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Seekers, Dwellers, and the Plural Contingencies of Grace: Hospitality, Otherness and the Enactment of Human Wholeness

Philip J. Rossi

Marquette University, philip.rossi@marquette.edu

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**Seekers, Dwellers, and the Plural
Contingencies of Grace:
Hospitality, Otherness, and the Enactment
of Human Wholeness**

PHILIP J. ROSSI, S.J.

“We are now living in a spiritual super-nova, a kind of
galloping pluralism on the spiritual plane”

Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*¹

**Seekers, Dwellers, and the “Nova Effect” as
Immanent Otherness**

The “nova effect” – a “galloping pluralism” of an “ever widening variety of moral/spiritual options, across the span of the thinkable and even beyond” – is a central socio-cultural phenomena that Charles Taylor sees emergent in and with “a secular age.” This expansive multiplication of the possibilities for giving shape, substance, and direction to human moral and spiritual lives has significantly altered the context for understanding the contours and structure of the religious beliefs and practices that engage the cultures of the globalized twenty-first century. It plays a key role in setting the conditions for belief, for unbelief – and even for indifference to either as a possibility for oneself – in a “secular age” and thereby delimits a new horizon for the self-understanding of all who now inhabit the ambient cultures of the twenty-first century.

According to Taylor’s account in *A Secular Age*, this force for multiplicity receives its initial impetus from the dynamics of “Reform,” then moves along an historical trajectory through “Providential Deism,” and across the “Age of Mobilization.” It emerges into its fully explosive stage in the “Age of Authenticity,” making an impact that continues to carve fissures and cross-fissures across the contemporary landscape of belief and unbelief. Though deeply implicated in the long

¹ (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 300.

and complex historical processes that have shaped modernity, the nova effect also manifests strong affinities to a dynamic of highly contrastive multiplicity that, in contrast to an undifferentiated universality often deemed characteristic of “modernity,” has then been cast as a marker of the so-called “post-modern.” The nova effect thus provides an encompassing ambient dynamic of expanding and irreducible plurality for all who live in these times of secularity. Plurality now explicitly forms a constitutive element of the life contexts and a framework for cultural meaning in which “dwellers” and “seekers,” along with everyone else, are challenged to orient their patterns of activity and to make sense of the world and humanity’s place within that world.²

Within Taylor’s account, the nova effect functions to provide an imaginative and conceptual grid for construing the dynamics that have opened a seemingly unlimited plurality of pathways, both old and new, on which individuals and communities can see themselves moving on the journeys constituting their moral and spiritual lives. Such plurality of life shaping possibilities – particularly when imaged as “pathways” and “journeys” – seems, however, to privilege “seekers” over “dwellers” in terms of the dispositions each might bring to bear on these plural possibilities. Implicit in being a “seeker” is a readiness to see oneself already “in motion,” prepared to strike out on an unfamiliar path and move along it even the absence of clarity about its endpoint. For some seekers, moreover, the journey may itself be given a value that is not dependent upon whatever end point a particular path may reach. In contrast, implicit in being a “dweller” is

² “Seekers” and “dwellers” might best be understood as ideal types that represent endpoints of a continuum for reflectively engaged life trajectories along which there are a range of possible combinations and configurations relative to both points. It is also important to recognize that, particularly with respect to self-identification, “seekers” and “dwellers” are not exhaustive categories with respect to a full range of possible spiritual and moral life trajectories; in an age of secularity, that range must now take account of the indifferent, the unconcerned, and, perhaps most significantly, those who place themselves among the “religious nones.” See “A closer look at America’s rapidly growing religious ‘nones,’” May 13, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/13/a-closer-look-at-americas-rapidly-growing-religious-nones/> (accessed June 21, 2015). Essays in this volume by James South, Thomas Hughson, Theresa Tobin, and Alan Madry, articulate a number of alternate ways to construe the contrast Taylor, following Robert Wuthnow, has drawn between seekers and dwellers,

that one stands in place of stability, a place of familiarity and settled meaning which provides one's orientation upon the world; being a seeker, experiencing the restlessness and uncertainty of the journey, plays a role only as prelude to reaching the place of dwelling that completes the journey. Dwelling puts one in a place from which embarking on a new pathway holds neither attraction nor urgency; to a "dweller," the prospect of such a (further) journey does not present itself, to use a term from William James, as a "living option."³

