George Grant: Intimations of Deprival, Intimations of Beauty

Neil G. Robertson

George Grant (1918-1988) was incontestably the most important Canadian conservative thinker of the twentieth century, and it is perhaps his distinctively Canadian approach to conservatism that has made his writings less well-known in the United States. For Grant, it was a serious confusion to associate conservatism with the ideology of the free market. As he was fond of pointing out, the right to make as much money as you can is the apotheosis of liberalism, not a mark of conservatism. For Grant, conservatism was related not to one side of the modern debate between socialism and capitalism, but rather was rooted in a desire to conserve still abiding instances of an older, pre-modern relation of humanity to God and the world. This desire to conserve was connected in Grant’s mind to the very being of Canada.

However, the Canada George Grant had in mind was not the Canada of the last half century; rather it was the Canada that understood its distinctiveness as residing in a loyalty to the pre-modern in the face of America’s revolutionary break. For English Canada, this relation to pre-modernity took the form of loyalty to British cultural and institutional forms; for French Canada it took the form of loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church. Grant saw that such loyalties were dissolving in the face of the rapid modernization that Canadians experienced after the Second World War. In his lament for a vanishing culture of higher ends, Grant shared something with America’s Southern conservatives, such as Richard Weaver or M. E. Bradford.

Grant came to his conservatism naturally enough. He was born into a prominent Canadian family deeply involved in institutions of higher learning. His father was the Principal of Upper Canada College, the country’s premier private school; one grandfather was the Principal of Queen’s University, one of the two or three most important universities in Canada at the time; the other grandfather oversaw the Rhodes Scholarship Trust. His uncle, Vincent Massey, was the first Canadian-born Governor General of Canada and was at one time Chairman of the federal Liberal Party; another uncle was a Member of Parliament and a great force in the federal Conservative Party. Grant was, then, born not only into prominence and privilege, but also into expectation and mission. He was heir to a now almost forgotten English Canadian nationalism.

For Grant’s grandparents, Canada’s
purpose was to support and uphold the British Empire as a force for civilization, humanity, and a progressive Christian liberalism. In this identification with the Empire, Canada's difference from the Great Republic to the South was also established. The character of this British North American nationalism was not a mere nostalgia for "olde England." Rather, what united Grant's family's involvement in higher education with their attachment to the British Empire was a sense that Canadians could, through imperially-oriented institutions of learning, gain access to a higher culture than was available to them simply on their own or in their relation to the United States. In the "British Connection," Canadians were able to relate to the older European culture of contemplation, reflection, and higher purpose united with social solidarity that was absent from the revolutionary individualism of the United States.

For Grant's grandparents' generation there was, as Grant would later describe, a too-easy identification of God with historical progress—which, in turn, was too readily identified with the development of the British Empire. The great events of the twentieth century were to disturb this confidence in Grant's father and destroy it in Grant himself. Grant's father fought in the First World War and became a pacifist as a result. This influenced Grant, and when the Second World War began, he resisted the pressure of family members to fight. To show that it was not cowardice that induced him to pacifism, Grant acted as an air raid warden in the very heart of the London Blitz—an event that would traumatize him deeply. His nerves shattered by the bombing, he was rendered almost suicidal by the discovery that he had tuberculosis. He fled to the English countryside and there had an experience of God that was to form the background to all his subsequent reflections.

It would be years before the implications of these wartime experiences would be fully absorbed into Grant's thinking. While he had given up the easy assumption of his upbringing—that providence and progress were one—nonetheless, through the 1940s and 1950s, Grant held out a hope that modern mass society could be united with a pre-modern sense of contemplation and charity. This hope was expressed in his first book, Philosophy in the Mass Age (1959). Two things would break Grant of this residual attachment to the doctrine of progress: a set of historical events and his encounter with three thinkers writing in the mid-twentieth century. The events that were crucial to him were connected: the end of the British Empire as an effectual force in history and the abandonment by Canadian elites of the older conception of Canada as an essentially conservative country. Any confidence Grant had that in Canada the pre-modern and the modern could be synthesized was unsustainable in the face of political reality. Historical forces were leading to the dissolution of all attachment to the pre-modern elements in Canada, and to virtual integration with the ultra-modern United States.

