's dependence on Simone Weil, comparing their contemplative and political theology.

7.4.3   Chapter 3 – Doctrine 1: Grantean deconstruction

Chapters 3–6 are titled according to the four aforementioned doctrines. Thus, chapter 3 is concerned with doctrine 1: "Out of the Shadows and Imaginings: Naming the Darkness as Darkness / *Grantean Deconstruction*."

Here I illustrated how Grant used the darkness and shadows of Plato's

cave as an analogy for modernity's fundamental delusion, which according to Grant is the 'primacy of the will.' Grant's enucleation of modernity led me back to an ongoing clash between competing images of God, even within the Bible. Grant and Weil described the God who is essentially Good/Love as over against the God who is primarily Will/Freedom. Grant then laid out the growing quarrel between divine Good and human will throughout Western Medieval and Reformation history, and how it came to fullness as the Enlightenment bloomed into secular liberalism as Grant knew it.

This journey of ideas prompted me to some original discoveries or newly expanded thoughts in Grant studies. I published these seven in other works:[3]

- A comparison of Grant's 'triumph of the will' to Nietzsche's 'will to power.'
- Grant's dependence on Eric Voegelin and Leo Strauss, highlighting his rejection of both men's American neoconservatism.
- Grant and Weil's critiques of the Hebrew Bible's conflicting images of God.
- Grant's commitment to Cochrane's Augustine in the 1940s in contrast to his criticism of Weil's Augustine three decades later.
- Grant's account of scholastic voluntarism in the rise of primacy of the will.
- An analysis of Grant's failure to include Luther as an antecedent to modernity.
- Grant's odd omission of Oliver Cromwell in his indictment of Puritanism as a culprit in the triumph of the will.

The most important original contribution of the chapter itself was to give special attention to Grant's account of the seeds of modernism in Biblical religion, especially in the competing images of God as Good/Love and God as Will/Freedom. I showed how Grant went beyond Weil to include the NT in his critique.

By the end of chapter 3, the heart of Grant's thought was made obvious in his theological and ethical affirmations, and in all of his prophetic deconstructions. Namely, history demonstrates how love of the Good shines on

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[3] Cf. Dart and Jersak, *GPG: Canada's Lone Wolf* (2011); Jersak, *GPG: Minerva's Snowy Owl* (2012); Jersak, *Red Tory, Red Virgin* (2012).

self-surrender and willingness, producing peace and justice, while the darkness of modernity—or any era—consists of self-seeking and willfulness, bearing the fruit of tyranny, injustice, and violence.

7.4.4 Chapter 4 – Doctrine 2: Grantean epistemology

I entitled chapter 4, "Into the Light: The Intelligence Illumined by Love / *Grantean Epistemology*." It sketches the main facets of Grant's censure of modern epistemology and the contemplative alternative he espoused.

I began with Grant's analysis of Enlightenment rationalism, particularly the fathers of technological knowing: Bacon, Descartes, and Kant. For Grant, the spirit of modern epistemology is again primacy of will. That is, knowing as willing, freedom, and making (or mastery), therefore adding another layer to his willingness-willfulness binary.

Thereafter, I looked at four contemplative sages, highlighting Plato's *nous*, Heidegger's *gelassenheit*, and Weil's *attention*, then turned finally to Christ's *Beatitudes* and *Passion* for the means and content of Grant's knowing. I gave special attention to the (de-)evolution of the Greek *nous* and *noesis* from their ancient sense of 'beholding with the eyes of the heart' to their modern reduction as the calculating mind.[4]

Moreover, I developed Grant and Weil's belief that Plato's 'knowing' is 'seeing' and ultimately 'loving'—a far cry from the supposed highpoint of alleged objectivity in modern knowledge and a leap beyond Heidegger's *gelassenheit*. Lastly, I drew together Weil's mystical epistemology through the stages of Plato's cave, noting how Grant assumed her open-attentiveness contra modernity's knowing-as-making.

7.4.5 Chapter 5 – Doctrine 3: Grantean theology

Chapter 5, "Beholding the Sun: The Perfection of God and the Affliction of Man / *Grantean Theology*" included major discussions on three interconnected points:

- Plato's distance between necessity and the Good;
- Grant's (anti)theodicy of the Cross; and,
- Weil's cosmology of consent.