To the extent that one takes the "nova effect" to lend more – and perhaps even decisive – weight to the "seeker" side of the seeker/dweller disjunction, it may not seem to provide a particularly apt interpretive grid from which both seekers and dwellers might find common ground on which to engage each other about the shape and substance of human moral and spiritual life in the aftermath of modernity. Where a seeker might see a plurality of attractive life shaping possibilities now on offer within the immanent frame, a dweller might see instead a disorderly field of distractions drawing attention away from a settled center that offers true, reliable and lasting life-orientation. In order to avoid a further bifurcation that might exacerbate this seeming polarity between seekers and dwellers, this essay proposes to construe the import of the nova effect not primarily in terms of the multiplicity of spiritual paths it presents, but rather in terms of its manifestation of what I will argue is a more fundamental form of plurality. This is a plurality of otherness that is embedded in the contingency and fragility of the finitude that is an abiding condition of humanity and the created cosmos it inhabits.

On this construal, plurality is a function of the more encompassing categories of contingency and finitude inasmuch as they each delimit the myriad ways in which whatever is stands in contrast to what might be, or has been, other and otherwise. In consequence, a key aspect of the significance of the nova effect lies in the ways in which it manifests the full range and the immense depth of the plurality already enmeshed in the contingency of our human finitude. It does so, moreover, in ways that are both consonant with, and challenging to, the immanent frame that is its context: *consonant* in that the immanent frame has helped to make this sharpened attention to

³ "The Will to Believe," *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1912), p. 3.

plurality possible, *challenging* in that the kind of plurality manifest in the nova effect unsettles the closure of the self-sufficiency that the immanent frame has embedded in its performative structure. This construal of plurality as a plurality of finitude and contingency, moreover, will function as part of a larger claim about an element in the dynamics of late modernity that I will argue is especially valuable for discerning the workings of grace. This element consists of the manner in which secular cultures of late modernity have laid bare in particularly striking and even compelling ways the thoroughness with which contingency and fragility stand in their plurality and otherness as a key locus for receptivity to grace within the contours of the human condition.

One consequence of this encompassing dynamic of plurality of the nova effect is that it provides what post-modernity takes as the disruptive energies of particularity, fragility, and incompleteness with enhanced power to fracture and interrupt many of the settled cultural contexts out of which we have been accustomed to exact the meanings that render the world and the place of our humanity in it intelligible. The nova effect authorizes both old and new forms of otherness, sometime with great boldness, to enter into what we may have previously presumed to be fields of settled meaning. Of even greater import for purposes of this essay, moreover, this dynamic of plurality seems to be shaping new possibilities for the self-understanding of our own humanity in its efforts to exact intelligible meaning from the world.⁴ It is not only the world and the human experience of the world that is being pluralized – *the dynamics of multiplicity have started to play a role in how we constitute and understand our very identity as human.*⁵

An important aspect of such plurality that will emerge in this essay is its role in shaping the self-understanding of our humanity in the guise of what I will term an “immanent otherness” at play in our agency. This aspect of the nova effect is embedded within the context

⁴ George Steiner has perceptively explored important dimensions of this dynamic of the pluralization and fragmentation of meaning in *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), and *Grammars of Creation* (London: Faber and Faber 2001).

