HORIZON'S END: THE CRISIS OF HISTORY IN GRANT AND NIETZSCHE

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By

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Abstract:

George Grant sees Nietzsche as the foremost thinker of what it means to conceive time as history, and so discount the notion of eternal truth. In *Time as History* (1969), he presents a reading of Nietzsche's thought in tandem with a critique of the modern self-conception of humanity as maker of history and dominator of nature. Yet Nietzsche is not merely an expositor of what it means to be modern but, like Grant, a critic of modernity's politically and spiritually fragmenting consequences. Although Grant is an avowed Christian Platonist, and Nietzsche an avowed anti-Christian and anti-Platonist, they share a positive appraisal of the necessity of mythic consciousness to counterbalance the relativizing effect of historicism. While both believe a healthy social order requires myths to communicate humanity's proper place in the cosmos, they differ in that Nietzsche sees the supra-historical character of the cosmos as tragic in the classical sense, while Grant affirms the existence of a dimly perceivable but ultimately redemptive supernatural order. Therefore their respective cosmologies imply sometimes overlapping, but ultimately divergent, prescriptive guidelines to conduct and thought.

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Thank you to Dr. Planinc, Dr. Kroeker and my parents.

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Abbreviations

Works by Nietzsche

References are to page numbers in *The Portable Nietzsche* and *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann.

AC: *The Antichrist*

BGE: *Beyond Good and Evil*

BT: *The Birth of Tragedy*

EC: *Ecce Homo*

TI: *Twilight of the Idols*

UO: *Unmodern Observations*

WP: *The Will to Power*

Works by Grant

CWIII: *Collected Works, volume 3*

CWIV: *Collected Works, volume 4*

GGP: *George Grant in Process*

GGR: *George Grant Reader*

IC: *In Conversation*

LN: *Lament for a Nation*

PMA: *Philosophy in the Mass Age*

TH: *Time as History*

TE: *Technology and Empire*

Introduction

Of George Grant's six published books, only one, the Massey lecture *Time as History* (1969*)*, is dedicated to the study of a single thinker. Why, of all his philosophical and religious influences—most notably Plato, Simone Weil, Martin Heidegger and Leo Strauss—did Grant choose to focus this radio lecture, broadcast to a largely non-academic audience, on Friedrich Nietzsche? In his editorial introduction, William Christian gives the beginnings of an answer: "He had come to the conclusion that Nietzsche's philosophic insights, more than any other thinker's, illuminated the background against which modern events, such as the Vietnam War and the growing Americanization of the Canadian economy, were moving" (TH xii). Grant believed, with good evidence (including Nietzsche's growing appeal to youth like his own son, William, to whom the work is dedicated), that Nietzsche spoke directly to the tenor of the times. Obviously the nineteenth-century German did not have anything to say directly about the Vietnam War, the Americanization of the Canadian economy, nuclear proliferation or the rise of the sixties counterculture. Yet, Grant argued, Nietzsche's thought unfolded the essence of the worldview causative of these and other current social and political trends: the conception of time as history, and the self-conception of humanity as maker of history.

Grant had discussed the quintessentially modern idea of history, and its biblical origins, in his first published book, *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (1958). Yet he felt in the 1960s that the issues raised by the conception of time as history had metastasized into a crisis. Grant perceived that "the liberal formulation of time as history" (or, more simply

put, the doctrine of progress) from which North Americans had traditionally garnered

their sense of purpose, was disappearing "before the hammer blows of the twentieth

century" (TH 30) and leaving a dangerous void in its wake. Grant found in Nietzsche's

vocabulary of horizons, the will to power, values, mastery of the earth, the spirit of

revenge, nihilists, last men and supermen a powerful way of articulating the existential

dimension of the problems he perceived besetting modernity in general, and North

America's technological society ("the spearhead of modernity") in particular. Thus he

used Nietzsche's metaphor of horizons to represent the core of the crisis: "the historical

sense teaches us that horizons [our absolute presuppositions, ideologies or religions] are

not discoveries about the nature of things; they express the values which our tortured

instincts will to create. . . . we cannot deny history and retreat into a destroyed past. On

the other hand, how can we overcome the blighting effect of living without horizons?"

(TH 40) My first chapter discusses Grant's application of Nietzsche's thought to the

crisis of the 1960s, and why—thanks in large part to Nietzsche's prophetic telling of the

maladies of his own time—he saw them as augers of worsening troubles to come.

In one of the few essays devoted primarily to Grant's reading of Nietzsche,

Ronald Beiner says "Grant merely puts together Strauss's image of Nietzsche as a radical

historicist with Heidegger's image of Nietzsche as the arch-philosopher of technological

mastery."[1] Grant clearly states his intellectual debt to Strauss and Heidegger (if less

loudly, perhaps for political reasons, in the case of Heidegger), and I do not intend to

argue a uniquely Grantian reading of Nietzsche exists. Rather, I think Grant's encounter

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[1] Ronald Beiner, "George Grant, Nietzsche and the Problem of a Post-Christian Theism" in George Grant
and the Subversion of Modernity, ed. Arthur Davis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 110.

with Nietzsche is worth exploring because the convergences and divergences in their thought, especially the convergences Grant overlooked or did not acknowledge, reveal much about their guiding outlooks and the crisis with which they struggled. In my second chapter I look at the convergences in Grant and Nietzsche's response to the problem of history. Specifically, I argue they were both drawn to mythic consciousness and communitarian religion as an alternative or at least corrective to the contemporaneous image of humanity as maker of history. I outline the affinities between Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity for leading directly to modern nihilism, and Grant's rejection of the dominant trends in *Western* Christianity. Using the terminology of Nietzsche's early essay, "History in the Service and Disservice of Life," as a starting point, I conclude that both Nietzsche and Grant affirm the necessity of a supra-historical order over and against which the history-making spirit may be curtailed and judged.

In my third chapter I mark out the areas in which Grant and Nietzsche part ways. Drawing on his later lectures and essays, I examine how Grant comes to modify his earlier representation of Nietzsche while maintaining and even intensifying his refusal of Nietzsche's conclusions. Grant and Nietzsche share a similar critique of, and, to a significant extent, prescriptive response to the problems inherent to what Grant (drawing on Strauss) calls the universal and homogenous state. Yet ultimately, Grant's intimations of a transcendent foundation to morality cause him to blanch at the consequences of living Nietzsche's thought. He believes Nietzsche pays too high a price, that price being the sacrifice of the theistic and Platonic notion of unconditional justice, for synthesizing the history-making spirit with a sense of belongingness in nature. Grant admits he cannot

refute Nietzsche on a purely intellectual plane, but appeals to the truth of tradition against Nietzsche's paradoxically modern attempt to overcome modernity. As much as their thought touches and at times intermingles, they reach a final standstill on opposite sides of a metaphysical boundary neither is willing to cross. Yet I argue that by, to paraphrase Grant, living critically in the dynamo, both thinkers, particularly when read with and against each other, present fruitful challenges and resources to those who would do the same.

Chapter 1: The Fading Liberal Horizon

I. Introduction

In *Time as History* (1969), George Grant prophesies the "the liberal formulation of time as history [disappearing] before the hammer blows of the twentieth century," leaving North Americans with "a more frightening conception of time as history which holds within it that presence of anxiety and willing which came from our particular origins" (TH 30). He means by history a subjective dimension of reality moderns conceive in contradistinction to mechanistic nature; "the particular human situation in which we are not only made but make" (TH 12). The history-making spirit is thus the animating sense that humanity is not essentially bound to a natural or divine order, but is free to creatively shape the world toward a desired end. Grant identifies the end of history envisioned by a minority of liberal thinkers since the seventeenth century, and willed by an increasing number of history-making actors since the American and French Revolutions, as "the building of the universal and homogenous state—the society in which all men are free and equal and increasingly able to realize their concrete individuality." He also identifies a particular means logistically inseparable from that end: "the pursuit of those sciences which issue in the mastery of human and non-human nature" (TE 33) or the technology needed to support the institutional structure of the universal and homogenous state and so make freedom and equality plausible on a planetary scale.

Besides the "liberal formulation of time as history," at various junctures in his writing Grant calls faith in the goodness and inevitability of progress toward the universal and homogenous state the religion or doctrine of progress, optimistic humanism and the liberal horizon. Grant's use of the metaphor of horizons is a product of his reading of Nietzsche, for whom horizons are the "absolute presuppositions within which individuals and indeed whole civilizations do their living," so called "because everything which appears, appears to us within their limits" (TH 39). In these terms, North America's quintessentially history-making civilization does its living within the limits of the liberal horizon. As Grant has it, to think outside the faith "that the highest good is North America moving forward in expansionist practicality" is "to make oneself a stranger to the public realm" (TE 28). Yet concurrently, Grant observed that liberal presuppositions were subject to increasingly public doubt as the United States' conduct in Vietnam undermined the polity's self-legitimizing rhetoric: that North Americans are "a people of good will bringing the liberation of progress to the world" (TE 27). As an outspoken stranger to the public realm, Grant himself argued the defoliation of Vietnam was symptomatic of the reduction of the progressive catechism of universal freedom and equality to a phrasebook of platitudes justifying imperialist *realpolitik.* Yet if Grant read cold war depravations as political augers of North America's liberal horizon fading in "the winter of nihilism" (TE 40), he read Nietzsche as the revelator of the meta-political cause: our modern self-identity as autonomous makers of history and reigning conquerors of an objectified natural world.

In this chapter I will show how Grant comes to prophesize the disappearance of

the liberal formulation of time as history (or more lyrically, the fading of the liberal

horizon) by interpreting Nietzsche's historicist challenge to *all* horizons as anticipating

the crisis of meaning enveloping the continent. Most explicitly in *Time as History*, but

throughout his mid-to-late sixties writings, Grant draws on Nietzsche's thought about the

radical implication of the conception of time as history—that "history (call it, if you will

'process') is that to which all is subject, including our knowing, including God, if we still

find reasons for using that word" (TH 11)—to place contemporary events into a socio-

political context of ascendant nihilism which I will call "horizon's end." While

conventional conservatives might point to the anti-war movement and youth

counterculture as the source of the sixties' troubles, Grant is not a conventional

conservative in the modern ideological sense. As Neil Robertson writes, Grant's

conservatism is "rooted in a desire to conserve still abiding instances of an older, pre-

modern relation of humanity to God and the world."[2] Grant argues disillusioned youth

are reacting on a visceral level *against* the source of North America's ascendant nihilism:

the increasingly obvious tension of our "vision of ourselves as creative freedom, making

ourselves, and conquering the chances of an indifferent world" (TE 137) with, not simply

liberal values, but humanity's proper purpose as expounded in the western tradition and

intuited through contemplation of the horizon-transcending whole: reverence for and

participation in a divine and natural order beyond the vagaries of history.[3]

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[2] Neil Robertson, "George Grant: Intimations of Deprival, Intimations of Beauty," *Modern Age* (Winter/Spring 2004): 74.

[3] For Grant the western tradition is that of "Athens and Jerusalem," Greek philosophy (particularly Plato) and the Bible (particularly the Gospels).

II. The Religion of Progress

We can better understand the socio-political significance of horizon's end for Grant by outlining his thought on the necessity of religion to the state and society. In "Religion and the State" (1963) Grant defines religion in reference to its origin from the Latin verb for "to bind together," as "that system of belief (whether true or false) which binds together the life of individuals and gives to those lives whatever consistency of purpose they may have," listing Marxism and liberal humanism as non-theistic examples (TE 46). He argues a constitutional state requires a minimum shared standard of public morality so as to prevent, on the one extreme, pluralism to the point of anarchy (the dissolution of the state), and on the other, reliance on sheer coercion and fear to rule (the dissolution of the constitution). The central question in the contemporary debate over the place of religious instruction in schools to which Grant is responding is thus whether the minimum public morality the constitutional state requires is attainable without the inculcation of piety toward a higher power (TE 48). As I will go on to elaborate in greater detail, for Grant the answer is "no." He clearly acknowledges the possibility, indeed the readily apparent global dominance, of secular religions or ideologies which fulfill the same binding function as theistic belief systems. Yet he does not think religions premised on fulfillment in history, like Marxism and liberal humanism, are capable of the millennia-long reigns of religions premised on reverence toward what is beyond history, like Judaism and Christianity; and he argues they are insufficiently substantive ballast for maintaining civic order.

Grant calls the system of belief thought to be true by a large percentage of a society's dominant classes its "public religion" (TE 51). Despite residual loyalties to and nominal professions of Protestant Christianity, Grant identifies the system of belief held to be true by North America's dominant (i.e. well-educated, opinion-molding, trend-setting) classes as the secular religion of progress. In other words, "they work for the coming of the universal and homogenous state with enthusiasm; they await its coming with expectation" (TE 57). Yet Grant distinguishes between what may be called the progressive conservative elite, who hold to the understanding that the good ordering of society requires piety and so are reluctant to sweep away Christianity from the public square and the less reticent, but also less culturally entrenched progressives who are confident in the mass of humanity's ability to get by without their opiate (TE 54). Significantly, Grant is clear that the majority of progressive conservatives do not actually *believe* in a divine power; they merely recognize the social utility of "the façade of tradition" (TE 57). Grant, meanwhile, asserts both the truth of tradition as a means of apprehending the transcendent whole, and the civic necessity of piety to a constitutional state—yet recognizes himself to be in a shrinking minority on both counts (at least among society's educated classes), and so "a stranger to the public realm."[4]

As I stated in my introduction, Grant uses "religion [or doctrine] of progress" interchangeably with the phrases liberal formulation of time as history, optimistic humanism and liberal horizon. I will be primarily using the phrase "liberal horizon"

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[4] Hence the despairing introduction appended to the essay in *Technology and Empire*, in which Grant castigates himself for having thought his intervention in the contemporary political debate over the place of religious instruction in schools "could have public relevance in the English-speaking world of the twentieth century" (TE 43).

because its implication that liberal progressivism is but one limited perspective among many is central to the "crisis of history" which is the focus of this paper. Yet I wish to emphasize that Grant's thought on the essential relationship between the state and public religion, and between reverential religion (a better term than theistic religion so as to include supra-historical but "godless" belief systems like Buddhism) and the *just* state, stays consistent even with changes in terminology. His warning that North America's liberal horizon is fading "in the winter of nihilism" implies the fragmentation of community and the atomization of individuals increasingly shorn of the common purpose and moral code provided by a viable public religion. The civic problem of "horizon's end" for Grant is that "the religion of progress [has] been able to kill Christianity in the consciousness of many, but it has not succeeded in substituting any other lasting system of meaning" (TE 58). Grant might agree with Margaret Thatcher's famous suggestion that "there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families." Yet from him this would be a damning indictment of a dysfunctional polity which, if capable of producing material prosperity, is incapable of encouraging public virtue and upholding a standard of justice commensurate with human dignity.

