

# Renewing the Self



# Renewing the Self:

## *Contemporary Religious Perspectives*

Edited by

Benjamin J. Wood

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Renewing the Self: Contemporary Religious Perspectives

Edited by Benjamin J. Wood

This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2017 by Benjamin J. Wood and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-9885-6

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9885-0

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ..... vii

Introduction ..... 1

Individuality and Sociality in Christian Social Thought

Jonathan Chaplin

## **Section A: Historical Orientations**

Chapter One..... 10

The Canadian Red Tory Tradition: Individualism, Selfhood,

Community and the Good

Ron Dart

Chapter Two ..... 30

Autonomous Selves or Loved Others: A Theo-Political Perspective

on the Individual

Roger Haydon Mitchell

Chapter Three ..... 50

From City to Carnival: Towards A Quaker Theology of the Urban Self

Benjamin J. Wood

## **Section B: The Social Self**

Chapter Four..... 74

Is the State a Solution to Individualism? An Analysis of Catholic

Social Teaching

Philip Booth

Chapter Five ..... 96

Learning to be Human in a Post-Liberal Era: Revisiting a Macmurrian

Account of Arts and Ethical Relationality

Esther McIntosh

Chapter Six.....	117
The Post-Liberal Idea of the Person in Pluralist Settings	
Timothy Stacey	
<b>Section C: Self and Other</b>	
Chapter Seven.....	138
Imagining Just Cities: The Dialogue between Theology and Human Rights	
Ethna Regan	
Chapter Eight.....	162
Individualism or Independence? In Search of More Complex Models	
of Society from Disability Perspectives	
Wayne Morris	
Chapter Nine.....	179
August Rioters, Anglicans, and Rough Sleepers through a Psychoanalytic	
Lens	
Charles Pemberton	
Concluding Reflections .....	201
The Making and Unmaking of the Individual	
Linda Woodhead	
Contributors.....	209
Index.....	213

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book was largely the fruit of the *What Next for Individualism?* project run from 2013-2015 by the *Lincoln Theological Institute* at the University of Manchester.<sup>1</sup> As the project's lead researcher, I brought together scholars and activists from diverse Christian backgrounds, to consider whether the notion of the individual had a future. This enterprise was set within a background of hostility. For the last three decades, theological scholarship has rallied against liberal and democratic visions of identity which gives the 'individual' primacy. I wished to investigate the reasons for this hostility and whether any richer and more affirming accounts of being human were possible. In this sense, the volume is both a scholarly elucidation of this problem, and a profound meditation on the individual in a tumultuous political era.

In helping this book come to fruition special thanks must be extended to the LTI's director Professor Peter Scott. Peter's critical eye, generosity, and support at all stages, made this book possible. An old proverb suggests that it takes a whole village to bring up a single child. It is likewise true of an essay collection. In this spirit, warmth and gratitude goes to fellow Manchester scholars Gary Keogh, Daniel Garner, Andrew Crome, Scott Midson, Atreyee Sen and Charlie Pemberton. Their energy, enthusiasm, encouragement, and good grace are woven tightly into the pages of this book. A sincere thanks to my old friend Liz Heesom for assisting me in the editorial process. Your patience and eye for detail was warmly appreciated. Lastly, I want to express my deep appreciation for those who have contributed to this book. Your knowledge and scholarly rigour has been a delight to see in progress.

Dr Benjamin J. Wood,  
University of Chester, September 2016

---

<sup>1</sup> The project centred around three conferences, 'Postliberalism, Individualism and Society', 'Does Labour Reject individualism?' and 'Self and the City'.



## INTRODUCTION

# INDIVIDUALITY AND SOCIALITY IN CHRISTIAN SOCIAL THOUGHT

JONATHAN CHAPLIN

The term ‘postliberalism’ is employed in this book in two distinct but related ways. It alludes both to a growing desire in public debate to move beyond the corrosive individualism widely perceived to have infected much modern liberal thought and to the recent emergence of ‘postsecular’ public space permitting a recovery of a transcendent anchorage for the human person. The diverse offerings here explore, from several contrasting theoretical and empirical perspectives, both the elusive complementarity of human individuality and human sociality and how that complementarity might be better grounded and enriched when both are construed as divine gifts and callings. My remarks will focus on the first of these senses, only implicitly touching on the second (which is addressed in intriguingly contrasting ways by Ronald Dart, Roger Haydon Mitchell, Tim Stacy and Benjamin Wood). The challenge of rendering intelligible the difficult-to-define relationship between individuality and sociality has long been at the heart of Christian social thought. This has been so at least since the apostle Paul sought to capture the ontology of the *ekklesia* in terms of the evocative metaphor of the unified Body of Christ incorporating many ministerially differentiated yet equally honourable members (1 Cor. 12). This was perhaps the most searching and demanding answer ever given to the fateful primordial, and universally returning, question, ‘am I my brother’s keeper?’ (Gen. 4:9). In its best articulations, the Christian social tradition has striven to uphold both poles of human social experience as inescapably necessary and mutually constitutive, regarding them as bound together by being simultaneously constituted and sustained by the loving creative and redemptive purposes of God. Theologies of radical individualism or libertarianism which conceive of human beings as, in principle, ontologically self-enclosed and morally autarkic, or theologies of totalising collectivism or statism which construe humans as subservient

components of a societal whole pursuing its own separate ends, have been rare in the Christian tradition and widely deemed heterodox. Neither extreme position finds the remotest succour in the pages of this book. The tradition has (at its best) held that, where individuality and sociality are pitted against each other as intrinsically in competition, or where one is explained as derivative from the other, or where both are theorised in entirely mundane terms, the integrity and the integrality of each is fatally obscured. Two millennia of the interplay of individuality and sociality have nevertheless yielded widely diverse perspectives. Christian social theories have, for understandable historical, contextual and theological reasons, often ended up tilting towards one pole or the other: either towards a defiant insistence on the distinctness of individuality (and of individual agency, ends, identity, liberty, dissent and so forth), in reaction to communities that confine, frustrate, oppress or blind; or towards a robust affirmation of sociality, belongingness, mutuality and interdependence (both generically, and in their many differentiated instantiations in numerous types of bond, covenant, relationship, community, association, institution and so forth), in reaction to the atomising tendencies of overweening macro-social forces. The chapters in this book strive to situate these tendencies in an equipoise that meets the contextual demands of our own time. They aspire to think about individuality and sociality together, drawing on the critical insights of Christian theologies of freedom, personhood, community, society, polity and history. In this short opening essay, I offer two observations arising from the way in which individuality and sociality are theologically construed in these chapters. But there is, as readers will quickly see, a great deal more in this book than these brief and selective reflections can convey.