⁵ Cf. Lieven Boeve *God Interrupts: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York; Continuum, 2007); “Theology and the Interruption of Experience,” in *Religious Experience and Contemporary Religious Epistemology*, ed. Lieven Boeve, Yves De Maeseneer, Stijn Van den Bossche (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), pp. 11-40.

of the dynamic of multiplicity that has become part and parcel of the global culture of the early twenty-first century. Its significance lies in the bearing that the recognition of otherness has for charting the trajectories of modernity and its aftermath with reference to the possibility that human wholeness and flourishing are most appropriately, adequately, and truly located by reference to a horizon of transcendent reality.⁶ I shall thus argue, along lines staked out by Taylor, that even as modernity has brought in its wake a pluralizing fracturing and fragilization that has been construed as reason for taking a stance of resignation to the enclosed immanence of a world void of transcendence, the best account we can give of our deepest aspirations as human in the face of such fracture and the otherness embedded in it tells us otherwise: This explosive multiplicity invites us to engage our fractured world from a horizon of hope, framed in reference to the encompassing kenotic hospitality of God, that enables us to discern, even in the “galloping pluralism” of the nova effect, enlarged possibilities for intensifying and expanding our capacity for enacting wholeness for our humanity and for our world.

I will be thus be arguing that this disruptive dimension of the dynamic of plurality provides an opportunity and invitation to locate Christian belief and practice within a horizon of “grace in multiplicity.” This horizon has come into view through the fissures and differences that, in the aftermath of modernity, we now can see more clearly at work in the human cultures in which our identities are embedded and which shape our self-understanding. This horizon of plurality, I will argue, provides significant conceptual and imaginative resources for a renewed understanding of the workings of divine and human interaction in the fragility of an enfleshed human finitude located in the contingencies of both creation and human history. These resources offer a basis for understanding and appreciating both the varied and incomplete character of the human receptivity into which God seeks entry in grace, and the richly plural operative modality of the grace with which God appropriately nurtures that receptivity along paths to fullness. They enable us to identify an emergent dynamic of multiplicity and otherness within the very constitution of the fundamental relationality of human moral and spiritual agency.

⁶ Put in in most general terms, this is a question about whether, and to what degree, the otherness inscribed in human relationality provides a trustworthy marker of the transcendent Otherness that is rightly named “God.”

My claim here is thus that important elements of the plurality that Taylor terms “the nova effect” have already become factors in the larger dynamics of human self-understanding – they are now ingredient in what may aptly be termed an emergent “re-making of the modern identity” in which the recognition of “immanent otherness” has a part to play.⁷ This plurality, as well as the conditions have brought it into play in the matrix of interdependent global cultures, offer seekers and dwellers alike a challenging horizon, one shot through with the pressures of what Taylor calls “fragilization,” from which to engage one another in articulating more adequate modes for mutually understanding the thoroughness with which God graces both us and the world entrusted to us.⁸ Within that horizon, I will further argue, one fundamental and particularly striking way in which seekers and dwellers are both called upon to empower hope for human wholeness is through practices and enactments of hospitality that, amid a landscape of pervasive plurality of meanings and values, accord welcome to otherness in all its variety and radical contingency.⁹

Taylor’s account of the nova effect thus provides a basis for articulating a conceptual grid to frame these dynamics of plurality within both the concrete human side of the relationship to God that grace constitutes and the transcendent divine graciousness of the enacting of that grace. In particular, this grid will provide possibilities for articulating the horizons of hope toward which both seekers and dwellers are empowered, in different yet eventually complementary ways, to orient their lives; this horizon is constituted in terms of the

⁷ I put it in these terms with the intent of indicating that Taylor’s earlier *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) is an indispensable prelude to *A Secular Age*.

⁸ “This mutual fragilization of all the different views in presence, the undermining sense that others think differently is certainly one of the main features of the world of 2000, in contrast to that of 1500,” *A Secular Age*, pp. 303-304.

