

## *Socrates' Joke*

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The majority of George Grant's writings deal with moral-political questions of contemporary technological civilization.<sup>1</sup> Very few deal with the foundations of his own thought from which such moral-political questions are addressed. Such a choice in a serious writer and thinker cannot be regarded as a mere detail. It indicates the prevalence of the critical intention and implies the situational, expressive and stylistic priority of critique even though it does not necessarily imply that critique is the only, or even the most important, activity of thought. Critique directed to the moral-political issues of technological civilization and being is an activity that attempts to retrieve the possibility of justice from the specific manner of its contemporary destitution. Evidently, Grant's conception of justice demanded such an activity of active retrieval to a greater extent than self-justification. Consequently, addressing the theological and philosophical bases of Grant's conception of justice risks an endemic distortion in which it may appear that the explication of this conception ought to prevail over its deployment or that its deployment is not crucial to the concept itself. To combat this distortion, one must keep firmly in mind that the activity of critique was demanded by Grant's conception of justice to such an extent that it prevailed over the project of self-justification insofar as one may validly judge from written evidence—that is to say, as a public philosopher—even though the public function of philosophy cannot be assumed to exhaust philosophy outright.

None of which is to imply, of course, that there were no attempts at self-justification at all. Even so, such attempts generally emerge in the context of specific critiques. Indeed, to such an extent that one may surmise that the concept of justice itself gains in definition from

its deployment in critiques. Grant's understanding of the object of critique—called variously modernity, empire, liberalism, the universal and homogeneous state, and, most completely, technology—developed significantly over approximately four decades of mature thinking.<sup>2</sup> Gains in defining the concept of justice that underlies critique develop with, although are not direct parallels of, gains in theorizing the concept of technology that is the object of critique. My explication of Grant's concept of justice here, which I will use in order to differ regarding its philosophical and theological foundation, is based in a teleological interpretation of his work. Philosophical dialogue requires that one be open to further determination of the adequate concept and its instantiations or, put negatively, that adequate determination is not already monologically available. If it were, one's duty would be simply to listen thoroughly to its authoritative voice or, if one were that voice, to speak without necessity of listening. Critique (whether oriented to oneself, others, or systemic assumptions inherent in a way of life) is thus an essential activity whose essentiality orients further attempts at adequate determination. Interpretation of any given articulation is consequently oriented teleologically—that is to say, only in the first place to Grant's meaning at a given point, in the second place to the improvements gained in successive formulations (which requires attention to dating and internal temporality), but finally and most importantly to the question itself. Teleological interpretation is the application of philosophical dialogue to the written work of a philosopher. However great one's appreciation of the man himself and his accomplishments, philosophical interpretation reaches beyond this toward the question itself in which is based such appreciation.

Grant's final position can be termed 'Christian Platonism' since it is centrally organized by the claim that the concept of good, or justice, in Plato is 'the same' as that inherent in the Gospel stories of Jesus' life. "That [central, pre-technological, western] 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.”<sup>3</sup> Such a sameness, or identity, does not extend to all the details, even all important ones, of either source. It refers to their animating centre. This animating centre is the basis for a synthesis between Christianity and philosophy that was never thoroughly articulated by Grant but which nevertheless provides the unity of his many statements about religion and philosophy. The Platonic element of this synthesis is the notion that Being, ‘what is,’ is itself good (and not merely a resource for human use). The Christian element is that the goodness of Being was revealed to humans in the life of Jesus. The necessity of the Christian element thus implies that Greek philosophy was in some manner deficient in expressing the goodness of Being. This deficiency was called by Grant in classical language ‘charity.’ Greek philosophy (due to its orientation to reason, which is unequal in humans) did not see the truth that all humans are due charity, or consideration for what they need. The necessity of the Platonic element suggests that the exemplary character of the life of Jesus requires some supplementation by philosophy, or reason, in order that what is due for humans be understood as rooted in Being itself (and not merely, or only, as a human choice). The synthesis of these two elements can be called Christian Platonism. This position has a long and deep history in Western philosophy and religion. Grant’s final questioning was oriented to the nature of this synthesis and to determining the basics of how he thought it should be understood. How this synthesis should be understood raises many questions, some of which this essay will address.

In this critical examination of Grant’s attempted synthesis between religion and philosophy, I will first undertake to explain the Christian Platonist version of that synthesis which he proposed. Second, I will parse Grant’s admission that there are tensions between

Christianity and Platonism into five aspects of tension that can be drawn out from the whole corpus of his work. Third, I will argue that Grant's attempted synthesis fails and that this failure is due not to its incomplete articulation but rather to the prior privilege granted to Christian religion in attempting the synthesis with the consequence that the incorporation of philosophy is always muted and partial in comparison. Fourth, I will explore in a comparative fashion what philosophy might independently have to offer about the crucial matter of what is due to humans. This critique implies a different position with regard to the critique of technological civilization and the two sources of Western civilization in philosophy and Christianity than that held by George Grant, but such implication will not be pursued in this essay.

### **1. Justice in Christian Platonism**

Grant directly articulated the philosophical and theological bases of his thought in four texts dedicated to this issue dispersed over his writing career: "Philosophy" (1951), "Two Theological Languages" (1953, with addendum 1988), "Religion and the State" (1963), "Faith and the Multiversity" (1986).<sup>4</sup> Even with respect to these works, the last two refer primarily to two external domains of the practice of religion—the state and the university—rather than straightforwardly to its philosophical and religious basis. In the 1988 addendum to "Two Theological Languages," written just a few months before his death, Grant engaged in a fundamental self-criticism of that work, especially the conception of freedom as "human absoluteness of choice," pointing out that "it has taken me a whole lifetime to begin to free myself from the language of modernity," and remarking that "whatever differences there may be between Platonism and Christianity as to how and when truth is given us, it is clear that in both freedom is given us through truth. ... Grace simply means that the great things

of our existing are given us, not made by us and finally not to be understood as arbitrary accidents. Our making takes place within an ultimate givenness.”<sup>5</sup> Teleological interpretation of Grant’s philosophy and theology must be oriented to the adequacy of articulating this givenness. For Grant, Christian Platonism expressed this givenness necessary to the concept of justice which he deployed in his influential social and political critiques.