Grant's break with the doctrine of progress occurred intellectually on three distinct and yet interrelated levels: the religious; the social and political; and the historical. At each level, Grant was aided by a different mid-twentieth century thinker: Simone Weil (1909-1943), Leo Strauss (1899-1973), and Jacques Ellul (1912-1994). Weil was important to Grant in articulating a Christianity freed of the doctrine of progress. Strauss was crucial to Grant in clarifying for him the difference between ancient and modern accounts of the moral and the political, and so demonstrating the impossibility of a synthesis between them. Ellul helped Grant to see both the novelty and the all-pervasive character of modern technological society.

All of these events and intellectual
sources came together in Grant’s most famous work, *Lament for a Nation: The Death of Canadian Nationalism* (1965). The occasion of this book was the defeat of the Conservative government of Prime Minister John Diefenbaker in 1963. Diefenbaker was defeated over his refusal to allow American nuclear warheads into Canada. What struck Grant was the vehemence with which the Canadian elites pursued the defeat of this old-style Canadian politician who was working out of a loyalty to the conservative principles of Canada’s founding. Grant saw in this vehemence a deep desire within Canadians to put aside all that fundamentally distinguished them from the United States, to betray what the country most deeply stood for—in a quest to be included in the most heightened form of modernity.

From Strauss, Grant had learned to understand modernity as a “project” initiated by thinkers such as Machiavelli and Hobbes and moving through a series of “waves” as it grew more and more radical. Implicit in the project of modernity is the end or purpose of establishing in the world a Universal and Homogeneous State—“a society in which all men are free and equal and increasingly able to realize their concrete individuality.” For the moderns, this would signal that the world had arrived at the fullness of freedom; for Grant, following Strauss, the Universal and Homogeneous State could only be a tyranny, necessarily resistant to all forms of higher contemplation or religious awe. Grant modifies Strauss’s account, however, by suggesting that the force that brings about the Universal and Homogeneous State is not so much political ideology as the technological dynamism so fully described by Ellul.

In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant argued that precisely because the United States is pragmatic and not given to the more radical political forms of modernity such as communism and fascism, its embrace of technology is paradoxically the most powerful force for modernity in the world. Communism and fascism seek to direct technology to ideological ends; American pragmatism lets technology develop without constraint or limit. “Liberalism,” Grant wrote, is “the faith that can understand progress as an extension into the unlimited possibility of the future. It does this much better than Marxism, which still blocks progress by its old-fashioned ideas of the perfectibility of man.” Canada’s desire to participate in the same technological modernization embraced by the U.S. was, for Grant, at one with the end of Canadian nationalism. Technology would require the disappearance of all attachments to older forms. Grant’s lament was, as he was later to put it, not “a lament for the passing of a British dream of Canada. It was rather a lament for the romanticism of the original dream.” The romance of that original dream was the noble belief that Canadians could build a form of political life more stable and orderly, more given to contemplation and charity, than the dynamic modernity of the United States would allow.

The passing away of Canada was for Grant not simply a passing away of what is “one’s own.” He lamented not only what had informed and given meaning to generations of his own family and of Canadians more generally; rather, he saw in the defeat of Canadian nationalism implications of a more pervasive kind of passing away. He writes in *Lament for a Nation*: “The impossibility of conservatism in our era is the impossibility of Canada. As Canadians we attempted a ridiculous task in trying to build a conservative nation in the age of progress, on a continent we share with the most dynamic nation on earth. The current of history was against us.” The character of modernity is precisely not to “let be” other ways of life: modernity is inherently dynamic and mastering in its tendencies both of nature and of human nature. Implicit in American modernity, therefore, was a kind
of imperialism.

Grant spoke often of the “American Empire” and ridiculed Canadians who believed they were somehow independent of it. With the defeat of Diefenbaker in 1963, Canada was, according to Grant, voluntarily joining that empire. This “American Empire” was not primarily an empire in the old sense, but rather a technological empire which spreads when other peoples are drawn or coerced into modern technological society. The imperial character of the United States was particularly revealed in the Vietnam War—a war he condemned and because of which he refused to travel to the U.S.6

It is crucial to understand that for Grant the “imperialism” he discerned in the United States was not the work of certain historical actors, such as President Johnson or the American military. Rather, Grant described the fundamental agency at work as “Fate.” So long as the United States embraced technological modernity, he argued, it would inevitably be drawn into the requirements of mastery implicit in that very modernity. In Grant’s eyes, Canadians were even more worthy of scorn than Americans, for Canadians had decided to reap the fruits of modernity while endeavoring to escape its terrible demands: “We make money from Vietnam; but we do not send our sons there. We are like the child of some stockbroker who can enjoy the swinging life, but likes to exclude from his mind where the money comes from.”7