⁹Such capacity for welcoming of otherness takes on more urgent significance in time in which circumstances seem to have exponentially increased the temptation that we eventually render ourselves as *all* hostile strangers to one another: In the face of the other whom we perceive threatening our identity, our capacity for welcome falters; in consequence, our failures, great and small, to welcome the displaced, the uprooted, the homeless, then give license to drive any and all “others” away with coldness, hostility and even violence,

promise of human wholeness to which all are invited in a world that increasingly manifests itself as shaped by the multiplicity, fragility and fractures of its abiding contingency. On the reading I am proposing, the “nova effect” is a manifestation of the deep contingency of human finitude that, in its wake, helps to render the fracturing of life and meaning into an appropriate locus from which to discern and to enact the hope by which grace is awaited, through which grace becomes manifest, and by which grace is enacted. The “nova effect” thus provides new and enlarged possibilities for recognizing and engaging the religious/spiritual “other” that already lies *within* the dynamics of both dwelling and seeking in the radical contingency of the world. Within this context, the acts and forms of a hospitality in which such otherness – an otherness that we might very well term an otherness from and of the Spirit – finds welcome will be a key marker of the possibilities and the presence of the working of grace.¹⁰

Contingency, Otherness, and the Graced Enactment of Human Wholeness

What, then, are these new and enlarged possibilities offered by the nova effect for recognizing the religious and spiritual other, and, more pertinent for this essay, what makes these possibilities ones whose significance for seekers and dwellers alike takes form in graced enactments of welcoming the other? As Taylor describes the nova effect, he places it on a conceptual grid in which multiplicity certainly constitutes a key line of reference; located along this line, moreover, is the apparent “optionality” of the paths the nova effect presents to humans in search of moral and spiritual orientation.¹¹ Such

¹⁰ This suggests that the depth and importance of what has become at stake in the extensive and continuing instances of involuntary human displacement that are now endemic in the early twenty-first century is hardly captured by calling it a “humanitarian” crisis: It is a crisis that, the longer it lasts in both its episodic and systemic avoidance of welcoming strangers in the depth of their human need, makes us complicit in the erasure of any moral meaning to our humanity.

¹¹ The extent to which “optionality” is itself optional is a key question that will not be pursued here. For an initial posing of this question, see Hent deVries, “The ‘Option’ of Unbelief, The Immanent Frame, see the web: <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/>

optionality, moreover, may be appropriately seen as one coordinate on another line that traces the prominent trajectory given to freedom within the articulations of human agency and self-understanding that have emerged in the cultures of modernity.

While these lines of reference may not constitute axes of orientation along which dwellers readily situate themselves, there is a further line, constituted by the contingencies of history and of the cosmos, that runs athwart them, one that serves to constitute them into a field of “fragilization” that affects both dwellers and seekers as they locate themselves under the “cross-pressures” of late modernity’s “social imaginary.”¹² It is when the nova effect is coordinated to this line of fragilization that it can be seen to be a manifestation not merely of a multiplicity referenced to a freedom exercised as a putatively autonomous individuality but also as a manifestation of the dynamics of the concrete contingencies of the historical, cultural, and social contexts within which a finite, enfleshed humanity inhabits the social imaginary of an immanent frame that displays a full array of fractures, interruptions and fragility.¹³

On this reading of the nova effect, multiplicity, along with its counterpart in optionality, may still pertain more immediately to “seekers,” particularly in function of the scope and importance that autonomy, including its exercise in the expansive modality Taylor designates as “personal resonance,” has taken within the immanent frame of secularity.¹⁴ Yet, by reading the nova effect through the

2008/12/19/the-option-of-unbelief/ (accessed July 7, 15). A more extensive discussion is found in Hans Joas, *Faith As an Option: Possible Futures for Christianity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

¹² Cf. *A Secular Age*, pp. 303-304, 531-532, 595, 833n19. My use of the terms of “orient” and “locate” are intended to evoke an important point that Kant’s makes in 1786 essay, “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” about how thought and action are appropriately framed by reference to a transcendental horizon for intelligibility.