Grace is our placing within a given order that is not altered by human making, specifically the apotheosis of making in technology which can be understood as the ontology of our contemporary world. Grant’s most mature understanding of technology was in Nietzschean terms as the disposition of a creative will over the world. “The world is a field of objects which can be known in their working through the ‘creative’ acts of reasoning and experimenting by the thinking subject who stands over them.”<sup>6</sup> While Heidegger succeeded Nietzsche as Grant’s reference point in analyzing technology, such that his definition became “the endeavour which summons forth everything (both human and non-human) to give its reasons,”<sup>7</sup> this was done in such a manner that Heideggerian ‘summoning forth’ could be folded back into Nietzschean ‘will.’ In the key essay “The Question Concerning Technology” Heidegger’s thought had undergone a fundamental shift with regard to technology based on his earlier critique of Nietzsche’s concept of will. Technology manifests itself as, indeed, a “challenging revealing” but one that is “a kind of unconcealment” so that, in the end, he states that “modern technology as an ordering revealing is, then, no merely human doing.”<sup>8</sup> The sovereignty of human will in technology is, for Heidegger, merely a self-misunderstanding, and actually a response in which humans themselves are called forth when the world is manifested as presence--thus technology becomes an episode in the history of metaphysics. But for Grant, and Nietzsche, the sovereignty of will is an actuality of historical decisiveness. As Grant said, “Europeans somehow seem to have come to an

apprehension of the whole as ‘will.’”<sup>9</sup> While Nietzsche was content to propagate the will unleashed by modernity, Grant considered this unleashing itself as the danger from which grace appears to deliver humans. To the extent that Grant continued to define technology through the phenomenon of ‘will,’ he never really accepted a Heideggerian account.<sup>10</sup> As a consequence he did not appreciate (until very late in an unpublished note) the extent to which Heidegger’s conception of ‘meditative thinking’ represented an alternative to technological thinking.<sup>11</sup>

To Nietzsche’s question “who deserve to be masters of the earth?” Grant replied that “the essential question may not be: who deserve to be masters of the earth; but rather, is it good that the race ever came to consider that mastery was its chief function?” He further noted that he does not know if this other question could even be posed “in the darkness of its impossibility. . . . Because if one says there is one light which is always a light at all times and places, namely that man qua man can only come to a fuller light insofar as he does not find himself beyond good and evil, one has in saying that placed oneself outside modern thought in its highest self-consciousness.”<sup>12</sup> Grant’s posing such a question indicates that for him modern thought does not understand its own darkness as darkness but requires an illumination by grace which allows the darkness to be seen and named as such.

The Christian Platonism of George Grant underpins his articulation of this illumination by grace which was practiced through moral-political critique of contemporary technological civilization. Such critique is based on the historical opposition between modernity and the traditions which have been pulverized by modernity. The theoretical opposition through which this articulation proceeds is the contrast between an increasingly determinate understanding of technology and a more tentative exploration of the foundation of critique in grace. This contrast is based on the historical opposition between modernity and the

traditions which have been pulverized by modernity. While Grant never defended tradition for its own sake, but only as a repository of the good, he invoked its voice in the attempt to criticize technological civilization's turn away from the dual sources of Western grace in Athens and Jerusalem. Thus, "the modern conception of goodness does not include the assertion of a claim upon us which properly orders our desires in terms of owing, and which is itself the route and fulfilment for desire."<sup>13</sup> Grant's use of the modernity-tradition distinction to address the moral-political questions of technological civilization explains his difficulty in expressing theoretically the good brought forth by technology in aid of charity (despite the issues which demand critique).<sup>14</sup> His use of the modernity-tradition distinction stems from his conviction that the dual sources of grace in Athens and Jerusalem are in the final analysis one. "Anyone who wishes to partake in philosophy, and also hopes that he or she is made with the sign of Christ, must be aware of some tension in the relation between thought and revelation, though at the same time knowing that finally they must be at one."<sup>15</sup> While in his critical mode Grant was willing to deploy Christianity and Platonism together, paying the theoretical price of not being able to consistently articulate the truth of technology, in his reflective mode he recognized a tension between these two sources of grace.

The core of the belonging together of Christianity and Greek philosophy was expressed by Grant with reference to Simone Weil's words that "faith is the experience that the intelligence is enlightened by love" and explicated by him as "love is consent to the fact that there is authentic otherness."<sup>16</sup> This understanding is not specifically Christian, which justifies referring to it generally as the traditional, or old, account of justice in critiques, but rather "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."<sup>17</sup>

Correlatively, one may assume that Jesus is the primary religious teacher of this dependence. If one seeks to determine the specifically Christian component of this belonging together, it is described by Grant in two turns of phrase: “the fact that Christ declares the price of goodness in the face of evil” and “an extension of what was due to others and an account of how to fulfil that due.”<sup>18</sup> The notion of “an extension of what was due to others” is by no means easy to understand. We can begin our inquiry into Grant’s understanding of Christian Platonism by focussing on what this statement might mean.

If the specifically Christian component consists in an extension of what is due to others, it seems that Socrates must have had an attenuated conception of what is due to others. If he had such an attenuated conception, it would follow that his account requires supplementation by a Christian account and, as the quotation suggests, this supplementation would extend also to the manner of fulfilling the good. Two classical attempts to resolve this problem seem to be closed to Grant: the supplement through love and the supplement through a greater universality of address.

First, one could argue that Christianity adds love to the Greek concept of justice. However, Grant, in his appropriation of Weil noted in the previous paragraph, attributes an understanding of the dependence of knowledge on love not only to Christianity but also to Greek philosophy—indeed, in such a key manner that it is precisely this characteristic that is the animating centre of their belonging together. This would be buttressed by Grant’s claim that the distinction between various versions of love, such as *eros* and *agape*, should not be so sharp as to undermine that love is a unity.<sup>19</sup>

Second, one could argue that Socrates’ attenuated conception of what is due to others refers to the others to whom it is due—placing the emphasis on the “account of how to fulfil that due” in the quotation. In other words, one could suggest that Socrates’ philosophic

task was inadequately universal in the sense of those to whom the good pertained. One might claim, as has often been done, that this was because of the slave-character of Greek society such that natural differences were not sufficiently overcome—in other words, that the purported universality of Greek philosophy could not be genuinely universal until it was realized in the Christian incarnation which demonstrated the universality of the human species. (Note that this interpretation assumes that the slave-character of Greek society was not, or not adequately, overcome by Socrates.) But this option must be closed to Grant also, since it implies that Greek philosophy is in principle incomparable to Christianity in the matter that matters the most—what is the due of humans—if the due of human is interpreted in terms of those to whom it is due. It doesn't imply a synthesis of Greek philosophy and Christianity but a straightforward surpassing of the former by the latter (characteristic of Hegel, among others). How could such a view be characterized as a Christian Platonism?

It seems rather that 'what is the due of humans' refers primarily to the *what* itself and secondarily, as a consequence of the specific nature of this *what*, to the account of *how* to fulfil it. If humans are due more than Platonic justice, such that it must be supplemented by Christianity, that 'more' must be both absent from Plato and yet compatible with his concept of justice such that "finally they must be at one."

Let us consider a third possibility. The synthesis between Christianity and Greek philosophy could perhaps be attempted, as Simone Weil did, through the argument that Greek philosophy prepared for the Christian incarnation, showed its necessity and awaited its fulfilment, even though the fulfilment itself could not be accomplished within Greek philosophy. The *what* in this case would refer to the sensuality of the incarnation and this sensuality would have implications not present in Plato for its *how*. Weil argued that the

search for an adequate mediation was the centre of Greek thought from Pythagoras to Plato.<sup>20</sup> “Just as the Christ is, on the one hand, the mediator between God and man, and on the other the mediator between man and his neighbour, so mathematical necessity is on the one hand the mediator between God and things, and on the other between each thing and every other thing.”<sup>21</sup> The search for mediation that characterized the Greek attempt to overcome dualism is thus accomplished in the Christian incarnation. Platonism accomplishes the intellectual love of God through the mathematical mediation; Christianity renders this intellectual love flesh in the incarnation.