In the 1970s and 1980s, Grant continued to reflect upon the character of North American life and the nature of technology that stood at the heart of it. To deepen his understanding of the modern darkness he took as his guides Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. What these philosophers showed to Grant was the “ontological” status of technological modernity and that at the heart of technological modernity was the “will to power.” To think about technology as ontological means, for Heidegger, that technology is at its heart not the devices before us, nor the sciences that give rise to those devices, nor even the various developments in thought that make possible the coming-to-be of those sciences. Deeper than these levels, technology is a mode of being, an “ontology.” As Grant puts it: “We have bought a package deal of far more fundamental noveness than simply a set of instruments under our control. It is a destiny which enfolds us in its own conception of instrumentality, neutrality, and purposiveness. It is in this sense that it has been truthfully said: technology is the ontology of the age.”8

For Grant, as for others influenced by Heidegger and Nietzsche, the technological standpoint is joined to the very being of modernity, which in turn is joined to a conception of the essence of humanity as freedom or as will. Technology assumes mastery of both human and non-human nature; from that standpoint of mastery, there is necessarily an obscuring of any reality greater than humanity by which man might be measured and towards which humanity might be directed. The notion that technology can be subordinated to human ends and purposes is seen from this standpoint to be naïve.

All such attempts, whether liberal or Marxist, are themselves technological, born of the same modernity as technology itself. “What calls out for recognition here is that the same account of reason which produced the technologies also produced the accounts of justice given in these modern political philosophies.”9 This more comprehensive understanding of technology purged Grant’s account of the demise of Canadian nationalism of a residual accidental character, still present in Lament for a Nation. There, his argument suggested that the end of Canada was in part due to the ambitions and the betrayals of certain individuals and social groups; now, for Grant, the folly of political actors and the incon-
stancy of Canada’s ruling classes are but the occasions for the unfolding of a fate implicit in modernity itself.

While Heidegger was crucial to Grant’s grasp of technology as ontological, it was in his reading of Nietzsche’s terrible teaching that Grant discovered the inner character of that ontology: “Nietzsche’s writings may be singled out as a Rubicon, because more than a hundred years ago he laid down with incomparable lucidity that which is now publicly open: what is given about the whole in technological science cannot be thought together with what is given us concerning justice and truth, reverence and beauty, from our tradition.” Grant was led to see in technology the primacy of a willing without object: a will to will, or, as Nietzsche describes it, a “will to power.” Grant describes technology as “the endeavour which summons forth everything (both human and non-human) to give its reasons.” Technology “turns the world into potential raw material, at the disposal of our ‘creative’ wills.”

Our technological fate is especially evident in the language of “values” or “quality of life” that is everywhere present in our culture, eclipsing the older language of the “good.” The older language implies a given order or set of purposes, and with this, a sense of “nature” as an ordered whole—ultimately, for Grant, a sense of God as the fundamental source and end of this order. But this older language has been replaced with a language that derives worth from a realm of “values” that are posited by human agency. To Grant, the language of values is a confused language: “Everybody uses the word ‘values’ to describe our making of the world: capitalists and socialists, atheists and avowed believers, scientists and politicians. The word comes to us so platitudinously that we take it to belong to the way things are. It is forgotten that before Nietzsche and his immediate predecessors, men did not think about their ac-

Grant had learned from Strauss that modernity came in three waves: first the modernity of natural rights associated with Hobbes and Locke which was so central to the American founders; next, the wave of Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx that turned from natural rights to discern the source of right in the history by which man comes to his full self-realization; and finally, the wave ushered in by Nietzsche, in which the source of right is not a rational development but the play of the will to power. For Strauss, classical liberalism was associated with the first wave, communism and socialism with the second wave, and fascism and national socialism with the third wave. From this point of view, the United States, while modern, has a conservative aspect relative to the further development of modernity in the second and third wave. Strauss admired the resistance and indifference of Americans relative to these more radical forms of political modernity.

