



Derrida's Accounts on Hospitality

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We are currently experiencing a worldwide population flood. Many Western countries are grappling with one of the most pressing problems: migration. We have seen many refugees come from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere in recent years. However, we also face complex reactions to refugees - strangers trying to cross borders in spite of so much uncertainty in order to find a better life than the one they had in their home countries. The idea of welcoming others to one's home and into one's country has received considerable attention in recent years. We have experienced countless stories of both hostility and hospitality. Do we open or close the door when we meet strangers?

Regarding the migratory situation - welcoming strangers, all philosophers believe that our hospitality determines our moral attitude towards others. However, they differ in the way a person approaches meeting and greeting others. In this article, I would like to address what it means to reciprocate (hospitality) according to the continental philosopher Jacques Derrida: The deconstructionist point of view. I also use Kearney's hermeneutical approach to point out or critique some problems in Derrida's notion of hospitality.

1.The questions of hospitality

But what exactly is hospitality? What does it mean for a host – whether an individual or a country – to welcome the stranger? Most of us identify hospitality with the act of welcoming friends and guests into our homes with kindness and charity. Early philosophical treatment of hospitality (or theorizing of the stranger) can be found in the 'Third Definitive Article of a Perpetual Peace: Cosmopolitan Right shall be limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality' in Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace* (1795):

Hospitality (a host's conduct to his guest) means the right of a stranger not to be treated in a hostile manner by another upon his arrival on the other's territory. If it can be done without causing his death, the stranger can be turned away, yet as long as the stranger behaves peacefully where he happens to be, his host may not treat him with hostility. It is not the right of a guest that the stranger has a claim to (which would require a special, charitable

contract stipulating that he be made a member of the household for a certain period of time), but rather a right to visit, to which all human beings have a claim, to present oneself to society by virtue of the right of common possession of the surface of the earth (Kant 2006: 82).

According to these texts, Kant states that an alien possesses the right "not to be treated as an enemy upon his arrival in another's country." For Kant, the "Conditions of Universal Hospitality" is the "condition of perpetual peace." The condition we are told for this universal treatment is that the visitor must both be a citizen of another country and behave peaceably. In other words, Kant asserts that peace cannot be guaranteed without some conditions: being a citizen of another country, he must behave peaceably in another country; he is only allowed to visit, but not to stay (ibid.). Kant limits the right to hospitality to a right to visit, not to the right to stay, which demands that the stranger or foreigner be a citizen of another country. So, rather than altruism, hospitality is a legal issue. Since the right to visitation is a conditional right, the host ultimately exercises the right to select who enters. This is a conditional form of hospitality in Derrida's account of hospitality. However, Derrida does not stop at the conditional form of hospitality. In contrast to Kant, Derrida maintains that only an "unconditional hospitality can give meaning and practical rationality to a concept of hospitality" (Derrida 2005: 84).

Derrida's account on hospitality

In the late twentieth century, Jacques Derrida focused his writings on the philosophical concept of hospitality.¹ Derrida presents two concepts of hospitality, unconditional hospitality, and conditional hospitality. For Derrida, the concept of hospitality is regulated by the aporia of hospitality which is the paradoxical and yet mutually interdependent link between unconditional, absolute or pure hospitality, on the one hand, and conditional hospitality, on the other. What is the difference between a conditional and an unconditional form of hospitality? Now let us go to examine this two heterogeneous hospitality.

2.1. Conditional hospitality

For Derrida, conditional hospitality operates within an economy of exchange and reciprocity, whereas unconditional hospitality is given *beyond* norms, rules, and laws without expecting reciprocity or requiring identification. Derrida differentiates between the conditional hospitality of invitation, which subjects the *arrivant*