The first observation is that the chapters press us to think more rigorously about the precise relationships between ‘personality’, ‘sociality’, ‘individuality’ and ‘embodiment’. Collectively, the authors make clear that we need to leave behind an individualist notion of ‘the individual’ as solitary, self-enclosed, self-assertive and always prone to cut loose, and embrace a notion of ‘the person’ as always already embedded in and constituted by many relationships of complementarity and interdependency. Rowan Williams identifies a fundamental error of individualism as the assumption that ‘there is in us some solid core which sustains who we are independent of anything else’.<sup>1</sup> A consequence of this

---

<sup>1</sup> See Rowan Williams, ‘The Person and the Individual: Human Dignity, Human Relationships and Human Limits’. The 2012 Theos Annual Lecture (London:

is a basic indifference to others – borne of the assumption that ‘what comes first is this isolated core which then negotiates its way around relationships with others but always has the liberty of hurrying back indoors’.<sup>2</sup> Esther McIntosh helpfully reminds us of the rich vein of theorising available on this point in John Macmurray’s account of personhood. Macmurray reiterates in fresh terms the central theological assertion that humans are persons not first by virtue of their separateness from others but ‘by virtue of reciprocal agent-to-agent or person-to-person relations’, especially close and ‘unconditional’ ones (McIntosh, 5). The interdependence of persons is inescapable to being human and not an after-effect of individual choice; it is constitutive, not constructed.<sup>3</sup> Macmurray even goes so far as to assert that ‘a morally right action is an action which intends community’ (16). That might be thought an excessive claim by some, but, as McIntosh cautions, it does not signal a lapse into ‘communitarianism’, or an elision of individual agency (for this very formulation already presupposes the capacity for individual intentionality).

A key question Macmurray poses to a contemporary liberal society is how far we are prepared to recognise interdependence as constitutive of human personhood, rather than casting about for ways to rationalise it as derived from freely chosen agreement, overcome it by enhancing individual power, or simply flee from it, as if it were a constraint on autonomy. Having embraced interdependence as first of all a gift (even if, in corrupted form, always a possible source of oppression), we can then begin to work out how best to honour and cultivate it in order to promote fuller human flourishing amidst what has increasingly become a society of self-enclosed individuals. For Macmurray, one vital means was a more holistic understanding of education oriented to the formation of persons – which was to include, strikingly, the education of emotions (so that children learn not only to think, but also to feel, for themselves). If it was necessary to insist on that point in his time, it is even more necessary to do

---

Theos, 2013), 16. Williams here draws extensively on the Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky.

<sup>2</sup> Williams, ‘The Person and the Individual’, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Williams speaks of the ‘essential mysteriousness’ of the person. The person is the ‘point at which relationships intersect, where a difference may be made and new relations created’ (‘The Person and the Individual’, 12). Relationality runs so deep in personhood that it is actually impossible to ‘lift some abstract thing called “the person” out of it’. Rather, ‘in relationship each of us has a presence or a meaning in someone else’s existence. We live in another’s life’, possessing the capacity to ‘enter into the experience, the aspiration, the sense of self, of others’ (‘The Person and the Individual’, 13).

so in ours, at a time when the official purpose of education is increasingly narrowed to an instrumental focus on preparing rootless and ever-adaptable individuals to contribute to sustaining the nation's economic growth in a competitive global economy – hardly a recipe for 'autonomy'. What is true for education is true for society as a whole. We stand in pressing need of new, holistic conceptions of what it is to be human, yet at a time when there has never been such deep disagreement and confusion about precisely this question. If Macmurray's work helps us recover a picture of persons as inherently social, more recent currents, both in theology and in secular social theory, urge a new recognition of humans as embodied. Macmurray's affirmation of the importance of emotions already begins to break away from the rationalistic conception of personhood that has so dominated modern liberalism, and which, for all its stunning achievements, has seriously impaired our ability to make intelligible sense of our own and others' bodiliness. Today, human embodiment is often seen, at best, as a mere container of the capacity for self-determination (and thus not itself part of 'the self') or, at worst, as a playground for the satisfaction of hedonistic desire. Rowan Williams, however, urges that it is 'no lessening of our dignity as humans, let alone our rationality and liberty as humans, if we exercise [our] "godlike" gifts in the context of bodies that are fragile and mortal and a world that we do not completely control'.<sup>4</sup>

Wayne Morris's exploration of disability confronts us in a salutary way with the question of how we – both people without and with what society terms 'disabilities' – currently understand our selfhoods, our agency and our personhood in relation to our bodies. He explores how a theological anthropology that is fully attentive to the conditions of vulnerability and reciprocal dependency – conditions experienced by all of us by virtue of our embodiment – might enrich or correct such an understanding. Two important preconditions for such a theology of the human emerging from his account are, first, that the *imago dei* must not be understood, reductionistically, in terms of the possession of empirically variable, and temporally unstable, capacities such as rationality, moral agency or even (as in the case with people with advanced dementia)

---

<sup>4</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 191. The misguided urge to control, he notes, results in the impatient aspiration for the perfect body, marriage, home or job. But while 'personal reality...unfolds itself and declares itself in time and in the body', 'individualist awareness resents both time and body, resents unfinishedness, resents limitation'. Williams, 'The Person and the Individual', 17.