Grant often quoted Nietzsche’s phrase “Christianity is Platonism for the people”<sup>22</sup> but here he uses it in the opposite sense. While for Nietzsche it referred to the continuation of Platonic two-world theory into Christianity, here it would refer to the continuation of the attempt to mediate and overcome the division between spirit and nature, God and human, self and other, through a human, carnal rendering of the love of God in the story of Jesus. This might be the greatest parallelism that one could imagine which would unite Socrates and Jesus: the same mediation approached by each one from a different side of that duality which is to be mediated: intellect reaching toward flesh, flesh opening toward intellect; one teaching philosophical, the other religious. This interpretation would imply that the lack in Platonic philosophy that requires Christian supplementation consists in the lack of a fully sensual estimation of the price. This is a plausible interpretation of the meaning of the passage where Grant claimed that Christianity provides “an extension of what was due to others.” In the same paragraph where that passage appears, Grant claims that Christianity requires of its adherents “to be perfect as God in heaven is perfect” and explicates this statement with reference to Weil’s phrase that “matter is our infallible judge”<sup>23</sup> indicating that it is the role of matter and sensuousness in Christianity due to the incarnation which

constitutes its specific difference from Platonism. This interpretation also has the merit of situating the specific difference in the *what* of incarnation and the *how* of the path that it implies. In this case the comparability of Jesus and Socrates is the core of both the synthetic unity and the specific difference of its parts.

Since the specific difference is not to be found in the two classical attempts to locate it through love, or through the universality of address, and given the merits of the third interpretation, I conclude that Grant sought the specific difference of Christianity from the classical account of justice through the incarnation understood as adequate mediation. However, this interpretation contains an implication unaddressed, and perhaps unobserved, by Grant. Since it claims that Plato was not sufficiently aware of the sensuous side of the mediation between spirit and matter, and since it claims that the specific difference nevertheless occurs within the same account of justice, a genuine synthesis would require some parallel insufficient awareness in the Christian side of the mediation. The logical consequence of the third interpretation of the specific difference is that the Christian incarnation requires supplementation by an appreciation of the intellectual side of the mediation by Plato. In short, that Christianity does not stand alone but requires supplementation by philosophy.

Thus, the third interpretation implies the necessity of the other side of the mediation: that Jesus was not sufficiently aware of the intellectual implications of his claim that God was his father. However, not only do I find no such statement in Grant's or Weil's work, I do not believe that either of them would ever make such a statement. Could such a statement be made by a believing Christian? If not, it seems that the road through Weil to a synthesis of Socrates and Jesus, Greek philosophy and Christian incarnation, could not fail to discount philosophy in a non-symmetrical manner that would destroy the synthesis as

equally synthetic from both perspectives to be synthesized. In short, it must render the judgment that Socrates is incomparable to Jesus in the matter that matters the most—what is the due of humans. But it is precisely this comparability that defines Grant’s position as Christian Platonism as opposed to a straightforward overcoming of Greek philosophy by Christianity. Such a straightforward overcoming in the issue that matters most would not exclude appropriation of lesser dimensions of Greek philosophy. The appropriation of Greek rationalism at the service of Christian apologetics is, of course, an influential interpretation (consistent with the first interpretation mentioned above) of the relation between these two sources in Western civilization, but it is an interpretation closed to Grant because of his Platonism.<sup>24</sup> Thus, while the third interpretation through Weil and the incarnation is closest to Grant’s intentions, it leaves unresolved a major issue which deserves more detailed scrutiny.

## **2. Five Tensions Between Christianity and Platonism**

How then should we assess Grant’s attempt to define the specifically Christian component of Christian Platonism through ‘an extension of what was due to others’? It was noted above that this synthesis was not presented systematically but emerges through its deployment in critiques. Grant was not unaware of the difficulties of this proposed synthesis. “When we look, in this time of deep uncertainty, at what we are as western people, the central task of thought requires us to be aware of some tension between what comes to us from Athens and what from Jerusalem. I prefer to say what comes to us from Socrates and Christ.”<sup>25</sup> I will note five aspects of this tension mentioned in the whole corpus of Grant’s work, three with regard to Christianity and two with regard to philosophy.

### **2.1 Christianity and Technology**

The first aspect is the most enduring in Grant's work because it derives from the essential direction of his critique of technology. Technology was understood as stemming from the assertion of human will against the world. Thus, any conception of Christianity that was influenced by such a focus on will was compromised both in its critical capacity and in its originality. Western Christianity, as well as Western philosophy, has been fundamentally influenced by making the will central to the definition of humanity since the writings of Augustine. This provoked Grant's sympathy for Orthodox Christianity, which did not undergo the Augustinian influence and was more Platonic in this respect, and Plato, whose tripartite conception of the soul was prior to, and different from, that prepared by the synthesis between Christianity and neo-Platonism in late antiquity. In this respect, though Grant's critique of Western Christianity was deep, it was a Christian criticism that "Western Christianity simplified the divine love by identifying it too closely with immanent power in the world."<sup>26</sup> The historical institution of this accommodation to immanent power was the Augustinian synthesis of neo-Platonism and Christianity through the concept of the will.

## **2.2 Modern Science and the Doctrine of Creation**

Christian thought became identified with power in another aspect also. In contrast to Leo Strauss, who interpreted modernity as fundamentally a moral-political phenomenon rather than a scientific one, Grant recognized the necessity of the Judeo-Christian concept of the creation of the world by God to the theoretical presuppositions of modern science.<sup>27</sup> Natural reason tends to complete itself in the thought of the permanence of the world. Even in Plato's *Timaeus*, where the coming-into-being of the world is considered, this is done under the twin models of paternity and *techne*, not as a creation from nothing. When an author creates something from nothing, it is knowable through and through without remainder. Knowledge of the artifact is unhampered by the recalcitrance of either matter or

necessary ignorance. It is this entry of the concept of a created world in Western thought that prevents any direct passage from Greek to modern science.<sup>28</sup> Like the first aspect of the tension, this second one pertains to the role of Christianity in shaping technology, though it is more radical insofar as the concept of creation surely could not be expunged from either the Judaic or Christian traditions without diminishing the power of God in a way that would make it unrecognizable. The Judaic concept of a God that transcends and creates nature which underlies the Christian revelation is in principle anti-natural and thus undermines any and all cosmology. This pertains not only to the Western Christianity whose Augustinian concept of will Grant criticized but to the whole of Judeo-Christian theology as well. This makes the return to Plato more problematic for Grant than it is for Strauss, for instance, since in this respect modern assumptions confirm Christian ontology rather than undermine it. Modern technology is made possible by a Nietzschean-Augustinian concept of the will whose dependence on Christianity is not only for the notion of human freedom as mastery but also in scientifically understanding nature (as that which is mastered) as thoroughly knowable because it is created. The modern understanding of freedom against nature is indebted to Christianity at least in its dominant Western form such that the return to Plato that Grant wants to synthesize with Christianity is doubly problematic. Thus, while the first aspect of the tension serves only to underline the specificity and originality of the synthesis between Christianity and Greek philosophy (Plato) proposed by Grant, the second aspect suggests that such a synthesis is problematic at a deeper level: Is a concept of Christianity (or Judaism) entirely without will conceivable? And, if not, is not Christianity unredeemably implicated in technology? Resolving this issue would require a critique of technology capable of articulating the truth of technology. As noted above, Grant's use of the tradition-

modernity doublet in his moral-political critiques made this a point of extreme difficulty for him.