¹ In the following writings, Derrida primarily explores the concept of hospitality: (1) Derrida, J. (1999, 2000, 2002, 2005); (2) Derrida, J. (1997). *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness (Thinking in Action)* (M. Douley & M. Hughes, Trans. 1st ed.). Routledge; (3) Derrida, J. (1999). Hospitality, justice and responsibility: a dialogue with Jacques Derrida. In R. Kearney & M. Dooley (Eds.), *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary debates in philosophy* (pp. 65–83). Routledge; (4) Derrida, J. (2002). Hospitality. In G. Anidjar (Trans.), *Acts of Religion* (pp. 356–420). Routledge; (5) Derrida, J. (2005). *Paper Machine* (R. Bowlby, Trans.). Stanford University Press; (6) Derrida, J., Brault, P., & Naas, M. (2005). *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason (Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics)* (1st ed.). Stanford University Press; (6) Derrida, J., Dufourmantelle, A., & Bowlby, R. (2000) *Of Hospitality (Cultural Memory in the Present)* (1st ed.). Stanford University Press.

to "customs and police checks," and the unconditional hospitality of visitation, in which there is no longer a door, allowing "anyone can come at any time and can come in without needing a key for the door" (Derrida 2000: 14). On the one hand, there is a law of unlimited hospitality that commands the unconditional or absolute reception of the stranger. On the other hand, there are conditional laws of hospitality.

In the context of conditional hospitality, there are some laws that establish a right to and duty in hospitality. This kind of hospitality asserts that a right should be given under certain conditions. In this case, a stranger has a right to visit, but he has to stay as a foreigner. The foreigner not only has a right, but he also has a duty obligation. From the point of view of conditional hospitality, the visitor is well accepted, and he is primarily a foreigner; he should stay that way. In other words, the position of the participants (host and guest) is acknowledged and reaffirmed in conditional hospitality. The host remains the host, and the guest remains the guest. Derrida states that the host remains "master in his house, in his household, in his state, in his nations, in his city, in his town... (he) who defines the conditions of hospitality or welcome" (Derrida 2000: 4). According to these texts, the host controls the threshold, he controls the border, and while he welcomes the visitor, he wants to maintain control (Derrida 1999: 69). The guest is received as a friend but on the condition that the host maintains his own authority in his house or his country. Since the right to visitation is a conditional right, the host ultimately exercises the right to select who enters. Without satisfied conditions, the guest is not accepted as a guest. He cannot enter the house of the host, or he can enter only as illegal.

Derrida states that understanding hospitality in this way (conditional hospitality) is precisely the hospitality that Kant proposed in his work *Perpetual Peace* which I mentioned above. Derrida asserts that universal hospitality as the condition of perpetual peace, and universal hospitality is guaranteed under certain conditions: "first, being a citizen of another Nation-state or country, he must behave peaceably in our country; second, he is not granted the right to stay, but only the right to visit" (Derrida 1999: 70). Therefore, peace cannot be guaranteed without these conditions—this conditionality, which also refers to the gift as an exchange.

Derrida contest this form of conditional hospitality in that "I am the master of the home, the city, the nation" with what he called "unconditional" or "pure" or "absolute" hospitality, which is without any conditions and in which the host is not to "ask the other, the newcomer, the guest, to give anything back, or even to identify himself or herself" (Derrida 1999: 70). What is the benefit and purpose of unconditional hospitality?

2.2. Unconditional hospitality

In Derrida's account, unconditional hospitality does not have any conditions or restrictions. In other words, the condition of unconditional hospitality is that there are no conditions. Unconditional or absolute hospitality requires the unconditional reception of the other, whomever she or he is. The host welcomes strangers without any conditions, limitations. Indeed, the law of unconditional, absolute, pure, hyperbolic hospitality asks us to say yes to the newcomers:

Let us say yes to *who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, uninvited guest, or unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrivals is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female (Derrida 2000: 77).

For Derrida, unconditional hospitality has to say "yes" to the stranger without any discrimination. It goes beyond the limits of the laws, norms of conditional hospitality. It resists all forms of border enforcement (Kearney 2012)². Absolute or unconditional hospitality presupposes a break from conditional hospitality. Absolute hospitality should be open to all kinds of otherness, and it demands us to welcome the stranger, regardless of who you are, your name, race, or species, which might be human, divine, or animal.

Absolute hospitality requires us "to give the new arrival all of one's home, all of oneself, to give him or her one our own, without asking a name, or compensation, or fulfillment or even the smallest condition" (Derrida 2000: 77). According to Derrida, this is a singular law which rupture with the plural laws are developed, "those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional, as they are defined by the Greco-Roman tradition" (Ibid.) In another passage with the same meaning, Derrida states:

... absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names (Derrida 2000: 25).

