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# Contingency and the Giftedness of Creation: Enacting Grace in a Fractured World

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## CONTINGENCY AND THE GIFTEDNESS OF CREATION

### ENACTING GRACE IN A FRACTURED WORLD

A mature theological articulation of the contingency of creation emerged, David Burrell has argued, from a long process of reflection within the traditions of Abrahamic monotheism. Central to this understanding of the originating of the cosmos – in contrast to Hellenic speculative accounts of necessary emanation from an eternal principle – is its characterization of the Creator's freedom in bringing creation to be: "creating fills no need in God and so is an utterly spontaneous and gracious act"<sup>1</sup>. This account of the contingency of creation thus marks not only the radical dependence within which the cosmos stands – i.e., it is not self-originating – but also the gracious free abundance out of which it is brought to be and sustained. The contingency of creation may thus be rendered theologically as the sustained primal enactment of grace – good freely bestowed from and enacted by the abundant inner goodness of God<sup>2</sup>.

Yet contingency viewed as the gracious abundance of God's creating enactment stands in tension with contingency encountered in the finitude of creation. This is the contingency of fracture, of "things gone wrong", of events that could (or should) have been otherwise, but are not – be it in consequence of the workings of nature or the enmeshment of human agency in the webs of contingency. Awareness of this tension is not new. The Book of Job hauntingly exhibits it as dramatic paradigm of the dynamics of human finitude at the intersection of both dimensions of contingency. Having voiced well-founded complaints and rebuttals against the defenses his friends offer on behalf of the workings of contingency *in* creation that have shattered his world, Job falls silent when confronted by the radical contingency *of* creation made manifest to him by its Author. Job's confrontation with the contingency of creation thus provides an initial point of reference for this essay; it then draws resources from Charles Taylor, George Steiner, and Susan Neiman, as

1. D.B. BURRELL, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, Notre Dame, IN, Notre Dame University Press, 1993, p. 8.

2. See D.B. BURRELL, *Creation as Original Grace*, in P.J. ROSSI (ed.), *God, Grace and Creation*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 2010, p. 99: "Avowing that the origin of the universe is free means, of course, that it is an utterly gratuitous act of God, a grace".

each engages these dynamics of contingency, in order to show how this interplay of contingencies opens the tensive space within which humans are called to participate in the worldly enactment of grace.

## I. TWO FACES OF CONTINGENCY

### 1. *The Contingency of Creation*

All religion, all theology could be defined as an endeavor to grasp, to offer thanks for, the gratuitous miracle of creation<sup>3</sup>.

In their efforts to understand the cosmos in relation to the divine mystery that the Abrahamic traditions confess as its ground and origin, Jewish, Christian and Muslim thinkers engaged each another as well as the variegated inheritance of other cosmological speculation, principally, but not exclusively, Hellenic<sup>4</sup>. As Burrell recounts that process, finding an appropriate way to conceptualize the manner of God's *acting freely* in creating was crucial for forging an understanding of the relation that creation bears to its Creator in a way that properly respects the radical difference between them<sup>5</sup>. The affirmation of creation *ex nihilo* provides one important marker of that difference: it notes that "the most radical sort of beginning" constituted in and by God's creating is "one that is utterly free on the part of the originator, and so cannot even be said to be received so originating is it"<sup>6</sup>. Further, the *manner* in which creation is freely enacted marks the unique character of this acting as *divine* acting. It is radically different from any form of acting *in* that world to which divine creating gives origin. The fundamental activity of divine creating is not an acting done upon what is pre-existent to the acting. It is not a *poesis* of "production" bringing forth from what already is, but rather a radical originating that brings forth "the to-be of each existing thing", a phrase with which Burrell explicates *esse*, the term Aquinas uses to "express the effect proper to the first and most universal cause which is God"<sup>7</sup>.

3. G. STEINER, *Grammars of Creation*, New Haven, CT, Yale, 2001, p. 128.

4. See BURRELL, *Freedom and Creation* (n. 1), and *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas*, Notre Dame, IN, Notre Dame University Press, 1986. Burrell recognizes that efforts to understand this relation antedate the medieval interchange among the traditions Maimonides, Ibn-Sina, and Aquinas represent. He focuses on that interchange inasmuch as it forges a grammar of creation both more appropriate than any preceding it and still useful in contemporary contexts.