awareness; second, that respect for persons as bearing unique worth requires a recognition of their very specific needs and possibilities. Thus, just as people with disabilities should not be judged according to the potentially oppressive benchmark of capacity for autonomy, equally they should not (as in the case of people with autism) be manoeuvred into forms of dependency that might evoke ‘terror’ rather than acceptance. Thus, it emerges that honouring personhood, while requiring a full embrace of relationality, also requires a gracious attentiveness to the individuality of the particular embodied human being who stands (or sits, or lies) before us – both to their distinctive powers and aspirations and to the unique cluster of fragilities they bear. Discerning what follows from the precise relationship between personhood, embodiment and individuality in *this* person (in every person) thus requires that we attend to them not first as representatives of some class or type (such as ‘the disabled’ or ‘hard-working families’ or ‘economic migrants’) but as what Roger Haydon Mitchell calls ‘the loved other’.

Ethna Regan’s exploration of human rights opens up another illuminating angle on these complex relationships. It is asserted by some theologians that if we are to recover a truly relational notion of humanness, we must jettison the very concept of ‘human rights’. Contesting such dismissals, Regan shows how the theological construal of human rights we need today is precisely one that is grounded in a relational model of personhood (as against a notion of ‘self-ownership’); oriented to a rich notion of human flourishing (as against an empty idea of autonomy); and driven by a rejection of arbitrary exclusions of people on the basis of contingencies such as race, gender or poverty. She thus shows how we can quite successfully take distance from the individualistic, proprietary tendencies in (certain) liberal accounts of human rights yet without abandoning the vital assertion that human beings have morally (and, in some cases, also legally) compelling claims to certain types of treatment by others and are not (only) recipients of the obligations of others.<sup>5</sup>

It is worth alluding here to Williams’ strikingly original account of how a robust vision of embodiment can provide the grounding for human rights that so often proves elusive to contemporary theorists. The body, he proposes, is ‘the organ of the soul’s meaning...the medium in which the conscious subject communicates’. Thus, it is ‘[t]he recognition of a body

---

<sup>5</sup> This argument has been forcefully advanced by Nicholas Wolterstorff in *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

as a human body [that] is...the foundation of recognizing the rights of another; and to recognize a body as a human body is to recognize that it is a vehicle of communication'.<sup>6</sup> Thus, 'the irreducible core of human rights is the liberty to make sense as a bodily subject; which means that the inviolability of the body itself is where we should start in thinking about rights'.<sup>7</sup> In a formulation that speaks directly to Morris's account of disability, Williams proposes that 'the body *speaks*...it is the way I make myself present to myself and to others. This holds true even for the most inarticulate, or those whose communications are hardest to decode'; for 'they still have faces'.<sup>8</sup>

The second observation concerns the substantive content of the 'sociality' canvassed in multiple ways in these chapters. What specific structural forms of sociality will contribute to true human flourishing? Human beings present themselves with quite specific needs, desires and capacities arising from their personal agency, embodied (and gendered) nature, and relational and historical situatedness, and so we are bound to take up the difficult and contentious task of trying to identify the concrete structures of sociality that correspond to and facilitate these dimensions of humanness. As McIntosh shows, Macmurray was particularly enamoured of the formative capacity of close, 'unconditional' relationships, as distinct to the 'looser' bonds seen in wider society. While he was not 'anti-state', he claims that while the state could (and should) furnish conditions for greater equality, it could not itself create community. We wonder, however, how Macmurray might have construed the humanising potentials of the highly diverse social structures populating wider society.

Here the chapters by Ronald Dart and Philip Booth prove especially helpful. In the course of his welcome presentation of the neglected Canadian Christian philosopher George Grant, Dart relates how Grant's 'Red Tory' vision affirmed the equal importance of community, association, and state, refusing to play any one off against the other (as, Dart holds, Phillip Blond's anti-statist stance does). He also reminds us of Grant's charge against modern (Canadian) liberalism that, while it officially championed freedom and pluralism, in effect it worked systematically to undermine the essential communities and associations (and 'nations') necessary for a flourishing human life and a balanced society. Such intermediate bodies were, he held, being destroyed under the

---

<sup>6</sup> Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, 152.

<sup>7</sup> Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, 155.

<sup>8</sup> Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, 154.

heel of a technocratic liberal state purporting to guarantee autonomy to individuals in a culture that, having abandoned its classical and Christian heritage, no longer knew what to do with genuine autonomy. Dart's account of Grant reminds us of the need to hold in place a comprehensive, integrated conception of the various structural components of sociality that will make for a flourishing human society. While small and sometimes intense communities such as family, school, neighbourhood, church or religious community will always occupy a central place in Christian social thought, these need to be situated against the larger canvas of intermediate and macro-level institutions that also make necessary contributions to the flourishing of human personhood. In our laudable efforts to rehabilitate 'the person', we must not lapse into a romanticising of the small, the inter-personal or the local, loading them with expectations they cannot bear.

In affirming the importance of this larger institutional fabric, Grant stood in line with the best of modern Christian social thought. Philip Booth deploys the powerful resources of Catholic social teaching to pose precise and compelling questions about the appropriate structural forms of a flourishing human society and the proper distribution of responsibilities among them. Equally repudiating individualistic conceptions of liberty and the market, and statist conceptions of the common good and solidarity, he urges a revival of the substantial but weakly acknowledged potentials of the many forms of free association springing up between state and individual. Whatever one makes of his reading of F. A. Hayek's thought as compatible (in the senses he discusses) with the thrust of Catholic social teaching, there should be wide endorsement of his important assertions that, first, solidarity cannot be delegated to the state, and, second, while the state must promote the common good, this does not imply that the common good is always the direct result of state action. In Catholic social thought, the common good is a comprehensive goal to which all persons and institutions should orient their actions, as well as the route by which it should be approached (it cannot be decided, or imposed, from above by the state or any other institution). The state's unique contribution to the common good (not always clearly identified in Catholic commentaries) stands alongside the complementary contributions of many persons, communities, associations and networks, each exercising their own proper agency and responsibility. The latter are, in turn, protected by the principle of subsidiarity. The market, too, is one specific and valuable arena of human cooperation (and not, Booth stresses, only of competition). Through the interacting decisions of its many participants, a market makes its own unique offering to the realisation of the common good. Booth is