### **2.3 Obedience as a Closure of Thought**

An even deeper criticism of Christianity was expressed in Grant's notes to himself that were posthumously published as "Obedience." The main thematic of the notes is, characteristically, the critical one that an intelligence not leavened by obedience to that which is not humanly made cannot become an adequate critic of technology. However, in one remarkable passage, Grant contrasted the openness of thinking with closedness and obedience. First, he characteristically affirmed that the openness of thinking does not stand above obedience but then, in an uncharacteristic moment, asked "Is not obedience a closing down of openness?"<sup>29</sup> He added "yet obedience is dark/ how nice it would be to be one of those/ to whom the darkness of obedience is not." And, further, "Those fortunate people/ for whom obedience has not been darkened/ darkened not simply in the sense/ of what they should do immediately/ but what is obedience." He called those who have escaped such darkening of obedience "happy," mentioning Ellul and Barth, and suggested that "to escape thought/ they have been told." I take this to express a doubt that the imbeddedness of thought in a world-order experienced and known as good (i.e. grace) could actually be a reigning thought for him because "modern thought has darkened obedience."

While Grant worked to free himself of the presuppositions of modern thought, he was also aware of the extent to which they had a hold on him. Grant often used the phrasing "I have been told that ..." when he spoke of himself as a Christian. Here, he notes the happiness that would come with simply being a believing Christian and suggests that the closing down of thought that obedience requires is a price that he cannot pay—perhaps because he is too modern, perhaps because he is a philosopher, perhaps because of both.

“Happy are those who can face the Greeks--/ without thinking of modern mathematical physics/ Happy are those who can get rid of ontology/ in their sense of the Bible.” In other words, happy are those who can live their Christianity without worrying about its relationship to Greek philosophy.

Furthermore, in the saddened and reluctant awareness “So we are back, always a closing down” I hear the desire that it were not so, that he could straightforwardly assert the Platonic-Christian synthesis. But, at least in this passage, he could not. He could not because he could not see obedience in any other way than as a closing of the openness of thought. Neither can I. But I think that Grant desired—perhaps believed—that obedience could itself be an opening, even though he could not *think* so. If it were so, there would result a tension between religion and philosophy not only in Western thought but also in Grant’s thought as well. This passage suggests such a tension and then tends to mitigate it by attributing it to modernity alone—which in this context must mean, ‘an error.’

Some attention to the hermeneutic of a passage unpublished by Grant himself cannot be avoided, especially since I have noticed the importance of the primary orientation of his published thought to moral-political critiques. It may be that we have here the expression of the kinds of doubts that all thinkers face but which are not characteristic of Grant’s thought in its basic orientation. After all, it was not published by him and is a thought not characteristic of his published writings. Though Grant certainly indicated that there were important tensions between philosophy and Christianity, I do not know of any published example where this tension is interpreted, as it is in “Obedience,” albeit tentatively, as a sacrifice of philosophical thought to Christianity, as a closing down. I would intrude too much on his solitude if I were to press this thought in the direction of his own beliefs as such. It is significant as a point of interpretation of a doubt about an assumption operative in

his critiques. It is also defended in his remarks which assert about Socrates and Jesus that one can appreciate the tension while “at the same time knowing that finally they must be one.”<sup>30</sup> The significance is that this knowing, when questioned as to the manner of its knowing, seems to generate a doubt that it can be known through thought; whereas it may well be the case that “I have been told ...”—which implies a divergence between the openness demanded by philosophy and the obedience required by religion. Nonetheless, it must remain significant that Grant never published such a doubt himself. It would not fit the modernity-tradition doublet that characterizes his moral-political critiques.

#### **2.4 Philosophy and Civil Religion**

The previous three aspects of the tension between Athens and Jerusalem pertain to Christianity as the object provoking tension and may thus be called ‘philosophical’ in the sense that the doubts about religion are raised by philosophy. There are also two ‘Christian,’ or perhaps religious, aspects of the tension with philosophy; they are ‘religious’ in the corresponding sense that they are doubts about philosophy as raised by a Christian religious commitment.

The fourth aspect of the tension is, like the first, thoroughgoing and characteristic of Grant’s work as a whole. In the early (1951) review of philosophy for the Massey Commission he asserted that “it would seem that unless philosophy is to become a purely negative discipline, it must have some kind of dependence on faith—whatever faith that may be.”<sup>31</sup> He seems to accept the critique of Socrates by Plato and Hegel that critique on its own leads only to *aporia* and requires completion in a constructive doctrine. Note that while Grant himself worked from within the Christian tradition, he admitted the possibility that others might work productively in a similar manner from within other religious traditions. Addressing the question of the proper relation of religion and the state, he observed that

“unassisted reason is able to know that without religious beliefs and actions no society whatever can last, but reason is unable to determine which should be the particular public religion.”<sup>32</sup> Philosophy cannot determine the content of religion but only the necessity of religion to social order as such. The religious critique of philosophy is that philosophy cannot provide the specific sensuous content to be believed by the many in order to guarantee social order. Thus the necessities of human social life are not adequately addressed by philosophy and require the content-oriented social and moral cement provided by religion.

We might call the above argument the social critique of philosophy by religion. It comprises also the classic observation that “not many men will become philosophers; but that all men are inevitably religious,” especially if religion is taken to refer to any and all “systems of belief” whether or not they refer to a higher power.<sup>33</sup> The emphasis of philosophy on intellect in the direction of human life—which requires, we might add, the critique of the specialist use of intellect—implies that, in fact if not in principle, the practice of philosophy is limited to a few. Since this is recognized within philosophy, as well as being subject to a religious critique, this tension pertains to the difficulty of coordinating the separate domains of philosophy and religion, even though this difficulty could not be justly inflated to assert the in principle impossibility of so coordinating them. It also raises the religious, and perhaps also philosophical, question of whether the religion required as social cement is true religion as such or merely a necessary social illusion—one of many possible civic religions whose social function exhausts its inner content.

## **2.5 The Deaths of Jesus and Socrates**

The fifth instance of tension, like the third, cuts directly to the heart of the matter. It appears when Grant directly compares the deaths of Jesus and Socrates or, more exactly,

uses the death of Jesus to comment on the death of Socrates—since I do not believe that he anywhere focussed on the former in the light of the latter. “Whatever may be said about the consummate serenity and beauty of Socrates at his execution, that scene is not as comprehensively close to the very heart of being as are Gethsemane and Golgotha.”<sup>34</sup> In two places in “Faith and the Multiversity,” Grant addressed comparatively the deaths of Socrates and Jesus with respect to their capacity to articulate the practice of dying through which Socrates defined philosophy and which Grant asserts is equally applicable to Christianity.<sup>35</sup> One, he pointed out that in the death scene Socrates asserts that the absence of goodness is madness, not ignorance.<sup>36</sup> Two, “the calm, the wit, the practice of thought which are present at Socrates’ death may be compared with the torture, the agony, the prayers, which are present in Christ’s death. Just before drinking the hemlock Socrates makes a wonderful joke; in Gethsemane Christ’s ‘sweat was, as it were, great drops falling to the ground’. Indeed the difference is also stated in the fact that where Socrates’ wife is absent for most of *Phaedo*, the two Marys stand beneath the cross.”<sup>37</sup> With respect to the death of Jesus, Grant refers in the appendix to “Two Theological Languages” to the “appalling admonition ‘Take up your cross and follow me’ [which] cuts to the heart of our existing and indeed to the heart of both being and goodness.”<sup>38</sup> It seems to be this which would disturb Socrates’ serenity, and his beauty, which is the essence of a philosophical death (understanding that death is not the highest price) and which makes possible his joke.

