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# Overcoming Metaphysics: George Grant and the Good Beyond Being

Randy ‘Peg’ Peters

## Abstract

*George Grant (1918–1988) agreed with Martin Heidegger that Western metaphysics had led to a hegemony of scientific rationality or calculative thinking. In light of the controlling nature of this paradigm of thought, Grant articulated a meditative or contemplative way of thinking that was grounded in Plato’s notion of the ‘Good beyond Being’.<sup>1</sup> This paper critiques modern calculative thinking and argues that an overcoming of metaphysical language is necessary if we want to talk about reason, ethics, and God. Grant believes that only a knowing-in-love rooted in the Good beyond Being can provide a way of thinking and acting justly in the modern world.*

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<sup>1</sup> Plato uses the phrase “*epekeina tes ousias*”, or the Good beyond Being, in his famous allegory of the cave in *The Republic* [509b]. G.M.A. Grube translates 509b as: “Therefore, you should also say that not only do the objects of knowledge owe their being known to the good, but their being is also due it, although the good is not being, but superior to it in rank and power.” Plato, *Republic*, G.M.A. Grube, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), p.182. By comparison, Francis Macdonald Cornford translates 509b as: “And so with the objects of knowledge: these derive from the Good not only their power of being known, but their very being and reality; and Goodness is not the same thing as being, but even beyond being, surpassing it in dignity and power.” Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, Francis Macdonald Cornford, trans. (New York and London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1945), p. 220. George Grant often quoted from Eric Voegelin’s book on Plato, in which Voegelin states: “the Agathon [good] not only makes objects knowable, but provides them with their existence and essence, though it is itself beyond (*epekeina*) essence in dignity and power. The *epekeina* is Plato’s term for “beyond” or “transcendent.”” Eric Voegelin, *Plato* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1966), p. 113.

## Technology and Western Metaphysics

George Grant, considered one of Canada’s foremost political philosophers, believed that the modern paradigm of knowledge, in its silencing of anything transcendent, left people empty and confused. Grant, through his teaching at Dalhousie and McMaster Universities from 1950–1988, argued that the Platonic notion of the Good beyond Being was a meditative way of thinking about God that shielded it from Martin Heidegger’s critique of Western metaphysics. Before we can explicate Grant’s thinking on the Good beyond Being, I would like to expand on what is meant by ‘Western metaphysics’. Heidegger, in his essay called, ‘What is Metaphysics?’, says that the word

metaphysics derives from the Greek *meta ta physika*. This peculiar title was later interpreted as characterizing the inquiry, the *meta* or *trans* extending out ‘over’ beings as such. Metaphysics is inquiry beyond or over beings, which aims to recover them as such and as a whole for our grasp.<sup>2</sup>

For Heidegger, metaphysics stands for a way of thinking that seeks to ‘grasp’ and stand ‘over’, and it is this way of thinking that has developed into modern scientific rationality, or what Heidegger calls ‘calculative thinking’. Grant agreed with Heidegger that modern science reduced all thinking to calculative thought. The word ‘calculative’ is connected to a type of thinking that finds its most powerful expression in modern Western technological science, and that is motivated by measurement, by the search for results. The calculative thinking which characterizes modern science is itself only

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘What Is Metaphysics?’, pp. 93–110 in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, David Farrell Krell, ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 106.

possible on the basis of having a subject that can calculate, and a 'world' or object which, as 'placed before' the subject, is easily manipulated, controlled, and contained. Heidegger called this world *technology*.

Grant wrote that technology is the "ontology of the age"<sup>3</sup> because he considered technology to be a particular paradigm of thinking which assumes that the Good is not beyond Being; in fact, it assumes that there is nothing beyond Being. For Grant, technology as a way of being had an effect on how we think about reason, how we think about ethics, and how we think about God. I will explore each of these three areas as they relate to Grant's understanding of Western metaphysics. Afterward, I will lay out the ways in which Grant's answer to calculative thinking differs from Heidegger's, especially as it focuses on their differing interpretation of Plato's phrase, the 'Good beyond Being'. For Grant, it was only a 'knowing-in-love' that would be able to overcome metaphysics and offer a new language in which to speak about the Good.