Grant in large part accepted Strauss’s analysis of modernity and the place of the American founding relative to it. But he argued that in its historical development technology had surreptitiously radicalized American modernity. Technology had not simply transformed the environment in which Americans lived out their lives; rather, it had penetrated the American soul:

[As] our liberal horizons fade in the winter of nihilism, and as the dominating amongst us see themselves within no horizon except their own creating of the world, the pure will to technology (whether personal or public) more and more gives sole content to that creating. Within the practical liberalism of our past, techniques could be set within some context other than themselves—even
if that context was shallow. We now move towards the position where technological progress becomes itself the sole context within which all that is other to it must attempt to be present.\textsuperscript{13}

To expose this radicalizing transformation of American modernity Grant, in *English-Speaking Justice* (1974), examined the thought of the Harvard philosopher John Rawls. In 1971 Rawls published *A Theory of Justice*, a book that has influenced not only the small world of academics, but also the way in which judges and ordinary citizens have come to understand the meaning of justice in American society. What Grant wanted to expose in Rawls's apparently benign and often tedious text was its Nietzschean heart. Certainly, Grant did not think Rawls to be anything as exciting as an esoteric Nietzschean. Rather, Grant underlined two things: first, that Rawls was held captive by a language of values, especially in his conception of a "person"; and, second, that Rawls could provide no resources for countering the Nietzschean tendencies implicit in this language.

In contrast to Hobbes, Locke, or the American founders, Rawls did not ground rights in nature or nature's God, but in an abstract contract made between abstract "persons." According to Rawls's theory, only "persons" have rights. Who counted as a "person" remained, according to Grant, deeply obscure: "the word 'person' is brought in mysteriously (one might better say sentimentally) to cover up the inability to state clearly what it is about human beings which makes them worthy of high political respect."\textsuperscript{14} It is this that Grant found so troubling: what was to prevent a good Rawlsian from excluding certain categories of humanity from the status of "person"?

In *Roe v. Wade*, Grant saw exactly this logic at work: unborn human beings, by a set of arbitrary criteria, were being "valued" as non-persons. The cozy liberalism of Rawlsian justice was revealed to have a brutal face. The language of "quality of life" was, through Rawlsian principle, to supersede the language of life; "values" replaced "nature" as the moral standard. What we are for—our end or purpose—fell to the human will to determine. Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s until his death, Grant and his wife were deeply involved not only with the anti-abortion movement, but also in campaigns against euthanasia of the old, the infirm, and those born with disabilities.

Grant was too honest not to recognize that technology had greatly liberated human beings from suffering and the slavery of work—especially women. He did not shrink from recognizing that the turn to modern technology was a response to suffering and that it was motivated by concerns for justice and charity. Indeed, Grant saw at the root of this turn a certain interpretation of the Gospels. Deep within Western Christian humanism was a call to end suffering and slavery.

Nonetheless, for Grant, to live in the midst of technology is to live in the midst of deprival. The very way of being that liberates us from necessity and suffering brings with it a more profound suffering—the suffering of spiritual deprivation. We are liberated—but for what? Still more liberation? Grant argued that in the midst of the dynamic modernity of North American life, there had been an obscuring of the eternal, that order which "we do not define and measure, but by which we are measured and defined."\textsuperscript{15} Grant found the naively cheerful and pragmatic way in which North Americans found themselves at home in modernity both sweet and contemptible. North Americans seemed confident that they knew what the "good life" consisted in, and they were simply trying to bring it about. He saw in all this a veil of illusions. He argued for the need to put aside all illusions and to recognize the darkness of North American modernity as darkness.
The principal naiveté he found in North American life was the supposition that technology could be "got in hand" and made to serve human ends. From Grant’s perspective, this belief betrayed a failure not so much of analysis as of perception: the only means North Americans had available to get technology in hand were themselves already technological. For Grant, the North Americans’ blindness to their condition sprang from the pragmatic character bred into a civilization that had had to forge itself in a wilderness and as a result tended to see everywhere finite "problems" to solve, a civilization that could not recognize a deeper fatality engulfing all its doings and all its reflections upon its doings:

We live in the most realized technological society which has yet been; one which is, moreover, the chief imperial centre from which technique is spread around the world. It might seem then that because we are destined so to be, we might also be the people best able to comprehend what it is to be so. Because we are first and most fully there, the need might seem to press upon us to try to know where we are in this new found land which is so obviously a "terra incognita." Yet the very substance of our existing which has made us the leaders in technique, stands as a barrier to any thinking which might be able to comprehend from beyond its own dynamism.

From this point of view, the intimation of deprival—the sense that something fundamental is absent from North American life—is, for Grant, not simply a terrible suffering, but also a gift. "Any intimations of authentic deprival are precious, because they are ways through which intimations of good, unthinkable in public terms, may appear to us." Any intimations of authentic deprival are precious, because they are ways through which intimations of good, unthinkable in public terms, may appear to us. To find our way out of modern, technological ontology we need first to know of its deprivations. Grant argues from the Platonic premise that evil is only the absence of good, and so the experience of deprivation presupposes a positive intimation.