especially wary of the many ways in which improper or excessive state intervention can frustrate or undermine the space for empowered and responsible human initiative in civil society and in markets. Yet, also in keeping with Catholic social thought, he affirms an indispensable role for the state both in securing the just rules required to govern free interactions in society and in supplying the basic human needs required to meet the needs of human dignity. Whether or not one agrees with his analyses of the empirical operations of markets and states and of their normative goals (such as ‘social justice’), his account does us the service of sharply clarifying the issues at stake in discerning what are the particular forms of sociality required to promote the genuine flourishing of persons. Bland, unspecific invocations of terms such as ‘common good’, ‘solidarity’ or even ‘social justice’, leave the door open for contending protagonists to fill these empty vessels with whatever ideological content they choose.

The fascinatingly diverse discussions in the chapters of this book, of which the above remarks have only offered a selective glimpse, provide rich resources for critical reflection on the complex relationship between individuality and sociality. They also set before us the challenge of articulating a fuller and more coherent account of this relationship, one able to meet the particular challenges of what Mitchell calls the ‘contemporary postliberal moment’ (Mitchell, 1). Mitchell echoes the critique, shared by all contributors to this book, of the autonomous individual as an ‘individualisation of sovereignty’ (Mitchell 3). His positive proposal is that our post-liberal moment ‘might be positively met by the individual as the loved other’ (Mitchell, 1). When grasped in its depth, this seemingly simple, even platitudinous, suggestion turns out to be profoundly radical. For it invites the searching question of why, after all, we are indeed ‘each other’s keepers’, and what it is to assume the task of ‘keeping’, and ‘being kept by’, another. How these demanding and unsettling questions might be posed, not only within religious communities themselves, but also in the wider context of a society which is, on the one hand, extensively secularized and increasingly fragmented, and yet, on the other, also yearning for re-enchantment and renewed solidarity, will remain a daunting challenge. The chapters in this book launch us off on that challenge with many fruitful resources in hand.

**SECTION A:**  
**HISTORICAL ORIENTATIONS**

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE CANADIAN RED TORY TRADITION: INDIVIDUALISM, SELFHOOD, COMMUNITY AND THE GOOD

RON DART

To modern political theory, man's essence is his freedom. Nothing must stand in the way of our absolute freedom to create the world as we want it. There must be no conceptions of good that put limitations on our human action. This definition of man as freedom constitutes the heart of the age of progress.

—George Grant<sup>1</sup>

### **The Dilemma: Political Fragments**

There is a predictable tendency to equate conservatism with right of centre political theory and political parties and liberalism with centre and centre left political philosophy. Much hinges, though, on what is being conserved. There is a historic form of Toryism that grounds itself in pre-Reformation thought (a Christian synthesis of classical Greek-Roman-Jewish thought), and this form of Toryism is often at odds with modern Conservatism which is a child, for the most part, of the Reformation and its secularization. It is, therefore, important, at the outset, to distinguish between Toryism (with its classical bent) and Conservatism (with its more modern leanings). This does not mean there is no overlap between Toryism and Conservatism, but there are distinct differences, also. It is these differences, in theory and practice, which often generate a confused equation of Toryism with Conservatism. This essay will examine these issues within the historic and contemporary Canadian context (with a focus on the life and writings of George Grant) and, by way of conclusion,

---

<sup>1</sup> George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965), p. 103.

discuss how the Canadian understanding of Red Toryism is quite different than the use of the political term by Phillip Blond in his recent book, *Red Tory: How Left And Right Have Broken Britain And How We Can Fix It* (2010). I will, in this essay, use Red and High Tory in a way that distinguishes the use of Tory from the more popular tendency to equate Tory with Conservative. The language of High and Red Tory does generate subtle yet necessary distinctions within the Tory position. Both Red and High Toryism are quite different from Blue Toryism or variations of Conservatism.

The core of this essay will examine different types of conservatism (one being extremely Liberal, the other organic Tory). As I attempt to argue, these distinctions do make a substantive difference in the much contested notions of individualism and selfhood. But, before I delve further into this topic, a brief discussion is in order on the diverse origins of American and Canadian politics—such an approach will prepare the way for the later discussion of the differences between liberal individualism and Tory notions of the self, community and the Platonic vision of the just and good self (ever in process towards a higher end). The publication in 1955 of Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America* raised the issue of the differences between political thought in Europe and North America. The more sophisticated and updated version of Hartz's thesis was published as *The Founding of New Societies* (1964). The Hartzian thesis, as applied to Canada and the USA, revealed some important and often neglected differences between the political experience of Americans and Canadians. Hartz suggested that with the break from European culture, political fragments (or would 'fragmentation' be clearer?) occurred. The American political tradition tended to fragment in, mostly, the liberal direction, whereas the Canadian political ethos held together the Tory and Whiggish traditions. It was this Tory touch in Canada that distinguished the Canadian way from the American European fragment. There have been those within the Canadian political tradition (Goldwin Smith, Kenneth Macrae, Frank Underhill, Janet Ajzenstaat) that beg to differ with the Hartzian thesis, and such political philosophers (past and present) insist that Canada, like the USA, is a liberal fragment that has drawn from the diverse wells of Burke (a Rockingham Whig), Locke, Paine, Hobbes, Smith and other English liberals. In short, so the argument goes, Canada is as liberal in its origins as the USA. Such a position, though, does not fully explain (past and present) the left of centre communal tradition (in thought and political party praxis) that exists in Canada in a way that it does not in the USA. There is within the Canadian political soul a commitment to the common good (we will examine the relevance of both the good and that

which is common and of the commons later) that is unique within Canada and distinguishes the political tradition in Canada from the United States.