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[4] Cf. Jersak, "Etymology of *Nous*," *MSO*, 65–79 for the expanded treatment.

The chapter delved deeply into the tension between Plato's revelation of the goodness of God and the reality of human affliction. I addressed the following points:

- From beginning to end, we saw that Grant's metaphysics were *not* speculative or rationalistic, but contextual and contemplative, applicable to his troubled era.

- I detailed Grant-Weil's account of reality in which God is both personal and impersonal, present and absent.

- I expanded on their theology of the Cross as a superior response to the problem of evil than the rationalist theodicies. Grant's Cross trumps the conceptions of providential control that undermine God's goodness in the face of evil or tragedy.

- I charted Simone Weil's Pythagorean ideals into a unified cosmology of consent.

Over all, this chapter added the theological layer to what we learned from Grant earlier concerning willingness. That is, we beheld his vision of the Cross: Christ's sacrificial love-as-consent (willingness). The Cross, for Grant and Weil, is a revelation of the very God whose original death-to-self created (i.e., made space for) all of creation.

7.4.6   Chapter 6 – Doctrine 4: Grantean ethics

Our final chapter examined the fulfillment of Grant's deconstruction, epistemology, and metaphysics, namely, "Return to the Cave: A Politics of Justice and Consent / *Grantean Ethics.*" The chapter covered Grant's political ethics, founded on the universal human obligation to love the Good and the other. Grant's resistance to modern willfulness, his epistemology of willing attentiveness, and his metaphysics of the Cross-as-consent come together in his ethical-political thought and action. Seeing this required the following combination of studies:

- I noted how Grant completes his Platonic trek by following Weil back into the cave under the Sun's compulsion to bring the light of the Cross to the realm of political ethics.

- I evaluated Grant's attack on liberalism as the modern ethic of willfulness, especially as he targeted John Rawls in *English-Speaking Justice*.

- I proposed a theory of Grantean justice he referred to obliquely as "a politics of consent and justice."[5] Using Weil's cosmology and Grant's theology of consent, I suggested a *politics of consent* funded by Weil's 'consent to obligation' in her later political tracts on human needs and obligations. Once again, Grant exposed modernity's self-obsessed, willful mastery on its ethical collision course with willing consent and self-giving love of the Good and of neighbour.

- The chapter closed by describing Grant's ultimate ethic in terms of the cruciform way of Christ—no mere ideal, but rather a realpolitik of life-giving love for the other that produces shalomic justice. "Not my will, but Thine be done" becomes the blueprint for just peacemaking.

7.5   The Coherent Whole Applied

As stated above, the four strands of Grant's doctrine, expressed symbolically through the four stages of Plato's cave, come together in the single strand of cruciform consent to God, necessity, and the other. The essence of Grant's contemplative theology and prophetic vocation was to contextualize his surrender (willingness) to the Good—the revelation of his conversion and his debt to Weil's corpus—to address an urgent Canadian crisis of identity. America's modern liberalism threatened to drown classic justice as embodied in the Red Tory tradition, but not without a clarion cry from Grant.

I believe Grant's call to a higher vision of justice should itself be transposed afresh into immediate domestic and foreign policies for this moment in history. As culture wars continue to polarize us at home and international conflicts escalate abroad, Grant the prophet may yet bear the 'word of the Lord' for a mad world. This final section doubles as a summary of Grantean thought translated for today's needs and a proposal for just peacemaking that warrants further research.

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[5] Grant, *ESJ*, 12.

7.6 Towards Just Peacemaking

7.6.1 The modern scales of justice[6]

Rights & Freedoms   Peace & Security

←———————————————————————————————→

'Left'   'Right'
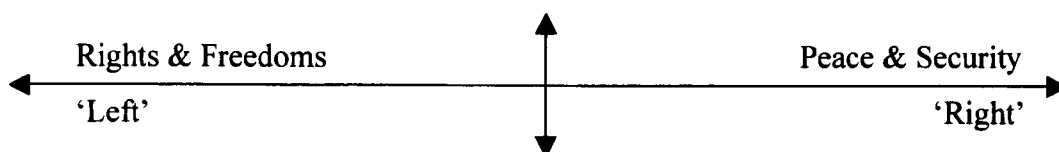
The modern scales of justice may be viewed as a semantic spectrum. The range of language used includes rights, freedoms, peace, and security as descriptors of what to pursue in a just society. Typically, 'rights and freedoms' are emphasized by those on the political left, whether the revolutionaries of America and France, or the independence and separatist groups today. The left generally advocates for the rights and freedoms of individuals or minority groups who need the protection of a Bill of Rights or a Supreme Court to avoid the tyranny of the majority.[7]

