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Finite Freedom, Fractured and Fragile: Kant's Anthropology as Resource for a Postmodern Theology of Grace

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Published version. "Finite Freedom, Fractured and Fragile: Kant's Anthropology as Resource for a Postmodern Theology of Grace," in *Philosophie et Théologie: Festschrift Emilio Brito, SJ*. Eds. Éric Gaziaux. Minderbroedersstraat, Leuven: Leuven UP, 2007, pp. 47-60. Used with permission.

FINITE FREEDOM, FRACTURED AND FRAGILE

KANT'S ANTHROPOLOGY AS RESOURCE FOR A POSTMODERN THEOLOGY OF GRACE

I. Fractured Situatedness

In laying out the conceptual topography of "the conflicts of modernity" at the conclusion of *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Charles Taylor notes "the crucial importance of the strands of philosophy ... which have been trying ... to develop anthropologies of situated freedom"[1]. He considers development of such anthropologies important for countering the ways in which contending strands of modern moral discourse and practice have constricted the range of goods that humans may legitimately affirm as morally compelling: These contending strands "find their way through the dilemmas of modernity by invalidating some of the goods in contest"[2]. In tandem with the case he advances for developing "languages of personal resonance" to articulate the legitimacy of the moral weight of these contested human goods, Taylor underwrites the need for "anthropologies of situated freedom" in terms of a set of philosophical considerations about human self-identity within which important theological subtexts about the relation of the human to the divine may be discerned[3]. In both cases, Taylor's engage-

1. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 514-515. Taylor does not offer a thematically focused treatment of "situated freedom" in *Sources of the Self*; his account relies upon his previous discussion of this concept in *Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp. 559-571; reproduced in *Hegel and Modern Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 154-169.

2. Taylor, *Sources* (n. 1), p. 503. A fundamental "zone of conflict" in which Taylor sees each party contesting the validity of crucial goods affirmed by the other is that between "disengaged instrumentalism and the Romantic or modernist protest against it" (*Sources*, p. 498). Some of the "contested goods" at issue play a constitutive role within the contending strands, e.g., the instrumentalized ways of life on the side of the proponents of disengaged reason, self-exploration on the side of proponents of (subjective) expressivism. Other "contested goods" are those overlooked by both parties in that zone of conflict, "for instance, why it matters and what it means to have a more deeply resonant human environment and, even more, to have affiliations with some depth in time and commitment" (*Sources*, p. 513).

3. See Philip Rossi, *Divine Transcendence and the Languages of Personal Resonance*, in J. Haers – P. De Mey (eds.), *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology* (BETL, 172), Leuven, Peeters, 2003, pp. 783-794, for an exploration of the theological dimensions operative in his notion of "languages of personal resonance".

ment with fundamental issues of human good – What constitutes genuine human good? What makes such good possible? What are the conditions for properly discerning it and for definitively attaining it? – occasionally takes note that such issues stand within a horizon of questions of how the human stands in relation to the divine[4]. Perhaps in view of an audience perceived as willing to give hearing to philosophical modes of discourse in his work, but wary of transpositions of such discourse into theological modes, Taylor does not pursue these questions about human good in an explicitly theological manner. Careful attention to certain aspects of Taylor's treatment of these issues suggests, however, that his brief notice of their theological dimensions is more than a polite bow in the direction of the historical role that Christian thought once played in framing them. Taylor's discussions also point to specific theological *loci* that continue to be pertinent to these issues. The one they point to most insistently – and thus the one this essay explores – is that of "grace", particularly as Christian traditions have forged it as an appropriate conceptual locus for theological exploration of fundamental questions about human good.

My goal in this essay is thus to lend theological support to Taylor's philosophical case that we need "anthropologies of situated freedom" by indicating how such anthropologies may serve as "prolegomena" for theological understandings of grace appropriate to the fragmented cultures of meaning for which the term "post-modernity" often stands as signpost. I will argue that framing an anthropology that is explicitly situated in reference to what Taylor terms "fractured horizons" of meaning may prove useful in constructing a theology of grace properly attentive to the fragmentation that deeply marks so many of the modes of human life and meaning in which the exercise of human freedom is now increasingly immersed. To provide an orientation to that horizon of fragmented meaning and the circumstances it encompasses, I will look principally to the work of Taylor and others who, while writing from a stance often unflinchingly critical of key features of modernity, nonetheless can be considered neither "'boosters' nor 'knockers' who either condemn or affirm modernity en bloc"[5]. I consider their work to offer particularly useful coordinates for situating us upon a terrain they all recognize as seriously fractured, and for which our human resources for successful negotiation are slender and fragile – but upon which neither

4. See TAYLOR, *Sources* (n. 1), pp. 410-413, for an instance in which he makes explicit a connection these questions have to notions of grace.

