George Grant is often regarded as one of the most important Canadian thinkers in the twentieth century. Outside Canada, however, not much attention has been paid to his interesting works. Whereas Canadian thinkers such as Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Northrop Frye, Michael Ignatieff or Charles Taylor have been translated into German, this is not the case with any of Grant’s essays. Most recently, Charles Taylor’s heavy and somewhat less than tightly written tome about the highly topical issue of secularization has been translated into German.

Grant’s works might seem to be too intimately linked to Canadian concerns to achieve a similar prominence. However, Grant’s reflections on the fate of Canada within modernity and in particular as the neighbour of the United States as the paradigm of the modern state, do have a bearing on all societies that experience the conflict between tradition and innovation, between morality and technology, between the good and the necessary. So even though for historical reasons Grant’s appeal may be by and large limited to the Canadian context, it is still very remarkable that such a handsomely produced edition of his collected works should have been published. This edition in four volumes

1 I have offered an attempt to present some key components of his political philosophy in my article *George Grant - ein kanadischer Philosoph als antimoderner Kulturkritiker* / Till Kinzel. // In: Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien. - 36 (1999),2, p. 185 - 200. - A more recent discussion of some more special aspects of Grant’s thought can be found in *Metaphysics, politics, and philosophy*: George Grant’s response to pragmatism / Till Kinzel. // In: Cultura : international review of cultural philosophy and axiology. - 2009, June, p. 7 - 21.


offers as complete a collection of Grant’s major writings as we are likely to get. Beginning with the first volume published in 2000, the whole range of Grant’s incisive and in many ways highly idiosyncratic philosophizing is now open to inspection.4 These four volumes are available in a handsome format which should be bought by all libraries specialising in modern thought and philosophy, especially of the modern variety.

In addition to Grant’s own works, there is also a new “guide to his thought” written by University of Toronto political science professor Hugh Donald Forbes that offers some densely argued and deep reflections of key issues of political philosophy in the light of Grant’s works.5 This work can be recommended for those who appreciate a systematic approach to Grant’s thought which was never developed in a systematic fashion but rather responding to concrete situations that needed to be thought through in the light of philosophy.

Grant’s books typically do not come as lengthy monographs but rather consists of extended essays (Lament for a nation would be a case in point), essay collections Technology and justice or lecture series (Philosophy in the mass age; English-speaking justice). This explains the fact that some of his books are rather short, such as e.g. Time as history, his confrontation with Nietzsche, which occupies a mere fifty pages of text in the edition of the Collected works, not counting a dialogue on the death of god in the appendix. The fourth volume published in 2009 includes three of Grant’s books, Time as history (p. 3-78), English-speaking justice (p. 190-268) and Technology and justice (p. 583-701). These texts offer trenchant and valuable reflections on some of the crucial dilemmas of all modern societies. Under the influence particularly of Heidegger’s understanding of technology, Grant recognized a serious and problematic tension between the morality of Christianity and the Western moral tradition generally on the one hand and the all-encompassing power of modern technology on the other. Grant’s doubts as to the possibility of maintaining some form of traditional morality in the face of technology’s increasing usurpation of human freedom were well-placed and offer starting-points for our own reflection on these troubling issues. In the 1970s, Grant repeatedly worked on a manuscript Technique(s) and good which he did not finish – excerpts are printed here to give the reader an idea of what he was trying to do (p. 118-143). Similarly, some very few fragments survive of a book project Grant variously called History and justice or History as justice, meant to "understand the atheism of the left better than previously" (p. 504), as Grant wrote in a letter. In this writing, his ultimate goal seems to have been to "demolish Rousseau" in order to "free people from that which can hold them from ever thinking Christianity might be true" (p. 504-505). The problem of history connected with the thinking of Darwin and Marx (p. 506) was that it was