### Metaphysics and Reason

Grant agreed with Heidegger that Western metaphysics tended to see human reason as independent and autonomous. The goal of calculative thinking was to place the object before oneself as a thing, and to examine it unemotionally. "Reason as project", Grant explains, "is the summoning of something before us and the putting of questions to it, so that it is forced to give its reasons for being the way it is as an object."<sup>4</sup> Grant believed that the subject-object dichotomy pervasive in the modern paradigm of knowing did not allow 'otherness' to be revealed to the knower. Grant noted that this approach to knowing reduced everything to mere objects for human control. Grant saw that this calculative way of thinking

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<sup>3</sup> George Grant, *Technology and Justice* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1986), p. 32.

<sup>4</sup>George Grant, 'Faith and the Multiversity', pp. 461-82 in William Christian and Sheila Grant, eds., *The George Grant Reader* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1998), p. 462. All subsequent references to this book will be denoted as *GGR*.

was pervasive in all disciplines. It cut off the Good as a source of knowing by saying that nothing outside of quantifiable, sensory observations can be known. Without a Good beyond Being, all of nature is reduced to material facts ready for consumption. Reason, powerful as it is, is limited to that which lies within the realm of nature. As a result of modern science and technology, the Good ceased to be one of the sources of knowledge; instead, knowledge was confined and restricted to that which lay within the realm of temporal history. "Humans", Grant says, "are fitted for trying to think openly about the nature of the whole."<sup>5</sup> The whole is all of reality, which includes both the temporal types of elements (that which is scientifically observable through human reason), and the eternal elements (that which is beyond and transcendent). Grant believed that in order to know something or someone one needed to consider both elements.<sup>6</sup>

### Metaphysics and Ethics

Not only did Western metaphysics reduce knowledge to unaided reason, but with the eclipse of anything 'beyond', the language of personal 'values' replaced the language of the 'Good'.<sup>7</sup> Grant argued that the Nietzschean concept of 'value-positing', in which people

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 463.

<sup>6</sup> Grant believed that the scientific way of knowing could account only for temporal phenomena, but could not account for many of those experiences that cannot be reduced to calculation. How can you reduce an eagle in flight to a set of mathematical equations, or a painting by Rembrandt to a mixture of colour on a canvas? Grant often talked about how science has reduced sex to electrical impulses; see *ibid.*, p. 473.

<sup>7</sup> Grant is here drawing from Nietzsche's notion of 'value positing', in which the human creates meaning by the power and control of the will. Grant says, "[i]t is forgotten that before Nietzsche and his immediate predecessors, men did not think about their actions in that language. They did not think they made the world valuable, but that they participated in its goodness." George Grant, *Time as History*, William Christian, ed. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 58; see also George Grant, 'Knowing and Making', pp. 407-17 in *GGR*, p. 414.

choose and create their values rather than discover them, was an example of the type of calculative thinking that was so prevalent in modern society. The human act of placing a value on something is a means of controlling and ordering it according to your will. For the moderns, because the Good ceases to have any transcendent correspondence, morality is reduced to values language which may be chosen by each autonomous individual. For Grant, this was an example of how calculative thinking sought to control and manipulate even human morals for the sake of personal preference. For the ancients, says Grant, the language of ‘Good’

meets us with the overriding claim of justice, and persuades us that in desiring obedience to that claim we will find what we are fitted for. The modern conception of goodness is of our free creating of richness and greatness of life and all that is advantageous thereto.<sup>8</sup>

Grant interpreted the prevalence of values language as the domination of the will to power in Western metaphysics.

Grant agreed with Heidegger that the modern world had placed humans beyond good and evil as part of our destiny, but that did not mean for Grant that we *are* beyond good and evil in the sense that we are no longer fitted or made to be just. The modern world may behave as if morality is subjective but Grant denied that

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<sup>8</sup> Grant, *Technology and Justice*, p. 31. The idea of ‘fittedness’ comes from the Platonic notion of a thing’s end or purpose, that is, its telos. A shovel is fitted for digging – that is its purpose. A flower is fitted for blooming. A chair is fitted for sitting. A human is fitted for justice. The idea of fittedness implied that beings had a purpose that existed outside of themselves and was given to them. When the language of Good became the language of value all transcendent notion of something’s fittedness or purpose became historically dependent. Purpose could change dependent upon the person’s desire and will. With the dominance of modern science and the eclipse of anything transcendent as a source of knowledge, the Good ceased to define something’s purpose and instead became dependent on human creative choice and will.

we actually *are* beyond good and evil. Because the modern world has taken away the language of good and evil and replaced it with what Nietzsche called ‘values language’, people no longer know and understand that they are fitted for justice. For Grant, the Good must exist beyond Being to make it the source of justice. Any thinking that fails to recognize the importance of justice was to Grant an example of how pervasive Western metaphysical language had become.<sup>9</sup>