5. Charles TAYLOR, *A Catholic Modernity?*, in James L. HEFT (ed.), *Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 36.

the fracturing of the terrain nor the fragility of our resources thereby require us to abandon all hope for safe traverse. Within this context, I will then propose some initial elements upon which to start construction of an anthropology of appropriately situated freedom. I will suggest that it may draw at least some elements from what may seem a surprising source, inasmuch as that source provided, according to many standard accounts of the emergence of modernity, a seminal delineation of the very "unsituated" human freedom that played a pivotal role in the intellectual dynamics that brought about the fractured landscape of modernity. This source is an anthropology of free, finite human moral agency, as it is both embedded in and articulated through the critical writings of Immanuel Kant

Two major considerations lie behind my proposal to re-read Kant against the grain of accounts – that start at least as far back as Hegel – in which his formal rendering of freedom is understood as abstracting it from every concrete human *situs* – and doing so precisely in order for freedom to have the universality necessary for its moral purchase on human action. In contrast to this thin, unpromising view of the anthropological *locus* of Kantian freedom, the first consideration in favor of a new reading of Kant's anthropology arises in consequence of significantly different interpretive directions that Kant scholarship has been exploring for at least two decades. These studies have been building a case for understanding his philosophical rendering of human moral life to include – and perhaps even to rest upon – a far more robust understanding of our human cosmic and social situatedness than has previously been recognized[6]. In contrast, for instance, to an almost exclusive stress on formal and deontological elements in Kant's account of the maxims governing an individual agent's moral choice, more recent studies take note of Kant's placement of these accounts in texts that attend to the concrete lineaments of ordinary human moral life. They give weight to the fact that crucial points of his arguments draw support, not from an abstract reading of rationality, but from direct appeal to such things as

6. For example, Sharon ANDERSON GOLD, *Unnecessary Evil*, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 2001; Patrick FRIERSON, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003; Jeanine GRENBERG, *Kantian Humility*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005; Susan NEIMAN, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2002; *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994; Robert LOUDEN, *Kant's Impure Ethics: From Rational Beings to Human Beings*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000; G. Felicitas MUNZEL, *Kant's Conception of Moral Character*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 1999; Philip J. ROSSI, *The Social Authority of Reason*, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 2005; Holly L. WILSON, *Kant's Pragmatic Anthropology*, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 2006.

"the common idea of duty and moral laws", "natural sound understanding", "the common human reason", and "the moral cognition of common human reason"[7]. These discussions of moral agency are marked by a deep respect for the humanity in every individual, whatever his or her status or condition in society, that originated in Kant's reading of Rousseau[8]. In the context of Kant's critical philosophy, they provide one marker of that project's fundamental concern, not with an abstract form of reason, but with reason in the concrete form it takes in a humanity embodied in conditions of spatio-temporal finitude. On these more recent accounts, the critical project is thoroughly anthropological, concerned with the unique position human beings occupy in the cosmos as the juncture of nature and freedom and with the vocation of humanity to bring about, in a manner appropriate to the exercise of finite reason, the conditions under which freedom and nature may work together for the attainment of "the highest good".

The attention paid by this scholarship to the dimensions of human situatedness to which Kant attends in constructing his critical philosophy may then be further sharpened by placing it under the lens that contemporary intellectual discourse provides by its emphasis on notions such as "context", "particularity", "otherness", and "difference" in its readings of humanity's conditions and prospects. Under the interrogation of post-modern questions, the paradigmatically modern texts of Kant's critical philosophy may yield, at least in some instances, surprisingly post-modern responses[9]. To the extent that these re-readings of Kant have emerged in terms of elements often resonant with key markers of a "post-modern" intellectual sensibility, this first consideration thus stands coordinate with a second one, which also underlies the effort of this essay to bring Kant's philosophical anthropology to bear upon the theological discourse of grace. This second consideration arises from what I will propose as an interpretive trajectory on which the work of Charles Taylor, Susan Neiman, and George Steiner, variously converge as each describes our current human situatedness in the aftermath of

7. *Ground Work of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. GREGOR, in Paul GUYER – Allen W. WOOD (eds.), *Practical Philosophy: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 44.52.57.58; *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, Berlin, Königliche Preußichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1902-, 4, pp. 389.397.402.403.