Grant places himself in the political-philosophical tradition of thinkers like Plato and Aquinas (and, as I will later argue, Nietzsche), according to which "not many men will become philosophers" but "all men are inevitably religious" and so both religion and philosophy "are necessary to the healthy life of a society." Against progressives who claim theirs is a set of rational propositions alone and should not be called a religion, Grant asserts that "this assumption is itself part of the religion of progress" (TE 59) and

objectionable on the basis of reason. "Most people," Grant says elsewhere, "are not

intended for sustained thought" because they are preoccupied with the practical struggles

of day to day existence: "raising their children, earning their living, governing the state"

(IC 57). So for instance, the majority of Canadians affirm the goodness of democracy not

out of a systematic study of political philosophy which they lack the time and/or

inclination for, but on the basis of a faith inculcated in them by nominally non-religious

schools (TE 49). Grant would say to progressives (in a sense inclusive of most self-

described conservatives) that their ideology, synthesized to varying degrees with still

extant Protestant Christianity, serves the same civic function in modern North America

as, for example, Catholic Christianity did in medieval Europe. Grant does not suggest

that the religion of progress is an exact analog in every respect to an ecclesiastic order,

but that it provides the symbols, tropes and myths through which the polity legitimizes its

existence to citizens and through which citizens understand themselves to share a

common destiny.

Grant's critical argument, given final shape through his reading of Nietzsche, is

that the claim of the religion of progress to be a set of rational propositions dooms it to

decline because its acolytes cannot rationally prove, and must increasingly argue against

historical evidence to the contrary (like intractable and morally comprising imperial wars

against states which inexplicably reject the self-evident benefits of freedom and equality),

that the building of the universal and homogenous state is both necessary and good. In

the wake of the Vietnam War and concomitant protest movement, Grant argues the

liberal formulation of time as history is no longer felt to be true by a significant

percentage of society's dominant classes. Those who administrate the war increasingly judge actions in terms of technical efficiency, not a sense of moral good imparted by even secular religion. Those who protest the war increasingly question the disjunction between moral rhetoric and amoral reality, but can offer no positive alternative except a more radical secular religion with the same Achilles' heel. Namely, any religion premised on an appeal to scientific reason (i.e. "laws of history") alone will be discredited when scientific reason (i.e. the evidence of events) reveals it to be but a horizon, i.e. a limited perspective with no claim to authority and so a spent force for stabilizing society since "we cannot live in a horizon when we know it to be one" (TH 40). According to Grant, only a religion which appeals to humanity's intuition of a permanent cosmic order to which men and women owe piety (and so not Christianity alone, although that is Grant's own professed tradition) is capable of underwriting a just society and a just soul.

In addition to indicating its de facto civic function, the phrase "religion of progress" is also apposite because Grant traces the liberal framing of history as a narrative with a "fallen" beginning (Hobbesian life in nature as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short") and a redemptive ending (the realization of human freedom from natural evils like scarcity and toil through technology), to the secularization of biblical belief in the providential coming of the Kingdom of God. Yet the term secularization also implies an essential change to how what were originally theological ideas are now anthropocentrically conceived, a change which Grant argues is ultimately destructive of all binding systems of meaning. The conceptual change hinges on the modern

understanding of men and women as makers of history, a change given impetus by the

dramatic achievements of positive science. While biblical believers understand history to

be a "divine comedy" in which men and women *participate*, optimistic humanists

understand history to be the *willing* of auto-emancipation from the natural world.

Beginning with *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (1958), Grant draws on the work of

historians and philosophers Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch and especially Georg Hegel and

Leo Strauss to explicate the religion of progress as in certain ways an outgrowth of, and

in certain ways a conscious break from, the Judeo-Christian idea "that the events of

human society have a meaning in their totality, as directed towards an end" (PMA 15).

More portentously, in *Time as History* Grant depicts the liberal horizon in Nietzschean

terms as the dim shadow of a dead God: an epigone of theism now subject to the same

skeptical questioning (whether privately or publicly) as its benighted biblical ancestor,

but without recourse to claims of supra-historical truth.

III. Providence to Progress

In *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, Grant first outlines his reading of the epochal shift

in authority from the biblical conception of history as providence to the modern

conception of history as progress; or what he might later call the waning of the Christian

horizon (which is not to say the obsolescence of its truth claim) and the dawning of the

liberal horizon. Alone among ancient civilizations, and despite lapses into the pagan

understanding of time as cyclical, the Hebrews looked forward to a redemptive end of

days instead of reconciling themselves to the infinite repetition of cosmic creation and

destruction. Unlike neighbouring soothsayers, the Prophets interpreted events not as "images of eternal patterns" but as novel contributions to "the divinely ordained process of man's salvation." The historical instead of mythical (i.e. singular rather than archetypical) incarnation of Christ in the flesh, and the evangelization of the promise of his second coming, enters the biblical conception of time as history into the larger Greco-Roman world. Under the influence of Augustine's magisterial theology of history, westerners come to see time as a linear movement culminating in the realization of the Kingdom of God (PMA 40-43). And so, perhaps counter-intuitively given the alternate (but related) contemporary meaning of the word as the study of the past, those who conceive time as history, while reading significance into past events, are ultimately oriented toward the future as their locus of hope.

Yet for orthodox Christians and Jews, the consummation of history is in the hands of the interventionist God, not the church of Peter or the nation of Israel.[5] In Grant's account, sweeping by his own admission, "the mediating term between history as providence and history as progress is the idea of freedom." As a consequence of the Protestant Reformers' validation of the individual's religious freedom from ecclesiastical constraints, and the *philosophes*' "extension of freedom into all spheres"—including Voltaire's championing of freedom *from* the tyranny of belief in God—"men came to believe that history could be shaped to their own ends" (PMA 44-45). As the liberal horizon begins to dawn in the seventeenth century, the creative will of humanity (energized by the concomitant rise of the natural sciences) overtakes the creative will of

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[5] An example of this mindset surviving is ultra-Orthodox Jewish opposition to Zionism.

God in moving history forward in the popular mind, and the scientifically premised

Kingdom of Man overtakes the prophetically premised Kingdom of God as the locus of

hope (PMA 44-6). Ready analogies aside, Grant does not minimize the revolutionary

changes the secular turn implies. While religious modernizers have attempted to

accommodate themselves to the zeitgeist by conceiving of man as co-creator with God

(TH 13), Grant insists that the history-making spirit is the obverse of Christ's statement

of submission to the given order of the created whole, "Not my will but thine be done"

(Luke 22:42), and his acceptance of the necessity of death with joy (PMA 91). Though

emphasizing familial links, Grant is careful to distinguish between the religion of

progress and traditional Christianity (and Judaism) even as many acolytes of progress

seek to synthesize the two.

Foremost among the philosophical synthesizers of providence and progress, the

divine purpose and the human will in history, is Hegel. In "Tyranny and Wisdom"

(1964), Grant's commentary on the debate between Alexandre Kojève and Leo Strauss,

he explicitly identifies the Kingdom of Man with Kojève's Hegelian concept of the

universal and homogenous (i.e. all are equal citizens before the state, without regard to

race or class) society. He describes it as a negation "aware of the truth present in that

which it negated" of the universal and homogenous (i.e. all are equal sinners before God,

without regard to race or class) church (TE 87-88). Grant agrees with the Hegelians that

the religion of progress inherits the truth contained in biblical revelation: that all people

are equal before God. He departs from them in doubting whether a social order can

uphold the truth of egalitarianism while negating the theism that grounds it, i.e. can

protect the equality of citizens while denying the existence of a greater good which they are equal before. How, he asks, can even the most well-intentioned makers of history adequately answer Nietzsche's challenge to the basis of their intentions without sacrificing moral or intellectual integrity?

VI. The Specter of Nietzsche

In *Time as History*, Grant distinguishes between the majority who perceive in the tumult of the sixties a crisis of details, and the minority who perceive in troubles like environmental despoliation and growing political alienation among youth a crisis of civilization (TH 7). In a radio interview appended to the text, Grant says the Vietnam war was "an enormous break in the sense that one felt that one could no longer do it for North America, that North America was proving itself a more violent empire [and] was entering the lists of competition" (TH 77-78). Why then is Grant unwilling to concede the Vietnam War and other problems of the era as a dip in the largely upward climb to liberty and equality for all, a problem the self-correcting system can fix, as those thinking within the liberal horizon might argue? Arthur Davis trenchantly observes that Grant believes "moderns [have] the right goals (genuine liberty and equality) but not the reverence to make it possible to achieve them."[6] Modern goals are "right" for Grant because, as I briefly elucidated, he traces them to the theological and philosophical tradition he affirms as his own. Yet, he argues, as makers of history, moderns conceive

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[6] Arthur Davis, "Did George Grant Change His Politics?" in Athens and Jerusalem: George Grant's Theology, Philosophy, and Politics, eds. Ian Angus, Ron Dart, and Randy Peg Peters (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 73.

liberty not as the opportunity to consciously participate in a divine and natural order by which our behaviour can be measured, and equality not as the universal human potentiality to consciously participate in that order, but rather think of freedom and egalitarianism (when they think of them at all) as self-legislated "values" imposed on an indifferent universe for the utilitarian ordering of a society conducive to comfortable self-preservation.

Grant's critique is that the modern dichotomization between nature and history, and the concomitant tendency to objectify nature (including human nature) as externalized raw material for the ordering of the universal and homogenous state, encourages makers of history to run roughshod over the divine and natural limits necessary to freedom and equality in more than name. He reads Nietzsche as thinking through the conception of time as history's internal logic to the frightening conclusion that there is no "permanency in terms of which change can be measured or limited or defined" (TH 37) so as to serve a greater good than itself. For Grant, "the idea of limit is unavoidably the idea of God" (PMA 73), because God is the absolute reality underlying the vicissitudes of history, the eternal ground of morality. Grant therefore interprets Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God to be the explicit acknowledgement of the implicit modern reduction of sacred restraints to repressive taboos, of the authoritative voice of conscience to the internalized vestige of an antiquated belief system, of revelations of the beneficent character of the whole to limited and limiting horizons. Grant argues North America's dominant makers of history already "see themselves within no horizon except their own creating of the world" (TE 40); and so, they act as if

God is dead, even if most lack the intellectual rigor and honesty of Nietzsche to openly

proclaim the fact. Grant therefore sees in the Vietnam protest movement a pining for

limits to North America's history-making power which, if thought through, is ultimately

a pining for God.

Joan O' Donovan remarks that, for Grant, "it is the peculiar characteristic of

modern men that their conscious relation to themselves and their world is permeated by

philosophical and scientific ideas, which are received in an undifferentiated and uncritical

way, as objects of belief."[7] In other words, as previously stated, Grant believes even

most atheist moderns are "religious" in the sense of being bound to absolute

presuppositions that give their lives consistency of purpose. Grant is drawn to Nietzsche

because he is the first modern who refuses to mitigate scientific ideas like Darwinism

with the optimistic progressive narrative that man has "at last come of age in the

evolutionary process," "taken his fate into his own hands" and "[freed] himself for

happiness against the old necessities of hunger and disease and overwork, and the

consequent oppressions and repressions" (TE 28). In Grant's reading, Nietzsche spells

out and indeed welcomes the horizon-annihilating implication of non-teleological

science: namely that the realm of human existence, like the natural world, has no intrinsic

purpose but is simply the "product of necessity and chance" (IC 113). Nietzsche

recognizes the finality of becoming to be the ugly truth prettified by the liberal

formulation of time as history, and understands "the profundity of the crisis that such a

recognition must mean" (TH 32): humanity must learn to live with the anxiety and

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[7] Joan O'Donovan, George Grant and the Twilight of Justice (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 111.

responsibility of knowing that history (let alone the evolutionary process) is only as

meaningful as its creative interpreters make it. For Nietzsche, the radical subjectivity of

the history-making spirit necessarily includes the subjectivity to reject the liberal values

of freedom and equality, because it implies they—and all values—are ephemeral

products of a perspective grounded in no more than the prejudices of a particular era.

Grant argues Nietzsche's logical unfolding of the conception of time as history is now

permeating the modern world in a largely uncritical way, even if the philosopher himself

remains a usually unstated presence in popular discourse.

     Like Grant, Nietzsche traces the idea of "*history* with an immanent spirit and a

goal within, so one can entrust oneself to it," to "the old habit of supposing that the goal

must be put up, given, demanded *from outside*—by some *superhuman authority*" (WP

16-17). He bemoans the price westerners pay for "having been Christians for two

thousand years;" that moderns "try to find in events an old-fashioned divine governance"

and look to "the eventual triumph of truth, love, and justice" (WP 20-21). Grant

considers Nietzsche the greatest critic of Hegel and Marx, and of their contemporary

epigones who repeat clichés like "history is on our side" and "you can't stop progress,"

because he reveals and dismisses the "net of inevitable success" (TH 48) girding the

triumphal narrative of history as a post-theistic veil over the abyss of becoming without

reason or end. Far from a beneficent story of progress culminating in the worldwide

realization of the perfectly just regime, Nietzsche persuasively presents history as "a

tremendous experimental laboratory in which a few successes are scored, scattered

throughout all ages, while there are untold failures, and all order, logic, union and

obligingness are lacking" (WP 55). For Grant, the crux of Nietzsche's challenge to the

acolytes of progress is to admit that the modern pretense of necessary qualitative

advancement in thought and morality over the past is itself a relic of the "benighted" past:

belief in the providential coming of the Kingdom of God.

Of course many progressives would say they are driven less by assurance of

historical necessity than by desire for a better world, or even by the fact that the coming

of a better world is *not* necessary. Yet according to Grant, Nietzsche argues on the basis

of usually implicit modern assumptions not merely that "the eventual triumph of truth,

love, and justice" is improbable, but that truth, love, and justice in their conventional (i.e.

post-biblical) formulation have no claim to rational superiority over falsity, hatred and

injustice. Grant says that "till recently, it was assumed that our mastery of the earth

would be used to promote the *values* of freedom, rationality and equality" (TH 40)

[emphasis mine]. Grant traces the entry of the word "values" into North America's

popular lexicon to the sociological school of Max Weber, who in turn was inspired by

Nietzsche, for whom "values were what we creatively willed in the face of . . . chaos by

overcoming the impotence of the will which arises from the recognition of the

consequences of historicism" (TE 39). Accordingly, by calling freedom, rationality and

equality "values" progressives imply they only exist by dint of social convention and

cultural context; which in turn only exist (according to Nietzsche) because great historical

figures shaped meaning out of the indifferent facts of life. According to Grant, the fact-

value distinction essential to both social sciences and pseudo-scientific public rhetoric

must lead thoughtful observers to the conclusion that values are historically subjective, and so lack the authority of unchanging truth.

Grant subscribes to the Heideggerian notion that "language is the house of being," i.e. a society's popular vocabulary expresses and even determines how its members apprehend the world (IC 122-123). He argues the absence of a contemplative tradition in North American life only delays the inevitable reckoning with the specter of Nietzsche hanging over the liberal horizon, a specter already implicitly present in the language of values used by ideologues of all persuasions and accepted "by even the semi-literate" (TH 36). Liberals once relied upon academics to intellectually legitimize and pedagogically preach their ideology, yet academics are now at the forefront of value-relativism (TE 123-125). For Grant, recall, a society's public religion is the product of what its dominant classes believe to be true about the whole and so worth doing. If North America's educated classes are taught that the distinction between good and evil is a contingent value, most will move "beyond good and evil" to the pursuit of what is not thought to be contingent: scientific advancement for the bright and ambitious, "cold, hard cash" for the rest. As the assumptions of the dominant classes spread to the lower echelons of society, liberalism will degenerate from a lived system of meaning to "a superb legitimizing instrument for the technological society" (TE 129). The final result is what I have termed "horizon's end" or the ascendance of nihilism in the public realm.