What is the nature of this appalling admonition? In one of Grant’s notebooks there are notes for five lectures on Christianity which address “the supreme figure, Jesus Christ. And to understand what Christianity is one must understand why for those of us who are Christians this is the supreme figure.”<sup>39</sup> He states that the primary issue about the good news that Christianity brings is the reconciliation of the contradiction between human suffering

and God's perfection—the question of theodicy—and claims that “it is the extremity of the suffering in Christ's death which has made these events more dominating in the western world than the death of Socrates.” The incarnation of divinity in the world in the figure of Jesus confers a significance on sensuousness that is deeply manifested in the torture of Jesus. Thus, Jesus' suffering shows the impossibility of Socrates's serenity and beauty as a final stance in human life. Grant refers to two statements made by Jesus which illuminate the meaning of his suffering: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” and “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” These statements indicate that Jesus' suffering “is the very absence of God from God. Suffering is absence.”

Grant thus claims that the extremity of Jesus' suffering marks an absence in Socrates' story. There is nothing in the philosophy of Socrates which responds to the extreme cruelty of tyrants. In the face of torture, the perfection of good/God recedes or becomes imperceptible. Thus, we must ask: If Socrates had been offered the cross instead of hemlock would that have interrupted his serenity and beauty? Is philosophy only possible in the absence of tyranny? Is the response to the extreme cruelty of tyrants the defining moment of the human condition?

Socrates' death perhaps benefited from the relatively humane practices of Greek law as applied to free citizens in comparison to the tortures exacted by the Roman imperium. Is it the case that this relatively humane practice, the hemlock, is what allows him to consider that his death is not the highest price, that the highest price is the committing of an injustice? The price for goodness that Socrates knew he had to pay may perhaps not be considered the highest price. Perhaps his experience did not show him that the highest price that can be demanded for the care of his soul and the giving of humans their due is not the committing of an injustice but the absence of God or, in philosophical terms, the good. For to know that

one is committing an injustice requires that justice be apparent.<sup>40</sup> It is this fifth tension that speaks most directly to the specific difference between Christianity and philosophy with respect to the due for humans. If this specific difference is to be found in the *what* of incarnation and the *how* of the sensuous path that it implies, then one might say that the extreme cruelty of the Roman imperium brought forth a truth not possible in the Greek world because the Christian incarnation conferred ultimate relevance on the cruelty practiced on those who sought to fulfil the good to such an extent that their vision of the good was itself eclipsed.

### **3. The Failure of Grant's Synthesis Between Religion and Philosophy**

In his reflexive self-justification Grant noted tensions between thought and suffering—the necessity of thought to the good life, the capacity of intense suffering to wipe out the possibility of thought—which take one to the core of the relation between Athens and Jerusalem and thus to the essence of Western civilization. I will risk a summary statement of Grant's understanding of this relation based on the five elements of this tension that I have found in his work: The critique of technology implies a conception of a good that is not of our own making. This good is expressed philosophically by Plato and religiously by Christianity. These two versions of the good, while involving tensions, are ultimately compatible. Platonism is the intellectual understanding of the ontological status of the good. Christianity is the story of suffering that the good undergoes within all humans. The meaning of the good is apparent in the deaths of Socrates and Jesus. The serene and beautiful death of Socrates shows the tragedy of philosophy in the face of the unknowing many. But the ugly shattered body of Jesus under the torture of tyrants shows that suffering and death cannot be overcome adequately by philosophy. Thus Jesus' death reveals

something that philosophy cannot. The human cost, and demand, of perfection comes to a limit in the necessity of the sacrifice of the good. The story of this willing sacrifice is superior to any story of perfection without sacrifice or without the most terrible sacrifice that we can imagine. Out of torture comes a truth unknown to Socrates.

Thus, one may conclude that philosophy is in the end subordinate to religion: all mediations of spirit and nature begin from here. Christianity can assimilate philosophy but not the reverse. The absence in Socrates' death can be seen in comparison to Jesus'. It is not attempted, perhaps it is not proper to attempt, to show an absence in Jesus' death through comparison to Socrates'. This conclusion is not anywhere stated in Grant's work. Yet, if the prior summary which I have risked is accurate, I do not see how the conclusion could be avoided. In this case, Grant's claim that the traditional account of God/good in Christianity and Greek philosophy are finally the same must be understood as a one-sided 'synthesis' not a true one. The 'synthesis' can only be maintained through a higher estimation of the death of Jesus and a subsequent recuperation of philosophy. The human import of Socrates' "wonderful joke" would be subordinate to the suffering of Jesus. If so, the deployment of the tradition-modernity doublet in moral-political critiques obscures a basic and insoluble tension between Christianity and philosophy.

If this conclusion is accepted, several questions pertaining to the tension need consideration. 1] Can the philosophical recognition of the social necessity of *a* religion be reconciled with the religious critique of philosophy that states that there is one *true* religion? 2] Does the obedience necessary to religion close down the freedom of thought necessary to philosophy? 3] Does the religious recognition of the human cost of the extreme cruelty of tyrants for the perception of the good reveal a limitation in the practice of philosophy? These questions pertain not only to the critical historical understanding which underlies

Grant's non-progressive and anti-technological Christianity, but also to whether there is a necessary and uneliminable tension between philosophy and religion as such.

The philosopher recognizes that philosophy cannot provide the concrete mythology that the life of a people requires. In *Crito*, Socrates recognizes that the laws and gods of Athens have made him what he is and cannot be abandoned by him just because he is personally threatened. A religion requires that its concrete content which directs the life of a people be regarded not as one mythology among others but as the true religion. Grant uses the death of Jesus to locate an absence in Socrates but never attempts the reverse. Socrates' joke shows us nothing important about Jesus' death. This indicates that Grant accepted Christianity as true and not as one version of truth (a civic religion) necessary in the social realm. The truth of religion is certified through belief which directs life in a satisfactory manner, legitimating some actions and discouraging others as profane. While the philosopher in a given place and time can accept the beliefs of that place and time because some such set of beliefs is necessary in social life to overcome the deficiency into which humans waver in practice, the beliefs are not accepted as true without reservation but as one of several more or less adequate sets of belief. The adequacy of such beliefs and the practices which they ground is judged with reference to the human good which is adequately perceived only in philosophy. While there can be accommodation between philosophy and religion because of their intertwining implications in the social and political world, such accommodation can only occur on the basis of a primacy given to either philosophy or religion.