5. Following R. SOKOLOWSKI, *The God of Faith and Reason*, Washington, DC, Catholic University, 1995. Burrell calls this "the Christian difference".

6. BURRELL, *Freedom and Creation* (n. 1), p. 26.

7. Cf. BURRELL, *Knowing the Unknowable God* (n. 4), p. 94.

Burrell takes Aquinas' articulation of the affirmation of God's acting freely in creation in terms of *esse* as a major accomplishment that issues from an extended argument that thinkers in the traditions of Abrahamic monotheism had with "the necessary emanation scheme of neoplatonism"<sup>8</sup>. Aquinas' achievement is significant in view of the fact that, in the intellectual cultures that were matrices for the formative conceptual articulations of the Abrahamic tradition's affirmation of God's free creation, emanation was "the principal contender to a revealed world view"<sup>9</sup>. Burrell expresses the tradition's core affirmation thus:

*Creation* means the free origination of all from the one God, who gains nothing thereby. Moreover, what the notion of *free* primarily concerns is the lack of any constraint, even a *natural* constraint; so it need not involve *choice*, as it spontaneously does for us, except quite secondarily. That creating fills no need in God and so is an utterly spontaneous and gracious act: that is the cumulative message of the scriptures appropriated by Maimonides and Aquinas. Everything else, including the apparent description in Genesis of an initial moment for the created universe, is secondary to that assertion<sup>10</sup>.

Creation, apprehended as gifted in its unique and singular entirety, apprehended as Steiner's "gratuitous miracle", displays the enacted graciousness of God to which fitting responses are wonder, thanks and praise. The contingency of creation presents a face that allows us to recognize how all that is – including ourselves – radically stands within a frame of an unasked for dependence<sup>11</sup>. Apprehending that the contingency of creation pertains to it first as a whole, as well as to every space of its particularity, manifests the thoroughness with which our own human finitude is deeply embedded in that contingency. As doubly part of the contingency of creation, our finitude may itself be approached as an object of a reverence evoked by attention to the radical possibility that we simply might not have been – *that we are at all* is unasked for, and is so in multiple ways. It is not just that creation need not have been; it is also that neither humanity, nor any of us who instance our species, need have emerged as an element in that creation.

Yet such reverence also has to contend with the equally unbidden fact that our finitude means that, as the cosmos goes its course with us as part of it, the scope of our power and control is small indeed – and the power

8. BURRELL, *Freedom and Creation* (n. 1), p. 8.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. As I am using it, "dependence" is to be understood in terms of a judgment about all that is, not simply about one's own status.

we do have is one we often use neither wisely nor well. Here contingency presents another, more unsettling, face. We are now aware that “the starry skies above” – which Kant saw as one of the two referents worthy to evoke awe from our finite human freedom<sup>12</sup> – stretch billions of light years beyond the horizon within which he and his age could place them. We thus might be able to stand under those skies with awe possibly even greater than his before the fact that, as human, we can claim no hand in the bringing forth and sustaining of the cosmos. Yet learning more about the complexity of the cosmos from which our species has – on the scale of cosmic time – only recently emerged does not of itself make us more attentive of the extent to which far too much of what our species does seems only to inflict scars upon our meager portion of that cosmos and upon the fellow beings with whom we share it as a common dwelling place. In these circumstances, it seems legitimate to question the extent to which humanity considers itself still capable of responding with equal awe before the other referent Kant places before our freedom: “the moral law within”. Placed against the immensity of cosmos in which our species has conducted itself more as intruder than welcomed guest, might we be well-advised – *contra* Kant – to be more modest than he in claiming awe as the proper measure of the worth of our human moral capacities and freedom?

The two-fold source of awe that Kant acknowledges in that well-known passage in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is justly emblematic of the philosophical anthropology that informs his critical project, which situates human finite freedom in the contingency of the cosmos. Within that anthropology, human reason provides a horizon of hope within which humanity can envision its moral agency as a power called to play a unique role in bringing the contingency of creation and contingency in creation to convergence. Though by no means the Enlightenment optimist he has often been taken to be, Kant did consider human agency, in the long run, able to meet the moral challenges set before it by the working of contingency in the world. That agency has power to make actual the social conditions befitting the moral freedom of members of a “kingdom of ends” – in particular, an international political order of “perpetual peace” and a social order of human moral interaction (an “ethical commonwealth”) within which virtue can, as it ought, reliably effect happiness.

