

# Hospitality and ontology

Lóránt Kicsák<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Open to the arrival of the other, ready to receive the other unconditionally, the responsibility is born as a response to the eventful arrival of the other. Hospitality, understood in this way, is thus an unconditional condition of possibility for meeting the other, even before any legal institution. In this sense, ethics is more original than law, and the hospitality relationship is more fundamental than any social, political, or legal relationship.

This primordially also means that Derrida reinterprets hospitality as an ontological relation, which now becomes an openness to the arrival of the arrivant, and a readiness to encounter the other. In coexistence, the absolute presence always poses a question to all beings and expects an answer from all beings. Still, in a certain sense, our ontological relation to all beings is also a responsive and responsible relationship.

## Keywords

unconditional and conditional hospitality, Jacques Derrida, ontological hospitality, hospitable ontologie, communicative coexistence, cooperative community, responsivity, ecological ethics

## 1. Introduction

In my writing, based on Derrida's reflections, I assess the scope of the concept of "unconditional hospitality," its pure idea, and its phenomenon "worthy of the name". The materials from the seminars held between 1995 and 1997 let us delve into the background of his longer and shorter writings and discussions published during his lifetime. This material was published in two volumes in 2021–22, edited by Pascale-Anna Brault and Peggy Kamuf, titled *Hospitalité I-II*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, Budapest Metropolitan University, [kicsak.lorant@uni-eszterhazy.hu](mailto:kicsak.lorant@uni-eszterhazy.hu)

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida. 2021–2022/I-II. *Hospitalité I-II. Séminaire (1995–1997)*. Édition établie par Pascale-Anne Brault et Peggy Kamuf. Paris: Seuil.

The theme of hospitality not only intersects with the questions of gift/donation and forgiveness in Derrida's seminars of the 90s (along the lines of giving/taking, offering/accepting), but also generates similar lines of thought and is guided by a deconstruction process that unfolds in a remarkably similar manner. The examination of these (more ethical and political) phenomena quickly leads to ontological problems that encourage us to deconstruct our ontological perspective. In this, hospitality plays a prominent role.

The purpose of Derrida's deconstructive analyses is not to point out the impracticability in reality of unconditional ideas. On the contrary, he stresses that the pursuit of their realization leads to their perversion. Their role is to guide in the perfectibility of what is always conditionally realizable. In general, to confront us with the fact that the laws that always contain and mark, the actions that always obey conditions, can be perfected. In this sense, unconditional is a synonym of just. At the same time, the requirement involved in "unconditional" compels us to reflect on fundamental convictions and beliefs, which may override not just one of our established views, but entire areas of the organization of our existence. This is what happens in ethics and politics.

The impossibility of realizing the unconditional hospitality in a concrete ethics and politics requires a rethinking of ethics and politics, often leading to at first glance astonishing and unacceptable conclusions, which, if we consider them as possible, however, allow for more just relations. We will see an example of this below in the question of the foundations of Kantian morality: the need to rethink of the meaning and role of rational beings and private property in ethical relation to beings, and rethinking of the definition of ethical relations. But it is also exemplified by Derrida's major theme of rethinking sovereignty. The idea of unconditional hospitality, the expression of responsibility *towards* the other by opening oneself and receiving the other without many existent reserves, poses a serious challenge to the current understanding of political sovereignty, and ethical and legal subjectivity, whose historical-cultural genealogy can convince us that their limits have constantly changed and their content has changed with them.

Deconstructing these institutions and their conditions is not about destroying them. On the one hand, it is an experience of their fragility, and on the other, by challenging established meanings (by creating a context around them or putting oneself in a situation where one has to think about them differently), the same concepts and institutions allow new experiences to be made, which can be incorporated into the institutions and enrich them with new aspects, and thus actually strengthen them. What would be the content of our responsibility to, and

solidarity with, the other, our commitment to their suffering, if we did not know the story of the Good Samaritan and experience through him and in him that devotion to the other cannot tolerate any existent limitation? And this story, the gestures of the agents, extended in the name of justice the experience and the relationship of compassion beyond all the institutions of the time, breaking through the regulated forms and modes of contact, and destroying the institutional framework of solidarity, compassion, and responsibility of the time, breaking through a series of barriers, a series of established rules, and in fact extending the institutional limits of contact with the other, strengthening its content and thus the institution itself.