The Canadian political philosopher, Gad Horowitz, took the Hartzian thesis and applied the argument, in more depth and detail, to the Canadian political tradition. Horowitz, in a meticulous way, unpacked his argument in an essay entitled, “Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism in Canada” that was, eventually, included in his first published tome, *Canadian Labour in Politics* (1968). It was Horowitz who applied the term ‘Red Tory’ to Grant after reading his polemic *Lament for a Nation* in 1965. There can be no doubt that Horowitz had been influenced in his reading of the Canadian political experience by Hartz, but Grant’s publication of *Lament*, confirmed for Horowitz that organic Toryism was alive and well in Canada. Grant had, by the 1960s, become one of the leading public intellectuals in Canada that dared to question the dominance of liberal ideology (in theory and practice) doing so from a distinctive Anglo-Franco Tory grounding. Grant was convinced that English speaking Canadians had, for the most part, capitulated to the American liberal fragment, and, in doing so, had turned their backs on the best of the Canadian Tory-Whig tension that defined the Canadian way of life. Grant stood on the shoulders of many who went before him, and his task became one of pointing out the consequences of uncritically adopting the liberal agenda. Hooker, Swift, Johnson and Coleridge became Grant’s guiding English lights in opposition to bourgeois liberals such as Hobbes, Locke, Smith, Mill and Rawls. Nietzsche and Heidegger held Grant’s attention even more, for the simple reason that their demanding thought had in many respects unmasked liberal pretensions. Grant would follow yet further the thinking of Plato and Simone Weil on his journey to unpack a more radical form of Toryism. It was such a rethinking that did much to clarify the crude and sophisticated forms of liberal individualism and historicism from Tory views of the self, community and the state.

## **Liberty and Individualism**

It was the late medieval world which set the stage for individualism. Nominalism and Voluntarism highlighted the centrality of the individual using will, as a free agent, to live life in the most meaningful way possible. Needless to say, such postures were quite understandable given the more collectivist political and ecclesial historic context of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, such philosophic positions were liberating. In their outworking during the Protestant Reformation, both Nominalist and Voluntarist strains

nurtured a number of distinct theological effects. There was a wide spectrum within the Protestant thought concerning how both currents could be interpreted. Nominalism gave rise to multiple denominations which hinged on disagreements over the self. Luther, Zwingli and Calvin generated disagreement through *Sola Scriptura* while Anabaptists, Baptists and Quakers differed regarding the controlling principle of Christian life, centring on questions of how the Bible, Spirit or the Inner Light should be interpreted and applied. The fragmentation of the Protestant Reformation was but the logical and predictable outworking of the rights of the individual, all being equal high priests and free to choose, in good conscience, the truest reading of the Bible. It is quite understandable why the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions were suspicious of the Protestants and Puritans. Erasmus and More saw, all too clearly, the writing on the fragmentary wall with Luther, just as Hooker did with the Puritans. Each and all would, in time, do what was right in their own eyes, and schisms would occur at an ever-increasing rate and pace. The genie of liberal individualism was out of the bottle, not to be returned.

It was just a matter of time (religious wars being what they were) that the religious impulse would be privatized. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 did much to increasing the role of the state in curbing functions of the sacred in the secular sphere. This did not mean that liberal individualism faltered - it merely became secularized. The Enlightenment had a tendency to question religious commitments but it also continued the liberal commitment to the rights of the individual. There were, of course, collectivist reactions to the ongoing emergence of the free and liberated individual (Marxism, left wing Hegelianism, social liberalism etc.), but revolutionary liberalism maintained its individualistic march forward in history. When the rights of the individual collided with families, communities or the state on various hot button issues of the time, individualism became, almost, a religious human right. There is, obviously, much more that could be said about the emergence and maturation of late medieval Voluntarism and Nominalism, but there is a definite cause and effect unfolding in liberal political projects. Is there a way back? There has been, predictably, an attempt to question a form of liberal and atomistic individualism that has run amuck and become unhinged and disconnected from families, community, religious institutions, society and politics, hence the rise of the language of various forms of community and communitarianism. But, much of the language of communitarianism is still shot through, when push comes to shove, with the rights of the individual to trump the community when the interests of both collide. How then, can, the language of selfhood and community

come as a corrective to a form of liberty-loving individualism in which will and agency are subordinate to other principles?

## **The Tory Touch**

Horowitz had argued that Canada held together Toryism and liberalism in a way the United States did not. George Grant embodied and, in many ways, proved this Horowitzian thesis. What is this Tory touch? It is rooted in an emphasis on the common good, the connection between the wisdom of the past and the present. It involves the organic unfolding of history and the positive impact of community. It is this Tory touch that pointed Grant beyond liberalism. If liberal theory poses an open-ended notion of human nature and elevated the liberty of the individual, organic Toryism searches for the Common Good. Grant took upon himself the task of enucleating the ways in which most modern liberals were enfolded within unquestioned principles and what such principles meant for issues of power, identity and public ethics. Yet, there was much more to the Tory touch than political matters. Religion, culture, philosophy, theology, and education were part of the organic Tory vision of the soul and society. Indeed, as Grant argued, our modern notion of individualism is grounded in the Protestant. The sheer fragmentation that liberalism wrought on societies, markets, religions, and ethical systems could not be corrected within the principles and ethos of liberalism. The notion of the Platonic Good was foreign to most forms of liberalism. Was there a way to challenge the hegemony of liberalism and articulate another way of being? The answer to such a question became, in many ways, Grant's prophetic vocation.