On the political right, the accent is on 'peace and security,' especially for the privileged in a hegemony, defending the land, property, and safety of the upper middle class in their gated communities, the national security of their borders, and their economic and military foreign interests abroad. Peace and security justifies a more severe retributive justice, construction of border security fences, and even the voluntary curtailing of rights and freedoms to ensure safety from those who 'hate our freedom' (e.g., the Patriot Act).

This may sound simplistic and misleading, but only to the same degree the spectrum itself *is* simplistic and its spokespeople *are* misleading. Grant's *Lament* exposes how the West wholly assents to this left-right binary and feels obligated to identify precisely where on the spectrum one finds oneself, one's subgroup, and one's politicians.[8] The more committed we are to this scale, the more we become enmeshed in culture wars, where everything from reproductive

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[6] I am interacting with such scholars as Steven Lukes, "Epilogue: The Grand Dichotomy of the Twentieth Century," T. Ball and R. Bellamy (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought* (2003), and Detlev Jahn, "Conceptualizing Left and Right in Comparative Politics," *Party Politics* 17.6 (Nov. 2011): 745–65.
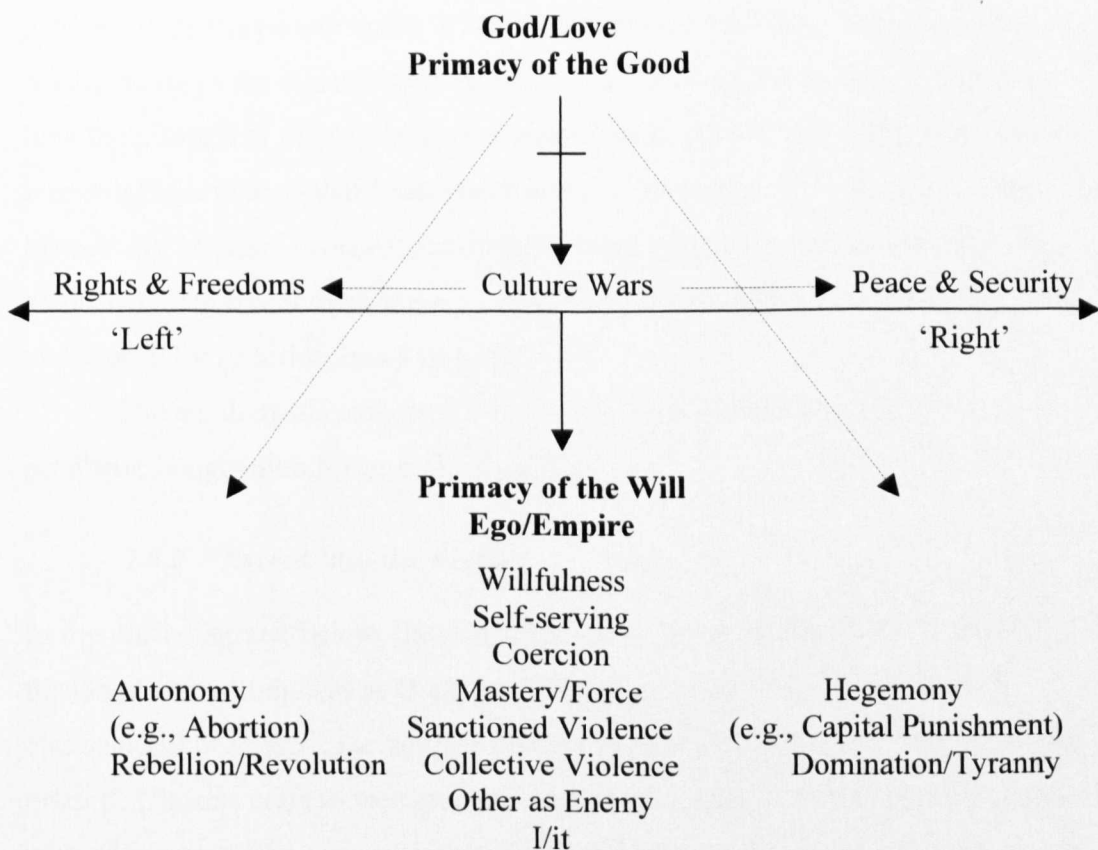
[7] The reverse is also arguably true, where the left wants peace and security through social safety nets and welfare programs while the right calls for economic rights and freedom from government interference in its laissez-faire capitalism. Cf. Grant, *TE*, 30.