By acknowledging unconditional hospitality as an open invitation to strangers, Derrida also recognizes that absolute hospitality includes the danger of not knowing who our guest will be or how the stranger will behave as a guest. He states, "For unconditional hospitality to take place you have to accept the risk of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing everything, or killing everyone" (Derrida 1999: 71). How do I identify the stranger? How do I know if the person knocking at my door is a madman seeking to harm me or the Messiah in disguise? Therefore, there are risks to welcoming the stranger, to opening the doors of one's border or

² <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/guest-or-enemy-welcoming-the-stranger/10100458>.

home. Derrida states that Kant strives to diminish or restrict the risks from the stranger in different situations as described in Perpetual Peace:

Why did Kant insist on conditional hospitality? Because he knew that without these conditions hospitality could turn into wild war, terrible aggression. Those are the risks involved in pure hospitality, if there is such a thing and I am not sure that there is (ibid.).

Derrida disagrees with Kant, and he asserts that we have to accept the risks in the act of hospitality. In unconditional hospitality, there is also the risk of further violence. He states:

to be hospitable is to let oneself be overtaken [surprendre], to be ready to not be ready, if such is possible, to let oneself be overtaken, to not even let oneself be overtaken, to be surprised, in a fashion almost violent, violated and raped [violee], stolen [volee] (Derrida 2002: 361).

To explain the risks of unconditional hospitality, Derrida used the story of Lot and his daughters in Bible to show that the host accepts the dangers that could happen when he welcomes the stranger. In this story, the stranger does not attack or violate Lot's family, but Lot sacrificed his daughters in order to protect guests from other people in his town: "Lot seems to put the laws of hospitality above all,...in order to protect the guests he is putting up the *at any price*, as family head and all-powerful fathers, he offers the men of Sodom his two virgin daughters" (Derrida 2000: 151). Why then does Derrida accept the risks in absolute hospitality?

Derrida asserts that there is no hospitality if we do not accept the absolute risk of others coming - the possibility that the newcomer could be a Messia or devil is coming to destroy our house:

Pure hospitality...may be terrible because the newcomer may be a good person, or may be the devil; but if you exclude the possibility that the newcomer is coming to destroy your house – if you want to control this and exclude in advance this possibility – there is no hospitality. For unconditional hospitality to take place you have to accept the risk of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing everything, or killing everyone (Derrida 1999: 70-71).

Pure or absolute hospitality, according to Derrida, necessitates openness to the unknown, the "wholly other, the absolute unforeseeable..., the stranger, the uninvited visitor, the unexpected visitation beyond welcoming apparatuses" (Derrida 2002: 361-362). Such pure hospitality grounds the very possible hospitality. There is no hospitality if we only welcome someone we invite or foresee. Derrida contends that unconditional hospitality cannot be reduced to the graspable, categorizable, or rational. Hospitality (unconditional) is not the question of knowledge; it is a decision. We only make a decision if it is impossible – we do not know. We would not risk anything if we knew for sure. Then hospitality would be just an idea among others. Derrida states, "Of course, we have to know as much as possible, but when we make decision – if we make a decision – we don't know and we shouldn't know. If we know there would be no decision" (Derrida 1999: 68). We are obligated to be hospitable, even though we have no idea what hospitality is and will never know. In Derrida's understanding, hospitality must

be impossible since we would have no decision if it were. Possible hospitality would imply that we comply with hospitality's rights and politics as machines rather than humans (Dauser 2018: 56). This is precisely why, according to Derrida, hospitality - or, to be more accurate, absolute hospitality - is impossible (Derrida 2000: 75-6). Derrida calls this is the messianic madness of hospitality: "to wait without waiting, awaiting absolute surprise, the unexpected visitor, awaited without a horizon of expectation: this is indeed about the Messiah as *hôte*, about the messianic hospitality ... or madness in the concept of hospitality, the madness *of* hospitality, even the madness *of the concept of* hospitality" (Derrida 2002: 362). In other words, for love and hospitality to occur, the other must be welcomed unconditionally – in loving blindness, which is similar to Soren Kierkegaard's call to love one's neighbor with closed eyes (in blindness) in *Works of Love* (Kierkegaard 1998: 163). According to Kearney, "Derrida bids us make a leap of faith towards the stranger as '*tout autre*,'" and he states that it seems that "this kind of pure hospitality can never actually be achieved" (Kearney 2015: 174). Why did Derrida make the distinction between unconditional and conditional hospitality? What is the relationship between them?