Thus a religious accommodation of philosophy and a philosophical accommodation of religion are not equivalent—in this fact is located not only the failure of Grant's synthesis but the failure of all such attempts at synthesis. The unaided use of human reason in the practice of the good and the obedience of belief do not admit of genuine mediation. All

mediations conceal a primacy. This would imply that we must interpret Grant's doubt about obedience as an anguished cry that we could only read posthumously. It must have been a personal, private trial, not a public avowal of truth. It must be read this way since it would otherwise undermine the priority of Christianity in his thought and thus the particular nature of the skewed mediation that he proposed with philosophy. He desired and hoped to experience and to think obedience as an opening, as an incentive to thought, but he could not. The philosopher in him prevented what the Christian wanted to believe. To a philosopher, this anguish is one of the most compelling existential moments manifested throughout Grant's writing. He did not let it stand in the way of his public duty.

Grant argued that Socrates suffered from a lack of insight into the price of goodness in the face of evil, which is a strange though not impossible claim to be made about someone who refused to compromise his philosophic task to save his own life. It is said that Jesus encountered this price when his torture provokes the cry "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This provokes the acceptance of an intervention by a higher person which cannot be explained but only believed—"thy will be done." If Socrates had been offered the cross instead of hemlock would that have interrupted his serenity and beauty? Would he have been able to make his joke? Is philosophy only possible in the absence of tyranny?

The encounter with the gods, the beyond-human forces of creation and destruction, throws the philosopher back to human experience and thought as the only available resource to determine right action. The key philosophical point here is that the gods do not abandon humans here and there for specific reasons. The gods are precisely the beyond-human. To imagine that they have a particular destiny in mind for humans and that they intervene in human affairs is to imagine the beyond as simultaneously present. This could not be a matter for philosophy, which always rebounds from the beyond back to its simply human resources,

renouncing divine wisdom for a human striving for wisdom, but is ceded to a belief originating from elsewhere. This is precisely where Grant locates the lack of insight into the price of goodness in the face of evil: the refusal of philosophy to abandon human wisdom for divine wisdom and perfection. If philosophy finds its limit in torture, it also finds its limit in anything which eclipses thought and plunges human life into total darkness. In the recognition of this limit, philosophy can find a motive for the alleviation of such eclipse wherever possible. From such a direction it can think torture and suffering as the badness, perhaps even evil, that would make its own activity impractical. If Christianity has given us the image of the extreme cruelty of tyrants, it does not follow that the response to that extremity must be in the terms in which it was shown. One can lose philosophy when it is not possible to practice thought, but one is not forsaken.

#### **4. Socrates' Joke**

Let us end by asking the key question: Is it possible to discover an absence in Jesus' death through a comparison of his death with that of Socrates? On the cross he cried out for his torturers to be forgiven. We may forgive those that we love, perhaps those to whom we are indifferent, and maybe even, from time to time, our enemies. But with the death of Jesus forgiveness is raised to a transcendental level, insofar as it is taken by believers as emblematic of human relations as such, in that it defines humans as forgiven because of and through their ignorance. For Socrates, ignorance masquerading as knowledge is precisely what allows humans to turn away from the good. Ignorance, not of details but of that which is due to humans as such, can't be forgiven. Or, more precisely, acceptance of ignorance, abandonment of the search for knowledge, is culpability itself. Socrates' sublime serenity is not accomplished by forgiving the ignorant but by understanding that the ignorant are,

precisely, ignorant—since they make claims to knowledge about the best way to live—and by accepting his own ignorance—which requires a search for knowledge; that is, living philosophy among the multitude of non-philosophers. This is part of his joke. Philosophy can never erase its outside in the multitude and the civil religion they require.

Socrates suffers, though not to the greatest extremity, but the suffering does not reveal anything to him. It is something that he must overcome in order to continue to practice philosophy. Suffering is blind, ignorant, inevitable, but ... a distraction. The philosopher must say: torture teaches us nothing. The extreme cruelty of tyrants eclipses the specifically human due. One must avoid such eclipse at all costs to maintain the human image of justice. Nonetheless, the truth of such torture is precisely its meaninglessness, its destruction of meaning, with regard to the due of humans. Perhaps, the philosopher may respond to the Christian, Socrates did not mis-estimate the price of goodness for human life. It may be that he did not see what the worst price could be—absence of the good, which would demand that philosophy become more tragic than Socrates allowed—but that worst price does not alter the task of philosophy. We do not know what Socrates might have said of the torture of slaves by the Athenian courts or of the slaves' lives shattered in metal mines. The extreme cruelty of the Roman imperium shows us only the image of that which is to be avoided. It brought forth no truth. Consequently, such cruelty defines also the human limit of forgiveness: Not knowing what they do is precisely that for which they are not to be forgiven if the human due is to be protected. Such ignorance is madness. The philosopher asks the Christian: What would it mean for madness to be forgiven? To forgive the person and condemn the madness?—thus separating the person from the madness, making it an attribute that doesn't touch the essence. But we are speaking of the due for humans. To forgive madness is precisely to depart from philosophy.

Then what of the “appalling admonition ‘Take up your cross and follow me’”? Is this the Christian core that might disturb Socrates’ serenity and beauty? But what does this admonition mean? To accept one’s destiny? Or, to turn one’s fate into destiny by meeting its challenge face on? It couldn’t be simply a Stoic *amor fati* but perhaps a Nietzschean one: an acceptance, a facing and transforming, of the challenge that the particularities of one’s time, place and condition have posed, thereby turning them into a comment on the human condition as such. If the meaning of the appalling admonition is to turn the particularities of one’s place and time into an understanding of the good for humans, I don’t see anything particularly and specifically Christian about it. This is the task of philosophy itself. It makes possible Socrates’ joke.

To find Socrates’ joke wonderful George Grant must be a friend of philosophy, a friend of the lover of wisdom. One hears cadences that suggest that he was more than a friend, a lover of wisdom himself: the doubt about obedience, the attempt to expunge will that leads him toward silence about the doctrine of creation, the suggestion that the fight against madness is the fundamental human task. To the extent that these cadences infuse his critiques, they express a commitment to philosophy independent of religion. Grant noticed and emphasized that, despite his view that Christianity and Platonic philosophy are finally at one in their account of the good, there is a *tension* between what is given in these sources. For there to be a tension, neither can be simply derived from the other. They must have a separate and distinct reality in order for a tension to appear even if they are finally in agreement. Thus, it would seem that George Grant had an independent commitment to philosophy in order to diagnose this tension.