a powerful paradigm which influenced the way of our thinking in such a way as to make any alternative appear foolish or irrelevant.
The range of topics with which Grant was concerned in the last two decades of his life is impressive. But the most enduring question he was thinking about surely relates to the impact of technology on human life. This concern about technology extends to issues of justice in general, the nature of the human person, abortion, the nature of the university (which had become, in Grant's eyes, rather a "multiversity") and of teaching in general. In connection with his understanding of the university, Grant explains, in a variety of texts, how he understands the modern paradigm of knowledge. Influenced by thinkers such as Jacques Ellul and Martin Heidegger, he saw modern technology as a combination of making and knowing that is in tension with the claims of religious faith.
The chronological order of the first section of the book offers his books in richly annotated form, talks, addresses and papers, interviews and exchanges, reviews and forewords to books by others. Among the texts collected here is an interesting review of Werner Dannhauser's book on Nietzsche's view of Socrates that offers some hints as to what Grant thought important in confronting Nietzsche. For he deplored the fact that Dannhauser had not offered a more comprehensive discussion of Heidegger's book on Nietzsche, a book regarded by Grant as "the greatest book of commentary on a philosopher which has been produced in our age" (p. 343). Grant's hunch that talking about Heidegger at some length would have made the book "too complex" is too obviously true to comment on - in fact, Grant's own plans to write a book confronting Heidegger and defending Plato and the metaphysical tradition against Heidegger's attack came to nothing very much. There is only a draft of a preliminary essay Confronting Heidegger's Nietzsche, excerpts of which have already been published earlier in The George Grant reader (cf. p. XXIV). The text gives at least a glimpse of what Grant was trying to do, although the magnitude of the task before him seems to have defeated him.
One of the most peculiar features of Grant surely was his great esteem for the literary works of Louis-Ferdinand Céline who is notorious for his anti-semitic pamphlets but also for novels written in a style all his own. Although Grant clearly did not approve of Céline's politics, he still regarded him as a great artist and especially so with regard to the postwar-trilogy depicting the breakdown of the Nazi regime in Germany in 1945. Grant himself posed the question why he was so enraptured by this writer (p. 427) - and set out to write a book on Céline which, like many similar projects of this kind, was never finished. This seems to have been a general feature of Grant, as Sheila Grant writes: "He was, admittedly, a great planner of never-to-be-written books, and the one on Céline would have been a luxury rather than a duty" (428). Thus, Sheila Grant speculates that apart from writing an article on Céline, also discussing his anti-semitism, for the Queen's quarterly, Grant may also have first wanted to make up his mind "about some important matters, such as Plato's account of poetry" (p. 428). As it is, Grant's extant notes and his article on Céline make for interesting reading and may well help to create some new interest in the French writer.
One section of the volume presents very interesting book reviews Grant wrote for the *Globe and mail*, one of Canada's most important newspapers. These reviews show Grant's sharp mind and his sure grasp of what is at issue. The books he reviewed range from an edition of John Stuart Mill's writings to Northrop Frye, Benjamin Disraeli, Hans Mayer and even Edward Said. They offer models for reviewers, so it is a pleasure to have them included in the collection. A few letters to the editor to the same newspaper are also reprinted. Some of the material published in this edition had been made available before in earlier reprints or editions in the context of collections on Grant's work or in the anthology *The George Grant reader*. But they are here offered freshly edited and annotated so that they can now be fruitfully explored in conjunction with all of Grant's writings from the same period. In general, the writings included in this volume come from the 1970s and 1980s, but in the case of Grant's writings on Simone Weil an exception has been made to include some material from the 1960s in order to collect here all of Grant's writings on Weil. Even though this breaks up the chronology it seems a reasonable editorial decision - reading these attempts by Grant to come to terms with this French thinker regarded by him as a saint throws light on the theological and religious concerns that were uppermost for Grant. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Weil for Grant, since Grant regarded her as a saint and therefore felt challenged by her in ways which are not true of other important philosophers such as Leo Strauss.

In addition to many texts actually written by Grant, the current volume also reprints thematically relevant excerpts of various interviews with Grant. Although these are already well-known to most readers of Grant, they add a lively dimension to the volume. Grant was an extremely skilled presenter on radio and participant in tv discussions, as can be seen on the CBC website.