To summarize Grant's Nietzschean understanding of the fading trajectory of North America's liberal horizon: the conception of time as history comprehensively thought reveals the systems of meaning (public religions or shared horizons) upon which

societies depend for regulative order to be "man-made perspectives by which the charismatic impose their will to power. . . . [expressing] the values which our tortured instincts will to create" (TH 39).   Most moderns who use the word "values"— particularly preachers who speak of religious values—would hardly recognize such a stark analysis of human subjectivity as their own. Yet the unfolding of the language of values thought in contradistinction to facts necessarily leads to the conclusion that what people assign meaning to or "value" is wholly subjective, a lifestyle choice.[8] The modern language of values, unlike the archaic language of good and truth, implies that meaning and morality are humanly imposed and not ingrained in the way things are. The filtering of values language through secularized Protestantism, which Grant sardonically calls the "intellectual movement whereby the Y.M.C.A. and Nietzsche were brought together" (TE 119), results in a liberal horizon without the depth to absorb radical criticism (i.e. Nietzsche's attack on the notion of historical teleology as a relic of belief in divine providence) or the contradictions presented by historical events (i.e. the disjunction between rhetoric and reality in Vietnam).

As a believer in egalitarianism on the basis of the biblical notion that all are equally open to the transcendent good, Grant fears that liberal platitudes increasingly shorn of intellectual legitimacy are not enough to refute the admonition of Nietzsche's literary prophet, Zarathustra: "The masses blink and say: 'We are all equal. – Man is but man, before God – we are all equal.' Before God! But now this God has died!" (TH 43) For Nietzsche and Grant alike, optimistic humanism is a sort of halfway house for

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[8] Otherwise put, because what individuals assign meaning to is the product of historical development and cultural context, values are inter-subjective.

moderns who cannot take biblical religion seriously as a system of meaning, but have not yet come to terms with humanity's "smallness and accidental occurrence in the flux of becoming and passing away" (WP 9). Essentially, Grant redirects Nietzsche's address in the second of his *Unmodern Observations* (to the "overproud European of the nineteenth century") to the overproud North American of the twentieth century:

> True, you climb toward heaven on the sunlight of knowledge, but you also sink downward towards chaos. Your mode of moving, the fact that you climb by what you know, is what dooms you. Earth and soil crumble beneath you; your life has nothing to support it, nothing now but spiderwebs, torn by every fresh lunge of your knowledge (UO 131).

As Grant has it, the liberal "will to change the world was a will to change it through the expansion of knowledge" (TH 25). Yet the expansion of knowledge dooms the liberal formulation of time as history to what in progressive terms might be called the dustbin of history, because "the languages of historicism and values which were brought to North America to be the servants of the most advanced liberalism and pluralism, now turn their corrosive power on our only indigenous roots – the substance of that practical liberalism itself" (TE 39). As a result, Grant thinks in tandem with Nietzsche, the universal and homogenous society that moderns, or at least modern institutions in their inertia, still work toward, will consist of two ignoble classes of citizen : nihilists who dominate the public realm in "the knowledge that our purposes are simply creations of human will and not ingrained in the nature of things," and last men who "inoculate themselves against the abyss of existence" through the vacuous pursuit of novel entertainment and creature comforts (TH 41, 45).

VI. Last Men and Nihilists

As early as his first full-length publication in the late fifties, Grant asks "whether our history-making spirit will degenerate into a rudderless desire for domination on the part of our elites, and aimless pleasure seeking among the masses" (PMA 69). Facetiously referring to the North American motto as "the orgasm at home and napalm abroad" (TE 126), Grant is less equivocal about the answer in the context of the sixties' *kulturkampf.* Borrowing the language of Nietzsche's Zarathustra to categorize the aforementioned history-making elites and pleasure-seeking masses, Grant declares "the last men and the nihilists are everywhere in North America" (TH 46). The history-making nihilists know the liberal horizon is but one perspective among many, but still employ its rhetoric to buttress their claim to absolute freedom from moral limitations. The pleasure-seeking last men still live within the assumptions of the liberal horizon, but only out of indifference to or conscious avoidance of the philosophical and political questioning that would reveal its inconsistencies, and so at the cost of the wisdom and nobility that come from openness to the truths of the whole.

According to Grant, "the central fact about the last men is that they cannot despise themselves" (TH 45) and so strive for perfection because, to the extent that the universal and homogenous society has been realized, they understand themselves to be the apotheosis of historical progress. Yet "only the desire to become perfect," implanted by intuition of the supra-historical divine, "does in fact make us less imperfect" (TH 60). The triumphal narrative of modernity, the popular belief that "the race has little to learn from human existence from before the age of progress" (TE 124), occludes both the

Socratic recognition that the quest for wisdom begins in the acknowledgement of ignorance and reverence for the examples of moral perfection given in the Bible. As Grant quotes Zarathustra, "'Formerly all the world was mad, say the most acute of the last men and blink. They are clever and know everything that has ever happened: so there is no end to their mockery'" (TH 45). Because the goal of history has been realized (except for the working out of administrative details, which they leave to the institutions built for the task and the nihilists who run them), there is nothing for the last men to do but taste the fruits of the scientifically conquered earth and seek out new sources of novelty to stave off boredom. In Grant's lacerating verdict, for the last men, "the flickering messages of the performing arts will fill the interstices" between orgasms (TE 126). The satiated majority of the universal and homogenous state exchange active ethical striving toward a historical end to human affliction, for passive faith in technology to solve any crises of details that might arise to threaten their quality of life.

As for the dominant minority, Grant describes them as scorning the decadent last men, but remaining loyal to the goal of technological homogenization out of their *libido dominandi*. When he writes that "most men, when they face that their purposes are not cosmically sustained, find that a darkness falls upon their wills" (TH 43), he has the nihilists in mind as the exceptions. In the category of nihilists Grant includes the politicians, scientists and businesspeople who "know that all values are relative and man-made," yet are "resolute in their will to mastery" because they "would rather will nothing than have nothing to will" (TH 45-46). They mouth loyalty to the still extant values of universal liberty and equality in public, but show little interest in what Grant argues was

the biblically-derived, primal motivation for the progressive conquest of nature: the relief

of human suffering. "The space programme [for scientists], necessary imperial wars [for

politicians] and the struggle for recognition in the interlocking corporations [for

businesspeople]" provide what purpose the nihilists possess (TE 126). Yet as Nietzsche

defines nihilism, "the aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer" (WP 9). Like Ivan

Turgenev's Bazarov, the first literary nihilist, his spiritual descendants strive ceaselessly

to fill the emptiness of their existence with activity because "no matter what we stuff

[life] with, it's better than having an empty space."[9]

Yet the literary nihilists of the nineteenth century did not live in a fully realized

technological society like modern North America. Grant cites the rocket scientist Werner

von Braun, for whom "the infinite is not the ancient eternal-beyond-time, but the limitless

possibilities of men for action in space and time" (PMA 24), as the consummate example

of the literal danger to the species of history-makers without horizons. When von Braun,

the man who designed the V-2 rocket for Nazi Germany, affirms the creative

opportunities opened up by technology, he is not thinking of the ability to relieve third

world hunger with modern irrigation techniques. Tom Lehrer's satirical verse "'Once the

rockets are up, who cares where they came down? That's not my department,' says

Werner von Braun," pithily captures what for Grant is the darkness at the core of the

conception of time as history, made increasingly apparent as the history-making spirit is

shorn of any residual theological notion of limit. When Grant says that "what seems to

me central to the whole modern experiment is the exaltation of freedom and will outside

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[9] Ivan Turgenev, <u>Fathers and Sons</u>, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (London: Bantam Classic, 1982), 180.

any given structure of justice" (GGP 106), he has the career of von Braun and statements like Robert Oppenheimer's "If an experiment is sweet, one must go ahead with it" (TE 117) in mind. Grant's point is not that scientists lack values; it is that values, conceived of as what our wills arbitrarily assign meaning to in a universe of brute factums, are a flimsy bulwark with which to resist interior and exterior voices demanding the visceral and economic benefits of novelty without end.

Grant comes to argue the religion of progress is destined to produce a society of last men and nihilists because "the building of the universal and homogenous state is not in itself a system of meaning in the sense that the older ones were . . . even in the realization people would still be left with a question, unanswerable in its own terms: how do we know what is worth doing with our freedom?" (TE 138) A minority of idealists may be inspired to give content to their freedom by the "actualizing of freedom for all men" (TE 33), serving as a rearguard against the most callow depravations of nihilists. Yet once the practical goals of progress have been met (and to the extent they already are), what is left for the majority of North Americans, who are neither ambitious enough to dominate others nor idealistic enough (or arguably, naïve enough) to work against the dominators, but to satisfy physical desires and revel in the latest technological wonders? Like the ancients, Grant judges the worth of regimes by the degree of human virtue they produce. He is an apostate from North America's public faith because he believes "human excellence cannot be sustained by those who think of it as sustained simply in the human will, but only by those who have glimpsed that it is sustained by all that is" (TE 133). The modern zeitgeist, in encouraging the autonomy of men and women to

make history, corrodes the supra-historical foundation for human dignity: the affirmation

of an eternal order of categorical limits accessible to all. For Grant, the deadly paradox

of the liberal belief that "our wills alone are able, through doing, to actualize moral good

in the indifferent world" (TH 24) is that "man cannot help but imitate in action his vision

of the nature of things" (TE 72), and so men and women will less and less use their wills

to actualize moral good.

VII. Facing the Limitless

In *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, Grant remarks that "the final judge of all moral

codes is the test of the limitless, and that they can be measured first and foremost by the

degree of their resistance to that test." Grant is critical of the liberal moral code not

because he rejects freedom and equality as laudable goals, but because he does not think

a critical mass of its putative believers can "withstand the temptation of the limitless,"

can deliver a categorical "no" to the ultimately freedom and equality-denying

possibilities technology presents to North American society (PMA 93). Awed by the

massive bureaucratic and corporate framework supporting ever more advanced

technologies, most moderns either gleefully or lackadaisically accept the truth of the

cliché that supports North America's linguistic house of being, "you can't stop progress,"

and define their purpose in life as the "right" to a fair dividend of natural spoils. The test

of the limitless is therefore not just a moral challenge to scientists, politicians and

businesspeople in positions of power. Rather, it is an existential reality the wills of

moderns cognizant of the relativity of horizons must daily face.

Grant argues that for Marxists and even traditional capitalist ideologues, "the burden on the will to make the meaning of the world" is "limited by the belief that in some unspecified future the age of willing will be at an end" (TH 27). Yet the frenetic pace of North America's technological society indicates that the political realization of universality and homogeneity (even if only in embryonic or piecemeal form) is no secular Sabbath. Rather, the burden is placed upon each individual to impose their values in a marketplace of competing egoisms, or become cogs in a corporation or bureaucracy devoted to furthering technology's reach. Most opt for the latter, simply because they are not sufficiently pathological to pay the moral cost of "making a name for themselves" in a public realm which idolizes quantity (in goods, friends, sexual conquests, money, etc.) and is dismissive of the very possibility of quality being rooted in more than willed prejudice.

Yet for North Americans who even half-consciously acknowledge the relativity of values in the slipstream of becoming, a tradition that claims to reflect eternal truth is no longer a viable alternate source of human purpose. The presuppositions of historicism render "timeless wisdom" a non sequitur. As Grant writes, the "enormous corpus of logistic and science of the last centuries" has separated moderns from "those images of perfection that are given us in the Bible and in philosophy" (TH 68). Yet the conception of time as history, born of biblical religion, is still the basis of the contemporary understanding of humanity's place in the universe. As Grant outlines in *Time as History*, "willing was exalted through the stamping proclamations of the creating Will" (God), "time was raised up by redemption in time, and the future by the exaltation of the

eschaton" (TH 29). The modern will is still enfolded in history and oriented to the future as pure potentiality, but without a credible promise of or path to redemption from the vicissitudes of time. The cost of humanity's absolute sovereignty as makers of history is a natural world, and increasingly a social world as well, rendered objectively meaningless by the scientific knowledge necessary to its mastery.

Grant plaintively asks: "How can we escape the fact that the necessary end product of the religion of progress is not hope, but a society of existentialists who know themselves in their own self-consciousness, but know the world entirely as despair?" (TE 58) Besides nihilists and last men, the history-making spirit produces alienated individuals without natural bounds to properly human conduct and revelatory guides to moral perfection; without even the comfort of an intellectually tenable faith in anything more than quantitative progress. The existentialist knowing of the world as despair, of the tension between the scientific truth "that we are accidental inhabitants of a negligible planet in the endless space" (TE 127) and the spiritual yearning still felt among some for participation in a cosmic order, is what Grant means by the liberal formulation of time as history fading into "a more frightening conception of time as history which holds within it that presence of anxiety and willing which came forth from our particular origins" (TH 30). It is why Grant sympathized with sixties radicals, no matter how futile he thought their revolutionary political efforts may have been, for their dissatisfaction with the limitless but purposeless expanse of possibilities the modern world presented to them. If he had any socio-political hope for the future, it was that youth would be driven by dissatisfaction with the increasing vapidity of the religion of progress' legitimization of

technological excess and utilitarian inculcation of socially useful behaviour, to seek

meaning in reverential openness instead of the drive to master the world.

VIII. Conclusion

Grant primarily derives from Nietzsche the central conclusion that informs his

analysis of North America's socio-political landscape in the sixties: "history, [cannot],

any more than God, provide men with a horizon within which to live" (TE 122). The

liberal formulation of time as history gave events meaning by placing them in the

explanatory narrative of progress toward the universal and homogenous state. Yet the

manifest brutalities of the twentieth century could not help but encourage the suspicion

that the historical process is but "sound and fury, signifying nothing." North Americans

were spared implication in the worst European ideological excesses and shielded from

existential doubt by an ingrained practical optimism. But now, "what is being done in

Vietnam is being done by the English-speaking empire and in the name of liberal

democracy" (TE 65), and so not easily attributed to a benighted other. As William

Christian writes, "for Grant the Vietnam War was both symbolic and symptomatic of the

type of moral crisis to which we would increasingly find ourselves called upon to

respond" (TH xviii) as the history-making spirit inexorably frees itself from the body of

laws handed down by the western tradition, and even attenuated secular religion comes to

be seen as a baseless constraint to quantitative advancement by society's rulers. Grant's

fear is that the fading of the liberal horizon will not mean a renewed turn to the natural

order and eternal truths that transcend history, but rather nihilism among the strong-

willed, despair among the idealistic and submission to the self-propelling flow of technological dynamism among the rest.