[8] Grant, *Lament*, 64, 73.

technology to illegal immigrants to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is framed from left to right as a matter of rights and freedoms or peace and security. Ideologies and parties form along the continuum to which one must remain loyal in order to belong. Convenient, because then we may also easily identify the other and the enemy with whom to partner in mutual hatred!

But what if the continuum itself is, as Grant would say, 'B.S.'?[9] What if intersecting the x-axis of left-right competing ideology is a vertical y-axis of Grantean justice: the primacy of the Good (classic conservatism) over the primacy of the will (original liberalism). This follows what we discovered earlier in Grant's lament: that left ≠ liberal and right ≠ conservative, as the English-speaking West automatically assumes. To Grant, the entire x-axis—left and right—belongs to liberalism as it slides down the y-axis into willfulness and freedom-as-mastery (as follows).

7.6.2   Descent into the demonic

God/Love
Primacy of the Good

Rights & Freedoms ◄ — Culture Wars — ► Peace & Security

'Left'   'Right'

Primacy of the Will
Ego/Empire

Willfulness
Self-serving
Coercion

Autonomy	Mastery/Force	Hegemony
(e.g., Abortion)	Sanctioned Violence	(e.g., Capital Punishment)
Rebellion/Revolution	Collective Violence	Domination/Tyranny
	Other as Enemy	
	I/it	

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[9] Yes, 'bullshit.'

Conclusion: Towards Just Peacemaking

In this second diagram, the entire left/right x-axis sinks into willfulness as Grant and Weil critiqued it. They described such modern (and post/*über*-modern) 'justice' as coercion, self-serving mastery—employing force to overcome the other as perceived enemies to one's 'freedom.' Primacy of the will co-opts the language of justice on the left so that 'rights and freedoms' justify the escalating violence of autonomy, rebellion, and ultimately revolution against allegedly oppressive religious and political authority. The will also enfolds the language of 'peace and security' on the right to justify its own brutal means of stabilizing hegemony, domination, and ultimate tyranny against whatever threatens the personal safety of the power-elite and the national security of the reigning empire. I have labeled this descent 'demonic' because in the name of justice, primacy of the will usurps God, crucifies the Prince of Peace, and violently overthrows the kingdom of love. It enthrones instead the individual and corporate manifestations of supreme will: the self-serving ego and self-perpetuating empire.
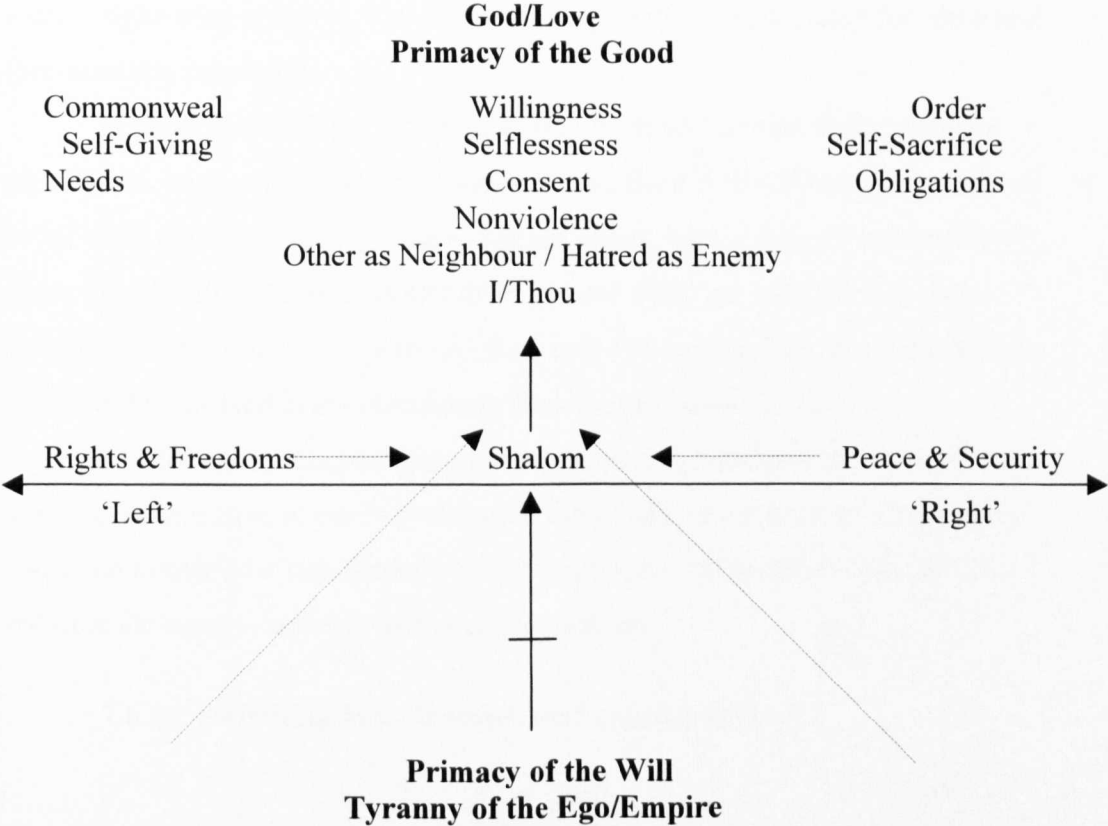
The diverging dotted lines represent the way in which this descent divides justice and drives people apart. Willfulness enslaves, excludes, segregates, and finally destroys the other. Martin Buber's 'I-it' (vs. I-thou) construct[10] speaks to how the triumph of the will treats the other as a thing to be mastered, or as objects who might hurt me so that I must preemptively hurt them. This, to Grant, is the historically verifiable consequence of the liberal hegemony (where liberal = will-as-primary and freedom-as-mastery, not merely leftist politics) to which the West, and especially America, bows its knee.