12. I. KANT, *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. M.J. Gregor (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 269-270. In the standard German edition of Kant (*Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, Berlin, Königlich-Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1902-), the passage is at 5:161-162.

In the more than two centuries that separate us from Kant, the horrors all too often wrought by individual and communal human agency have severely challenged even his carefully tempered confidence in the moral power of human freedom. As Charles Taylor points out, the expectations Kant helped to articulate as legitimate moral demands upon human freedom are immense – perhaps too immense for the fragile powers of that freedom. As a result, the moral horizons of the cultures of later modernity have been prone to fracture under the pressure of demands for universal justice and benevolence that seem to exceed our capacities to respond to them fully. He argues that in the face of such pressure, the two responses that have often seemed the only options have proven tragically inadequate. The first allows the demands of justice and benevolence an imperiousness that obliterates distinctions between ends and means, and thus leads to fanaticisms small and large. The second is the temptation to lower our moral sights, to settle into a sometimes genial, sometimes jaded, practical relativism that Taylor aptly likens to “spiritual lobotomy”<sup>13</sup>. In either case, it seems hard to provide a coherent account of how human freedom exercised within the context of the contingency internal to creation deserves to stand in parity with the immense and ages-old givenness of creation as a source of awe and reverence.

## 2. Contingency in Creation

The problems of our relative helplessness in the face of contingency arise whether we are thinking of moral evils or natural ones. For the former are an instance of the latter: we are one of the things that go wrong with the world<sup>14</sup>.

The contingency of the world’s creation – that in its entirety, and in each of its parts, it is *at all* (for, inasmuch as “creating fills no need in God”, creation simply might never have been) – may evoke wonder and praise and provide occasions for awe, reverence, and delight, but matters appear quite differently with contingency encountered *within* creation. Contingency encountered *in* creation – that events and things go amiss and, far too often, go dreadfully wrong – is occasion for bewilderment, fear, sadness, despair and rage. Contingency in creation is unsettling not simply by being random or capricious in how it befalls us; it is unsettling

13. See C. TAYLOR, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 495-521; ID., *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, MA, Belknap, 2007, pp. 495-617.

14. S. NEIMAN, *Evil in Modern Thought*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 91.

all the more by the fact that, when things go amiss, we can envision how they "might have been otherwise" – particularly when the "otherwise" seems within the scope of human action and control. Unlike the contingency of creation, for which the counter possibility of utterly nothing at all strains the limits of imagination, thought, and language, we can readily imagine, think and speak of many possibilities of how it might have been otherwise when things go wrong in the workings of contingency in creation – and perhaps no more so than when we are enmeshed in contingency in ways that make us participants in its agency<sup>15</sup>.

Long before the work of Aquinas, Maimonides and Ibn-Sina provided supple conceptual and grammatical strategies to engage questions that each face of contingency raises, the author of the Book of Job had already staked out key lines of tension and contrast in their interaction. Each devastating woe that befalls Job, taken singly, in isolation from each other, might be accounted as just one more of the many unfortunate events that take place in the frame of the contingency that functions in creation through a variety of agencies. Might things have gone otherwise if the oxen had been plowing in a different field on the other side of his property, or if his children had been eating and drinking in another house, or if a more lucrative target for plunder had been available that day for the Chaldeans or for the Sabeans? But in conjunction with each other – to which is then added the physical infirmities that beset Job – the manner in which they all conjointly "go wrong" becomes far more unsettling in its implications. Though Job and his friends disagree on how to account for all the ills that befall him, they do agree that these ills cannot simply be the outcome of a contingency that is totally *random* with respect to its moral import. They cannot conceive of the contingency of creation operating so blindly and mindlessly that it defeats all effort to make sense of its impact upon the human condition.