¹³ For a discussion of the possibility of a social construal of autonomy that disputes its often uncritically assumed association with an individualistically rendered autonomy, see Philip J. Rossi, “Faith and the Limits of Agency in a Secular Age,” in *At the Limits of the Secular: Catholic Reflections on Faith and Public Life*, ed. William Barbieri (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), pp. 226-249.

¹⁴ Taylor’s notion of “personal resonance” issues from his account of the expressive function of language and plays an important role in *Sources of the Self*, Part V, “Subtler Languages.” See Philip Rossi, “Divine Transcendence and the “Languages of Personal Resonance”: The Work of Charles Taylor as a Resource

perspective of the pervasive contingency of the human condition, it can be seen more fundamentally to manifest, to seekers and dwellers alike, what Taylor calls the “fragilization” of even the most entrenched and cherished world-perspectives that result from the cross-pressures of the immanent frame.¹⁵ As Taylor describes it, fragilization is a phenomenon rooted in dynamics by which the “strangeness” of world view inhabited by the religious “other” – including the other of non-belief – no longer stands as “really inconceivable” for me, in part because the cultures of modernity have lessened the differences of other kinds between us. The religious other has become “more and more like me, in everything else but faith. Then the issue posed by difference becomes more insistent: why my way and not hers?”¹⁶

On Taylor’s account fragilization affects seekers and dwellers alike – as well as whatever points of reference that may lie between and beyond them – by creating spaces of uncertain or occluded meaning that unsettle the closure that constitutes the buffered identity of modernity’s punctual self. “The interesting story [of secularity] is not simply one of the decline [of religion], but also of a new placement of the sacred or the spiritual in relation to individual and social life. The new placement is now the occasion for recompositions of spiritual life in new forms, and for new ways of existing both in and out of relation to God.”¹⁷ Such “recompositions” may seem to be more evident in the trajectory taken by seekers to the extent that fragilization serves as part of the impetus setting their quests in motion. Yet dwellers are by no means immune inasmuch as they are also participant in the identity of the buffered self of modernity: they thus may experience fragilization not so much as an “option” for new meaning, but as a force impinging upon the contours of the spaces of meaning they inhabit. While it may not impel a movement to “seek,” its impingement may nonetheless prompt a reflective re-surveying of the lines that demarcate the spaces of one’s dwelling and open possibilities for a least a partial glimpse of how things look from

for Spirituality in an Era of Postmodernity” in *Theology and Conversation*. Eds. J. Haers, P. De Mey (Leuven: Peeters-Leuven UP, 2003), pp. 783-794.

¹⁵ See *A Secular Age*, pp. 303-304, 531-532.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

within the spaces of meaning inhabited by that “other” – or perhaps even by a number of different “others.”¹⁸

In the face of such fragilization, questions of identity may thus surface, even for the most secure and tranquil of dwellers. All of us now inhabit a human world in which many boundaries of meaning and practice that once delimited spaces for dwelling in secure possession of our identities, be they ethnic, linguistic, religious, or cultural, have increasingly become fragile and porous. Such fragilization makes possible an awareness of how deeply our identities are embedded in the otherness in which and from which we delimit ourselves; it also may allow us to discern the extent to which our identities may be shaped by dynamics of hybridization in which the “other” already stands within the ambit of our identity. Fragilization offers the opportunity to recognize the extent to which that our identity and agency has come to be constituted in an “immanent otherness” that has its roots in our very sociality. Fragilization thus provides a sharp and stark reminder that a fundamental human project is finding ways, in the face of all the otherness we communally and individually bring with us, to dwell together in the contingencies of time with one another on the finite and fragile planet entrusted to us. As George Steiner quite aptly put it “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.”¹⁹