Here is a crucial moment in his conservatism: for Grant, most of us can only have access to such positive intimations in recollection, by receiving in tradition an encounter with a world that is pre-technological. The loss of pre-modern forms, however, makes it more difficult to realize the deprival of the world of technology: "Our present is like being lost in the wilderness, when every pine and rock and bay appears to us as both known and unknown, and therefore as uncertain pointers on the way back to human habitation. The sun is hidden by the cloud and the uselessness of our ancient compasses has been put in question." Grant reserved his deepest contempt for the many ways in which North American religion had transformed itself into playing "the role of flatterer to modernity." Because of his fatalistic account of modernity and his concern for its deepening grip upon not only North America, but also the whole planet, Grant has often been described as a pessimist. Certainly in one sense this is true: Grant was deeply pessimistic—although he would say realistic—about the development of modernity. But more fundamentally, he resisted this denomination because, as he put it, to be a Christian one cannot be a pessimist. Implicit in Grant’s whole critique of technological modernity is a positive account that might best be described as a Christian Platonism. The darkness of our age, the absences within it, point to a presence or light; our task begins with "bringing the darkness into light as darkness." Within our humanity is a relation to the eternal such that its very absence can be known and recognized as such:

Deprivation can indeed become absolute for any of us under torture or pain or in certain madesses. We can become so immersed in the deprival that we are nothing but deprivation. Be that as it may, if we make the affirmation that the language of good is inescapable under most circumstances, do
we not have to think its content? The lan-
guage of good then is not a dead language,
but one that must, even in its present disint-
egration, be re-collected, even as we pub-
lcly let our freedom become ever more increasingly the pure will to will.22

Because of Grant’s positive account of “what is,” his conservatism has a twofold
sense. On the one hand, it is a conserva-
tivism that would conserve the still-abid-
ing forms of a pre-modern culture of con-
templation and worship. In this sense
Grant sought to retain vanishing mo-
moments in our culture, and to oppose, even
if vainly, the further depredations of
modernity. But there also is a more rad-
cal side to Grant’s conservatism, one
which welcomes the full development of
modernity as the only route to exorcising
it from the earth. Only in the final dark-
ness of modernity can we see it for what
it is—and, equally, recognize an illumin-
ating source prior to and apart from the
modern technological will. There is a
tragic fatality in modernity, but as in the
ancient tragedies, there is an illumina-
tion that occurs in and through tragic
history.

What specifically does it mean to speak
of Grant as a “Christian Platonist”? Here,
it might be useful to move in two stages,
and to distinguish a more general “an-
cient” aspect of his positive vision from a
specifically Christian aspect. Like Strauss,
the Neo-Thomists, and many other con-
servative thinkers, Grant argues that what
the nihilism of modernity reveals is an
order that precedes, and is untouched
by, the whole history and unfolding of
modernity. For him, this order is above all
captured in the traditional language of
“Justice” or “the Good.” It is this order
that forms the basis for our knowing in
advance that there are actions which we
ought not to do. As Grant says, “This
affirmation about justice can be put nega-
tively by saying that if we are realistic
about our loves and realistic about any
conceivable conditions of the world, we
must understand that justice is in some
sense other to us, and has a cutting edge
which often seems to be turned upon our
very selves.”23

What Grant’s turning to the ancients
brings to light is an account of the world
as an order of Justice. The human being is
placed within this order, and there he
discovers that for which he is fitted. By
contrast, modernity is the “very dimming
of our ability to think justice lucidly.”24
For Grant, a crucial point about Justice in
the ancient account is its dependence
upon the Good, upon a principle beyond
time and human history. In this eternal
source, justice is secured in its “other-
ness” and priority. At the same time, how-
ever, justice is the presence of the Good
in the world, and is there as the recogni-
tion of “otherness.” This “otherness” is
encountered in the nature and variety of
things in the world: the marvelous diver-
sity of beings with which we are con-
fronted, and which technology would
reduce merely to moments of the will.

Yet, to understand Justice and the
Good as simply the recognition of a given
order of “otherness” is, Grant believes,
inadequate to a specifically Christian
(and Platonic) account of Justice and the
Good. While we might contemplate oth-
erness and recognize its priority to us,
this still falls short of our full encounter
with the world and the divine. Insofar as
“otherness” is also a source of suffering
and affliction, the demand to recognize it
appears merely as a burden. Thus, while
Grant sympathizes with the natural law
or “nature of things” arguments of the
ancients, in the end, he finds them inade-
quate. One must be moved by faith from
this rational apprehension of the order of
things to a standpoint of love or charity.