The arguments that Job's friends offer are thus not so much defenses of the intelligibility of intra-worldly contingency as such; they do not propose to make Job's misfortunes intelligible by offering a dispassionate account of "how the world works". They provide, instead, a way of reading the contingency of the human and natural agencies that have inflicted woe upon Job in relation to the manner in which the divine judges human worthiness: "how the world works" has to have an order

15. Neiman's striking interpretation of Kant's oft criticized essay *On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives* sees it making a point about contingency that "we have no wish to hear: our power over the consequences of our actions is really very small" (*ibid.*, pp. 73-74).

of intelligibility built into it that also displays the moral necessity of just reward and punishment. In varied ways, all of Job's friends argue that, if things have gone wrong for Job, then he must in some way bear blame for it. Blameless suffering is not part of the contingency of the world. Job's most potent protest against this is that, conscious of his (moral) blamelessness, if there is any "blame" at all, it lies in the simple fact of being born into a world of contingency. Job's protest takes the audacious turn of shifting the terms of contention between himself and his friends from a question of blame to a question about the very order of creation, from a moral question to a metaphysical one. Perhaps more accurately, Job's protest identifies the fundamental metaphysical question as equally a moral one<sup>16</sup>.

Neiman points to Levinas for an articulation of this transposition that not only mutually implicates the metaphysical and the moral, but suggests that their now unbreakable mutual entanglement is rooted in the historical exercise of human agency in the workings of contingency in the world:

The first metaphysical question is no longer Leibniz's question *why is there something rather than nothing?* but *why is there evil rather than good?* The ontological difference is preceded by the difference between good and evil. Difference itself is this latter; it is the origin of the meaningful<sup>17</sup>.

The "no longer" in this Levinasian re-formulation of Leibniz's question is of major import. That our most fundamental level of reflection on the human condition must now – after all the horrific things humans have done to one another in the twentieth century (and have continued to do in the twenty-first) – first consider the "difference between good and evil" before grappling with the "ontological difference" is as much a historical claim as it is a philosophical one. To put this in a way that may more directly frame its bearing upon the discussion of contingency and grace, it is a claim that history – the paradigmatic space for the working of human contingency and thus the intra-worldly tribunal before which we must be prepared to hold one another accountable for what we do to shape (or to shatter) the world we hand on to the future – truly has power to alter the metaphysical.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 314-328, offers a provocative discussion on linking of the metaphysical and the moral.

17. E. LEVINAS, *Transcendence and Evil*, in A. TYMIENICKA (ed.), *The Phenomenology of Man and of the Human Condition*, Dordrecht, Riedel, 1983, p. 160, cited by NEIMAN, *Evil* (n. 14), pp. 322-323.

## II. ENACTING GRACE WITHIN THE "BETWEEN" OF CONTINGENCIES

"Creation," therefore, offers itself up for definition as *that which is enacted freedom and which includes and expresses in its incarnation the presence of what is absent from it or of what could be radically other*<sup>18</sup>.

The drive to metaphysics is a drive to find a real order behind the apparent one, in which all the things we long for – the good and the true and the beautiful – will be connected and revealed<sup>19</sup>.

A provisional way to characterize these two dynamics of contingency I have been sketching is to take the first as the "contingency of [creaturely] dependence" and the second as a "contingency of uncertain outcome". Although the latter arises within the context of the former, there is a crucial difference between them with respect to the way in which that which comes forth contingently stands in relation to that which brings it forth. The contingency of creation both manifests the radical non-reciprocity of otherness yet is informed by an equally radical mutuality of presence. It is marked by a unique relation in which all that is and whatever is stand in radical dependence with respect to the originary priority of that which is their source<sup>20</sup>. Articulating this relation poses a complex imaginative, conceptual and linguistic challenge. Burrell observes that "the relation between this One and all that is created cannot be likened to a relation among created things, forcing us to search for a way of articulating its uniqueness, so leading us ineluctably to 'negative theology,' of which there are several varieties"<sup>21</sup>. We attend to the radicality of this dependence when we allow ourselves to enter the vertiginous metaphysical wonder of Leibniz's question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" We further gesture at the uniqueness of this relation when we grapple with the difficulty of imagining there being "nothing at all", as well as when we ponder the *aporiai* that since Parmenides

18. STEINER, *Grammars of Creation* (n. 3), p. 131.

19. NEIMAN, *Evil* (n. 14), p. 203.

20. See BURRELL, *Creation as Original Grace* (n. 2), p. 104: "If creator and creature were distinct from each other in an ordinary way, the relation – even one of dependence – could not be non-reciprocal; for ordinarily the fact that something depends from an originating agent, as a child from a parent, must mark a difference in that agent itself. Yet the fact that a cause of being, properly speaking, is not affected by causing all-that-is does not imply remoteness or uncaring; indeed, quite the opposite. For such a One must cause in such a way as to be present in each creature as that to which it is oriented in its very existing. In that sense, this One cannot be considered as *other* than what it creates, in an ordinary sense of that term; just as the creature's *esse-ad* assures that it cannot be separately from its source".