The nova effect thus manifests neither simply nor primarily an undifferentiated plurality keyed to the arbitrary freedom of what Taylor has termed the “punctual self.” It also manifests – in ways that resonate with, yet also deeply challenge, the dynamics of the “immanent frame” – the contingency and fragility of the otherness with which we all face one another in the workings of history, society, and culture. This manifestation of our contingency provides a key locus for discerning the workings of grace in a secular age: the very fracture, incompleteness, and interruption that thoroughly interlace

¹⁸ The emergence of the practice of “comparative theology,” as found, for instance in the work of Francis Clooney, S.J., manifests such an effort to engage religious otherness “from within.” I am grateful to William Wainwright for pointing out this connection.

¹⁹ Theo Hobson, “On Being a Perfect Guest: The Tablet Interview: George Steiner.” In: *The Tablet* 259 (August 13, 2005), p. 15.

the immanent frame and all who inhabit it are key loci in which humans are called upon to be participants in the enactment of grace. In consequence, the fracture, incompleteness, and interruption that subtraction accounts of secularity read as markers of the unintelligibility of a world taken to stand within the ambit of God's provident graciousness, may be read otherwise. They need not be taken as indices of the absence of God, but instead as indices of the shared condition of the contingency of our human otherness before one another, and thus as invitations to be bearers of grace to one another.²⁰ As Steiner's remark suggests, a primary mode for being bearers of grace to one another is in enactments of welcome to each other in our mutual contingency.

It is thus with reference to this shared contingency that dwellers and seekers are together called upon to discern in their common fragility a call to grace that empowers them to embody in practices of mutual and inclusive welcome a radical hope for human wholeness. Such hope for wholeness needs to be radical inasmuch as the fracturing so pervasively marking the workings of contingency in the cultures of late modernity renders provisional and precarious even the best of our efforts, be they individual or communal, at attaining and sustaining human wholeness. As Taylor has sagely observed, one consequence of the bloody and brutal failures of twentieth century attempts to realize "the most lofty ideals of human perfection"²¹ is that "[p]rudence constantly advises us to scale down our hopes and circumscribe our vision."²² Susan Neiman also notes how awareness of the deep fractures interlacing late modernity brings in its wake great pressure to scale down the horizons of our hope: "... 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."²³

²⁰ See Philip J. Rossi, S.J., "Human Contingency, Divine Freedom, and the Normative Shape of Saving History," in *The Shaping of Tradition: Context and Normativity*, ed. Colby Dickinson, with Lieven Boeve and Terrence Merrigan (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2013), pp. 117-130.

²¹ *Sources*, p. 519.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 520.

²³ *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 326.

Taylor and Neiman, moreover, both recognize that paying careful “attention to the pieces” in a fractured world is by no means the same as “scaling down our hopes” in the face of such fracture. “Scaling down of our hopes” in our fractured world marks out what Taylor has called a “neo-Lucretian stance,” most notably anticipated by David Hume, that, by making us “able to take our lives as they are” allows us to recognize and be relieved of “the crushing burdens laid on humans by [our] great spiritual aspirations.”²⁴ On Neiman’s account, such scaling down is the “realism” that is “a form of sloth. If you tell yourself that a world without injustice is a childish wish fantasy, you have no obligation to work toward it.”²⁵ They both discern that in settling for the immanent frame as that which determines not only “all that there is” but also “all that there can and should be,” we *thereby radically truncate the contours of what it is to be human*. They thereby recognize that orienting ourselves to a transcendent frame of reference, whether we name it, give it no name at all, or simply take it as no more than a marker of human finitude, is crucial for how we construe the make-up of our humanity as well as for our capacity to imagine possibilities for enacting a wholeness to our humanity and for our world.²⁶

In contrast to this neo-Lucretian stance of resignation to the permanence of fracture, “attention to the pieces” provides a point from which hope for the enactment of human wholeness takes its origin inasmuch as it is constituted by the recognition of our shared human vulnerability in the face of contingency. In theological terms “attention to the pieces” provides invitational space for participating in the enactment of grace that enables us to address our human vulnerability in concert with one another. Within such space, moreover, the invitation to participate in the enactment of grace draws attention to the deep commonality of our human vulnerability: contingency is no respecter of persons, we all stand in need of being made welcome, and we all have the capacity for offering welcome. In

²⁴ *Sources*, p. 345.