2.Relationship between unconditional and conditional hospitality

According to Derrida, without unconditional hospitality, there is no hospitality (real hospitality) at all. In other words, hospitality is unconditional hospitality. However, it does not mean that Derrida dismisses the significance of conditional hospitality. On the contrary, although Derrida acknowledges that absolute hospitality is the unconditional welcoming of others, he also makes clear that absolute or unconditional hospitality could be dangerous if it proceeds without the conditional hospitality:

It is a question of knowing how to transform and improve the law, and of knowing if this improvement is possible within an historical space which takes place *between* the Law of an unconditional hospitality, offered *a priori* to every other, to all newcomers, *whoever they may be*, and *the* conditional laws of a right to hospitality, without which *The* unconditional Law of hospitality would be in danger of remaining a pious and irresponsible desire, without form and without potency, and of even being perverted at any moment" (Derrida 1997: 22-23).

Indeed, the two types of hospitality, unconditional and conditional, are heterogeneous and irreducible, yet they are the same. On the one hand, the conditional laws of hospitality would cease to be laws of hospitality if the law of unconditional hospitality did not guide them.

In order to avoid being limited to the demands in a current time and place, political and moral action must be linked to a moment of unconditional or infinite responsibility: it must be founded on a moment of universality that transcends the pragmatic demands of a particular environment. As a result, the laws of hospitality require the law of absolute hospitality in order to keep them in a constant state of improvement (Kakoliris 2015: 148).

The law of unconditional hospitality, on the other hand, would be at risk of staying abstract, ineffectual, wishful thinking, and utopian without the conditional laws of a right and a responsibility to hospitality (Derrida 2000: 79). The law must become actual, effective, solid, and definite in order to be what it is. As a result, absolute hospitality requires conditional hospitality laws, which establish limitations, powers, rights, and obligations that could endanger, corrupt, or "pervert" it. There is no such thing as unconditional hospitality if there is no time limit - it is impossible to come to your home as a visitor and stay there indefinitely or if there are no number constraints - if you invite me to your place, I cannot bring all my relatives and friends (Kakoliris 2015: 148). Thus, on Derrida's account, unconditional hospitality cannot proceed without negotiating with the laws of hospitality – laws in which the host exercises sovereignty by choosing, electing, filtering who will be granted asylum or hospitality (Derrida 2000: 55). There must be limited space, a political space that sets the condition for unconditional hospitality may emerge: "No hospitality without sovereignty of oneself over one's house" (ibid.). Therefore, absolute hospitality cannot escape its relationship to the laws of hospitality – conditional hospitality. As Michael Naas argues, "absolute hospitality has its only chance in impure or conditional hospitality, which simultaneously "conditions and threatens it."³ Absolute hospitality is impossible as it depends on the limiting and concrete institutions of the border, state, nation, and public or political space (Derrida 1997: 23). Derrida insists that "In order to what it is, *the* law thus needs the laws" (Derrida 2000: 79). However, unconditional and conditional hospitality are not symmetrical. The law - unconditional hospitality is above the laws – conditional hospitality (Derrida 2000: 79). In short, the two regimes of hospitality are not symmetrical but nonetheless irresolvable. It will always be the case that we will have to negotiate one in the name of the other.