21. D.B. BURRELL, *Creator/Creatures Relation: 'The Distinction' vs. 'Ontotheology'*, in *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (2009) 177-189, p. 182.

have constantly beset efforts to articulate a syntax for speaking of what, in contrast to all that is or might be, (absolutely) "is not"<sup>22</sup>.

In contrast, the contingency of uncertain outcome provides abundant possibilities for imagining what may or may not be. In this regard, it serves as a fundamental locus within which we engage practices that both govern and test various grammars of cause and effect. Inasmuch as the non-reciprocal manner of dependence central to the contingency of creation (as a whole) is of a singular kind, mapping it onto the (reciprocal) language of "causality" poses enormous imaginative and conceptual difficulties. The dependence central to the contingency of what God creates is not an instance (let alone a "super-instance") of the dependence *within* creation that we construe as cause and effect, even though we seem to have no more evident or perspicuous way of expressing creation's contingency of radical dependence other than terms drawn from intra-worldly forms of causal efficacy. Even Aquinas' hard won articulation of this unique relation into the language of the Creator's *esse* (and, as Burrell astutely notes, of creation's *esse-ad*) can all too easily be read to mark a trajectory drawing of God into the ambit of the "ontotheological"<sup>23</sup>.

A further complication in the relation between these two dynamics of contingency arises on the side of the contingency of uncertain outcome. Uncertainty here is not simply the epistemic qualification that we are not in a position to know all the factors that converge to bring about *this* result. Chagrin, grief, regret from thinking that "it could have been otherwise" do not arise simply from a belief that, if I had left three minutes later the collision at the intersection would not have happened; it arises as much from a sense of not having had *control* of the outcome as it does from a sense of a lack of knowledge. It is not that the working of the

22. Perplexities confronting grammar and imagination in limning the contours of the "not" delimiting the radical contingency of creation have preoccupied a number of philosophical and theological inquiries in late modernity. These offer opportunities for philosophical engagement with theological questions that, earlier in modernity, would be dismissed as, at best, the quaint residue of metaphysical perspectives of little credibility in an intellectual culture of empirical science and secularity.

23. See BURRELL, *Creator/Creatures Relation* (n. 21), pp. 177-189. In *Creation as Original Grace* (n. 2), p. 104, Burrell notes: "So the very existence (*esse*) of a creature is an *esse-ad*, an existing which is itself a relation to its source. Yet since the Other is the cause of being, each thing which exists-to the creator also exists in itself: derived existence is no less substantial when it is derived from the One-who-is, so it would appear that one could succeed in talking of existing things without explicitly referring them to their source. 'The distinction', in other words, need not *appear*. But that simply reminds us how unique a non-reciprocal relation of dependence must be: it characterizes one relation only: that of creatures to creator..." For a related defense of Aquinas against the charge of being progenitor of the "ontotheological", see M.J. BUCKLEY, *Denying and Disclosing God: The Ambiguous Progress of Modern Atheism*, New Haven, CT, Yale, 2004, pp. 48-69.

world is opaque; it is that the world does not do our bidding. Recognition of this, of course, is one important lesson in the life-long curriculum of studies we all need in order to put firmly in place the recognition that we are not God. Yet the issue runs even deeper: even if we are able to come to terms with the fact that a world thoroughly enmeshed in the contingency of uncertain outcome does not do *our* bidding, discerning (let alone comprehending) what might then constitute *God's* bidding in such a world seems an achievement beyond human capacities.