But an alternative may exist for those who surrender the will to a prophetic imagination for pursuit of the Good.

7.6.3   Ascent into the divine

In my third diagram, below, the scale of justice ascends up the y-axis in love of the Good and willingness as Grant and Weil prescribed it. They described the classic account of justice as selfless consent to the Good, and love of neighbour as oneself. Citizens unite to welcome and care for the other as fellow travelers on the path of freedom, and as a result they experience the freedom of living at peace.

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[10] Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (1937).

Conclusion: Towards Just Peacemaking

God/Love
Primacy of the Good

Commonweal	Willingness	Order
Self-Giving	Selflessness	Self-Sacrifice
Needs	Consent	Obligations

Nonviolence
Other as Neighbour / Hatred as Enemy
I/Thou

Rights & Freedoms ──▶ ◀ Shalom ▶ ◀── Peace & Security
'Left' 'Right'

Primacy of the Will
Tyranny of the Ego/Empire

The Grantean key is that primacy of the Good draws together 'rights and freedoms' and 'peace and security' into the hospitality of shalom. The Good also transcends the opposition of left and right, recognizing our common needs and corresponding obligations, resulting in a harmony of self-giving for the commonweal and self-sacrifice for societal order. Those given to the higher Good employ nonviolent resistance to confront the powers, an alternative to destructive insurgencies or acquiescing passivity. I have labeled this descent 'divine' because in the name of just peacemaking, primacy of the Good surrenders one's will in order to participate as partners in God's kenotic nature. It follows the way of the Prince of Peace, and establishes the reign of God's kingdom of love.

The converging dotted lines represent the way in which this ascent draws the breadth of justice into a shalomic society and unites citizens of diverse cultures and economies. Willingness renounces force and vengeance in favour of liberation, inclusion, and integration, and ultimately humanizes the other. Martin Buber's 'I-Thou' construct speaks to how the triumph of the Good treats the other with dignity, as a human image of the divine, and those whose needs I am obligated to address. This, to Grant, is the potential outcome of conservative justice (where conservative = Good-as-primary and freedom-as-consent, not

Conclusion: Towards Just Peacemaking

merely right-wing politics). The West, and especially Canada, have forsaken and forgotten this possibility.