Horowitz was the first, in 1965, to coin the term 'Red Tory', and he applied the language of Red Toryism to George Grant. Grant never accepted the designation, but he was aware the language of Red Toryism had some corrective possibilities. Chief among these was an understanding of Toryism in ways that upheld deep affinities between the Tory notion of the common good and the leftist ideas of the collective. Most forms of conservatism are merely an outworking of liberalism (with a commitment to competitive and contractual individualism). Horowitz and Grant saw this most clearly. The problem for Grant was that leftist forms of political thought were also products of liberalism, and shared the underlying principles of liberalism. Grant realized that the leftist notions of the individual, when decoded and seriously examined, were problematic. The organic Tory notion of the Platonic Good had possibilities that both

Protestantism and secularized Protestantism of the left and right had little understanding of. The Tory tradition, rooted as it was in the best and wisest of the Classical tradition and applied in the Euro-Canadian context, was what animated and shaped Grant's critique of the modern project. The publication in 1905 of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* did much to clarify the notion that, centuries before Adam Smith, capitalism was justified by a form of Calvinism. The deeper premises that underwrote such an equating of religion and work had much to do with the rights of the individual. In this mould, all were free and equal to use their agency and will to bolster their private interests. Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists and Quakers all appealed to the implicit principles and prejudices of liberalism. The fragile unity that once held together the Roman Catholic form of Christianity in the West had been shattered with the establishment of various types of Protestant Christianity. Grant was convinced, in some ways shaped, in his thinking by Weber that Calvinist individualism went hand in hand with contractual and market-led politics. In the aftermath of the Reformation, liberalism sought to facilitate the liberty of individuals. A contract existed between individuals and the state, yet when the state ceased to adequately fulfil its role as a mediator of the free individual, the contract could be broken.

Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau were foundational to such a liberal notion of the self and society. The rise of Protestant denominationalism and laissez-faire economics were just two forms of the inevitable outworking of the principle of individualism mentioned above. It is one thing to track the origins of liberalism to the Reformation, but Grant traced the origins of errors still further back. Both the Jewish and Greek world had pondered these same problems. It was the way Calvin had read the Hebrew canon that first alerted Grant to the anthropological roots of the excesses of liberal modernity. Simone Weil was Grant's guide on this path. She was, by nature, a meticulous reader and interpreter of Biblical and Greek thought. Weil was a Jew who honestly and faithfully engaged with the troubling and difficult passages of the Hebrew Scriptures. The God of the Jews is one who chooses a certain people, commands his people to commit genocide, promises them land that others inhabit and seems, at times, to be more like Jupiter, Mars, Odin or Zeus. The "I Am Who I Am" seems to elude and transcend ethical constraints. In this vein, willing and choosing seems to trump Goodness and Nature. Power and force seem to marginalize accountability and responsibility. The Will to Power of the Divine and Goodness often seem at odds, the former negating the latter. It was this tension in the narrative of Israel that worried both Weil and Grant. It was, therefore, not just the Reformation which

introduced the West to the constrained will. Judaism had prepared the ground. This Will-Goodness clash justified the Divine election of some and damnation to others. It was this much older problem that confronted Weil and Grant.

How then can this power-centred self be oriented towards the just and eternal good? It is significant to note that Weil and Grant turned to the Classical Greek tradition to assist them in making sense of the problems within the “revealed tradition” of Judaism (and some forms of Christianity). Both found in Plato a way through the Willing-Goodness tension at a deep theological and anthropological level. They discovered that neither individualism nor community should be ends in themselves. Both, in their different ways, can be means of embodying a form of unethical willing or aspiring to the Good. How can we know the Good when such a reality cannot be proved empirically? The scientific method has often gone hand in hand in significant ways. The closed universe of scientism has caused those seeking deeper meaning to detect what Grant called “intimations of betrayal”. It was this sense of unfaithfulness that both vexed and animated Grant. By heeding the inner intimations that something was missing, one could open the portals beyond the leaden sky. It was the separation between time and eternity, that brought into being the “strange gods” of reductionist dominance. Most organic Tories are committed to the time- honoured vision that to be human is to be both immersed in history and time but, also, to take bearings from the eternal dimension. It is in the intersection between time and eternity that classical Tory thinkers are immersed. To what are these thinkers opposed? It was the modern addiction to “*techne*” as a way of knowing and being. Guided in this critique by Jacques Ellul and Martin Heidegger, Grant desired a renewal of the soul, society and state in the present. If the Protestant Reformation assisted in the birth of liberal principles and ideology, it also contributed towards the malaise of our postmodern condition. We are living through a reversal so well noted by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*. Most classical cultures are grounded in the *vita contemplativa* (or the contemplative life). This is the foundation from which the *vita activa* (or the active life) builds on and bears ample fruit. The fact that classical civilizations frequently honoured the monastic life speaks volumes about how cultures in the past have understood the relationship between the sacred and the secular,

The emergence of the Reformation undermined and undercut the Western contemplative vision from which the active life emerged. Monasteries were destroyed and the more activist and entrepreneurial life

came to dominate in the Christian world (so well described by Weber and Tawney). Philosophy became, increasingly, a plaything of late medieval scholasticism and scientific empiricism. The turn from the subjective journey to the objective world meant that logic, induction, deduction and empirical analysis came to dominate our ways of knowing. The contemplative way, in thought and deed, became ignored or sent into exile. The results of such a cultural and religious shift meant an addiction of sorts to the *vita*. As the Protestant tradition, has waned, a form of secularized *vita activa* had come to rule the day. Most, in the modern and postmodern ethos, are very much victims of their motion and know not how to slow down, be still and be centred.