But, here again, we begin to stray from the sources toward the man himself. In an interview he said “Christianity is only a kind of beacon flashing into darkness. That beacon

does not overcome the necessity of philosophy in a way that certain theologians seem to think it does.”<sup>41</sup> If he were more than a friend, and in his notes to himself and interviews it seems clear that he was, he found sufficient reasons for reticence in the critiques with which he entered the public realm, where he did not speak as a philosopher, but as a Christian philosopher—which, in the end, is to say “as a Christian.” In his critiques Grant deployed the conceptual opposition modernity-tradition in order to renew the dual source of Western grace. Thus he spoke of modernity as darkness, a metaphor which unites Greek and Christian sources, and neither as madness nor sin, which divides them—even though he did leave evidence that madness was his own private trial.<sup>42</sup>

The darkness that Grant strove to illuminate as darkness requires that light emerge from outside. The motive for the philosopher’s turning away from the reflections in the cave is given no account by Plato; it is confined to an ‘if.’ If the turning away from the darkness toward the light of the good for humans remains unaccounted for, or accidental, (as it does in Plato) one has an opening to a Christian interpretation of the motive for the turning even though it does not yet arrive at such an interpretation itself. If the motive is understood as originating from outside the darkness (as in neo-Platonism) then the synthesis with Christianity is underway. To this extent Simone Weil is right about the anticipation of Christianity among the Greeks. Her account of God in Plato claims that in *Timaeus* 27d-28b “the Model is the source of transcendental inspiration—and therefore the Artificer fitly corresponds to the Father, the Soul of the World to the Son, and the Model to the Spirit.”<sup>43</sup> However this interpretation shifts from Socrates’ questioning in the Greek public spaces to the definition of all such places as thoroughly plunged into darkness. It is the middle Plato’s metaphor of the cave that grounds this synthesis.<sup>44</sup> Mediation between Christianity and Greek philosophy must substitute a metaphysical Plato for an *aporetic* inquiring Socrates. A

Socratic philosophy—and if philosophy is unsocratic, is it philosophy?<sup>2</sup>—though it grapples with darkness, is never plunged into a darkness that encompasses the entire human world. Not in the late Greek *polis*, not in contemporary technology. In speaking of the darkneses of contemporary technology Grant spoke of darkness as such, but if ignorance loses its plurality it comes to define the whole human world such that philosophy is domesticated by religion. It is here that his modernity-tradition doublet that structured the moral-political critiques comes to obscure the difference between the two pre-modern sources of the good. There are always resources in partial everyday human understandings, infused as they are with ignorance of the best, that turn toward the unrestricted good for humans. If not, philosophy is impossible and one must simply wait for the news from elsewhere.

When Crito asked how to bury Socrates after the poison has done its work, he replied “Any way you like . . . that is, if you can catch me and I don’t slip through your fingers.” He laughed and added, ostensibly to the others, “I can’t persuade Crito that I am this Socrates here who is talking to you now and marshaling all the arguments. He thinks that I am the one whom he will see presently lying dead, and he asks me how he is to bury me!” Referring to Crito’s promise to the court that he would ensure that Socrates would not escape, he continued “He undertook that I should stay, but you must assure him that when I am dead I shall not stay, but depart and be gone. That will help Crito bear it more easily, and keep him from being distressed on my account when he sees my body being burned or buried, as if something dreadful were happening to me.”<sup>45</sup>

It’s always a mistake to explain a joke but, anyway, note three riffs: when my soul no longer inhabits my body, I am no longer here;<sup>46</sup> I am here now (this is indeed me); my enemies can’t hold me (this is a reassuring fact). Socrates leaves with dignity and knows that leaving is necessary and, at times, reassuring. I think, as Grant apparently did not, that the

wonderful quality of such a joke shows something about human wisdom not present in Jesus' death. Jesus died in public, Socrates in private. His joke affirms in dignity and with joy: "I am here!" In ignorance but without madness or despair: "it's time to go." But, then, I haven't heard the good news and they say that all would change if I did. Would I really be lucky to subordinate philosophy and experience the closing down of thought by obedience and thereby to trade the battle against madness for the rigours of belief? It's all Greek to me.<sup>47</sup>

Footnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of this essay appeared as “Athens and Jerusalem? A Critique of the Relationship Between Philosophy and Religion in George Grant’s Thought” in *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2, Spring 2005.

<sup>2</sup> I have previously noted four stages in Grant’s thinking about modernity and technology that can be associated with the successive influences of Hegel, Strauss-Ellul, Nietzsche and Heidegger in Ian Angus, *A Border Within: National Identity, Cultural Plurality, an Wilderness* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1997) pp. 81-95.

<sup>3</sup> George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Sackville: Mount Allison University, 1974) p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> Except in the second case, where the dating is based on Grant’s internal comment in the addendum to the 1990 publication of the text, these dates refer to first publication.

“Philosophy” in *Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (The Massey Commission)*, (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1951); “Two Theological Languages” in Wayne Whillier (ed.) *Two Theological Languages by George Grant and other essays in honour of his work* (Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990); “Religion and the State” in *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969) which was first published in *Queen’s Quarterly* in 1963; “Faith and the Multiversity” in *Technology and Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> George Grant, “Two Theological Languages,” appendix, pp. 17, 17, 16.

<sup>6</sup> George Grant, *Time as History* (Toronto: CBC, 1969) p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” in *The Question Concerning Technology and other essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977) pp. 16-7.

<sup>9</sup> George Grant, “Thinking about Technology” in *Technology and Justice*, p. 18.

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<sup>10</sup> For this reason I must now, as a self-criticism based in teleological interpretation, suggest that the Nietzschean and Heideggerian phases of Grant's view of technology were not really philosophically distinct but signify only a change in the major reference. My earlier periodization of Grant's understanding of technology did point out that his appropriation of Heidegger was partial, limited to the explication of technology, and did not extend to the account of philosophy as metaphysics that enabled that explication. Nevertheless, my overly textual interpretation did not consider these factors as sufficient to undermine the distinctness of a Heideggerian period. See *A Border Within*, p. 98.

<sup>11</sup> In that note Grant claims a convergence between Simone Weil's notion of 'attention' and Heidegger's concept of thinking (*Denken*) and releasement (*Gelassenheit*). (*Gelassenheit* has been usually translated into English versions of Heidegger as 'letting-be' but I use the more recognized and adequate translation of Meister Eckhart's term which influenced Heidegger.) In Heidegger's works on technology the term used for a non-technological form of thinking is *Besinnung*. See "The Age of the World Picture" and "Science and Reflection" in *The Question Concerning Technology and other essays* (pp. 115, 155) where the translator uses the misleading term 'reflection.' The note can be found in George Grant, *Notes for Lectures on Simone Weil*, McMaster Notebooks, 1975. Copied by Randy Peg Peters with the permission of Shiela Grant in May 2002. I am profoundly grateful that Mr. Peters has shared his primary research with me on this matter. His forthcoming dissertation at Simon Fraser University on the theology of George Grant will discuss this and related documents in comprehensive detail.

<sup>12</sup> George Grant, "Revolution and Tradition" in Lionel Rubinoff (ed.) *Tradition and Revolution* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1971) pp. 93, 94, 95.

<sup>13</sup> George Grant, "Thinking About Technology" in *Technology and Justice*, p. 30.

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<sup>14</sup> This difficulty is explained in *A Border Within*, pp. 95, 104, 248 (note 51). Grant had earlier criticized Leo Strauss for not including in his analysis of technology the fact that “the poor, the diseased, the hungry and the tired can hardly be expected to contemplate any such limitation [of technology] with the equanimity of the philosopher.” “Tyranny and Wisdom” in *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969) p. 103. I do not see that he ever made good on this criticism in his own work, a fact which can be attributed to the deployment of the modernity-tradition doublet—a dualism which makes it hard to avoid simply choosing one side over the other (however much the superficiality of such a choice is emphasized) and which thus drew him towards Strauss’ thoroughly anti-modern critique of technology (despite his remark which was made as a critique of this aspect of Strauss’ thinking).