8. Manfred KUEHN, *Kant: A Biography*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 131-132.

9. A prime example of this may be found in NEIMAN, *Evil* (n. 6), in which Kant's understanding of the function of hope in the conditions of human finitude is crucial for resisting evil in a post-Auschwitz world.

modernity[10]. This convergence emerges as they plot the course of the deep fissures that now lie athwart the terrain of human meaning, even as they also note how various efforts to traverse this terrain have disclosed the fragility of the resources we have as human to see us through safely. These tropes of "fracture" and "fragility" will thus provide a yoke by which I propose to link this interpretive trajectory upon our post-modern human situatedness to a re-reading of a Kantian anthropology of finite freedom. This link consists in the different yet complementary ways each trope exhibits how our current situatedness, *precisely in confronting us with the radically fractured fragility of our freedom*, invites us – and perhaps even requires us – to re-think how our humanness stands in relation to the outpouring of divine freedom that Christian theological traditions have sought to articulate in terms of concepts of "grace"[11].

II. Fractured Horizons, Fragmented Terrain

Some of the recent re-readings of Kant – including those operative in the work of Taylor and Neiman – suggest that we may more readily take an initial sighting upon the key markers of a Kantian anthropology of the fragility of situated freedom from the perspective of the fractured terrain of the modernity subsequent to Kant, rather than from the perspective of what was once perceived as the unbroken intellectual landscape of his "Age of Enlightenment". Our own fractured cultural circumstances have brought to our attention how a variety of social, intellectual, economic and political dynamics functioned as tectonic forces shaping the landscape of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries into a far more variegated and unstable terrain than what we had formerly glimpsed as an unbroken vista of "The" Enlightenment. I thus propose to open the case for re-reading Kant's anthropology as a resource for a theology of grace with an account of the interpretive trajectory that maps our contemporary human situatedness onto terrains of "fractured meaning". Taylor, Neiman, and Steiner will serve as principal guides upon these terrains

10. Such convergence is not limited to the work of these three. I believe that a case can be made that, among others, the work of philosophers such as Iris Murdoch, Louis Dupré, and D.Z. Phillips, theologians such as Michael Buckley and David Tracy, and intellectual historians such as Martin Jay, contain significant elements also heading toward such a convergence.

11. It is important to understand that this claim is that notions of "grace" serve as *one* reflective theological articulation of divine freedom. They are not the sole theological locus for such articulation, nor is freedom the only aspect of the divine that such notions seek to articulate.

because their sure footedness here seems oriented by markers of the human that, particularly in the crucial case of the fragility of human freedom, lie close to those that had been staked earlier out by Kant. In addition, they each seem acutely aware – as was Kant – that on these terrains of fractured meaning, with a fragile freedom as one of our slender resources for navigation, God and humanity have both been put in question in radical, seemingly unprecedented ways.

The remark from Taylor with which I started this essay occurs in the concluding chapter of *Sources of the Self*, titled "The Conflicts of Modernity". This chapter, concerned with exploring the three "zones" of conflict that Taylor sees emergent on the moral terrain of modernity[12], is placed against a background image of "fractured horizons". That image served as title for an earlier chapter in which Taylor's probing of the "whole modern development we gesture at with the word 'secularization'"[13] disputes accounts that understand the decline of religious belief and practice in much recent Western culture to be an inevitable consequence of modernizing institutional changes and/or the rise of science. That chapter sets the stage for a three chapter exposition of Taylor's alternative reading of the conditions that have made unbelief culturally plausible. He articulates this alternative in terms of "two big constellations of ideas which either immediately or over time have helped generate forms of unbelief"[14]. One constellation clusters around the powers of disengaged human reason; the other around the powers of human creative imagination. On Taylor's account, the unbelief of the secular age has emerged insofar as, first, each "constellation" has provided a central focus for construing the powers of the human self emergent in the course of modernity and, second, as each focus has also gained credibility as a moral source apart from the theistic ground out of which it historically arose. Both foci are anthropological in that they are each indexed to a specific human power as it operates in relation to its particular reflexive construal of nature. One centers upon the powers of disengaged human reason to exercise control within the domain of an instrumentalized nature; the other upon "the powers of creative imagination ... [that] links these [powers] to a sense of nature as an inner moral source"[15]. Taylor sees emergent in the tensive interplay of the two "constellations of ideas" an outcome that has "diversified our moral