### **Grant and the Repair of Philosophy and Culture**

Grant saw, with the sharpest eagle eyes, that the modern affection for Francis Bacon and his empirical-scientific approach to thought and action were having a dire impact on the soul, society and ecology. Grant was, in many ways, decades ahead of his time in exploring how Baconian thought undermined a more significant understanding of nature as icon. After the Second World War, George Grant's uncle, Vincent Massey (first Canadian Governor-General), initiated the Massey Commission. The purpose of the Commission was to ponder and reflect on the role of Canada in the fields of arts, sciences, humanities, and education. Grant was asked to write the essay for Massey on Philosophy. The article was published in 1951, and argued, in a probing manner, that philosophy had become mired in Baconian empirical scientism. Grant challenged, directly, the philosophical Sanhedrin in North America. Like a ram's horn held high, he called philosophers and theologians back to the origins of philosophy and theology. Contemplation must become, again, the Delphic oracle and Diotima that should guide and shape the direction of the active life (that had so genuflected to a mindless and entrepreneurial activism and narrow rationalism). Grant so offended the philosophic Sanhedrin in Canada by his article that the annual meeting of the Canadian philosophic Sanhedrin met to condemn it. Bacon and Plato had become the two metaphors for the classics and the moderns. Plato embodied a contemplative way of gazing on the good, Bacon the modern scientific rationalist making a new Atlantis. This can be pictured as Swift's bees and spiders (Plato as the bee that draws from the best that can be thought, and Bacon, making and spinning out a web of reality). The fact that post-war Western philosophy had, for the most part, doffed the cap to logical positivism, meant that Grant had some sympathies with existentialism. Yet there were few

existentialists (religious or secular) that were seriously interested in the *vita contemplativae*. Grant thought that many of the existentialists were equally enslaved and ensnared by the inner *vita activa*. It was this disturbing fact that had led most intellectuals to turn against the contemplative way. This led Grant to foster an interest in Oriental religions (particularly Gandhi's fusion of the contemplative and active life). It was this turn to the contemplative East that gave rise to Grant's rather cryptic statement, "Christianity seems in a certain way closer to Hinduism than it does to its fellow religions that arose in the Middle East". What did this fusion mean for Grant? The contemplative offered a deep challenge to liberal individualism at the root. By initiating a return to *vita contemplativae*, the subject can live a fuller, more meaningful life. This letting go of liberal individualism can, if properly and wisely approached, open the portals to the true and eternal self. It is in the rejection of the ideology of liberal individualism that, phoenix-like, the self is born. Such are the deeper possibilities offered by the contemplative path so well understood by Plato, Aristotle, and the Christian Patristic traditions.

There has been a tendency within Western religious thought to offer centre stage to triumphalist theologies of glory. The resurrection motif cannot be denied within Christian thought, but an overemphasis upon the God of victory can lead to an unrealistic merging of church and state. Herein lies the model of imperial Christendom. We are left with an uncritical "my will be done" theology that merges the language of power, faith, and empire. Grant offers us another way, informed by *vita contemplativae*. There is the often-neglected theology of the cross that homes in on the tragic and painful, unresolved, and mysterious, paradoxical and agonistic aspects of life. George Grant, like Simone Weil, was drawn much more to the theology of the cross.<sup>2</sup> There has been a worrisome tendency amongst certain liberal, Reformed, and evangelical Christians to commit themselves to a theology of theology (to a pre-eminence of willing). Jesus, as he approached the cross, prayed, "Not my will, but thine be done". It is in this "not my will" and the theology of the cross that a deeper and more demanding notion of the individual and selfhood emerges. It is through the contemplative way that the egoism of individualism is questioned. In the events of the crucifixion there is a letting go of that which we are not. There is the death of a false sense of

---

<sup>2</sup> The recently published PhD (now a book by Pamela McCarroll, *Waiting at the Foot of the Cross: Toward a Theology of Hope for Today* (2014) brings to the fore the writing of Weil, Grant and one of Canada's finest theologians, Douglas John Hall.

ego and a new and eternal self (that bears the eternal image and distorted likeness of God) comes into being. It is this intricate and well-wrought connection between the contemplative path (the wisdom to know the differences between the true and false) that lies at the core of this new self. Instead of a constructed ego, we are invited to embrace a new being, lived out in community. In short, the weeds of what we are not, give way to the garden of what we are within the contemplative domain of the heart. In this respect, Grant was, in many ways, at the forefront of recovering the contemplative and wisdom way of knowing in opposition to the rationalistic, empirical, reductionist way of modernity.<sup>3</sup> It was in such a contemplative turn that Grant saw, as did Plato in his cave analogy, the importance of the Good as a telos of sorts that drew the soul and mind, imagination and heart to its true end and purpose. It is quite possible to see these themes played out in Grant's earliest book, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, in which "The Mythic and Modern Consciousness" (chapter II) and "Natural Law" (chapter III) form the alternate vision to liberal modernity. In opposition to the constructed individual, an order exists in the cosmos and soul in which each and all know and attune themselves to the "moving image of eternity". In this fusion of nature and eternity, the soul and society become just and peaceful. This does not mean that, as humans, we can fully know such an order. The task of theology, philosophy, religion, science and education is to work together to search out the obvious and subtler nature of this teleological order. Grant spent much of his academic life pointing to the classical way contra modern liberalism. There can be no doubt the inward journey was part of the reclamation and recovery of the deeper and truer self that Grant was committed to. Yet, there were also, in his role as a good Tory, the social and public dimensions of the journey.

---

<sup>3</sup> There have been various intellectuals who have questioned the modern liberal project (root and branch, fruit and trunk), but few have focused on the contemplative-active reversal that took place in the late Middle Ages and the Protestant Reformation. Heidegger did this in a way few did, and Hannah Arendt, his controversial and erstwhile student, did so in a more politicized way. It is significant that Heidegger, Arendt and Grant had some interest in the Orient, but Grant, in time, came to see that the Western contemplative tradition, within the modern context, was an unmapped and much forgotten reality; he became, in many ways, a digger for the motherlode, a prophet decrying the clear cutting of the contemplative beauty that once existed and shaped theology, philosophy and politics.

## **The Public Dimensions of Toryism: Gemeinschaft, Gesellschaft and the State**

Many of the American Tories were Anglicans and knew well that in opposing the revolution they were opposing Locke. They appealed to the older political philosophy of Richard Hooker. —George Grant<sup>4</sup>

The far-reaching implications of Ferdinand Tönnies' distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (direct interpersonal community relationships of family and friendships) and *Gesellschaft* (indirect relationships at the level of institutions) became foundational for Tory thinking. Those who start and end with the liberal notion of the atomistic individual can only go so far down the road to Communitarianism. Yet, inevitably conflict emerges and individuals collide at interpersonal and ideological levels. If there is not a deeper and more contemplative understanding of what must be released (*Gelassenheit*), fragmentation and isolation ensue.