## Metaphysics and God

Heidegger believed that the realm of theology was not to be exempt from the totalizing effects of Western metaphysics. If theology meant the study of God, and ontology was the philosophical study of Being, then to mix God into philosophy was to undertake the damning practice of ‘onto–theology’. Heidegger uses the term onto–theology in his book *Identity and Difference* to describe the effect calculative thinking has on the understanding of God.<sup>10</sup> The onto–theo–logical constitution of metaphysics means that God enters into philosophy but only on philosophy’s terms. God becomes the *causa sui*, the *logos*, the prime ratio – all of which are totalizing projects of human thought. Even the act of ‘placing’ God at the top of all beings or declaring God to be the highest value is still part of the metaphysical language that sees the human as subject and all else as objects to be controlled. Although Grant appropriated Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics and the resulting calculative thinking that resulted, he tried to offer a way of thinking about God that overcame what Heidegger termed ‘onto–theology’. It was this desire that led Grant to focus on the Platonic notion of the Good beyond Being. God needed to be beyond human reason and human philosophical attempts at control.

For Heidegger, calculative thinking is the *how* of onto–theology. The goal of calculative thinking is to have the world at our disposal

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<sup>9</sup> Grant, ‘Justice and Technology’, pp. 435–44 in *GGR*, p. 442.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, Joan Stambaugh, trans. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 54.

either practically or theoretically. Grant believed that Heidegger's fullest account of representational thinking as the placing of the world at our disposal was contained in his book on Leibniz called *The Principle of Reason*. Calculative thinking begins as the demand for reasons and completeness. Since an unexplained explainer (ie, God) leaves things ultimately unexplained, the principle of reason becomes an appeal to God as *ultima ratio* – the ultimate reason. God exists so that human reason can give ultimate explanations. Grant believes that it is the *how* rather than the *what* of theological assertion that is Heidegger's target. Heidegger was not out to disprove God or displace Christianity with nihilistic atheism; rather, Grant suggests that he is warning us about the language that we adopt when we talk about God and Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Grant often quoted from Heidegger's 'Letter on "Humanism"', in which Heidegger writes:

[w]ith the existential determination of the essence of man, therefore, nothing is decided about the "existence of God" or his "non-being"... Thus it is not only rash but also an error in procedure to maintain that the interpretation of the essence of the human being from the relation of his essence to the truth of being is atheism.<sup>12</sup>

### **Meditative Thinking As Response to Western Metaphysics**

Grant recognized that, for Heidegger, the history of Western philosophy had been a history of the domination and hegemony of calculative thinking. Heidegger wanted to undermine the exclusivity of calculative thinking without denigrating this mode of thinking. He desired to open a space for other forms of thinking. A first step away from the domination of calculative thinking consisted of uncovering the presuppositions which underlie it, and in

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<sup>11</sup> George Grant, unpublished personal journal on Martin Heidegger, 1977.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"', pp. 239–76 in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, William McNeill, ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), p. 266.

thereby seeing that calculation is not the only possibility of human 'thought'. Grant realized that Heidegger proposed another way of thinking called meditative thinking. Heidegger claimed, "[c]alculative thinking races from one prospect to the next. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is."<sup>13</sup> Commenting on what meditative thinking is, Heidegger said:

I call the comportment which enables us to keep open to the meaning hidden in technology, *openness to the mystery*.

Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together. They grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way.<sup>14</sup>

Heidegger says the threat of annihilation posed by the atomic age is not our greatest danger. The greater danger is the monopolization of all thinking by calculative thinking. Further, accepting calculative thinking as the only way of thinking is a greater threat to humanity than even the threat of nuclear annihilation, because in limiting thinking to calculation, the human being will "have denied and thrown away his own special nature – that he is a meditative being."<sup>15</sup> Heidegger closes this line of analysis by pointing out that the "releasement toward things" and the "openness to the mystery" which characterize meditative thinking will never happen by themselves. "They do not befall us accidentally. Both flourish only through persistent, courageous thinking."<sup>16</sup>

Grant saw that Western Christianity was guilty of associating God with Being and logic. Grant wants to understand God as beyond Being rather than as Being. This is why Grant saw in Plato's phrase the 'Good beyond Being' a way