To offer a comprehensive impression of Grant the volume offers, as did earlier volumes, excerpts from some of his lectures. These do not necessarily constitute important new matter in terms of Grant's thinking, but they do offer a glimpse of how he taught and how his personality as a teacher and especially as a thinking teacher managed to fascinate so many of Canada's bright young students. We find here excerpts from lectures on Christianity, the beautiful and the good, the resurrection and Plato and Augustine as well as on Nietzsche, Heidegger, Kant, Strauss and Aristotle. They show the intensity with which Grant personally wrestled with all these thinkers, infusing his statements with

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7 The reader interested in getting an impression of Grant's personality can referred to *Impressions of George Grant*, broadcast 3 August 1973: http://archives.cbc.ca/arts_entertainment/literature/clips/16204/ [2009-12-03]. The date (August 3) may be wrong; the volume under review says the interview was broadcast on 5 August 1973 (p. 148). The text of this interview can be found on p. 148 - 158 of the present edition. There was also a CBC 'Spectrum'-program on Grant broadcast around 1980 under the title *The owl and the dynamo* which, however, is not available online. This documentary manages to capture Grant's general outlook very well.
an urgency that can still be felt to have been infecting for many students. The
texts are helpfully annotated, but sometimes the editorial material is
incomplete. E.g., the excerpts from Grant's lecture on Leo Strauss and political
philosophy have already been published in a collection of essays which,
contrary to the usual practice in this volume, is not mentioned in the
introductory note (p. 1073).8

The volume also includes a chronology of Grant's life and three appendices
listing Grant's undergraduate and graduate courses from 1970 to 1980, a list
of his notebooks from the 1970s and 1980s, a list of radio and television
broadcasts from 1971 to 1989 with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
(CBC) and an explanation of the editorial and textual principles and methods
applied in this volume. The editors here declare that they want to "provide
readers with a complete collection of reliable reading texts" of Grant's writings.
This goal is definitely achieved by the Collected works. According to the
editors, the text selected for this volume "did not pose difficult questions
regarding the versions that ought to be chosen as copy-text"; the guiding
principle here are "the author's intentions and preferences". This means that
the copy-texts are "the works as they were published and unpublished writings
as they were found in Grant's papers" (p. 1087).
The index contains both references to persons and concepts. All in all one can
only express gratitude to the editors, Arthur Davis and Henry Roper, for
bringing together, and to the University of Toronto Press for publishing, this
formidable edition of George Grant's writings. The thinker Grant who asked
some fundamental questions about life in the modern world is still worth reading,
regardless of whether one agrees with his particular indications for
answers. Grant's strength surely lay in seeing the fundamental questions in a
world that regards the fundamental questions as no longer open. Modern
technology, one could argue, has already answered the question of the good
life for each and everyone. However, Grant's seriousness forced him to
consider the option that Plato may have known something about the good life
for human beings that has been lost in the modern world. The most important
consideration for Grant was to think a limit to what men could do. Limits,
however, had to be non-arbitrary and therefore founded in God, in order to
effectively oppose the modern notion of freedom as limitless. By forcing his
readers to think about issues like these and thinking them through, Grant was
an oddity in the modern university - but an oddity of the kind the modern
university sorely needs if some notion of the "idea of a university" (John Henry
Newman) is to be preserved or restored. Grant, e.g., was very much aware of
the dangers of the research paradigm for the humanities, a danger that would
seem to be particularly relevant: "The strange event is this: the more the
humanities have gained wealth and prestige by taking on the language and the

8 See Athens and Jerusalem: George Grant's theology, philosophy, and politics / ed. by Ian Angus ... - Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006. The text about Leo Strauss can be found on p. 87 - 92. This book is hard to come by since the publisher withdrew it from the market and destroyed the printrun due to allegations of plagiarism concerning one contribution. It seems unfortunate, however, that the other texts have not been made available again.
methods of the progressive sciences, the less significance they have in the society they inhabit" (p. 653).

Till Kinzel

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