3. Richard Kearney on Hospitality: Critiquing Derrida's position

As previously said, our answer to the stranger, according to Derrida, is an endless command given without calculation and knowledge in unconditional hospitality, and thus it implies an absolute risk. It does not convince Kearney. While Derrida's hospitality necessitates a responsible blindness and a lack of knowledge, Kearney maintains that our ethical relationship with the other cannot be realized solely via the application of existing rules or norms. Kearney argues that the practice of hospitality necessitates some level of interpretation and practical knowledge – phronetic understanding. This is precisely what he believes the deconstructive approach to the subject of hospitality lacks. The deconstructive analysis of hospitality (Derrida's account), according to Kearney, "that it

³ Naas, M. (2008), *Derrida From Now On*, New York: Fordham University Press, 23.

undervalues our need to differentiate not just legally but ethically between good and evil aliens" (Kearney 2003: 70).

Kearney asks for another understanding of hospitality, referring to Paul Ricoeur, hermeneutical or linguistic hospitality. He claims that hermeneutics offers an alternative approach that "addresses the need for critical practical judgments" (Kearney 2003: 100). Although we have to open to otherness, we "must also be careful to discern, in some provisional fashion at least, between good and evil," Kearney argues, "without such discernment, it seems nigh impossible to take considered ethical action" (ibid.). As a result, according to Kearney, to act ethically, we must know to whom or what we are reacting to - we must be able to see the other's face. Deconstruction, on the other hand, claims that in order to behave justly, one must unreservedly accept the stranger - foreigner. "Only truly just...when it resists the temptation to discriminate between good and evil others, that is, between the hostile enemy (hostis) and the benign host (hostis)" (Kearney 2003: 68) argues Kearney of Derrida's hospitality.

According to these analyses, we can say that both Kearney and Derrida speak of hospitality as the appropriate response to the stranger, to those victimized by injustice. But they are different in some ways. From Kearney's point of view, if someone calls for our help, we must choose whether or not to be hospitable. The host must be secured against potential attacks: "If the foreigner knocks on your door, you have a right to say: 'If I invite you into my host language are we both going to benefit or are you going to destroy me?'" The ethical conditions of hospitality require that sometimes you have to say 'no'" (Kearney 2015: 177). Hospitality is ambivalent, of course. As Kearney admits, "It is always a risk." Derrida's hospitality requirement of blindness. Kearney discusses the ethical aspects of hospitality; it appears that ethics necessitates norms and rules in order to be reasonable and responsible. On the other hand, Derrida claims that if we just follow ethical criteria, there is no hospitality and no ethics. Defining the conditions would imply that you know exactly what to do. Therefore, hospitality would be a matter of knowledge rather than choice. Sometimes, Kearney actually comes close to sounding like Derrida in accepting the absolute risk – undecidability when he writes, "The love of the host for the guest always precedes and exceeds knowledge"; nevertheless, he repeatedly emphasizes the importance of discerning between strangers (Kearney 2011: 47).

It is worthy to recall that the act of discernment in Kearney's account is similar to negotiation in Derrida's account mentioned above. An ethical decision is made in the midst of the to – and – fro between the two imperatives of hospitality. As Derrida states in *Paper Machine*: "It's between these two figures of hospitality that responsibilities and decisions have to be taken in practice" (Derrida 2005: 66). Derrida asserts the same idea in *Of Hospitality*,

"We will have to negotiate constantly between these two extensions of the concept of hospitality" (Derrida 2000: 135). In negotiation, conditional laws of hospitality are "guided, given inspiration, given aspiration ... by the law of unconditional hospitality" (Derrida 2000: 79). Briefly, acts of negotiation influence both orders of hospitality, implying the inevitability of contamination.

In conclusion, in this paper, we have discussed how Derrida's concept of hospitality is characterized by a constant negotiation between two conflicting imperatives. However, we have seen that the "two regimes of law" are not symmetrical and that, according to Derrida, unconditional hospitality is favored in our acts of negotiation. The law, or "the Great Law of Hospitality," is "above the laws" for Derrida (Derrida 1997: 18; 2000: 79). Furthermore, we have stated that unconditional hospitality has an ethical problem; it is concerned with exclusion, discrimination, and a form of sovereignty supported by the "right of hospitality." The 'ethical' reading of Jacques Derrida has recently faced a substantial challenge from Kearney's hermeneutical approach, which opposes the problem of the undecidability of absolute hospitality. However, Derrida has used the concept of negotiation to solve the problem that is similar to discernment in Kearney's account of hospitality.

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