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<sup>13</sup> These two different types of thinking are expanded on by Heidegger in his book *Discourse on Thinking: A Translation of Gelassenheit*, John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

of freeing God from Western metaphysical concepts. Grant argues that the whole Western metaphysical tradition – starting with Aristotle – of naming God must give way to a new understanding of God as pure love.<sup>17</sup> To subordinate the God of love to speculative distinctions of Being and non-Being is to resort to principles of reason which God radically transcends. Indeed, for Grant, Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s conceptual atheism is curiously one of the best weapons against the ‘conceptual idolatry’ of onto-theology. Why? Because it permits a new logic to emerge: that of gratitude and ‘knowing-in-love’. For Grant, this logic meant the readiness to receive the other as other without the need to stand over and control. It was Grant’s desire to find a language for God that was insulated from Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics and calculative thinking. To accomplish this task, Grant turned increasingly to the life and writing of Simone Weil.

Grant saw in Heidegger’s meditative thinking something that he thought was an important insight into how to think. Simone Weil, the French mystic, had a notion of *attention* that Grant believed was very similar to Heidegger’s meditative thinking. In his personal journal on Simone Weil, Grant says:

Within the general philosophic tradition the place where I find writings very close to what she means by attention is in the late writings of Heidegger...When he says that meditative thinking is the “letting it lie before you and taking it to heart the ‘to be’ of beings”...whatever that may mean, it seems to me to take one close to what Simone Weil means by attention. Or in Heidegger’s writing about *Gelassenheit* [releasement], when he points to a thinking without willing, one is close again to Weil.<sup>18</sup>

### **Simone Weil’s Notion of *Attention***

For Grant, “[w]hat most supports the possibility of...consent is our attention to the

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<sup>17</sup> George Grant, private journal for class on Simone Weil at McMaster University, 1975–76.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

beauty of the world.”<sup>19</sup> Grant, following Weil, understands attention to be that which waits upon the beauty of otherness to be shown. To be attentive is to be open to the coming forth of the other in itself. It is by attention to, and waiting upon, the other (human, non-human, and, especially for Weil, divine) that beauty is revealed. True attention means an emptying of the self, a letting go of the self, whereby the other appears in the truth of its beauty:

To pay attention truly is not to contract muscles etc. – but to leave oneself empty, disposable, open to that which we wait upon...Attention is finally attention to the void...It is a waiting for something to appear, to manifest itself, to reveal itself. In contemplating a picture...the beauty of the picture only appears to us when we have surrendered to something external and real – one has to open oneself to the void so that one can let something appear as itself.<sup>20</sup>

For Grant, such attention in waiting upon beauty is absent in modern science. Certainly, he would also say that the other aspects of loving – consent, openness, receptivity to otherness (human and non-human alike) – are also lacking in modern science. However, he is strongly critical of the fact that the human impulse for mastery over otherness that is manifested in modernity has eclipsed the possibility to be attentive – to wait upon – the showing forth of the beauty of the other. In order for thought to behold the greater truths (those parts of truth that more fully speak of the unity of what is), the human mind must be attentive. It is by such attentiveness that thought waits upon the enlightening of love, the illumination of the Whole. For Grant, it was the Good beyond Being that gave alterity and a sense of otherness to Weil’s notion of *attention*.

### **The Good and Knowing-in-Love**

Grant’s Platonic epistemology goes beyond thought and Being because the whole is bound

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<sup>19</sup> George Grant, ‘Introduction to Simone Weil’, pp. 238–53 in *GGR*, p. 253.

<sup>20</sup> Grant, journal on Simone Weil.

together by the Good. For Grant, because the Good is beyond Being, it cannot be apprehended by mere reason alone. Grant wishes to articulate thought in terms of a ‘knowing-in-love’,<sup>21</sup> a knowing which unfolds in a different dimension from anything that emerges from the modern technical account of things. In effect, this understanding or contemplative knowing belongs to that sphere beyond the knowable to which Plato pointed. When opening oneself to this sphere, one can reasonably meditate on things in terms of the whole of reality. It is only in loving that anything can truly be known, for love requires an acceptance or consent to the fact that there is authentic otherness. Grant argued that judgment grows from an attachment to a truth which is known both objectively (as moderns would put it) and subjectively. This ‘authentic otherness’ is that part of anything that cannot be reduced to scientific data. This love has its source outside of man, outside Being itself, and springs from ‘the Good’. The Good is beyond appearance and can only be ‘seen’ by the faculty that ‘sees’ beyond, namely, love.<sup>22</sup> Without love, knowledge is condemned to a scientific mode of knowing alone. If Plato argues, as Grant suggests, that the Good is ‘beyond Being’ and that which one seeks through love, then to seek the Good by objective reasoning would be to miss it. For Grant, the Good is not subject to human reasoning; rather, we are subject to its rule. It is both the author of the human constitution and its ultimate end.