12. These "zones" involve conflicts over, respectively "(1) the issue about sources, (2) the issue about instrumentalism, and (3) the issue about morality" (TAYLOR, *Sources* [n. 1], p. 499).

13. TAYLOR, *Sources* (n. 1), p. 309.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

sources and added two frontiers of exploration to the original theistic one: nature and our own powers"[16].

Taylor sees a complicated interplay taking place during the nineteenth century between the "two big and many-sided cultural transformations, the Enlightenment and Romanticism with its accompanying expressive conception of man, [that] have made us what we are"[17]. Within this interplay, Taylor sees an issue emerging "which doesn't have an exact precedent in earlier times", one that he terms "the issue of self-affirmation"[18]. As Taylor probes the newly problematic status of "self-affirmation", two related issues of key import for framing a post-modern theology of grace begin to take shape in the unfolding of his theological subtext: 1) *the possibilities for recognizing and affirming good, both of ourselves and of nature*, as well as 2) *our capacities for effecting the good we affirm.*

Taylor's discussion shows marks of the presence of both issues. With regard to the first, he explicitly places the issue of self-affirmation against the horizon of a Christian theology of creation for which "it is never possible to escape altogether the notion that the creation is ultimately good"[19]. He further recognizes that a Christian theological affirmation of the goodness of creation bears upon the notion of "grace" as a locus for its articulation both as the *gratuity of God* that brings created good to be and as *divine empowerment of human capacities* to love what is good. In addition to this explicit indexing to the doctrine of Creation, Taylor provides a more allusive, but still clearly recognizable linkage of grace to the doctrine of the Incarnation through his notion of an "epiphany", i.e., "a manifestation which brings us into the presence of something which is otherwise inaccessible ... which also defines or completes something, even as it reveals"[20]. This notion is crucial for moving the later chapters in *Sources* toward a construal of grace as empowerment to effect the good that seeing and loving good affirms. It serves the function – marked out by references to the Johannine texts of the New Testament – of expressing an interweaving of the activity of God in Creation with the activity of God in Incarnation. For Taylor, the "epiphanic", as it functions within what he sees as a distinctively modern sense of expressive "inner depth", provides us with a crucial mode

16. *Ibid.*, p. 390.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 393.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 447.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 448.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 419. See Philip J. Rossi, *Seeing Good in a World of Suffering: Incarnation as God's Transforming Vision* (forthcoming).

of active participation in the "seeing good" of God that is operative in Creation *and* in the Incarnation:

> Put in yet other terms, the world's being good may now be seen as not entirely independent of our seeing it and showing it as good, at least as far as the world of humans is concerned[21].

Taylor had noted earlier that grace (or a secularized counterpart) plays an important role in accounts of what makes possible commitment to "the very stringent demands of universal justice and benevolence"[22] that have become the constitutive goods informing the dominant moral concerns of modernity. That earlier discussion of the power of moral sources to move us did not explicitly situate its account of that power in the context of questions about the goodness of creation or about our capacities to recognize, affirm, and effect that goodness. This later discussion, however, suggests that a construal of such empowerment that is appropriate to the aftermath of modernity will need to encompass, as part of its account of the graced human capacity to affirm and love good, a participation in those dimensions of God's creative and incarnately salvific power in which *seeing and loving good brings good to be*. What this part of such an account might look like, and why its inclusion may be useful in a articulating a theology of grace appropriate to the fractured context of post-modern culture, will be the focus of the next, concluding section of this essay.