Community and social life can only extend so far when a form of liberty-loving individualism dominates daily life. There has been, in recent decades, an ongoing distinction between the political right, with its emphasis on the market and society, and the statist left with its emphasis upon higher taxes and bureaucratic structure-administration. Where would Grant and other Canadian Tories stand on this Society-State dilemma? Tönnies' distinction is a good place to begin such an analysis. Grant, like most Tories, conservatives, anarchists, and libertarians, would applaud the role of direct, interpersonal, and spontaneous relationships. Such is the importance of Tönnies' emphasis on *Gemeinschaft*. But, as noted above, if those in community lack a deeper understanding of the self, egoistic, 'my will be done' relationships come to dominate and genuine sociality has limited life expectancy. The ideals of I-Thou soon become clashes of the will by one group or individual to dominate another. Therefore, the deeper contemplative way of knowing is foundational to communal life. There is something to be said for the importance of what Burke called the 'little platoon' as a corrective to the atomistic individualism of liberalism (with its isolating and alienating tendencies). Often problems begin when the journey is made from the more personal and direct community life of *Gemeinschaft* to the more organized and institutional reality of *Gesellschaft*—this is where some of the differences begin to emerge. The level of organization and administration needed to run public institutions such as health care, education, social services, and political parties does

---

<sup>4</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965), p.75.

presuppose a certain level of impersonal organization and administration. The inevitable shift and transition from *Gemeinschaft* (community) to *Gesellschaft* (organized social life) does have its tensions. Those on both the right and left tend to idealize the one while denigrating the other. Yet, both are important for a healthy public life. I and Thou and I and It (to quote Martin Buber) sit in creative tension. The problem occurs when a bureaucratic and administratively driven *Gesellschaft* loses its I-Thou elements and becomes merely an I-It organizational machine. When this occurs, as it often does for the sake of efficiency, the community-oriented *Gemeinschaft* types rightly rebel.

But, there is more to public life than the distinctions within the social spheres. There is also the role of the state, political parties and politicians in bringing into being the public good to consider. The political right often has a certain cynicism regarding the state as does the anarchist left. An organic Tory, yet again, would never be so reactionary. Each and all play their role within the larger good of a country; each and all can distort and demean their public roles, but abuse does not prohibit use. It is significant that Grant had a high regard for the role of the state in bringing into being and ensuring a variety of public goods. Grant, as High Tory, recognized the important role of the small platoon in humanizing and making more personal public life, but he also realized the state should not be denigrated and society elevated. This is where the distinction between a true and false self needs to be reintroduced. Where there is no internal understanding of the differences between an egotistic individualism and a cruciform personhood, the state becomes a plaything and object to be manipulated to serve selfish ends. Toryism on the other hand posits the intricate relationship between the necessary goods offered within community, society and the state. Individuals tend to retreat into private or isolated enclaves when their wants are not met in a way they desire. Grant was convinced that the merging of will, freedom and egoistic individualism stood against the benign language of tolerance, pluralism and diversity so beloved of liberal politics. This left Grant in the position of aligning with socialists in their opposition to American militarism, imperialism, multinational corporatism and rape of the earth, and the political right in opposing abortion, euthanasia and the alteration of family values. Both the right and the left, Grant argued, were in themselves inconsistent. The right justified the use of power and choice by legitimating an aggressive will to power via the market economy. The left was willing to legitimise the killing of unborn children, redefine the family and dismiss religion as an opiate of the people. Thus, both creeds undermined real pluralism. Grant saw, as few did, how the language of

liberalism hid behind the language of pluralism, but the reality of a non-negotiable will to power dominated at a more substantive level. It was this fusion of will-power guided by a fixation on “techne” (as a panacea for the human condition) that prompted Grant to write his 1986 polemic, *Technology and Justice*. Here Grant positions himself at the forefront of a critical analysis of the problematic unfolding of liberal principles in world history. Grant was not content merely to ponder the differences in the roles between community, society and the state. There was something much more insidious at work that had to be faced. What was required was the unveiling of the animating principles of liberalism. Here Grant was at his piercing and probing best. When power and control set the tone for social existence, tinkering with the secondary issues of community, society and state was much like moving chairs around on the deck of a ship that was heading in the wrong direction.

Now, we should return to Grant’s account of contemplation. At its core is the suggestion that it is the Good that serves as the compass which points us to how society and the state, selfhood and community should orient themselves. If there is no higher north star to guide the self, society or the state, each can become an egotistical enterprise that undermines and undercuts the purpose and end of life. The thick roots of contemplation and wisdom, the Good and Justice, provide for most Tories the grounding that holds together the humanising capacities of community, society and the state. When these capacities are ignored, marginalized or demeaned, the public sphere tends to become reactive and impotent and fruitless. Such is High Tory critique of the character of modern liberalism. What fruitful directions do such trajectories produce? Many of us in Canada were quite surprised when Phillip Blond’s *Red Tory: How Left and Right have Broken Britain and How We Can Fix It* was published in 2010. The language of Red Tory, as I mentioned above, emerged in 1965 in Canada in the engagement between Gad Horowitz (on the Canadian socialist left) and George (a High Tory nationalist). Both men opposed the drift to the right in society and the state, the capitulation to American imperialism and, at the more popular levels, to a form of individualism and the retreat of meaningful citizenship. Both men, for different reasons, held high the role of the state and civil society. Both saw citizenship as concerned with persons working together for the preservation of the common good. This was not a case of elevating society and community contra the state or demeaning society and idealizing the role of the state. There can be no doubt that Blond’s tome had definite affinities with these aspects of organic Toryism. The fact that the book was divided into two parts, “The Mess we’re in and How We Got There” and “Alternatives”