Grant quotes his "great contemporary" Leo Strauss in *Time as History*: "Oblivion of eternity, or, in other words, estrangement from man's deepest desire, and therewith from the primary issues, is the price which modern man had to pay, from the very beginning, for attempting to be absolutely sovereign, to become the master and owner of nature, to conquer chance" (TH 63). Like Strauss, Grant reads Nietzsche as drawing out the ethical and political implications of the history-making spirit's oblivion of eternity. Grant's originality is to apply Nietzsche's insights to the particular problems of North America's technological society and the *kulturkampf* of the sixties, and to do so with the impassioned anguish of a spiritually implicated participant. Speaking of the dissolution of the religion of progress and the ascendance of nihilism as "the tight circle of the modern fate" (TE 132), Grant often comes across as fatalistic in his writings of the decade. Yet Grant is positively inclined toward the disillusioned young because he senses they are battling modern North America's "estrangement from man's deepest desire," the oblivion of eternity in the black hole of radical historicism. I will next argue that Grant shares with Nietzsche not merely the same diagnosis of "the malady of history" besetting contemporary society, but also the "cure" Nietzsche posits in the essay I referenced earlier in the chapter, "History in the Service and Disservice of Life." This "cure" is the judicious application of the unhistorical and the supra-historical, or "those forces which direct our eyes away from Becoming and toward that which gives existence its eternal and unchanging character, toward art and *religion*" (UO 142). Nietzsche, like

Grant, attests to the need for a public religion or shared horizon to circumscribe

existential possibilities and bind a healthy society together. Where they clash is on the

issue of that horizon's substance.

Chapter 2: Antidotes to History

I. Introduction

Although Grant does not directly cite "History in the Service and Disservice of Life" in *Time as History*, it is Nietzsche's most sustained writing on the problem of history and where he first elaborates the metaphor of horizons. As Werner Dannhauser observes, "Nietzsche assigns special importance to his teaching about horizons by promulgating in this connection the only 'general law' of his essay on history. 'No living being, he asserts, 'can become healthy, strong, and productive except within a horizon'" (UO 77-78). Nietzsche's "general law" seems to run counter to Grant's overall representation of him in *Time as History* as a radical historicist who decries any limitations on human freedom. Instead, Nietzsche's stance here at least superficially resembles Grant's own: that "the conception of time as history is not one in which . . . life can be lived properly" (TH 58). My purpose in this chapter is to establish the extent to which Nietzsche and Grant share a common critical standpoint in response to the crisis presented by the conception of time as history. The common critical standpoint I argue they share consists of the affirmation of A) the necessity of a public religion, or shared horizon, to uphold political and spiritual health in the face of radical historicism's nihilistic consequences and B) the necessity of a supra-historical or mythical basis to that horizon. As I showed in the previous chapter, Grant draws on Nietzsche's critique of modernity's contradictions to prophesy the fading of the liberal horizon. I will now see if Grant is right in claiming to "turn away from Nietzsche and in so turning express [his]

suspicions of the modern project" (TH 58), given Nietzsche's own suspicions of the

modern project and recurrent appeal as "a nursling of past ages" (UO 88) to the "natural

values" embodied in ancient Greek tradition.

In *Time as History*, Grant marshals a suggestive passage from *Human, All Too*

Human to depict Nietzsche as a radical historicist: "What separates us from Kant, as from

Plato and Leibnitz, is that we believe that becoming is the rule even in the spiritual

things. We are historians from top to bottom . . . They all to a man think unhistorically,

as is the age-old custom among philosophers" (TH 36). Yet Grant's representation of

Nietzsche is diminished by beginning from *Human, All Too Human* and not deeply

engaging the earlier works *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Unmodern Observations*. In the

second of his *Unmodern Observations*, the aforementioned "History in the Service and

Disservice of Life," Nietzsche emphasizes that *"the unhistorical and the historical are*

equally necessary to the good health of a man, a people, and a culture" (UO 90). Grant

attributes to Nietzsche the acceptance of the "finality of becoming," or the realization that

"in the historical sense we admit the absence of any permanence in terms of which

change can be measured or limited or defined" (TH 37). Yet Nietzsche, self-proclaimed

historian though he is, does consistently measure, limit and define change by a permanent

standard. While Grant calls the permanent standard by which to measure change God or

the good (as a self-declared Christian Platonist he uses the terms interchangeably), for

Nietzsche it is life itself, or rather *healthy* life apotheosized in the mythical figure of

Dionysus who stands in eternal judgment of the transitory flow of people and events.

Nietzsche's notion of "a Dionysian value standard for existence" (WP 537) is as much a

supra-historical measure as Grant's belief in a Christian-Platonic divine order. What

Nietzsche rejects is "petty people's morality as the measure of things" (WP 117), or the

elevation of what he regards as the anti-natural, reality-falsifying Christian-Platonic value

standard (including in secularized forms) to the position of transcendent, unquestionable

standard.

In *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist*, Peter Berkowitz gives voice to a more

balanced reading of Nietzsche than Grant provides in *Time as History*, writing:

> . . . alongside and in constant tension with Nietzsche's weighty cluster of opinions
> affirming that the world lacks a natural, rational or divine order, that morality is
> artifice and pathology, and that the will is sovereign, exists a rival and equally
> weighty cluster of his opinions asserting that the cosmos has an intelligible
> character, that there is a suprahistorical ethical order, and that knowledge of these
> matters brings health, liberates, and ennobles. It is the unsolved antagonism
> between these sets of fundamental convictions that animates and orders
> Nietzsche's thought.[10]

By drawing on Nietzsche's non-historicist, constructive instead of deconstructive cluster

of opinions, I will argue Nietzsche and Grant share significant common ground as

heterodox yet essentially religious communitarians. While there remains an unbridgeable

gap between Grant and Nietzsche as to whether Christianity is an adequate basis for a

supra-historical ethical order, they both affirm that such an order is necessary for both

individual (i.e. spiritual and psychological) and public (i.e. political and cultural) well-

being. Accordingly, they both criticize historically-premised horizons like the

progressive faith in humanity's inevitable betterment through time as given to nihilism

and unresponsive to human needs. Since, as I outlined in the previous chapter, Grant and

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[10] Peter Berkowitz, Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 26.

Nietzsche both trace modern progressivism to the tenets of biblical religion, their critique

also extends to the west's traditional theistic framework. Nietzsche calls for the

surpassing of Christianity and the revival of the tragic worldview of the Greeks, while

Grant anticipates the purification of Western Christianity's aberrations and a renewed

focus on the religion's supra-historical or mythical essence.

II. The Death of Historical Horizons

According to Grant's gloss of Nietzsche, "the death of the Christian God in

Western civilization is not just the death of one horizon, it is the end of all horizons . . .

because its formidable confidence in truth-seeking . . . brought forth that science and

critical philosophy which have made evident that all horizons are man-made" (TH 40-

41). Yet despite Grant's claim that "for Nietzsche, there is no possibility of returning to

the greatness and glory of pre-rational times, to the age of myth and cult" (TH 46), there

is ample textual evidence to suggest Nietzsche welcomes the death of the Christian God

not because it means the end of all horizons, but because it creates the opportunity to

promulgate a healthier, non-Christian horizon indeed capable of anchoring the greatness

and glory of pre-rational times. Reflecting on *The Birth of Tragedy* in *Ecce Homo*,

Nietzsche says "everything in this essay points to the future: the impending return of the

Greek spirit, the necessity of counter-Alexanders who will retie the Gordian knot of

Greek culture" (EH 731). Nietzsche is not a simple reactionary who wishes to leap back

from modernity to pre-Socratic times as if the intervening centuries and scientific

discoveries (including the discovery of history, or the development of the historical

sense) had never happened. Yet Nietzsche thinks a revival of the Greek spirit (in the

sense in which the Renaissance revived classical learning and art) is possible because he

regards the tragic worldview of Aeschylus and Heraclitus as, unlike Christian dogma,

compatible with the science and critical philosophy of the modern age. He believes this

is so because the Greek spirit is not premised on a now dubious historical narrative of

resurrections and second comings, but on supra-historical "true myths" safe from

scientific obsolescence.

Nietzsche never repeals his early "general law" that horizons are necessary for the

health of an individual and a people. For instance, in *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche

praises Goethe for having "surrounded himself with limited horizons" and so affecting "a

return to nature" (TI 553-554). Nietzsche is critical of Christianity not because it is a

horizon as such, but because it as a *failed* horizon incompatible with the historical sense,

and so given to the production of last men and nihilists (i.e. unhealthy life). The

historical sense does not undermine all horizons (Nietzsche says Goethe "sought help

from history"), only those which confuse the boundaries between myth and history. Here

I assign particular importance to Nietzsche's remark in *The Birth of Tragedy* on how

religions are wont to die out (as stated in the previous chapter, I regard shared horizons

and public or civil religions to be interchangeable terms). According to Nietzsche:

> For this is the way religions are wont to die out: under the stern, intelligent eyes
> of an orthodox dogmatism, the mythical premises of a religion are systematized as
> a sum total of historical events; one begins apprehensively to defend the
> credibility of the myths, while at the same time one opposes any continuation of
> their natural vitality and growth; the feeling for myth perishes, and its place is
> taken by the claim of religion to historical foundations (BT 75).

Grant misreads Nietzsche as hailing the death of all religions, when Nietzsche's specific

animus is toward the Christian and what he regards as post-Christian (i.e. liberalism,

socialism and anarchism) "historical" religions. Nietzsche scorns Christianity and its

epigones because their dogmatic claims to historical foundations are incompatible with

the historical sense and the scientific account of nature, so civilizations which rely on

them as horizons are doomed to nihilism. Contrastingly, Nietzsche is positively inclined

toward the ancient Greek and Indian religions because he regards them as premised on

myths reflective of the actual workings of the universe, the doctrines he regards as true

but deadly: "the doctrines of sovereign Becoming, the fluidity of all concepts, types, and

species, the lack of all cardinal distinctions between man and beast" (UO 135). Thus the

Greeks hallowed "true life as the over-all continuation of life through procreation . . .

[and] the sexual symbol was therefore the venerable symbol par excellence."

Contrastingly, Christianity "threw *filth* on the origin, on the presupposition of life" (TI

561-562) and directed its followers' reverence toward a non-existent afterworld and their

antipathy toward the realities of the world as is.

For Nietzsche, to possess the historical sense is to possess a sound (read

scientific) conception of cause and effect. Christianity, at least as formulated by Paul, is

antithetical to the historical sense because in it "the natural consequences of a deed are no

longer 'natural,' but thought of as caused by the conceptual specters of superstition, by

'God,' by 'spirits,' by 'souls,' as if they were merely 'moral' consequences, as reward,

punishment, hint, means of education . . ." (AC 630). In the modern age, the notion of a

miracle-working god who ceaselessly intervenes in history (and the secularized Hegelian

notion of an Absolute Spirit directing the historical process) is simply unbelievable: "our

time *knows better*" (AC 611). Yet ironically, as in the process Nietzsche outlines in *The*

Birth of Tragedy, Christians are themselves responsible for ossifying what were

originally supra-historical myths into dogmatic claims to historical foundations. In

Nietzsche's account of Christianity's origins, Jesus "rejects any kind of word, formula,

law, faith, dogma." Rather he is an intuitive symbolist who understands "everything

natural, temporal, spatial, historical, only as signs, as occasions for parables" (AC 607).

Just as in Nietzsche description of the supra-historical thinker in "History in the Service

and Disservice of Life," Jesus "illuminates the entire historical experience of peoples and

of individuals from within himself" (UO 93). Instead of, as later interpreters have it, a

one and one time only incarnation, for Jesus "the concept of 'the son of man' is not a

concrete person who belongs in history, something individual and unique, but an 'eternal'

factuality, a psychological symbol redeemed from the concept of time" (AC 607). By

reducing the symbolic concept of Christ from an eternally livable ideal to "a concrete

person who belongs in history," Nietzsche argues, Christians embody him in an

externalized form susceptible to scholarly crucifixion. Philologists and historians are

able to reveal "the madness, the injustice, the blind passion, and, in general, the whole

dismal and earthly horizon" (UO 94) of any purely historical phenomenon, and so

deprive it of its ennobling unhistorical atmosphere of grandeur and mystery. Thus the

ecclesiastics who made Christianity into a historically-grounded narrative instead of the

psychologically-grounded way of life it was originally meant to be are themselves

responsible for rendering it untenable in the modern age.

Unfortunately, Grant does not deeply engage with Nietzsche's interpretation of

the life of Jesus and his theory of the priestly historicizing of the itinerant prophet's

supra-historical symbolism. As Zdravko Planinc notes, "Grant was surprisingly reluctant

to use Nietzsche's work to discuss any historical period except modernity."[11] Yet

although Grant made it a point not to criticize Christianity too openly (CWIV 638), there

is evidence to suggest he largely agrees with Nietzsche reading of Christianity's mythical

essence. Indeed, he might qualify among those Nietzsche calls "the purest and most

authentic disciples of Christianity [who] have always doubted and obstructed, rather than

promoted, its worldly success" (UO 136). When Grant refers to scholars "who have

learnt much of the detailed historical and literary background of the Bible, and yet who

remember less of what was essentially given in those books than Jews or Christians

untutored in such scholarship" (TH 67), he is affirming the distinction Nietzsche makes

between the mythical premises and claim to historical foundations of a religion. Grant

implies that the sum total of historical events does not encompass the truth of Christianity

(or Judaism), and so biblical scholars miss the supra-historical essence of their object of

study when they overlook its symbolic meaning. In a class lecture, Grant states "the

greatest symbol to any of us is another human being's life and, therefore, you have at the

centre of Christianity a symbol or image of the final unity of the world in a concrete life

through which men can come to find that unity for themselves" (GGR 213). Grant's

reading of Jesus' life as a "concrete symbol" of how to live agrees with Nietzsche's, in

form if not in detail. Further, in William Christian's account, Grant "did not believe that

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[11] Zdravko Planinc, "Paradox and Polyphony in Grant's Critique of Modernity" in <u>George Grant & The Future of Canada</u>, ed. Yusuf K. Umar (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1992), 38.

the crucifixion was a limited historical event; other revelations and redemptions might be granted," and so "in India, Christ's name might be Krishna" (TH xxx). Grant would seem to agree with Nietzsche that "among Indians [Jesus] would have availed himself of Sankhya concepts; among the Chinese, of those of Lao-Tse—without having felt any difference" (AC 605). As a disciple of the anti-Judaic Simone Weil and an admirer of Hinduism, Grant may have even preferred it if Jesus *did* appear in India instead of first-century Judaea, availing himself of Sankhya instead of Pharisaic concepts.