Is Grant's lament a concession to the stubborn fact that this vision is a pipe dream, impossible in the post-modern era? Even if this is how things should be, of what practical value is such a utopian vision, particularly when sacrificial death to self-will is not exactly trendy? I believe there are specific ears that remain tuned to hear this invitation—they may yet emerge from the darkness of the cave if expressed in the terms described above and as follows.

The following diagram pictures the move that Grantean justice invites us to make. Irrespective of one's position on the x-axis—no matter how just one's cause; no matter how unjust one's enemies act—the call comes to switch axis, redefine the enemy, and reap better consequences.

7.6.4 Switching axis, enemies, and consequences


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                        God/Love
                        The Good
                       Shalom/Life
                        Embrace
           --------►     I/Thou    ◄--------
                            ▲
                            │y
                      ....../
           ◄──────────────┼──────────────►
        'Left'      x      │          'Right'
                            │
                            ▼

        I            Conflict/Death          It
           ◄--------   Exclusion   -------►
                        The Will
                       Ego/Empire
```
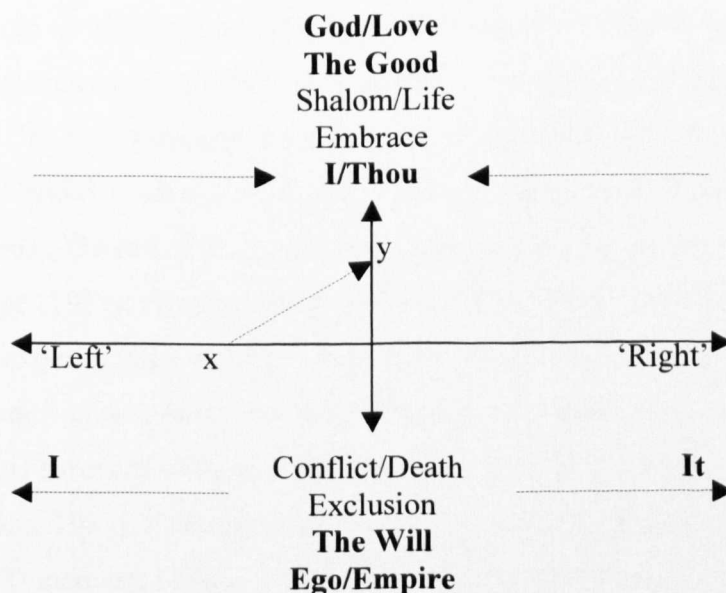
Simply put, we are called to repent of this culture of enmity, to rise above the x-axis of left/right or I-it, and reposition ourselves on the higher prophetic ground in pursuit of the Good, of love, and life. We thus redefine the enemy, not as the other, but as hostility and hatred itself, which always generate injustice. We enter I-thou engagements with those across the scale, uniting as peacemakers beyond our differences. The true enemy is named: conflict, willfulness, and death-dealing hatred. We refuse to be enemies with the other, whether or not they reciprocate, choosing instead to take up the Cross of sacrificial love and radical forgiveness.

Conclusion: Towards Just Peacemaking

As Grant saw, this is not a simple pacifism (or worse, passivism): no turning of the blind eye from injustice, no comfortable silence of denial, and certainly no attempt to remain neutral or centrist on the x-axis. Christ was not crucified for passively acquiescing to the injustice of the Temple establishment. His 'triumphal entry' and Passion Week occupation of the Temple (Mark 11; Matt. 21) were precursors in form and function of the modern civil rights marches and Occupy Movement. Jesus openly condemned religious oppression (Matt. 23), counseled against vengeful insurgency (Matt. 5), and commanded nonviolent resistance in which the evil of the occupation is opposed and overcome by good rather than retaliation (Matt. 5).[11] Love for one's supposed enemy unilaterally breaks enmity by checkmating violence with love *or* sacrificially exposing the real enemy (scapegoating violence) by receiving and forgiving violence without returning it. As Weil says, "The power of initiating and bringing an end to hostilities is exclusively in the hands of those who do not fight."[12]

Far from an idealist fantasy, Christ's Sermon on the Mount—the basis for nonviolent resistance and rejection of vengeance—has proven not only morally just and right, but also tactically more effective than violent conflict in modern realpolitik.[13] Gandhi's salt march (1930); Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birmingham campaign (1963); the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism in Eastern Europe (1989); elements of the Arab Spring (2011)—these movements intentionally experimented with the 'Jesus way' of challenging injustice or enacting regime change apart from violent means or an agenda of revenge. Sometimes this succeeds without a shot fired (the 'Velvet Revolution' in Czechoslovakia, 1989). At other times, it ends in a bloody defeat at the hands of the military (Tiananmen Square, 1989). And still others, protestors are drawn back onto the violent x-axis and civil war erupts (Libya, 2011; Syria, 2012). In

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[11] Cf. Rom. 12:1–13:7, where Paul urges believers not to join the tax revolt against Nero, but to overcome evil with good.