So even though we do not stand in Job's dire circumstances, this does not give us license to think that we are better placed than he to comprehend whether and how the world does God's bidding. Job's friends certainly thought they had such license; so they do not hesitate to propose accounts in which reward and punishment provide the central dynamic for discerning how the world does God's bidding. What differentiates Job from his friends is thus not his unwavering confidence *that*, even though all that has befallen him puts the very form of good and justice in question, the world nonetheless does God's bidding. The difference between them lies instead in Job's acknowledgment that he can no longer comprehend *how* it does so, given that his plight so patently stands counter to any standard of earthly or heavenly justice. It no longer makes sense for Job to take the contours of God's will and work within the world's contingency of uncertain outcome to be bounded by questions of reward and punishment. Susan Neiman perceptively suggests that the truth that Job sees may be that "there is no moral order in the world as it is, and there ought to be some"<sup>24</sup>.

A further difference between Job and his friends lies in his readiness, based on his confidence that the cosmos does God's bidding, to call on God to render on his own behalf an account that would make comprehensible to Job a creation so riddled with contingencies that impinge disastrously upon the trajectories of human life. In offering this challenge to God, Job is probing, more deeply than his friends have wisdom or courage to do, the space upon which the contingency of the radical dependence of creation – from which issues the unasked-for character of Job's own existence as well as the sheer abundance of a cosmos teeming with energy and life – intersects most painfully and poignantly with the contingency of fracture and uncertain outcome, of things gone wrong within creation. Job holds steadfastly to the possibility of living with integrity within the contingency of fracture – yet his calling God to

24. S. NEIMAN, *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-up Idealists*, Orlando, FL, Harcourt, 2008, p. 421.

account does not result in rendering the contingency of fracture more comprehensible. It evokes instead a display of the divine gratuity by which creation was brought to be. God's response to Job's challenge, though it initially seems only an assertion of raw power over the workings of the contingency of fracture, points more tellingly to the gratuity of the radical contingency of creation:

The speech reveals the Creator's pride, to be sure, but with language that justifies it. Life is itself a gift, when this is what it looks like, and each of us is in debt to the world for the gift of having lived in it ... If God speaks truth, as Job admits, it may be to say that creating moral order in the world is just what we're meant to give back to it. If there's going to be reason in the world, it is we who have to put it there<sup>25</sup>.

What Neiman terms "Job's final humility"<sup>26</sup> seems to come from a recognition that the grace of living with hope *in* a creation that is morally fractured by contingency requires that we first attend to the radical gratuity of the coming to be that is the primal grace of creation.

As significant as Job's venturing into this space "between" the two dynamics of contingency may be, of even greater significance is the fact that *God* comes forward to encounter him upon that space. The voice from the whirlwind resounds with divine power, but does not grind Job into deeper misery; in the context of Job's challenge, it gestures to a divine vulnerability meeting him on the fractured ground of contingency. It marks what Charles Taylor calls the "first mystery": "God's initiative is to enter, in full vulnerability, the heart of the [human] resistance [to God], to be among humans, offering participation in the divine life"<sup>27</sup>. On a Christian reading of the Book of Job, there is good reason for taking God's initiative in standing with Job in the space of contingency as a foreshadowing of the enactment of grace that is brought to fullness in the incarnation and the suffering love of Jesus: "God's steadfast resolve not to abandon humanity in its worst distress"<sup>28</sup>.

Neiman puts well the criticism that has long stalked the prose narrative that concludes the text with the restoration of Job's fortunes: "The ending ... seems to ignore all of the questions the rest of the book posed"<sup>29</sup>. Yet more pertinent to questions of contingency and grace may be the fact that God invites Job to make efficacious intercession for his friends, whose well intentioned words brought neither wisdom nor comfort

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 421-422.

27. TAYLOR, *A Secular Age* (n. 13), p. 654.

28. *Ibid.*

29. NEIMAN, *Moral Clarity* (n. 24), pp. 415-416.

because they misspoke God. Yet for all that, Job's friends nonetheless did enact what may be the first grace for the space of fractured contingency: they did not abandon him. Job's intercession completes that grace: it signals that, for all their pride and bluster, God does not leave them abandoned in the space of contingency. At the end, they have all become instruments of God's enacting – through Job in integrity and wisdom, through his friends unwittingly – the primal form of grace by which the divine enters the fractured landscape of human contingency: accompaniment of one another in and through our brokenness.

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