²⁵ *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-up Idealists* (Harcourt, Orlando: 2008), p. 145.

²⁶ This affirmation of an orientation to the transcendent as ingredient in the (anthropological) construal of our humanity and its significance thus stakes out what is arguably the crucial locus of contention in the emergence of the immanent frame of secularity: the field upon which the possibility and legitimacy of belief in God and, indeed, the possibility of God, is put in question.

consequence, this space also invites recognition of the shared hope requisite for sustaining efforts to “gather the pieces” and to bring them together in due reverence for their fragility: in terms of Neiman’s trope, we must have the kind of hope that makes it possible us to “pick up the pieces” not merely for one another but especially *with* one another. Hope thereby opens possibilities for enacting, in the first instance, that which reverences and treasures the remnants we are left with, as well as possibilities for envisioning ways to bring them to a renewed wholeness. Such hope enables us to envision and undertake these efforts as tasks we are called upon to share with one another in virtue of our common human vulnerability.

Conclusion: Accompaniment as Shared Enactment of Grace

Steiner and Neiman thus provide in their commentaries on the aftermath of modernity conceptual and imaginative resources, complementary to those offered by Taylor, that help to locate the fragmented landscape of the contemporary human condition as a central locus from which human agents are invited to participate in the enactment of grace.²⁷ Like Taylor, they each characterize the circumstances of late modernity and its aftermath in terms of fragmentation and interruption, particularly with respect to human efforts to make sense of the world in a comprehensive way. They all

²⁷ The principal works for their accounts of the fractures that have marked human efforts to find and construct meaning in the aftermath of modernity are: Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); *Grammars of Creation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). I have previously discussed dimensions of the work of Neiman, Steiner, and Taylor that bear on questions of grace in Philip J. Rossi, S.J., “Theology from a Fractured Vista: Susan Neiman’s *Evil in Modern Thought*,” in *Modern Theology* 23 (2007), pp. 47-61; “Finite Freedom: Kant’s Anthropology as Resource for a Postmodern Theology of Grace,” in Éric Gaziaux, (ed.), *Philosophie et théologie: Festschrift Emilio Brito*. Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 206 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), pp. 47-60; “Seeing Good in a World of Suffering: Incarnation as God’s Transforming Vision,” in Terrence Merrigan and Frederik Glorieux, (ed.), *Godhead Here in Hiding: Incarnation and the History of Human Suffering* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), pp. 453-466; “Faith and the Limits of Agency in a Secular Age,” in *At the Limits of the Secular: Catholic Reflections on Faith and Public Life*, ed. William Barbieri (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), pp. 226-249.

recognize that the tectonic shifts taking place across human cultures in the wake of new technologies, global interdependence, and varied forms of secularity have made the construction and maintenance of “master narratives” offering comprehensive and universally compelling horizons of meaning a far more precarious and contested enterprise than it once had been. Deeply entrenched patterns of injustice, inequality, and exclusion, as well as the persistence of violence at all levels of human culture, add to the precariousness of the conditions for dwelling with one another. These are circumstances for which Neiman, Steiner, and Taylor all find images of fracture, brokenness, and rupture providing apt tropes for the societal and culture terrain upon which seekers must find their paths, dwellers must make their places of habitation, and, above all, all of us must be attentive to making spaces for the welcoming of one another.