Grant said that “Plato proclaims the dependence of intelligence upon love in a much clearer way than Aristotle ...the modern apprehension of will ...implies that we stand

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<sup>21</sup>Grant, ‘Faith and the Multiversity’, p. 473. Edwin Heaven explores Grant’s idea in an essay entitled, ‘George Grant’s Knowing in Love’, *The Friend* 6 (2001), pp. 3–8.

<sup>22</sup>David Heaven, ‘Heidegger, Technology and Plato’ (1971), p. 21. This is an unpublished essay written for a seminar class taught by George Grant at McMaster in the early 1970’s. Edwin and David Heaven wrote the essay, ‘Some Influences of Simone Weil on George Grant’s Silence’, pp. 68–78 in Larry Schmidt, ed., *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1978).

over against love.”<sup>23</sup> Grant believed that the only response to the hegemony of calculative thinking was to revive the older understanding of ‘knowing-in-love’. Only love, Grant maintains, can counter the objectifying effects of modern rationality. The ancient biblical account of ‘knowing’<sup>24</sup> had this deeper connotation. Grant turned to Weil to help him articulate the importance of love. In a passage of Weil’s that he often quoted in his journal,<sup>25</sup> she says:

Man cannot exercise his intelligence to the full without charity because the only source of light is God. Therefore the faculty of supernatural love is higher than the intelligence and is its condition. The love of God is the unique source of all certainties.<sup>26</sup>

### The Good and Justice

Grant, in appropriating Weil, held that the ancient model, realized in Plato, says that the faculty of reason can take us only so far; this, because it is limited to that which lies within the realm of Being.<sup>27</sup> Because the Good is beyond Being,<sup>28</sup> it is apprehensible only through the faculty of love. Grant interprets Plato to teach that the Good is both known and loved. The importance, therefore, of character development in the pursuit of wisdom means that philosophical inquiry is connected to the whole person and not simply to the activity of the intellectual part of the soul. For Grant, following

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Conversation with George Grant’, pp. 101–09 in *ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>24</sup> Throughout the biblical literature there is a connection between sexual intimacy and knowledge. Love and knowledge were united in the heart. Genesis 4:1 talks about Adam’s knowing Eve and her conceiving a child. Grant says that in the older world, “the words ‘to love’ and ‘to know’ were joined. For example, because of the intensity and intimacy of orgasmic love, it was said when people freely participated in it, they ‘knew’ each other.” Grant, ‘Faith and the Multiversity’, p. 474.

<sup>25</sup> Grant, journal on Simone Weil.

<sup>26</sup> Simone Weil, *On Science, Necessity and the Love of God* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 104.

<sup>27</sup> Grant, ‘Justice and Technology’, p. 442.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Weil, the conclusion that ‘whatever cannot be summoned to give its reasons is meaningless’ was wrong. To discount that which is beyond Being was wrong because it limits the human experience and does not allow for beauty, the mystical, and the divine. Grant lamented that the beauty of otherness is not given any meaning in the modern approach to reason. Modern notions of reason “cannot accept the existence of authentic otherness because [they] can only account for that which [they themselves have] created”.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, Grant believed that we encounter otherness, whether through sexual love, or spiritual longing – we experience it as something ultimately beyond our capacity to manipulate or transform.<sup>30</sup>

Grant believed that it is only through this ‘knowing-in-love’ that the beauty of such things as Mozart’s music or human sexuality can ever be comprehended. Grant goes further and asks:

are there some works [of art] that are more worth paying attention to than others? What is given in those that are most worthy of attention? What is it that enraptures us about them, so that even in the desolation of *King Lear* or [Mozart’s piano concerto in C minor] we are enraptured? Can we describe the enrapturing as the immediate engrossment in the beauty of the work, which points to good which is quite unrepresentable?<sup>31</sup>

The scientific way of knowing had separated reason from love and thereby weakened any chance of knowing the Good beyond Being.