III. God's Hospitality upon Fractured Human Ground: An Anthropology of Grace for Our Time

If I have correctly read the theological subtext operative in Taylor's depiction of the cultures of late modernity, it offers an invitation to develop specifically theological resources to address a multi-dimensional crisis endemic to these cultures regarding the nature, scope, and quality of the articulations and affirmations of good they allow us to make – be they affirmations of the good of the cosmos or of the human selves dwelling in the cosmos. These resources could function as significant coordinates for the task of articulating the "anthropologies of situated freedom" that Taylor sees providing the conceptual frameworks through which we might effectively begin to resolve this crisis. More specifically, I find Taylor's subtext presenting a challenge to develop, as

21. Taylor, *Sources* (n. 1), p. 448.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 410.

a step toward a theological anthropology of situated freedom, a construal of grace appropriate to the fragmented circumstances of post-modernity. Such a construal would provide an account of the graced form of human capacities to affirm and love good that articulates how they participate in God's creative and incarnate salvific powers in which *seeing and loving good brings good to be* in a thoroughly fragmented world.

This final section does not pretend to offer a full response to this challenge; it will simply propose two considerations that may be of use in constructing such an account. The first indicates how reading Kant's anthropology as an anthropology of the fragility of human freedom offers a framework for a construal of the human locus for the working of grace appropriate to post-modern circumstances of fractured meaning. *That locus is the very condition of human fragility in a fractured world.* The second then proposes a particular locus within that fragility that invites our human freedom to the performance and practice of graced enactments of the seeing and loving of good that brings good to be in a form that I believe holds major import for our human engagement with one another on the fragmented terrain of post-modernity. Our current human circumstances may offer no more poignant and tragic display of the impact of the dynamics of fragmentation upon the capacities of our freedom than the large and small scale uprootings of peoples in consequence of local, regional, and international conflicts, attempted ethnic cleansing and genocide, in response to which the toleration, let alone the welcoming of those who leave their native lands – be it unwillingly in fear for their lives or willingly in hope of better circumstances – is becoming increasingly constricted out of hesitation and fear in the presence of cultural and religious difference. In consequence, a crucial locus in which human freedom may be called upon to enact a seeing good that brings good to be may very well be encompassed in *the welcoming comportment of human hospitality*. Such hospitality, as enacted risk both of greeting another's vulnerability out of one's own vulnerability and of the acceptance of that risk by the one welcomed, exhibits to a fractured world a concrete fragment of the divine hospitality displayed to us in Creation and Incarnation: The hospitality in which God makes the fractured world a place for divine welcoming of the human in all its contingency and brokenness.

1. *Kant's Anthropology of the Fragility of Human Freedom*

Kant's anthropology of the fragility of human freedom marks a major fault line on the fractured terrain of modernity upon which Taylor's

explorations in *Sources of the Self* converge with those undertaken by Susan Neiman in *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*[23]. This fault-line is one that, as it runs *through* the self, also marks a fissuring *of* the self *from* both nature and God. Neiman provides coordinates to locate this fault-line as the finitude of human freedom lying athwart the workings of created nature in their radical contingency with respect to human intents and purposes: "Are our capacities to find and create meaning in a world adequate to a world that seems determined to thwart them?"[24]. She suggests that this fissure marks the point upon which Kant's entire critical enterprise – and with it, his philosophical anthropology – pivots:

> Kant offers a metaphysic of permanent rupture. The gap between nature and freedom, *is* and *ought*, conditions all human existence... Integrity requires affirming the dissonance and conflict at the heart of experience. It means recognizing that we are never, metaphysically, at home in the world[25].

Neiman's attentiveness to the depth to which Kant charted the major contours of this fissure is particularly instructive for reminding us how his charting continues to provide definitive markers of the human condition addressed by grace. She and Taylor each understand how Kant's recognition of the inestimable dignity of the power of human freedom to effect good is equally a recognition that such power resides in agents who are profoundly fragile: The human power for bringing good to be thoroughly pertains to, and is rooted in, the fragmentary, fragile exercise of a finite practical reason. With respect to the exercise of that power in the contemporary context of shattered meanings Neiman adds, "where so many structures of modern thought have been shattered, whatever sense we find must be incomplete. Attention to the pieces is now all the more important"[26]. For his part, Taylor clearly recognizes that Kant's account of autonomy – the self-responsibility of finite human rational agency – marks a divide from "nature", that, at least with respect to what has power to move us morally, parallels the Augustinian divide between "the two loves, the two directions of human motivation"[27]. Even the commitment to universal justice that, as a "secularized variant

23. NEIMAN, *Evil* (n. 6).
24. *Ibid.*, p. 318; see also p. 322: "the drive to seek reason in the world – even, or especially, at the points where it seems most absent – is as deep a drive as any we have".
25. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
27. TAYLOR, *Sources* (n. 1), p. 366; cf. *ibid.*, p. 83.

of *agapē*", eventually comes to empower the higher of these two loves to "stupendous humanitarian efforts" as modernity has unfolded, rests upon a Kantian basis, noumenal rational agency, that Taylor tellingly characterizes as "fragile"[28].