For Grant, Christianity is not a comprehensive substitute for natural science, historical study or philosophy but "only a kind of beacon flashing into darkness" (GGP 101). He objects to theologians who "make Christianity depend on the religious history of a particular people" (presumably the ancient Hebrews) and so make it "such a 'historical' religion that its universal teaching about perfection and affliction is lost." Just as Nietzsche says religions die out when they are made dependent on events in history (i.e. the validity of miracles), Grant insists that when "tied to an account of God's dynamic activity in the world," Christianity leads to atheism (GGP 102-103). He speaks against the account of miracles in which "the first cause interferes with the usual network of secondary causes" because "it makes of God an arbitrary and immoral tyrant" who does not intervene when people are being tortured (CWIV 943). Obviously I cannot come to definitive conclusions about the innermost beliefs of Grant, particularly since I am drawing here primarily on published conversations and class lectures. Yet I think I have cited enough material to suggest Grant and Nietzsche share at least elective affinities in their understanding of Christianity's supra-historical essence, and more

broadly the horizon-killing fallacy of interpreting a religion as primarily a register of

historical facts instead of a source of symbolic truths. In other words, both Grant and

Nietzsche affirm the necessity of myth.

II. The Necessity of Myth

Significantly, in Nietzsche's first published use of the metaphor of horizons, he

writes that "without myth every culture loses the healthy natural power of creativity: only

a horizon defined by myths completes and unifies a whole cultural movement" (BT 135).

I surmise that for Nietzsche, the Christian horizon faded because it defined itself not by

the myth-making and exemplary life of Jesus but by the claim to historical foundations of

priestly interpolators—claims now discredited or at least thrown into question for an

increasing multitude by the work of scientists and historians. The post-Christian liberal

horizon is similarly doomed to fade because its optimistic view that progress is both good

and inevitable cannot answer the refutations of science (according to which evolution is a

directionless process and human nature is, to put it lightly, less than perfectible) and the

more viscerally disillusioning impact of depressions, natural disasters and wars.[12] For

Nietzsche and, I argue, for Grant as well, the proper response to the crisis of history's

failure to provide meaning is neither the affirmation of a defiantly atavistic horizon ("a

leap of faith" into a closed community ghettoized from the modern world, resistant to the

philosophical standpoint Grant calls "openness to the whole") or the nihilistic acceptance

of a universe without purpose, but the strengthening of a horizon defined by myths. For

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[12] For instance, Grant attributes his disillusionment with secular liberalism to the atrocities he witnessed in Britain during the Second World War (GGP 62).

Grant, who places himself "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" (GGP 102), this means the embrace of a mythically-inspired, more "Eastern" Christianity. For Nietzsche, this means the transcendence of Christianity and its secular epigones in favour of a renewal of the sort of tragic myths of the ancient Greeks. Here I must be clear that neither Grant nor Nietzsche mean by myths simple falsehoods or "noble lies," but rather multivalent symbols of timeless truth. Fundamentally, a horizon defined by myths relies on a different conception of time than the conception of time as history. In *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, Grant describes the essence of the mythic consciousness in terms I think Nietzsche would largely agree with.

Relying on the work of comparative religions scholar Mircea Eliade, Grant calls mythic consciousness the awareness that human acts have meaning insofar as they repeat or participate in sanctified archetypes. Grant indicates the relevance of mythic consciousness to Christianity by saying in reference to John 14:16 that for archaic man "the way, the truth, and the life had been laid down by the divinities *in illo tempore*." He further emphasizes the contemporary relevance of myth by calling the liturgical repetition of the birth, passion, death and resurrection of Christ a carry over of this ancient conception of temporality. The self-declared Christian Platonist asserts that mythic consciousness "has its most luminous justification in the philosophy of Plato, in which time is considered as the moving image of an unmoving eternity and in which the passing events of life only have meaning as they lead men to the unchanging reality of God" (PMA 18). His statement is especially relevant to the present discussion because Grant

considers Nietzsche (along with Heidegger, although that takes us too far afield) the anti-Platonist par excellence. Yet Nietzsche's rhetorical enmity toward Plato does not mean he is uniformly critical of mythic consciousness as Grant so describes it. Nietzsche praises pagan cults revolving around the symbolic interpretation of natural cycles (WP 95) and, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, criticizes what he calls "Socratism" (meaning the theoretical mindset) for *destroying* myth.

In Nietzsche's account, Socratism "seeks to dissolve myth" by substituting "for a metaphysical comfort an earthly consonance," optimistically believing "that it can correct the world by knowledge, guide life by science, and actually confine the individual within a limited sphere of solvable problems." From the above description, what Nietzsche calls Socratism is similar to what Grant describes as the commonly-held modern belief in the necessity and goodness of the universal and homogenous state, or the fully realized technological society (although Grant does not implicate Socrates in its realization). Nietzsche even foreshadows Grant's Heideggerian critique of technology by referring to "the god of machines and crucibles, that is, the power of the spirits of nature recognized and employed in the service of a higher egoism" as the theoretical man's myth-displacing idol (BT 109). Although they are iconoclasts in service of different gods (Christ and Dionysus), Grant and Nietzsche mirror each other in rhetorically hammering the *deus ex machina* of optimistic humanism. While differing in their understanding of its theoretical origin, both doubt the viability and desirability of the progressive promise of "earthly consonance" (what Grant characterizes in *Philosophy in the Mass Age* as the Kingdom of

Man) and affirm instead the necessity of supra-historical myths to order society and the

individual.

By calling myths supra-historical, I am harkening again to "History in the Service

and Disservice of Life," in which Nietzsche calls the unhistorical and the supra-historical

"natural antidotes to the suffocation of life by history, by the historical sickness." Here

he defines the unhistorical as "man's skill and power to *forget*, his ability to seclude

himself within a limited *horizon*." He defines the supra-historical as "those forces which

direct our eyes away from Becoming and toward that which gives existence its eternal

and unchanging character, toward art and *religion*" (UO 142-143). Nietzsche means by

supra-historical art and religion the mythical kinds which convey the truth "that past and

present are one and the same, that they are archetypically equivalent in all their diversity,

and, like omnipresent, imperishable types, are motionless forms of unchanging value and

eternally equal meaning" (UO 93). Nietzsche argues life "collapses, becoming

discouraged and feeble, when a conceptual upheaval provoked by science deprives man

of the basis of all his security and peace [his unhistorical horizon], his faith in the

enduring and eternal [the supra-historical focus of that horizon]" (UO 143). Grant is

right in thinking Nietzsche believes horizons or religious systems to be humanly made.

Yet for Nietzsche, horizons defined by tragic *myths* are not entirely "human, all-too-

human." Rather they are necessarily limited perspectives (simply because we as a

species have finite vision and a finite ability to understand what we see) on an

unchanging, supra-historical whole, most adequately expressed in Greek tragedy and

embodied in the god Dionysus.

III. Supra-Historical Dionysus

Grant rightly says Nietzsche is scornful of "comforting illusions" like the

typically modern belief in "the net of inevitable progress" (TH 48). Yet according *The*

Birth of Tragedy, the Greeks managed to attain metaphysical comfort *without* illusion; by

opening themselves to tragic myths that reflected instead of falsified the inner workings

of the cosmos. Using the language of the supra-historical, Nietzsche describes the

chorus of satyrs in Greek tragedy as "natural beings who live ineradicably, as it were,

behind all civilizations and remain eternally the same, despite the changes of generations

and of the history of nations . . . in a religiously acknowledged reality under the sanction

of myth and cult" (BT 58-59). The satyr chorus conveys the essence of the tragic

worldview, or what Nietzsche calls Dionysian wisdom: "the fundamental knowledge of

the oneness of everything existent, the conception of individuation as the primal cause of

evil, and of art as the joyous hope that the spell of individuation may be broken in augury

of a restored oneness" (BT 74). Nietzsche envisions the god Dionysus as the immortal

constant behind the transitory masks of tragic heroes like Oedipus and Prometheus, the

note of universality to their particularity. In contrast to "comforting illusions" like belief

in progress and divine providence, Dionysian wisdom does not contradict, but

spiritualizes scientific and historical truth by "looking boldly into the terrible

destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature" and

transfiguring it into sublime and comic art (BT 59-60). At the risk of over-extending

Nietzsche's metaphors, if unhistorical horizons are the purview of Apollo, god of just

boundaries and limitations, Dionysian festivals and mysteries are their necessary supra-

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historical correlate. They are necessary because participation in the rites of tragic myth reconciles revelers with nature and each other by placing them in the awing presence of "the mysterious primordial unity" (BT 37) at the heart of existence. To use Nietzsche's later language, Dionysian rite frees us from the curse of *ressentiment*, of seeking unlimited revenge against the terrors of existence, without falsifying the indeed terrifying character of existence.[13]

  In a later note, Nietzsche writes, "One only needs to pronounce the word 'Dionysus' in the presence of the best latter-day names and things, in the presence of Goethe perhaps, or Beethoven, or Shakespeare, or Raphael—at once we feel that our best things and moments have been *judged*. Dionysus is a *judge*— Have I been understood?" (WP 541) In essential ways, Dionysus functions for Nietzsche as Christ functions for Grant: as an enigmatic image of unparalleled nobility against which to measure the potentially overwhelming spectacle of faces and events passing through the flux of time. Grant calls Nietzsche an atheist, but he seems to have thought of himself as a *pan*theist instead, baptizing "the highest of all faiths . . . the *faith* that only the particular is loathsome, and that all is redeemed and affirmed in the whole . . . with the name of Dionysus" (TI 554) and declaring himself "the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysus" (BGE 425). According to Nietzsche, "that we find no God—either in history or in nature or behind nature—is not what differentiates *us*, but that we experience what has been revered as God, not as 'godlike' but as miserable, as absurd, as harmful, not merely as an error but as a *crime against life*" (AC 627). In other words, Nietzsche seeks

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[13] Cf. Paul Gauguin, "Life being what it is, one dreams of revenge."

not the destruction but the revaluation of divinity. He wishes to serve a god who does not

demonize nature (including human nature, sensuality, the body, the instincts, the

passions), but who is instead its apotheosis. Nietzsche finds the symbolic figure he is

looking for in Dionysus; or, more mystically put, Dionysus finds him. As I said

regarding Grant, I cannot claim to know Nietzsche's innermost beliefs. Yet certainly he

claims to experience what can only be described as mystical experiences, "timeless

moments that fall into one's life as if from the moon, when one no longer has any idea

how old one is or how young one will yet be" (WP 534). If, as Grant has it, "in

mysticism men have sought to find their true selves by being united with that which is

beyond change" (PMA 20) Nietzsche duly qualifies as a mystical thinker.

IV. Natural Values

As I elaborated in the previous chapter, central to Nietzsche's significance for

Grant is his propagation of the typically modern language of values. He argues Nietzsche

"wants a new language to express how we decide what we should do, and therefore he

substitutes for the language of good what we are fitted for, the language of values" (IC

121). In Grant's account, when thought through the concept of natural values is a

contradiction in terms. Nietzsche "does not speak of the race of men as if they had a

nature that is unchanging through the course of history" (TH 50), but uses the word

"values" to refer to the subjective meanings humans impose on an objectively indifferent

universe. And yet, in *The Antichrist* Nietzsche writes:

> For one must understand this: every natural custom, every natural institution
> (state, judicial order, marriage, care of the sick and the poor), every demand

inspired by the instinct of life—in short, everything that contains its value *in itself* is made altogether valueless, anti-*valuable* by the parasitism of the priest (or "the moral world order"): now it requires a sanction after the event—a *value-conferring* power is needed to negate what is natural in it and to create a value by so doing (AC 597).

In contradiction to Grant's standard representation of him, Nietzsche here affirms the existence of natural, non-humanly derived values: and lists "care for the sick and the poor" among them! Nietzsche castigates priests, or proponents of the falsifying view that there is a moral world order, for denying value to what is valuable in itself and reassigning human esteem to the realm of the supernatural. Thus from his own perspective, Nietzsche's project of the "revaluation of all values" is not revolutionary, but conservative in the sense of wishing to restore the proper harmony between humanity and nature disturbed by the priestly revaluators who projected their own resentments onto the world.

According to Grant, historicism implies "the presuppositions [of different societies] are absolute because thought at any historical moment is always within them and no man can rise above them to judge them" (TH 5). Yet Nietzsche consistently deigns to do just that. Per Grant's comment that "philosophy stands or falls by its claim to transcend history, but that transcending can only be authentic when it has passed through the forge of historical discipline" (PMA xxx), Nietzsche criticizes Christian or priestly-ascetic values as a philosopher who affirms the existence of a supra-historical standard by which those values can be measured. Grant's misunderstanding of Nietzsche as a consummate relativist may have something to do with confusion in terminology. As Peter Berkowitz writes, Nietzsche tends to use "morality" as a synonym for "bad

moralities," and criticizes them "in the name of a higher morality or ethic, a particular

vision of the good life."[14] Nietzsche scorns the language of good and evil not because he

thinks there are no natural purposes humans are fitted for, but because he thinks priestly

types have upheld such strict dichotomies to fortify their own *un*natural designs.

Nietzsche's concept of "natural values" equally implies there are purposes human beings

are naturally fitted for and purposes we are not naturally fitted for. What Nietzsche

objects to is the disingenuous confusion of natural law with theological law, as he

believes they are in many cases (if not most) diametrically opposed.[15] His critical stance

is of the same spirit as Oscar Wilde's quip that Wordsworth "found in stones the sermons

he had already hidden there."

As an example of Nietzsche's recurrent appeal to natural standards, in *Beyond*

Good and Evil he restates the general law of "History in the Service and Disservice of

Life" by referring to "the need for limited horizons . . . *the narrowing of our perspective*"

as "the moral imperative of nature" (BGE 292). Nietzsche does not consider all horizons

to be equally false, but rather directs his ire toward those who possess the "theologians'

instinct" and so view "all things in a distorted and dishonest [i.e. unnatural] perspective"

(AC 575). Of Christianity, Nietzsche writes "this *world of pure fiction* is vastly inferior

to the world of dreams insofar as the latter *mirrors* reality, whereas the former, falsifies,

devalues and negate reality" (AC 582). I read Nietzsche's opposition between the world

of pure fiction and the world of dreams to be a restatement of the distinction in *The Birth*

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[14] Berkowitz, 48.
[15] A contemporary example of this phenomenon is the common theological argument that homosexuality is unnatural, despite ample evidence of even monogamous same-sex relations among animals.

of Tragedy between the mythical premises and claim to historical foundations of a religion. For Nietzsche, tragic myths *mirror* reality because the truths they convey are in agreement with sensory and historical experience. The danger of hubris and the limits of knowledge, not dogmatic insistence on the existence of a Sphinx, are essential to the myth of Oedipus. A horizon defined by myths is but one perspective among many and so not *exclusively* true, yet if it relates Dionysian wisdom and affirms "natural values" it is a perspective revealing of the truth of eternal being. Christianity, on the other hand, "does not have contact with reality at any point" and so "crumbles as soon as reality is conceded its rights at even a single point" (AC 627). It is, to use a twentieth-century metaphor, a paper tiger impotently snarling at science, history and human nature itself.