Grant was deeply influenced here by
the work of Simone Weil, who sought to
read Plato in the light of the Gospels.
According to Weil, “Faith is the experi-
ence that the intelligence is enlightened
by love.”25 According to both Grant and
Weil, Plato’s account of the relation of Justice to the Good states this exactly: “in [Plato’s accounts of] the Sun, the Line, and the Cave, the metaphor of sight is to be taken as love. That which we love and which is the source of our love is outside the cave, but it is the possibility of the fire in the cave and of the virtues that make possible the getting out of the cave.” 26 For Grant, faith is about “seeing” the world in and through love. Love or Charity is the apprehension of otherness, not simply as otherness, but also as beautiful. It is in this apprehension that Justice is made beautiful and so takes one beyond recognition of the natural law to the actual affirmation of other natures as beautiful in their otherness. This, for Grant, is what is revealed in Plato’s dialogues, but still more fully in the Gospels of Christ—and unsurpassably, in his crucifixion. 27

Fundamental for Grant was Weil’s cry of anguish: “I am ceaselessly and increasingly torn both in my intelligence and in the depth of my heart through my inability to conceive simultaneously and in truth, the affliction of men and the perfection of God and the link between the two.” 28 With Weil, Grant refused to flee the suffering of the world in the contemplation of the rational order of things, or to let go that order in seeking to end the suffering.

For Grant, to love otherness was at the same time to let otherness be, and in this, to let be—to see as inherent—the suffering that belongs to the created order as other than God. For Grant, these two irreducibles—the suffering of humanity and the perfection of God—are impenetrably united in Christ’s crucifixion. On the cross, Christ in the very midst not only of suffering but of affliction—suffering without purpose and experienced as the total abandonment of God—is yet able to give himself away in forgiveness to those who have afflicted him. For Grant, this moment penetrates to and reveals the most fundamental ontological mystery: that the world is love. In Christ, we are able to know the world as beautiful and so to affirm it, graciously free of the mastering willfulness of technology.

George Grant’s cogent analysis of the contemporary world as a fatality founded in modernity and driven forward by the expanding force of technological mastery is deeply disturbing for conservatives. He brings to light how terribly ambiguous are all conservative politics that would seek to be publicly effective in the age of progress. Once the ontological and all-pervasive character of technology is recognized, the effort to make premodern modes publicly effective can only be seen as a project founded on empty hopes and illusions. The best that a conservative can offer in the modern condition is a politics of resistance. As Grant put it, “Thomas More’s statement about politics is my favorite, ‘When you cannot make the good happen, prevent the very worst from happening.’” 29

In the main, however, any publicly effective politics claiming to be conservative could only be a conservatism of the very structures that made technological dynamism possible in the first place. Of such “conservatives,” Grant wrote: “They are not conservatives in the sense of being custodians of something that is not subject to change. They are conservatives, generally, in the sense of advocating a sufficient amount of order so that the demands of technology will not carry society into chaos.” 30 The only way “beyond technology” lay in letting technology carry through its full self-destructive logic: any effort to co-opt it, he said, was doomed either to ineffectiveness or to subversion to yet another form of technological willing. Like the Israelites of old at the waters of Babylon, conservatives are left with lamentation and waiting.

And yet Grant could say to a group of student protestors in 1965 that while their Utopia-laden hopes were folly, “I am not advocating inaction or cynicism. Noth-
ing I have said denies for one moment the nobility of protest. Nothing I have said denies that justice is good and that injustice is evil and that it is required of human beings to know the difference between the two. To live with courage in the world is always better than retreat or disillusion." What is required, he insisted, is a politics without illusions about technology and yet without despair in the face of that technology. He told those young protestors:

“We must face the laws of [technology's] necessity—its potential to free men from natural necessity, its potential for inhuman-ity and tyranny. We must not delude ourselves and we must not throw up our hands. We must define possible areas of influence with the most careful clarity. When in this mammoth system can we use our intelligence and our love to open spaces in which human excellence can exist?”  

What allows Grant a contradictory politics of acting in the face of fate is his knowledge that while we live a destiny circumscribed by technology, we live in a yet more abiding context: in the presence of that which is “supremely beautiful” and which, as Grant says, “may be eclipsed, but cannot disappear from man.”  