To the tropes of fragmentation and fragility, Neiman's marking of the fault line upon which Kant's account of human freedom functions adds the poignant one of "homeless" to signal the human condition in a world in which meaning has been left in fragments. Taylor's marking of this fault line – which, at least in Kant's own reading, is at once a marker of a rupture *and* a juncture deeply bound to our human finitude[29] – employs a trope that may seem gentler than Neiman's "homeless" but still expresses the same sense that humanity has found itself cast adrift in the aftermath of modernity: He writes of a "loss of rooted certainty" that occurs when moral sources not bound to belief in God gain credibility[30]. Yet for both Neiman and Taylor, as it was for Kant, this marker of our human finitude – characterized by Neiman as "the gap between our purposes and a nature that is indifferent to them leaves the world with an almost unacceptable structure"[31] – however much it stands as a reminder of being homeless and uncertain on the fractured terrain of modernity, still does not leave us bereft of all hope for finding a welcome that even will embrace our fragility.

2. *Guests to One Another: Grace as Mutual Welcome on Fractured Ground*

Despite the apparent bleakness signaled by the trope of "homeless", Neiman does not recommend despair as the fitting human response to the fragmented condition of late modernity. She sees the persistent inquisitiveness of the child as sign of an unquenchable hope for making sense of the world that, in formal philosophical terms, is expressed in the principle of sufficient reason:

> The urge to greet every answer with another question is one we find in children not because it's childish but because it's natural... In the child's refusal to accept a world that makes no sense lies all the hope that ever makes us start anew[32].

28. *Ibid.*, p. 367.
29. For an account of Kant's portrayal of the function of finite human reason as juncture between nature and freedom, see Philip J. Rossi, *The Social Authority of Reason* (n. 6).
30. Taylor, *Sources* (n. 1), p. 312.
31. Neiman, *Evil* (n. 6), p. 75.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 320.

Neiman's image of the child is a powerful one for capturing the personal and individual dimension of the dynamics of hope that she affirms as appropriate to a fragmented world. Yet the resources for hope in the face of such fragmentation are not merely personal and individual. So it may be that a different image – indeed, one that appropriately stands as converse to the trope of "homeless" – may better serve to locate a place within an anthropology of the fragility of freedom from which to articulate a graced empowerment for seeing and loving good that brings good to be. Such an image plays a central role in George Steiner's account of the fragmentation of meaning. In face of a recognition similar to that of Neiman's that we all stand "homeless" on a terrain of fractured meaning, Steiner opens possibilities for seeing and enacting good appropriate to our circumstances on that terrain by proposing that we need to comport ourselves as "guests to one another"[33] in our sojourn on this fractured ground.

Like Neiman and Taylor, Steiner sees the dynamics of modernity and its aftermath as that of break and rupture:

> It is this break of the covenant between word and world which constitutes one of the very few genuine revolutions of spirit in Western history, and which defines modernity itself[34].

In the face of so deep a rupture, he proposes that our engagement with one another on this fractured terrain requires more than ever before (now that we are in the "after-word"[35]) that receptivity of mutually encountered freedom he variously terms "*courtesia*", "tact of heart", a receptivity he sees exhibited in "the intuition that the true reception of a guest, of a known stranger in our place of being touches on transcendent obligations and opportunities"[36]. Even more pointedly, he has reaffirmed the importance of this fundamental receptivity in the face of the whole array of dynamics through which human beings in late modernity have made themselves ever more deeply complicit in systemic refusals of otherness:

33. Theo HOBSON, *On Being a Perfect Guest: The Tablet Interview*, in *The Tablet* 259 (13 August 2005), p. 15.

34. George STEINER, *Real Presences*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 93, author's emphasis.

35. George STEINER, *Grammars of Creation*, New Haven, CT – London, Yale University Press, 2001, p. 283; earlier Steiner remarks "I believe this dissociation, this tidal wave against the word to be more severe and consequential than any other in modernity. Indeed, it may define the essence of modernity as that which 'comes after'" (p. 278).