Nietzsche's critique of Christianity is similar in important respects to Grant's critique of *Western* Christianity. Grant bemoans the "procrustean, triumphalist Western vision of Christianity, which led Western civilization out into the world thinking it could do anything it chose to other civilizations" (IC 119). Nietzsche regards as Christian "hatred of all who think different; the will to persecute" (AC 589), because of Christian insistence on dogmatic, and so particular, instead of mythical, and so universal, truth. Grant bemoans "the torture of the body in North American Protestantism" (GGP 104). Nietzsche regards as classically Christian the rejection of the body, valuable in itself, in favour of the valuation of a non-existent, otherworldly soul. Ultimately, regardless of religious affiliation or lack thereof, Nietzsche and Grant seem to share a belief in the same "natural institutions": the state, judicial order, marriage, care of the sick and the poor. To put it simply, and given Grant's statement that "the truth of conservatism is the

truth of order and limit, both in social and personal life" (PMA 100), they share a

common conservatism. The source of much of their disagreement is Nietzsche's

insistence that Christianity is *not* a conservative religion but is instead responsible for the

revolutionary devaluation of natural values, and indeed the secular revolutionary

movements of modernity. So as to elaborate Nietzsche's broadly conservative ethos, I

will focus on his understanding of the relation of religion to one "natural institution" in

particular: the state.

V. Dionysian Civil Religion

Grant and Nietzsche both hold to the argument that a public or civil religion is

necessary to the well-being of the state and, since man is a political animal, the

individual. I outlined Grant's understanding of the necessity of public religion in the

previous chapter. As for Nietzsche, Julian Young persuasively argues that from *The*

Birth of Tragedy forward, despite his disillusionment with the German revival promised

by Wagner, "Nietzsche's fundamental concern, his highest value, lies with the flourishing

of community, and to that end he believes that this can happen only through the

flourishing of communal religion." Young does not dismiss Nietzsche's often hyper-

individualistic rhetoric out of hand, but instead argues that for Nietzsche "the flourishing

of individuals *presupposes* the flourishing of community. . . . that individuals only truly

flourish, *when their own highest commitment is to the community as a whole*, when, that

is, their highest personal goal is the communal good"[16] Similarly, Ronald Beiner states,

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[16] Julian Young, Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.

in contradistinction to Grant's representation, that "the Nietzschean emphasis on radical

willing has the effect not of opening horizons so that we may will what we choose, but . .

. of closing horizons, so that whole societies regain the sense of cultural purpose that

modernity inexorably disrupts."[17] I will look more closely at Nietzsche's exaltation of

the will, and Grant's critique of the will, in the next chapter. For now, I wish to simply

emphasize the communitarian tenor evident in Nietzsche's thought and commented upon

by a number of scholars.

Nietzsche's remark in *The Birth of Tragedy* that "even the state knows no more

powerful unwritten laws than the mythical foundation that guarantees its connection with

religion and its growth from mythical notions" (BT 135) and his praise of Dionysian

festivals for making each participant feel "not only united, reconciled, and fused with his

neighbor, but as one with him" (BT 37), contribute to a rough sketch of his ideal civil

religion: one premised on tragic myths reflective of Dionysian wisdom. Cyclical

festivals oriented to eternity filled a political purpose for the Greeks in that they

"stimulated, purified, and discharged the whole life of the people" (BT 125), extirpating

what Grant aptly calls "the will to revenge against others, against ourselves, against the

very condition of time itself" (TH 50) resultant of the pressures of a purely historical

existence. In Nietzsche's view, a secular religion or ideology will not suffice to meet the

needs of a healthy community, since "whoever is rich wants to give of his riches; a proud

people needs a god: it wants to *sacrifice*" (AC 582). "Real" or not (for Nietzsche

Dionysus is real at the least in the sense of being a "true myth"), properly conceived gods

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[17] Beiner, 113.

fulfill a necessary civic function as embodiments of the community's unifying ethos and

transcendent repositories of their *ressentiment*-free gratitude and reverence toward the

natural order of things.

Tellingly of his communitarian inclinations, Nietzsche criticizes Christianity for

its malign political or even anti-political effects. Against the egoistic belief in personal

immortality, he asks, "Why [then] communal sense, why any further gratitude for descent

and ancestors, why cooperate, trust, promote, and envisage any public welfare?" (AC

618) He calls the doctrine of equal rights "the calamity which crept out of Christianity

into politics" (AC 619) and so destroyed "the feeling of distance between man and man"

necessary for a natural, that is to say hierarchical, society. Again turning to support from

nature, Nietzsche says "the order of castes, the supreme, the dominant law, is merely the

sanction of a *natural order*, a natural lawfulness of the first rank, over which no

arbitrariness, no 'modern idea' [i.e. the secularized but originally Judeo-Christian

doctrine of equal rights] has any power" (AC 644-645). According to Nietzsche's

polemical exercise in comparative religion, while the Hindu law of Manu is a religious

legislation "whose aim it was to 'eternalize' the highest condition of life's *prospering*, a

great organization of society—Christianity found its mission in putting an end to

precisely such an organization *because life prospered in it*" (AC 647). Nietzsche's

salutary account of Dionysian festivals unifying the ancient Greek *polis* in primordial

oneness would seem to contradict his praise of a regimented, caste-based society. Yet

Nietzsche extols the ancient Greeks precisely because he believes their regulated bouts of

supra-historical Dionysian transcendence were balanced with worldly concern for a

horizon of just social and political boundaries. Their world-historical greatness disproves

Grant's paraphrase of Nietzsche that "any belief that time cannot be identified with

history comes from the broken instincts of men who cannot live greatly in history" (TH

52). He thinks the Greeks both identified time with something greater than history *and*

lived greatly in history, and did so on the basis of a social order balancing a Dionysian

sense of ultimate interdependence and unity with an Apollonian sense of everything in its

right place.

In Nietzsche's idealized portrait, the Greeks, "in spite of the extraordinary

strength of their Dionysian and political instincts," did not exhaust themselves "either in

ecstatic brooding [which Nietzsche attributes to India] or in a consuming chase after

worldly power and worldly honor [which Nietzsche attributes to Rome]," but rather

attained "that splendid mixture which resembles a noble wine in making one feel fiery

and contemplative at the same time" (BT 125). If Dionysus is Nietzsche's supra-

historical measure of spiritual health, the ancient Greeks, as the nearest collective

incarnation of the properly harnessed Dionysian spirit, provide an intra-historical

measure for the political and cultural health of a people. If, in his view, history is "a

tremendous experimental laboratory in which a few successes are scored, scattered

throughout all ages, while there are untold failures" (WP 55), Greek civilization at its pre-

Socratic height is the consummate model of success and Greek tragedy both source and

evidence of its greatness. By their standard, Nietzsche thinks his own people (the

Germans) and modern westerners in general fall far short. His devastating cultural

critique proceeds, and cannot help but proceed, from an art of qualitative comparison utterly opposed to the ethical relativism of radical historicism.

VI. Conclusion

Nietzsche seems to speaking not only of the decline of the ancient Greeks but of the decline of the modern west when he writes:

> And any people—just as, incidentally, also any individual—is worth only as much as it is able to press upon its experiences the stamp of the eternal; for thus it is, as it were, desecularized and shows its unconscious inward convictions of the relativity of time and of the true, that is metaphysical significance of life. The opposite of this happens when a people begins to comprehend itself historically and to smash the mythical works that surround it. At that point we generally find a decisive secularization, a break with the unconscious metaphysics of its previous existence, together with all its ethical consequences (BT 137).

Both Nietzsche and Grant bemoan the ethical consequences of radical historicism, or the nihilism consequent of what I have been calling horizon's end. Yet neither thinker can be dismissed as a purely negative, anti-modern reactionary. Nietzsche takes as a given, indeed often praises the historical sense and the scientific spirit; while even the usually more circumspect Grant insists "the conception of time as history is not to be discarded as if it had never been" (TH 68). What Grant and Nietzsche seek is an accommodation between the accomplishments of modernity and the pre-modern sense of reverence and obedience toward a natural order (even as they conceive that natural order differently). They work, in Nietzsche's language, from the understanding that *"the unhistorical and the historical are equally necessary to the good health of a man, a people, and a culture"* (UO 90). Without being optimistic about its immediate realization or programmatic in its outline, Nietzsche and Grant agree that an unhistorical shared horizon premised on supra-

historical myths is the antidote required to alleviate the spiritual malady (whether labeled radical historicism, nihilism, moral relativism or mass alienation) besetting modernity. Even at their most critical or deconstructive, they affirm at least a minimum of positive commitment toward the rehabilitation of mythic consciousness to complement the historical sense.

In a bid to balance what I argued is Grant's one-sided representation of Nietzsche in *Time as History*, I have largely focused on their similarities in outlook in this chapter while minimizing what differences exist. Yet of course significant differences do exist. From Nietzsche's perspective, Grant is on the wrong side of the religious and historical, even existential struggle he characterizes as "Dionysus versus the 'Crucified'" (WP 542). Meanwhile, Grant follows his exegesis of Nietzsche's thought in *Time as History* by unambiguously refusing Nietzsche's prescriptive conclusions on intellectual and fundamentally moral grounds. In the next chapter I will look more closely at Grant's reasons for refusing Nietzsche's conclusions (or Grant's perception of Nietzsche's conclusions), and measure their validity when confronted with the alternate picture I have presented in this chapter. To do so, I will draw on Grant's later articles and lectures, in which he deepens and in some cases adjusts the representation of Nietzsche given in *Time as History*.

Chapter 3: Grant Contra Nietzsche

I. Introduction

In 1974-5 class lectures, Grant adjusts the representation of Nietzsche given in *Time as History*. Grant remarks that he now sees Nietzsche "not simply as the thinker who catches the very swell of the ocean of modernity, but also as somebody who is [not] content to swim with that current—but find other currents than that." Thus Nietzsche believes "theistic man produced higher beings than modern atheism," culture is not merely a product of history but "idealized nature," and humanity's project of free creation "must have its roots in nature." Grant concludes that "the great question with which Nietzsche struggled" was "how do you find your way back to nature as the standard for man—without denying all the difficulties which the moderns have raised against having nature as the standard" (CWIV 973-5). In sum, Grant acknowledges Nietzsche's use (or struggle to define) a supra-historical standard, nuanced valuation of religion and affirmation of non-arbitrary horizons (culture as idealized nature and not simply the ossified dictates of the powerful). Yet these important caveats do not alter Grant's ultimate refusal of Nietzsche's conclusions. In his last published writing on Nietzsche, "Nietzsche and the Ancients" in *Technology and Justice* (1986), Grant goes so far as to say "if I were not afraid of being taken as an innocent dogmatist, I would have written that one should teach Nietzsche with the understanding that he is a teacher of evil" (CWIV 648). In this chapter I will elaborate and comment upon Grant's refusal of Nietzsche's notion of *amor fati*, his account of justice, language of willing and politics of

global mastery. I will mark out areas of possible conciliation and misinterpretation, and delineate the points at which Grant and Nietzsche ineluctably part ways.

II. The Love of Fate

Before formulating his final refusal of Nietzsche in *Time as History*, Grant affirms the language they share. For both, *amor fati*, or "love of [even] the injustices and alienations and exploitations of time," is the height for human beings. Yet according to Grant, Nietzsche's love of fate does not imply the receptivity to transcendence characteristic of the western tradition at its best, but "is at one with his call to dynamic willing . . . [it is] the guarantee that dynamic willing shall be carried on by lovers of the earth, and not those twisted by hatred and hysteria against existing" (TH 59). Nietzsche's rhetoric is modern because it calls for the making of history: for supermen who can exercise their wills (unlike the last men), free of resentment and in pursuit of noble goals (unlike the nihilists) with knowledge of the permeability of horizons (unlike the ancients). Grant's response is to question "how anybody could love fate, unless within the details of our fates there could appear, however rarely, intimations . . . of perfection (call it if you will God) in which our desires for good find their rest and their fulfillment." I argued in the previous chapter that, for Nietzsche, tragic myths do intimate a particular kind of perfection to great civilizations and souls. Amidst the pressures of history, they provide metaphysical comfort by transfiguring the indestructible fecundity of life into aesthetic sublimity. Yet whether Nietzsche's revaluation of *amor fati* is the revival of an older pre-Socratic tradition or a modern innovation, Grant is right to distinguish the

theistic notion of transcendent being (or a being) underwriting fate from Nietzsche's call

for supermen who will affirm "the creating and destroying powers of man and the rest of

nature" (TH 60) without rancour or falsification.

Although Nietzsche accepts the existence of a natural order, it is a natural order

which from most people's perspectives is unjust: history is aimless, there are no rewards

and punishments in the afterworld, undeserved things happen to undeserving people.

Nietzsche's ideal is for man to reach an elevated perspective from which the natural order

does appear just, indeed lovable. Grant's countervailing claim is that Nietzsche's tragic

picture of the cosmos, or the scientific picture of the cosmos his thought unfolds, is

intrinsically unlovable and unjust. As Planinc notes, Grant regards the voice of Nietzsche

as "the antithesis of the openness toward and love of the eternal good expressed in the

voice of Weil."[18] Like Weil, Grant believes a truly realistic appraisal of the cosmos must

accept the absence of God made manifest in worldly affliction (symbolized by the cross),

but also the "secret presence" of God made visible through love (symbolized by Jesus'

forgiveness of his torturers on the cross).[19] Grant argues the tragic worldview Nietzsche

extols can only lead to madness, not the health and equanimity he wishes to promote.[20]

For Grant, only saints graced with the knowledge that "the destruction of good serves the

supernatural end" (LN 5) can be reconciled with the misery of the world (PMA 92-93).

The rest of us, for the sake of sanity and because it is our due, must remain open to the

good to catch an occasional glimpse of what the saints continually see.

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[18] Planinc, 38-39.
[19] Harris Athanasiadis George Grant and the Theology of the Cross (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 88-93.
[20] The cautionary example of Nietzsche's own madness undoubtedly stands in the background here.

As Grant observes, for Nietzsche "belief in permanence in the world around us arises from the different rhythms of change – for example, in roses, in birds, in stones" (TH 37). Nietzsche's notion of *amor fati* involves identifying ourselves with the natural rhythms of change—including the conventionally maligned "evils" of war, exploitation, death and decay—and so ultimately becoming one with the eternal rhythm of life itself. For this reason the quintessential Dionysian art is music, which must include dissonance to be beautiful. By contrast, Grant's idea of perfection is not Dionysian rhythm, but a divine stillness or reverential silence. His notion of *amor fati* does not imply identification with the sum total of becoming, but participation in the divine order which in a mysterious way both includes and transcends becoming. Grant believes along with Plato that time is "the moving image of an unmoving eternity" and so "passing events only have meaning as they lead men to the unchanging reality of God" (PMA 19). Grant is unable to see a god worth worshipping in Nietzsche's vision of Dionysus endlessly torn apart and born again. Dionysus, rather, is something of a demiurge blocking out all but occasional shafts of light from the good beyond time.