If Grant’s ‘knowing-in-love’ answered the reductionism of modern science, it also answered the ethical neutrality of Heidegger’s notion of ‘Being’ and meditative thinking. In response to Heidegger, Grant spoke of the ‘claim’ of justice on all. To speak of justice is to speak of what one ‘ought’ to do and any sense of

‘ought’ implies a sense that you ‘owe’ others the dignity of justice. Grant says that in the modern world, “[g]oodness’ is now apprehended in a way which excludes from it all ‘owingness.’...What is true of the modern conception of goodness...is that it does not include the assertion of an owed claim which is intrinsic to our desiring.”<sup>32</sup> Grant’s concept of ‘owingness’ is connected with his understanding of the Good beyond Being that reveals an order of justice beyond human desiring. As he states, “[o]wing is always provisory upon what we desire to create.”<sup>33</sup>

### The Good and Obedience

To ‘owe’ something or someone means that you are not in control of them. You are not standing over an object summoning forth its reasons, instead, you see in that *other* something of the Good that demands your response or obedience. Grant maintains that the idea of obedience does not close down openness when it is in response to that which you appreciate and love. Most couples would say that obedience and respect in a mutually loving marriage is not destructive of personal freedom. It is only in loving and being drawn through *eros* that one can truly be open to knowing something or someone fully. To know someone means to love them and to act in obedience towards them. To consent to their otherness is to agree that you owe something to everyone you encounter. It is here that Grant points to some weaknesses in Heidegger’s meditative thinking. For Heidegger, there was no Good beyond Being, and therefore nothing to which one owed ultimate obedience. Grant says that is precisely what is missing in Heidegger: “the greatest writer on what technique is turns his back on obedience.”<sup>34</sup> In a brilliant chapter on Grant in his recent book, *Spirit, Book, Word: An Inquiry into Literature and Spirituality*, J.S. Porter asks:

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<sup>29</sup> William Christian, ‘Religion, Faith, and Love’, pp.47–57 in Yusuf K. Umar, ed., *George Grant and the Future of Canada* (Calgary: Univ. of Calgary Press, 1992), p. 56.

<sup>30</sup> Grant, ‘Faith and the Multiversity’, p. 464.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 469.

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<sup>32</sup> George Grant, ‘The Computer Does Not Impose on Us the Ways It Should Be Used’, pp. 418–34 in *GGR*, p. 429.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> George Grant, ‘Obedience’, *Idler* 29 (July–August 1990), p. 25.

Can you think of anything more bizarre to write about in our time than obedience? To what or to whom would we be obedient? What or whom do we reverence enough, stand in awe of enough, to proffer obedience? What could be more anti-historical, ahistorical, than obedience?<sup>35</sup>

It is only the Good beyond Being that can give content to justice. Without some sense of that 'Good beyond Being' which cannot be manipulated, one must conclude that there can be no such thing as a realm of justice where all are equal.

### **The Good and the Madman**

I have argued that Grant, in drawing from Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics, used the concept of the Good beyond Being as a way to create space for a language and understanding of the 'Other'. Grant's use of words like *attention*, *owingness*, and *obedience* was his attempt to find a language that was not grounded in Western metaphysical notions of control and objectification. It was in this overcoming of Western metaphysics and onto-theology that Grant saw a renewed place for ethics, God, and the Good. By rooting his thinking in love, Grant was able to ward off the calculative reductionism of modern science and the morally neutral response that leaves no place for justice. Grant's understanding of justice leads one to obedience but this is not an obedience that is blind and destructive to individual freedom. Instead, it is obedience to that which is lovable. This understanding of justice consents to otherness because it sees the other as lovable. Grant says that, for Plato the

opposite of knowledge of good is not ignorance, but madness, and the nearest Plato can come to an example of complete madness is the tyrant, because in that case otherness has disappeared as much as can be imagined.<sup>36</sup> For Grant, calculative thinking and Western metaphysics led to a world filled with madness because they cease to see that otherness can only exist if the Good is beyond Being.

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<sup>35</sup> (Ottawa: Novalis Press, 2001), p. 165. In this book, the Canadian author takes the reader through the writings of ten pivotal philosophical and religious thinkers of the past century and centres each of their writings around a different key word that was important to them. The book seems to culminate with the final two thinkers selected by Porter, the contemplative philosopher George Grant and the Catholic mystic Thomas Merton. Grant's key word, he believes, is obedience. I would have to agree that he has rightly distilled much of Grant's thinking into this complex word.

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<sup>36</sup> Grant, 'Faith and the Multiversity', pp. 464, 467.