[12] Weil, "War and Peace," *FW*, 253. A double entendre, addressed to the moral power of peacemakers who risk their lives resisting violence and to militarist leaders who would never put themselves on the front lines.

[13] I have applied the above principles in the test case of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in Jersak, "Christ at the Checkpoint," *MSO*, 141–8.

every case the body count on the x-axis is exponentially higher (even in a 'just war' victory) than is the case with nonviolent uprisings (even in bloody defeat).[14]

7.6.5 Two caveats

Two caveats are necessary. First, we must acknowledge that 'the way of the Cross,' however right and actually effective, remains lethally risky. One must be every bit as ready to sacrifice one's life as any soldier in battle (and be just as well-trained). For when one abandons their post on the axis of violence, there is blowback, often from one's own people and family. Weil was called a "self-hating Jew,"[15] and Mendelson targets Grant as an anti-Semite[16]—no surprise given the history of prophetic voices. As Stephen the martyr said,

> Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it. (Acts 2:52–3)

A second caveat: while risky, Grant's vision is comparatively easy to embed in the value system of an organization or movement where membership into the practice of nonviolence and hospitality is voluntary (e.g., World Vision, the 'peace church' tradition, or the civil rights movement). Staff and volunteers only join if they are *willing to be willing*. But in a mixed society of wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24–30), citizens by birth cannot be *coerced into consent* and so a national politics of the Cross would seem impossible. But has an evolution in justice ever truly worked from top down? What may work is the public witness of a church, organization, or movement that models Christ's alternative culture. They might act as persuasive leaven in the broader culture until the shalomic way is increasingly adopted as the highest good for all. This new way will require all the more faithful maintenance once such a movement becomes the new dominant (there's the risk) culture.

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[14] Cf. Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People* (2003).

[15] Paul Giniewski, *Simone Weil: Ou, La haine de soi* (1978).

[16] Mendelson, *Exiles from Nowhere* (2008).

7.7   Postlude: Campfires and Masquerades

In the spirit of George Grant, I close with these lyrics of a song written for and dedicated to the findings of this thesis. They summarize Grant's synthesis of the light of the Gospel with the darkness of the cave, and the need for a renewal of contemplative theology and political justice in this present darkness.

Campfires and Masquerades[17]

I remember a story,
A story of a little boy
A story of a mother's child
The story of old
I remember the middle of the darkness
Reaching out for a hand to hold
Reaching out for anything that'll lead me back home

I'm still here; I'm still waiting for you
After all these years, after all these years

I remember the shadows
There on the walls of my memory
They move around like reality
In this prison that we've made
I remember the firstborn sunrise
I couldn't stand to open my eyes
Like a blind man wandering on the edge of his grave

Campfires and masquerades
They come and go like cheap parades
When nothing's lost and nothing's changed
We seem to like it that way
Our politicians have to lie
'Cause if they opened up our eyes
We'd kill them just like the others who tried to pull us out of this cave

Maybe that's why we're so shaken
When our questions have the courage to come
And drag us from our fiction
For those who fear the grave seldom tell the truth

If every day begins at midnight
If we're ever going to see a sunrise
Somebody's got to wake up
Before the morning comes

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[17] Jason Upton, "Campfires and Masquerades" (2012), UBP.

Conclusion: Towards Just Peacemaking

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[1] All internet sites were last accessed for verification on May 18, 2012 unless otherwise specified.

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