<sup>15</sup> George Grant, “Two Theological Languages,” appendix, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> George Grant, “Faith and the Multiversity,” p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 42, 54.

<sup>19</sup> George Grant, “Faith and the Multiversity,” in *Technology and Justice*, p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> This notion that it is the sensuality of the incarnation that is the specific supplement of Christianity to Greek philosophy is also the view of Hegel and would require an evaluation of whether such a view could avoid leading toward modernity as Hegel argued. In contrast, to Hegel’s claim that Greek civilization was haunted by unreconciled ‘tragic’ duality, Weil attributed, correctly in my view, the search for mediation to Greek philosophy.

<sup>21</sup> Simone Weil, “The Pythagorean Doctrine” in Elizabeth Chase Geissbuhler, trans., *Intimations of Christianity among the ancient Greeks* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976) p. 185.

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<sup>22</sup> For example, George Grant, “Faith and the Multiversity,” p. 72. The phrase is from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface.

<sup>23</sup> George Grant, “Faith and the Multiversity,” p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> The subordination of philosophy to religion is a main, perhaps the main, tendency in the Western account of the relation between philosophy and religion. It goes back to the formulations of Philo of Alexandria. Pierre Hadot has pointed out that this subordination generally goes hand in hand with the derogation of philosophy from a way of life to philosophical discourse or reason. See Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002) especially chapter 11. Thus, religion comes to take charge of the way of life while philosophy is demoted to its rationalization. A genuine encounter between philosophy and religion must not begin from the common assumption that philosophy is about discursive reason whereas religion is about a whole way of life since this derogation of philosophy is a product of the very debate that must be re-examined. I have thus attempted to examine this relationship with regard to the ways of life proposed by philosophy versus religion in an attempt to approximate the different ordering of the soul that each proposes. I was lucky when I first encountered philosophy with José Huertas-Jourda to have it clearly communicated that philosophy is a way of life.

<sup>25</sup> George Grant, “Two Theological Languages,” appendix, p. 18. Grant had already spoken of this “tension” in “The University Curriculum” in *Technology and Empire*, p. 121.

<sup>26</sup> George Grant, “Faith and the Multiversity,” p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> The conceptual reliance of 17<sup>th</sup> century science on the Judeo-Christian conception of nature as created has been documented, among many others, by M.B. Foster, “The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science,” *Mind*, Vol. 43, 1934;

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“Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature (I),” *Mind*, Vol. 44, 1935; and “Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature (II),” *Mind*, Vol. 45, 1936. The articles by M. B. Foster were often referred to by Grant in lectures. See my discussion of this point in *A Border Within*, pp. 80-1, 99.

<sup>28</sup> For this reason, the well-known argument of Lynn White Jr. in his influential and often republished essay “The Historic Origins of the Ecological Crisis” that this tradition underlies the domination of nature in European modernity should be taken seriously. A more thorough and philosophically convincing account is given in William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (New York: George Brazillier, 1972). It is difficult to see how the concept of will could be thoroughly expunged from either Judaism or Christianity given the metaphysical account of the relation between God and world upon which they rely—though, Grant’s remark that “I’m on the side of Christianity that is farthest away from Judaism, and nearest to the account of Christianity that is close to Hinduism in its philosophic expression” (George Grant, “Conversation: Theology and History” in *George Grant in Process* (Toronto: Anansi, 1978) p. 102) should likely be interpreted in the light of the issue of the doctrine of will. To this extent, most, if not all, recent attempts by Christians and Jews to respond to the argument of White and others with an ethic of stewardship remain based upon an instrumental relation to nature and stress only a long-term and widely-social interpretation of the domination of nature for all humanity and not for partial interests. Consequently, I have argued that a continuation of Grant’s critique of technology should take one toward an ecological ethics based on an immanent conception of the sacred (*A Border Within*, p. 103). It is clear, however, that Grant himself would refuse such an immanence.

<sup>29</sup> George Grant, “Obedience” in *The Idler*, No. 29, July and August 1990, p. 28. All subsequent quotes in this paragraph are from “Obedience” on the same page.

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<sup>30</sup> George Grant, "Two Theological Languages," appendix, p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> George Grant, "Philosophy," p. 122, cf. pp. 132-3.

<sup>32</sup> George Grant, "Religion and the State," in *Technology and Empire*, p. 54.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pp. 59, 46.

<sup>34</sup> George Grant, "Two Theological Languages," appendix, p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> George Grant, "Faith and the Multiversity," p. 71-2.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>38</sup> George Grant, "Two Theological Languages," appendix, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> George Grant, Five Lectures on Christianity for 1B6, McMaster Notebook A, 1976.

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<sup>40</sup> At this point in *Crito* (50a-c), where Socrates considers what the laws of Athens would say to him if he were to escape, his ignorance does not seem evident, or at least as evident, as the credibility of the laws.

<sup>41</sup> George Grant, "Conversation: Theology and History" in *George Grant in Process*, p. 101.

<sup>42</sup> "Those of us who are much lesser thinkers than Nietzsche can be taken up with that immoderation (and I am sure that the central characteristic of modern thought which touches us all is immoderation) which is not good for one's sanity. I am sure that most of you here are less prone to madness than myself ... ." George Grant, Notebook M, 1977.

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<sup>43</sup> Simone Weil, "God in Plato" in *On Science, Necessity and the Love of God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) p. 133.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 108. One does not have to agree with Hannah Arendt's penetrating claim that the image of the good was substituted for the more genuinely philosophic image of the beautiful under the influence of Plato's later assessment that the *polis* had been plunged into darkness to notice that the attempted synthesis between Platonism and Christianity both expugns the non-political dimensions of philosophy and elevates philosophy in a manner that eclipses the specificity of politics. See Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968) p. 112 and *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) p. 20.

<sup>45</sup> *Phaedo* 115c-e. Hugh Tredennick translation. I assume that this is the passage to which Grant referred as Socrates' joke.

<sup>46</sup> Note that this doesn't necessarily imply that the soul lives after the body (as *Phaedo* but not *Crito* asserts) but only that life consists in the coincidence of soul and body and thus that death occurs when the coincidence ceases.

<sup>47</sup> There is only one of George Grant's remarks about the difference between Socrates and Jesus that I have not responded to in this essay: that Socrates' wife was absent from his death scene whereas the two Marys were present at Jesus'. While he regards this as equivalent to the difference between Jesus' sweat and Socrates joke ("Faith and the University," p. 72), I am not sure that this is so. Thus, I have only responded adequately to this point through my defence of Socrates' joke insofar as they are indeed equivalent. Grant's is a profound observation with great significance for philosophy. A proper discussion would require accounts of philosophical friendship, the relation between philosophers and non-philosophers, the love that philosophers can have for non-philosophers, and the relation that this love has to the good for humans. Not only is such a task far beyond the scope of this essay, but it would not affect the current argument substantially. That is to say, such an

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account can be given within philosophy, so that while this observation is profound, it does not imply a necessary absence in the practice of philosophy. The very complexity of the response that this remark demands suggests that the difference between philosophers and non-philosophers is fundamental for philosophers whereas the remark immediately seems to suggest that no such difference ought to be significant and thus that the response should be simple.