Yet in the face of such fracture, these thinkers also all recognize a deeply rooted human drive and disposition to put the pieces together, to make sense of the world, not simply as ordered in a conceptual framework, but as a locus in which human activity can shape stable conditions for bringing about some lasting degree of human wholeness. They thus all see that the enterprise of making sense of the world consists not simply of what and how we think, but also of what we do and, of at least equal importance, how we do it. The sense we make of the world needs to be an “enacted” sense, a sense for which we are accountable and in which we have a hand in making. Making sense of the world is thus both a conceptual enterprise and a practical, moral enterprise, encompassing all the capacities of human thought, imagination and agency to effect what is needed to make the world a place in which human good, human wholeness and human flourishing are possible.²⁸ Seekers and dwellers alike have to contend with a fractured world, as agent-participants in its fracturing, even as they are called upon to share the task of rendering it sufficiently whole to be a place for the enactment of human good.

Tomas Halik has provided an insightful trope to characterize the shared task that is incumbent upon both seekers and dwellers for their

²⁸ The conceptual part of the enterprise may aptly be named “metaphysics” and the practical part “ethics”; Neiman astutely remarks, “Ethics and metaphysics are not *accidentally* connected. Whatever attempts we make to live rightly are attempts to live in the world” (*Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 327).

mutual sojourning in such a fractured world.²⁹ He urges all of us to become versed in practices of accompaniment. I understand such practices to consist in a “being with” that encompasses both a “travelling in the company of” seekers on their quests and an “abiding” with them, as well as with dwellers, wherever and whenever their quests might come, for however briefly or however long a time, to a place of “rest.” Fully interwoven with these practices of accompaniment, moreover, is an engagement in dialogue, in conversation, in listening and attending to the voices – of *all* the voices, and most especially to the barely audible whisperings of those who seem voiceless – of those in whose graced company of otherness we are blessed to be. What marks out such practices of accompaniment as significant for engaging one another in putting together the fractured pieces of our human world is how these practices run both with and athwart the pervasive and intensive “plurality of otherness” that marks the globalized and fractured age to which we have now brought ourselves and, along with us, our environing world. These are dynamics of an age that seem that, even as they offer greater opportunities for global interconnectedness, also increasingly enable us to render ourselves as all (hostile) strangers to one another.

Halik’s trope of accompaniment thus complements the accounts Taylor, Neiman, and Steiner provide of how we are to comport ourselves in accord with our humanity in the fragmented context of modernity. This enterprise requires imagining in hope possibilities for our human interaction to engage the consequences of the human conduct that leaves in its wake a crushing and persistent ravaging of our embodied human vulnerability as well as the vulnerability of our planet. Such hope provides the moral space for empowering us, as reflective agents, to enact, from out of our fragile, fractured humanity, the meanings and the practices that bring a measure of wholeness to a fractured world and to our agency as itself participant in that fracture.

When transposed into a theological register, these accounts affirm “grace” as that locus in which and from which we are offered *possibilities empowering us to enact the overcoming of fracture*. “Grace” creates a space of possibilities for us to act, even as we ourselves are

²⁹ “The Afternoon of Christianity: Church and Theology for a Post-Secular Age,” at: https://ndias.nd.edu/assets/181243/tomas_halik_colloquium_intro-ductory_esay.pdf, pp. 4-5; accessed December 4, 2015.

fractured, in ways that help one another in the work of healing the fractures of the world.³⁰ In that space, it becomes possible, whether we consider ourselves seekers or dwellers, to become “guests to one another” and to accompany one another by enacting forms of hospitality that genuinely welcome the other – and accept such a welcome – in full mutual recognition of the shared fragility that marks our human finitude. Practices of welcoming, hospitality, and accompaniment thus provide signal instances for such shared enactments of grace in response to the invitational space opened by the contingencies that insistently call upon us, fractured as we all are, to find ways to dwell in peace with one another across the range of the particular fractured times and places in which we encounter one another.

³⁰ On this point, the Jewish notion of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) provides a significant point of reference. See Elliot N. Dorff, *The Way Into Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World)* (Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock VT, 2005).