

Dissertation:
The Fate of North America:
George Grant's Idea of a Civilizational Destiny

By: Raphael Anthony Arza

Abstract

A relatively unknown figure in the American academy, George Grant, illuminates the nature of North American civilization. In the process of that illumination, he cultivates the notion of a civilizational destiny. The present work seeks to thematize Grant's understanding of a civilizational destiny in order to shed light on his philosophical project and our world. Far from a peripheral concept, the idea of a civilizational destiny discloses Grant's paradoxical reconciliation of Platonism and Historicism. This work follows the chronological development of Grant's work in order to explain his mature conception of a civilization as the embodiment of an all-encompassing metaphysics. Starting from his earliest journal entries, we explicate Grant's engagement with the intersection of an eternal order with historical contingencies. These initial writings illustrate his preoccupation with the causes that make a nation and lead to such catastrophes as World War I & II. The second stage in our work demonstrates Grant's insistence upon the inseparability of metaphysics and ethics. This inseparability serves as a foundational idea that supports his understanding of a civilization as ineluctably entrenched in a metaphysics, conscious or unconscious. Informed by this principle, Grant's middle years are shown to focus on the essence of a nation and the constitution of its fate. Grant's concept of a historical fate will be clarified through his embrace of the Platonic tension between *time* and *eternity* and the rejection of Hegel. Next, we will treat Grant's indebtedness to Nietzsche's conception of modernity as a destiny and therefore something in which our very existence is caught up. In this chapter we will begin to see that historicism conceals the difference between time and eternity, making it difficult for human beings to transcend it. Finally, Grant's explicit description of a civilizational destiny will be looked at through the lens of liberalism's fate. The essence of that destiny is shown to consist in a technological apprehension of being that hides its essence as nothing more than indifferent externality. Through an appropriation of Plato's understanding of human nature as constitutively related to the good, Grant seeks to transcend that destiny in thought and love.