Despite Grant's reputation for pessimism, his notion of *amor fati* makes clear he is distinct from Nietzsche by virtue of his overarching—that is, in terms of the metaphysical "big picture," not socio-political details (including the fate of western civilization!)—optimism. He remarks in conversation, "optimism means that it's the best of worlds and pessimism means that it's the worst . . . if you believe in God, you must be an optimist" (IC 75). Ultimately, if obliquely, Grant accepts the theodicy of providence, or the promise of a redemptive end to history. He considers himself unorthodox, or at

least outside the mainstream of liberal Protestantism, in that he regards belief in the scrutability of providence as blasphemy (IC 83). Grant does not reject the idea that good can come out of bad, but rather "the idea that good can come out of bad in a way that we can understand" (GGP 64). He counsels reverence before the mystery of the cosmos and trust in its final redemption, signs of which are visible if not wholly intelligible to loving eyes; while characterizing modern and even pre-modern efforts (such as Augustine's theology of history) to trace the unveiling of the mystery and steer the unfolding of redemption through time as Promethean hubris.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, rejects the doctrine of providence *in toto* as a falsification of reality and symptom of hatred toward life. The two thinkers are at one in their antipathy toward the progressive identification of specific events with God's will or the cunning of history, which Nietzsche aptly calls "idolatry of the fact" (UO 127). Yet Grant's predominantly apophatic theology, cognizant of the absence of God, is still built on the underlying affirmation that "beyond time and space there is order" (IC 49), intimations of which are discernible, through a mirror darkly, in history. For Nietzsche, there is an order to space and time which men may glimpse through the medium of tragic myths, an order to which one may attune oneself and so achieve spiritual health, but nothing beyond. He mocks the prevaricators (in his likely estimation including Grant and Weil) who "consider 'beautiful sentiments' adequate arguments, regard a heaving bosom as the bellows of the deity, and conviction a *criterion* of truth" (AC 578). Grant beautifully argues "human beings are not beyond good and evil, and that the desire for good is a broken hope without perfection, because only the desire to become perfect does

in fact make us less perfect" (TH 60), but can communicate no more than what Nietzsche

calls "beautiful sentiments" to support the belief that the perfection of the transcendent

good is anything more than a regulative ideal. As Grant himself admits, he is capable of

refusing but not refuting Nietzsche (TH 65). In Laurence Lampert's words, Grant's point

is that "the thinness and deficiency of the modern must become apparent from within,

and this is so even in its noblest form, in Nietzsche."[21] The gap between their

assessments of the character of the cosmos narrows at certain junctures, if for no other

reason than because Nietzsche believes becoming can approximate the character of being,

but is finally unbridgeable. The potential consequences of their dueling cosmologies are

made apparent in their conflicting accounts of justice.

III. The Quality of Justice

In "Nietzsche and the Ancients," Grant fleshes out his refusal of Nietzsche by

centering in on his account of justice, which he claims is "at the very core of what

[Nietzsche] is saying." Grant quotes two (supposedly) representative passages from

Nietzsche's notebooks to enucleate this core. The first: "Justice as function of a power

with all encircling vision, which sees beyond the little perspectives of good and evil, and

so has wider advantage, having the aim of maintaining something which is more than this

or that person." The second: "Justice as the building, rejecting, annihilating way of

thought which proceeds from the appraisement of value: highest representative of life

itself." Grant interprets both selections as giving "an account of justice as the human

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[21] Laurence Lampert, "The Uses of Philosophy in George Grant" in George Grant in Process, ed. Larry
Schmidt (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1978), 189.

creating of quality of life" prescient of modern eugenics, social engineering and even genocide. Nietzsche's is a conception of justice in which "what gives meaning in the face of historicism is that willed potentiality is higher than any actuality," "there are other human beings to whom nothing is due—other than extermination," and which, ominously, "more and more unveils itself in the technological West" (CWIV 649-650). For Grant, Nietzsche's conception of justice is emblematic of the terrifying potentiality of the history-making spirit freed from the traditional moral limits given in theology and classical philosophy. It is a signpost of the catastrophic (from the perspective of tradition) direction we as technologically-bound and unconsciously Nietzschean North Americans are headed.

Clearly, Grant's use of two unpublished fragments to convey Nietzsche's account of justice is open to critique.[22] Published passages he could have cited, i.e. "when the exceptional human being treats the mediocre more tenderly than himself and his peers, that is not mere politeness of heart—it is simply his *duty*" (AC 647) or "the noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not, from pity, but prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power" (BGE 395), indicate that a sense of noblesse oblige accompanies Nietzsche's anti-egalitarianism. Additionally, the passages Grant cites are more ambiguous than he lets on. To see beyond "the little perspectives of good and evil" may be interpreted as a rejection not of ethical standards as such but of the sort of Manichean dualism which often *causes* evil (as Grant would define it). The title *Beyond*

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[22] Significantly, Heidegger cites the same passages. Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead,'" in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 90-91.

Good and Evil itself indicates an attempt to move past "talk of opposites where there are only degrees and many subtleties of gradation" (BGE 225). Nietzsche attributes the Christian "hatred of all who think different; the will to persecute" (AC 589) to such falsifying dichotomization. Similarly, "having the aim of maintaining something which is more than this or that person" may be interpreted not as a proto-totalitarian vision but as a critique of modern egoism in line with his comment in *Twilight of the Idols* that "we [moderns] have lost all the instincts out of which institutions grow . . . the will to tradition, to authority, to responsibility for centuries to come, to the solidarity of chains of generations, forward and backward *ad infinitum*" (TI 543). And as I remarked in the previous chapter, Nietzsche's list of natural institutions in *The Antichrist*—"state, judicial order, marriage, care of the sick and the poor" (AC 597)—seems largely in line with Grant's own conservative disposition.

What then of the test of the limitless? Recall that for Grant, "the final judge of all moral codes is the test of the limitless, and that they can be measured first and foremost by the degree of their resistance to that test" (PMA 93). Otherwise put, for Grant "any philosophy that cannot condemn certain actions as categorically wrong is in my opinion iniquitous (and I choose the adjective wisely), whatever else it may say about anything" (PMA 85). Arguably, Nietzsche's philosophy cannot, and certainly does not aim to, condemn certain actions as categorically wrong for any person in any time or place. Rather, he calls "the taste for the unconditional," or the sort of absolute prohibitions Grant seeks to define, "the worst of tastes" (BGE 233). According to Nietzsche, different moral codes are appropriate for different human beings. So, for instance, in a person

"who is called and made to command, self-denial and modest self-effacement would not

be a virtue but the waste of a virtue" (BGE 339). And as Laurence Lampert points out,

he believes in direct contrast to Grant that preservation of the past is only essential to men

or even races of an antiquarian nature.[23] In Nietzsche's view, unconditional moral

commandments and prohibitions, "thou shall" and "thou shall not," are unnatural insofar

as what spurs the healthy growth of one person's nature may retard another's spiritual

development.[24]

Nietzsche's political support for an aristocratic society follows from his

assessment of the gaps in needs and desires between classes of people. For him, there

will always (again, belying Grant's representation of Nietzsche as a radical historicist) be

a divide between the exceptions and the herds, men and women, the noble and the

ignoble, and the idea that different standards should apply to each is a leveling, life-

denying impulse contrary to the natural order of things. Whether Nietzsche's rejection of

unconditional moral judgments and insistence that what are conventionally called good

and evil are intertwined and often, to use modern parlance, socially constructed, makes

his philosophy admirably realistic or woefully iniquitous perhaps comes down to whether

one perceives, as Grant claims to, intimations of a supernatural order of the good. Grant

himself admits the inadequacy of a purely naturalistic defense of egalitarianism: "there

may be good arguments against equality at a political or natural level, but if one is a

Christian, there can be none at a supernatural level" (GGP 107). At a supernatural level,

all people are equal in the eyes of God or, in more Platonic terms, equally able to glimpse

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[23] Lampert, 190.
[24] Nietzsche uses the metaphor of spirit while denying personal immortality.

the unchanging order of the good. The supernatural level, needless to say, is one

Nietzsche rejects out of hand as an error in thought.

As a self-declared Platonist, Grant is undoubtedly speaking of his own beliefs as

well when he says "for Plato nature is *eros*. For Nietzsche nature is will to power . . .

eros is aspiration toward something beyond itself to something eternal, unchanging,

perfect, and final. Will to power is not *eros*, it has no end in itself" (CWIV 1008). If

Grant is correct that "man cannot help but imitate in action his vision of the nature of

things" (TE 72), Nietzsche's vision of the nature of things does serve to justify actions

considered immoral in the western tradition at its height (as Grant so defines it).

Nietzsche, in a famous passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*, says "life itself is essentially

appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness,

imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation"

(BGE 393). He argues the noble soul is the one who accepts with equanimity the

subordination and sacrifice of others (BGE 405). Yet it should also be emphasized that

Nietzsche describes himself not as relaying a prescriptive theory, but as conveying "the

primordial fact of all history" (BGE 394). For him, Christianity's historical distance

from its own ideals, "the type 'Christian' reassumes step by step everything that it

originally negated . . . he takes up again all the activities he has forsworn (—self-defense,

judgment, punishment, oath-taking, distinguishing between nation and nation, contempt,

wrath—)" [WP 125], demonstrates the truth of Horace's dictum, "try with a pitchfork to

drive out nature, she always returns" (BGE 404). Nietzsche is not simply, as Grant

indicates, "a teacher of evil," but a teacher that much of what is conventionally called evil

is an ineradicable aspect of human existence that should be economized and sublimated

instead of annihilated, especially since the attempt at annihilation tends to reproduce the

original "evil" in a perverted and extreme form.[25] Thus Nietzsche praises the Greeks in

the following terms:

> The wisdom of their institutions lies in there being no gulf between good and evil,
> black and white. Nature, as she appear, isn't denied but merely *ordered*,
> restricted to specific days and religious cults. This is the root of all spiritual
> freedom in the ancient world; they sought to release natural forces moderately,
> not to destroy them or suppress them. –The whole systemizing of a new order
> becomes the state. It was built not on limited individuals but on the recurrent
> human traits . . . (UO 375).

Similarly, Nietzsche's account of justice is premised on an acknowledgement of the

inescapability of recurrent human traits, including those like sensuality, selfishness and

violence which have been castigated (even while being indulged) as evil in the Christian

era.

Grant is wrong to say that "with the coming-to-be of technology, justice becomes

something new. This is what Nietzsche means by the transvaluation of all values" (GGP

145). Rather, for Nietzsche, with the coming-to-be of Platonism and Christianity, justice

became something new. His notion of the transvaluation of all values indicates the

revival of what he regards as the properly natural conception of justice of the ancient

Greeks and Romans. On that note, Daniel Conway insightfully draws attention to

Nietzsche's praise of Pontius Pilate's sense of justice in *The Antichrist*, which is

especially relevant to the present discussion given Grant's obvious sympathies with the

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[25] A contemporary Nietzschean might point to the results of the Catholic priesthood's experiment with
celibacy.

accused (and, on a political level, national loyalties over imperialistic designs). Conway

writes:

> Pilate, the "Roman governor" of a remote Middle Eastern outpost, possessed an
> imperial sense of perspective, which issued from his unflinching appraisal of the
> real weight of human affairs. As a representative of the grand expansionist
> ambitions of the empire, Pilate refused to lower his hyperopic gaze to consider
> seriously the local struggles of the Jews. He was unsentimental, "nobly scornful,"
> indifferent, and loyal only to the empire. In fact, he was like the Roman Empire
> itself, for he cared only about the maintenance and expansion of imperial power.
> He was only minimally—and therefore optimally—human, and he thus resembled
> those embodied forces of nature whom Nietzsche extols as the apotheoses of
> human flourishing.[26]

Conway draws particular attention to Nietzsche's praise of Pilate's "noble" attitude of

"one Jew, more or less—what does it matter?" (AC 46) I think Grant is, as is frequently

the case with Nietzsche, less than judicious in relating his account of justice. Yet there is

no doubt that Nietzsche's anti-egalitarianism and unflinching naturalism, while by no

means genocidal in intent (Grant rightly points out that Hitler's hysteria is the ultimate

example of the spirit of unlimited revenge Nietzsche calls *ressentiment*), is congenial to

the imperial sensibility of "one Jew, more or less—what does it matter?" The

discrepancy between Nietzsche's and Grant's accounts of justice is perhaps best

illustrated by Grant's comment that "Nietzsche clearly has more sympathy for the

nihilists than for the last men" (TH 45) contrasted with his own implication that he has

more sympathy for the last men: "though I am contemptuous, intellectually, of left-wing

atheism, I think it is morally preferable to the right-wing atheism just because it is

secularized Christianity and Judaism" (CWIV 977). Grant is contemptuous of liberalism,

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[26] Daniel W. Conway, "*Ecce Caesar*: Nietzsche's Imperial Ambitions?" in Nietzsche, Godfather of
Fascism? On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy, ed. Jacob Golomb and Robert S. Wistrich (Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 2002), 182-183.

but an ally of liberal politics insofar as he believes in the individual's universal right to

life and freedom (even if he defines those terms differently than most liberals) on the

basis of a supernatural order of the good. Nietzsche, even if, as Conway says, "nowhere

near as cold and calculating as he pretended,"[27] does not, and so was amenable to

intellectual appropriation by the nihilists he looked down upon in his own lifetime.

As Ronald Beiner observes, "for Grant . . . modernity is viewed as a frenzied

engine of willing. Nietzsche, by contrast, sees modernity, shaped by Christian

humanitarianism and Enlightenment rationalism, as defined by a woeful incapacity to

will something grand."[28] While both reject the universal and homogenous state of the

progressive world order for begetting last men and nihilists, Nietzsche's ire is primarily

directed to the last men (and so the success of liberal ideology), while Grant's ire is

primarily directed toward the nihilists (and so the *hypocrisy* of liberal ideology). Grant

considers Nietzsche inescapably modern precisely because he extols the power of the

human will, or, otherwise put, the history-making spirit: even if he wishes to push it in a

direction other than that of the universal and homogenous state and the nihilistic will to

will.

IV. The Language of the Will

Beiner captures the seeming paradox of Nietzsche's brand of conservatism: "the

Nietzschean emphasis on *willing* the civilizational possibility of premodern institutions is

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[27] Conway, 185. C.f. Milan Kundera calls the Nietzsche who wept and went mad at the sight of a beaten horse the Nietzsche he loves.
[28] Beiner, 127.

radically modern."[29] By contrast, Grant flatly rejects the modern language of willing and

the unlimited history-making it implies. He emphasizes that "'tradition' means literally

handing over; or, as it once meant, a surrender," and so advocates a position of

"remembering and loving and thinking" to "those who cannot live through time as if it

were simply history" (TH 65). Clearly, Nietzsche consistently glorifies the power of the

human will. At the same time, as Grant says in lecture, Nietzsche's doctrine of the

eternal recurrence of the same implies "not the conquest of fragmentedness and chance

but the redemption of fragmentedness and chance" (CWIV1005). For Nietzsche, the

human will at its greatest height surrenders or becomes one with the will of nature: this is

the meaning of Dionysian consciousness. As Karl Löwith puts it, "by accepting with an

'ultimate will'—willing backward the past as well as forward the future—eternal

necessity as 'the highest constellation of being,' the original contradiction between free

Will or history and Fate seems to be solved."[30] As I elaborated in the previous chapter,

Nietzsche considers the Greeks the highest civilization because they were able to both

live greatly in history (to will great things) and to be reconciled with what is beyond the

control of the will: the eternal order of perishing and becoming.