36. STEINER, *Real Presences* (n. 34), p. 155.

> I believe we must teach other human beings to be guests of each other... We must teach people we are guests of life on this crowded, polluted planet[37].

Steiner's identification of hospitality as a practice central to any adequately human response to the pervasive circumstances of fractured meaning comports particularly well with the configuration that an anthropology of the fragility of freedom would take; it also bears at least faint traces of the considerations that led Kant to propose a "cosmopolitan right to hospitality" as an appropriate articulation of the manner in which human freedom is to respect the otherness of the stranger who comes to visit in our midst[38]. It is a practice in which we learn how our human status in the world is marked by mutual vulnerability to one another – particularly when we meet as strangers to one another. The recognition of such vulnerability may result in wariness, tempered perhaps by politeness, leading us keep our distance from the stranger. In a more corrosive form, however, awareness of our vulnerability may evoke hostility – even to the point of taking "war" as a defining feature of the condition we expect to pervade some portion of our relations to at least some of our fellow humans. In contrast, hospitality that is enacted as a gracious receptivity of the otherness of the stranger, is far more than a wary politeness that allows us to mark a barrier between "us" and "them" that is transgressed at peril. It is the enacted risk of greeting another's vulnerability out of our own – and the acceptance of that enacted risk by the one welcomed – that allows each of us to stand upon a new space of respect that issues from a mutual recognition of vulnerability.

The mutual recognition suggested here – that we stand both as "homeless" and yet as "guests to one another" on the fractured terrain of modernity – is one that I believe has an important role to play in the construction of an anthropology of the fragility of human freedom and, *a fortiori*, in a account of graced human empowerment to see, love, and bring good to be in our broken world. Central to this anthropology is a capacity for human freedom *to enact in and through hospitality* (or, to use Steiner's term, in its "courtesy") *a "seeing good"* informed by the

37. HOBSON, *On Being a Perfect Guest* (n. 33), p. 15.

38. I. KANT, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, trans. Mary J. GREGOR, in GUYER – WOOD, *Practical Philosophy* (n. 7), pp. 328-31; *Zum ewigen Frieden*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften* (n. 7), 8, pp. 357-360; *The Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy* (n. 7), pp. 489-490; *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften* (n. 7), 6, pp. 352-353. See Philip J. ROSSI, *Cosmopolitanism and the Interests of Reason: A Social Framework for Human Action in History*, in *Proceedings of the X International Kant Congress*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter (forthcoming).

graciousness of an incarnate God whose sojourn with us has made it possible for even such fractured ground to be made into a place of welcome. An apt starting place for theological reflection on hospitality as locus for the enactment of a seeing good that brings good to be might very well be – for lack of a more felicitous phrase – the "underside" of God's incarnation into the fractured contingency that constitutes the dynamics of our human world. That "underside" is the absence of welcome, the unavailability of hospitality, encountered by God's Word incarnate – an unavailability marked in human terms in Luke's infancy narrative as "no room at the inn" and in cosmic terms in John's prologue as "his own received him not". Yet this absence, unavailability, even refusal of welcome is met not by its counterpart, but by its radical inversion: The ignored, unwelcomed guest becomes the welcomer, human inhospitality is reciprocated in gracious irony by a divine hospitality in which God makes the fractured world a place for divine welcoming of the human in all its contingency and brokenness.

Recognition that the first hospitality is God's as condition for the possibility for our enactment of mutual welcome as guests to one another on the fractured terrain we have inherited from modernity is thus recognition that we do so within the ambit of grace. This first hospitality has welcomed us in all our human fracturedness to the point of making our fragile humanity God's very place of dwelling; it is thus in God's welcome enacted in the Word creative and incarnate that we are empowered to welcome each other. To Neiman's trope of "homeless" we can, I believe, appropriately add that our condition of homelessness in a world of fractured meaning does not leave us bereft of the gifts and skills of a hospitality through which the radiance of the divine hospitality that enables us to welcome each other can be glimpsed[39].

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39. I am grateful to Wesley Biddy, Richard Hanson, Matthew Powell, Aaron Smith, and the participants in the Philosophy of Religion section of the College Theology Society for helpful comments on earlier versions of this essay.