Nietzsche cannot be said to unequivocally embrace the technological conquest of

nature, because he recognizes boundaries which humanity must learn to live with and

love rather than struggle against. While he writes "we have to realize to what degree we

are the *creators* of our value feelings—and thus capable of projecting 'meaning' into

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[29] Beiner, 114.

[30] Karl Löwith, "Nietzsche's Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6, no. 3 (June 1945): 279.

history" (WP 523), this does not imply we are creators of our value feelings to an *infinite* degree, but to a greater degree than we are conventionally taught to realize. Man is the as yet undetermined animal, but still an animal in the scheme of things. Speaking against what might anachronistically be called Sartrean delusions of personal autarky, Nietzsche compares "the desire to bear the entire and ultimate responsibility for one's actions oneself, and to absolve God, the world, ancestors, chance, and society" to the audacity of Baron von Munchausen (BGE 218). To deny one's ancestors, to deny one is embedded in a shared horizon, to deny gods (recall that Nietzsche believes gods are necessary receptacles for human gratitude), is to be poisoned by the spirit of revenge against fate. For Nietzsche, it is the height of optimism, and thus delusion, to believe we can "heal the eternal wound of existence" and "correct the world by knowledge" (BT 109) to a limitless extent. Rather we must come to terms with our fixed place in the historical timeline and genealogical tree, acknowledging our human limitations even as we glimpse past our transient horizons through tragic art and myth. Ultimately, Nietzsche's philosophy is an attempt to reconcile the will and receptivity, the history-making spirit and surrender to nature, the tabula rasa with humanity's inner "granite of spiritual *fatum*, of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined selected questions" (BGE 352). His attempted synthesis is thus not entirely dissimilar to Grant's own pseudo-Hegelian, and latterly disavowed effort to reconcile the truth of the modern and the truth of the pre-modern in *Philosophy in the Mass Age.*

If, as Grant says, "words that once summoned up receptivity have disappeared or disintegrated into triviality" (TH 61), Nietzsche's is the grand task of making the words

that summon up dynamism, words like willing and history, summon up receptivity and

nature at the same time. In class lecture, Grant says in reference to Nietzsche that

"nothing could be more repugnant than the doctrine of human beings as creative" (CWIV

1010). Yet for Nietzsche, the creative artist "has already been released from his

individual will, and has become as it were, the medium through which the one truly

existent subject [Dionysus] celebrates his release in appearance" (BT 52). In *Ecce Homo*,

Nietzsche poetically equates his own artistic inspiration for *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* with

the concept of revelation: "one hears, one does not seek; one accepts, one does not ask

who gives; like lightning, a thought flashes up, with necessity, without hesitation

regarding its form—I never had any choice." Yet in the same paragraph, he includes the

caveat "*if* one had the slightest residue of superstition left in one's system, one could

hardly reject altogether the idea that one is merely incarnation, merely mouthpiece,

merely a medium of overpowering forces" (EC 756, emphasis mine). Nietzsche

frequently approaches the precipice of traditional religiosity (or what Grant simply calls

tradition), which is receptivity to the beauty of genuine otherness, and just as frequently

withdraws into a position of modern skepticism. As Neil Robertson says, "for Grant,

otherness is preserved as otherness by being seen as grounded in the Good as its source

and so as having a being apart from human willing."[31] Nietzsche's articulates his

encounter with otherness using the language of revelation, but falls short of

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[31] Neil Robertson, "Freedom and the Tradition: George Grant, James Doull, and the Character of Modernity," in <u>Athens and Jerusalem: George Grant's Theology, Philosophy, and Politics</u>, eds. Ian Angus, Ron Dart, and Randy Peg Peters (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 158.

acknowledging its source outside the self. Grant's simultaneous attraction and repulsion to Nietzsche is consistent with the ambiguities in Nietzsche's own thought.

In lecture, Grant acknowledges Nietzsche's attempt to surpass modernity, noting Nietzsche's superman "shares something with the beasts which distinguishes both the superman and the beasts from historical man, namely the harmony and unity with the cycle of nature" (CCGG 1014). In Nietzsche's own words: the concept of whole human beings "means at every level, 'more whole beasts'" (BGE 392). As I said in the previous chapter, for Nietzsche tragic myths serve to unite historical peoples with the cycle of nature, with the archetypical satyr beneath their civilized trappings. (I argue Nietzsche regarded the superman as both a communal and individual goal.) The artistic and religious transmission of Dionysian wisdom dissolves what Grant calls "the divided state which characterizes individuals in modernity: the plush patina of hectic subjectivity lived out in the iron maiden of an objectified world" (TE 142) into primordial oneness. The effect of the tragic feeling is "to be *oneself* the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity—that joy which included even joy in destroying" (TI 563); to redeem necessity and chance (or feel necessity and chance redeemed). Yet whether this feeling is more than a simple illusion necessary for spiritual health is left unresolved. Grant, given his belief in the reality-defining power of language, does not think Nietzsche's Herculean task of transcending modernity from within can succeed; nor, given his taste for the unconditional, does he think it *should* succeed.

V. Mastery of the Earth

Nearing the end of *Time as History*, Grant remarks: "Perhaps the essential question about the modern project is not that of Nietzsche—Who deserve to be masters of the earth?—but the very question of mastery itself" (TH 69). Nietzsche's ideal masters of the earth are clearly not the nihilists and last men of the universal and homogenous state. I have argued they are, and must be (to be free of the spirit of revenge against fate), masters who affirm the limits of mastery, who indeed achieve mastery by virtue of their affirmation of natural limits and natural values (as opposed to the conventional limits and morals falsely considered natural). Yet Nietzsche's supermen are certainly not in the Christian mold of the meek who shall inherent the earth. They are closer in spirit to Pontius Pilate, for whom justice is fealty to an empire as magnificent and cruel as nature itself. Nietzsche's quintessential statement in the history-making spirit, which Grant references in lecture to demonstrate his modernity, is the following passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> To teach man the future of man as his *will*, as dependent on a human will, and to prepare great ventures and over-all attempts of discipline and cultivation by way of putting an end to that gruesome dominion of nonsense and accident that has so far been called "history"—the nonsense of the "greatest number" is merely its ultimate form: at some time new types of philosophers and commanders will be necessary for that, and whatever has existed on earth of concealed, terrible, and benevolent spirits, will look pale and dwarfed by comparison (BGE 307).

Clearly, Nietzsche's rhetoric concerning mastery of the earth has grave political implications. Grant reads Nietzschean politics as "the technology of making the human race greater than it has yet been" and his superman as "the only noble ruler of the technological age" (CWIV 650-51). Yet as I remarked in the previous chapter, Nietzsche *criticizes* the technological paradigm for seeking to "correct the world by knowledge,

guide life by science, and actually confine the individual within a limited sphere of solvable problems" (BT 109) for its "delusions of limitless power" (BT 111). The Nietzschean superman has limits, even if they are limits far beyond those Grant places around properly human conduct.

If, as Grant says, "the idea of limit is unavoidably the idea of God" (PMA 73), Nietzsche's thought concerning limits is comparable to what Grant refers to as "the metaphor of a self-legislated moral law" stemming from "the doctrine of many mystics that man is necessary to God" (PMA 99). Nietzsche's notion of the "will to tradition" (TI 543) is *un*traditional (at least outside of mystical circles) insofar as it acknowledges not just, as Grant does, the necessity of tradition to man, but the necessity of man to tradition. Nietzsche recognizes, as Grant does in *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, that "the limits men impose upon themselves in an age of reason must be self-imposed and must arise as the fulfillment, not the denial, of human freedom" (PMA 96). Thus Nietzsche's definition of freedom includes "the will to assume responsibility for oneself" (TI 542). By contrast, he characterizes the modern notion of freedom with the phrase "one lives for the day, one lives very fast, one lives very irresponsibly" (TI 543). Grant would likely agree with such a characterization, while rejecting "the will to assume responsibility" as self-negating language. For Grant, truly human freedom and self-responsibility are only attainable through the acceptance of Christ's injunction (and equivalent injunctions in other traditions), in the spirit of receptivity to genuine otherness: "Not my will but thine be done."

By offering what Beiner calls "a stridently modern vocabulary in defence of a rabidly antimodern way of life,"[32] Nietzsche fulfills Grant's early demand that "[for philosophers and theologians] the search must be for a new authentic meaning that includes within itself the new conditions that make that search necessary" (PMA 8)—i.e. the historical sense and the history-making spirit of modernity. Yet, Grant argues, Nietzsche's superman, whose *raison d'etre* is mastery of the earth through loyalty to the earth, is achieved by "the atrocious price of saying men must pass beyond good and evil" (CWIII 671). Arthur Davis is correct in saying "Grant agreed with Nietzsche that we should learn to love the earth, even if he opposed Nietzsche's rejection of Christian morality."[33] Grant's ideal love of the earth is predicated on the earth being a conduit of the divine. Thus the typically modern attempt to master the earth and reshape it in the service of the human will is in an essential way blasphemous. Nietzsche's ideal love of the earth is predicated on man perceiving the earth itself as divine. Yet if the earth itself is divine, so is the perfectly natural will to power which would seek its domination. Grant, affirming what he intimates is the core truth of tradition, refuses Nietzsche's attempt to inject meaning into modernity as alien to the existence humanity is properly fitted for. Such is an existence not simply one of loyalty to the earth and imitation of nature, but of loyalty to and imitation of the transcendent being of which earthly beauty is an image (TE 143). As Yusuf Umar says: "by persuading us to perceive the world anew,

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[32] Beiner, 114.
[33] Davis, 68.

[Grant] expects that we will act differently in the world."[34] By differently he means

justly, in the spirit of the towering exemplars, Jesus and Socrates, of the western tradition.

VI. Conclusion

In the end, Grant cannot be satisfied with Nietzsche's solution to the problem of

history because of his own intimations that "beyond time and space there is order;" an

order that upholds the unconditional distinction between good and evil which all people,

no matter their intellectual or social class, no matter their place in space and time, are

privileged to discern. Nietzsche finds in the doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the

same "the closest *approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being*" (WP 330)

and so a formula for redemption from the spirit of revenge against the brute fact of our

transient existence. Yet Grant cannot accept a mere approximation of being, even if, as

he acknowledges, his loyalty to a supernatural order may be a consequence of his own

"botched instincts" and lack of loyalty to the earth (CWIV 967). Like Nietzsche, Grant

advocates the love of fate, not the nihilistic will to will of the unlimited history-making

spirit, as the height for humanity. But unlike Nietzsche, Grant believes in, and believes

man *qua* man is only capable of loving, a fate within which sparks of the transcendent

good are visible even if normally (and, he argues, especially in the technological era)

enshrouded by darkness.

In his notebooks, Grant writes "*Beyond Good and Evil* is saying you can't be

certain that there is difference between good and evil. But this is perhaps the one thing

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[34] Yusuf K. Umar, "George Grant's Political Philosophy" in George Grant & The Future of Canada, ed. Yusuf K. Umar (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1992), 2.

we should try to be always certain about" (CWGG 325). Grant is certain (or receptive to the certainty and the saints who communicate that certainty) there is an absolute distinction between good and evil, man *qua* man is able to recognize the distinction, and the meaning of the good is incarnate in the symbolic life of Christ. I argued in the previous chapter that both Grant and Nietzsche believe humanity is fitted to live within shared horizons of meaning defined by supra-historical myths. Yet Grant believes humanity is also fitted to live within limits Nietzsche believes humanity at its height (the superman) can transcend. As he articulates those limits in the essay "Revolution and Tradition," "the core of what has been handed over to us from Athens and Jerusalem" is the "language of good and evil" and it is "the condition of men to live within and not beyond good and evil" (CWIV 83). Although Grant unduly minimizes ambiguities in Nietzsche's thought and the degree to which their thought touches, his desire for the unconditional and intimations of transcendent perfection—a desire Nietzsche rejects as life-denying and intimations he rejects as false—delimits a space where never the twain shall meet.

Conclusion

Nietzsche includes the following aphorism in *Unmodern Observations*: "I do not teach submission to *Necessity*—since we would first have to *know* it to be necessary. Maybe there are necessities, but generally speaking it is still a lazy evasion" (UO 350). Read in conjunction with Grant's admission in *Philosophy in the Mass Age* that "the doctrine of limit can so easily be used to make sacrosanct the particular structures of the present—whether in economics, politics or metaphysics—and by so doing to eliminate from our minds the hope and the determination that the evils of this world will yet be overcome" (PMA 100), the similarities between the two thinkers are brought to the fore. Both Grant and Nietzsche seek to find a mean between the uncritical acceptance of traditional limits, and the history-making spirit blind even to the existence of limits. Nietzsche teaches that talk of "necessity" has often been a lazy evasion in the service of a will to power hiding behind the mask of religion and morality. Grant echoes Nietzsche's criticism of religious hypocrisy with his comment on "how terribly the powers of this world have used the phrase 'the poor we have always with us'" (PMA 100) and comparison of belief in the scrutability of providence to the worship of force (LN 87). Yet significantly, Grant's critique is given from within the same moral perspective the "powers of this world" at least claim (or until recently claimed) to hold: a perspective cognizant of the categorical distinction between good and evil. Nietzsche rejects absolute morality for falsifying the ambiguous natural order of things and justifying hostility to life itself. Whereas Grant would reformulate Christianity on a less historical basis, Nietzsche would bury it in favour of the tragic worldview of the ancient Greeks.

I have argued against Grant that Nietzsche does uphold supra-historical ethical standards. He speaks against conventional accounts of good and evil because he does not, in Grant's words, hold the particular structures of the present to be sacrosanct. He believes the language of good and evil, like the language of necessity, is at best a lazy evasion. History, Nietzsche emphasizes, teaches us how moral codes have been created and exploited for ends immoral by their own standard. The more we know of their immoral origins, the less we are able to give them credence as valid guides to conduct. Yet this does not necessarily leave us, as Grant describes the modern self-conception, "an unlimited freedom to make the world as we want in a universe indifferent to what purposes we choose" (TE 138). Nietzsche, like Grant, is cognizant of a permanent natural law superseding transient conventionality. Yet Grant, unlike Nietzsche, also claims to be cognizant of a permanent supernatural law superseding, although in a mysterious way connected to, natural law. To Grant's credit, he is more philosophic than dogmatic about the content of that law. As he argues in *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, "a moral code, the authority for which is based solely on faith and that makes no attempt to define itself rigorously, is a dying code, a closed morality, a morality that does not care about its own communication" (PMA 94). And yet, with the caveat of "if I were not afraid of being taken as an innocent dogmatist . . ." Grant calls Nietzsche a teacher of evil (CWIV 648). Whether Grant must in the end resort to unsubstantiated evasions to speak against Nietzsche, or whether he is articulating as best as language can articulate intimations of a transcendent standard lost to the modern, is an open question with implications for the basic concern of classical philosophy: how best to live.

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