The known and regulated forms of hospitality, and the other institutions that make them possible (private property, home, sovereign subject, established notions of freedom and responsibility) are similarly “tested” and are “testing” us. Unconditional hospitality (which corresponds to its eidetic essential structure), for example, leads to a reinterpretation, not a destruction, of sovereignty, of the boundaries and foundations of self and other, of home and homelessness, of property and common. The experience of a different kind of sovereignty, a different kind of self, a different kind of property, a different kind of home, comes from subjecting oneself to the test of extended hospitality. These must remain indispensable conditions of hospitality, but we can live with them in a different way, and will thereby find that they are not destroyed, but strengthened, now in another sense. To better fulfill my role as a host, but with different content and in a new position. It turns out that it is meaningful to think about these other meanings: there is another kind of sovereignty, not a sovereignty of “I can do” but a sovereignty of “I let it happen”, where freedom is not manifested in living my power but in exposing myself to a new uncertainty, and in this I experience my freedom. There exists an “own” that is not dissociated and detached from and not opposed to the common, but derives its force precisely from sharing a common that is never given up, and in sharing with others is one’s own; my ownness and my ownership is not fulfilled in isolation but in my right to share, and the “right to share” does not limit but rather expands ownership. My home is not opposed to the common, but mutually conditional with it, and their ever-changing boundaries are marked and changed in this mutuality; so my home can become a home open to all, returning to where it originated, to the home common we all share. In the sharing of the rights of the host, the free sovereign a home of his or her own, it acquires a whole new experience of itself, of its subjectivity, in which it affirms and fulfills itself. In the face of these experiences, speculations which, from some principle, produce in uncontradicted deductions the concepts and values of sovereignty, property, freedom, and responsibility, lose their force.

Deconstruction confronts these speculations with the test: “Expose yourself to the unconditional reception and acceptance of the other and see what happens to what you have thought about the self, the home, the master, the stranger, freedom, responsibility!” This essay can be seen as a thought experiment for this test, drawing on the Derridean notion of unconditional hospitality and thinking it through.

I know that such a thought experiment, conceived as a test, must unfold in dialogical analysis. And that it opens up a space where, perhaps, the impossibility of thinking otherwise is demonstrated. But what is the experience of thinking if not the search for new possibilities and the affirmation of limits?

## 2. The eidetic structure of hospitality

Hospitality is a ritualized relationship across cultures and eras under varying circumstances and conditions. It takes place between individuals of different social statuses and in asymmetrical life situations. At its core, it revolves around the arrival and peaceful staying of a stranger, a newcomer, and his or her non-hostile reception. For the hospitality relationship to function and become a reality, an essential prerequisite is the awaiting asymmetry – the necessity of having someone who has the means and opportunity to welcome another person in their home, who needs this service and expresses a desire for this service either because he or she lacks a home or is not at home. Hospitality transforms this asymmetry into equality through peaceful arrival and staying, and non-hostile reception, by recognizing the right to appear and fulfilling the obligation to receive.

According to Benveniste, compensation leads to the precise concept of hospitality, and equating it is the basis of its legal institution. This is the only real form of realization. Its most formal analysis was carried out by Kant. However, the legal-compensatory institution of hospitality always has ethical implications and content. The relationship between human beings inherently carries ethical dimensions at all times because duties and rights emerge when two individuals come together. In the context of hospitality, duty and right emerge from a common origin but do not yet differentiate one from the other. To invoke Kant’s definition (“the *obligation* of hospitality is a stranger’s *right* to...”); in hospitality, the obligation of receiving and the right of visiting are the same, and correspond to each other. However, no temporal distinction would order the encounter, events, or actions into the schema of first and second, active and reactive, cause and effect, or consequence. Simultaneously, one person’s right and the other person’s duty emerge from each other, leaving no

time for deliberation, consideration, or calculation. Above all, there is no time for this, and the lack of time does not leave space for questions and answers, active and reactive deeds, or conditional aspects of rights and duties.

By outlining the situation of hospitality, we arrive at the source of the birth of rights and duties. The hospitality situation is akin to the immediate emergence of morality when two individuals meet, where rights and duties arise, and do so simultaneously and mutually. Simone Weil's thoughts can assist in understanding this. From each person's own perspective, they only have duties towards others, while from the same perspective, others only have rights over them. Naturally, from their own perspective, those others also only have duties. Rights are born when both parties acknowledge and recognize each other's duties towards them. This defines the content of rights: we shape rights based on what is the other's duty, and conversely: I have obligations towards you, necessarily entailing that you have rights. It is important to note that this is not a transaction or exchange; I do not grant rights to the other in exchange for their duties towards me. Instead, their rights evolve from the duties I hold toward them; I endow them with rights based on my duties towards them.

### 3. Conditional and unconditional hospitality

The concept of unconditional hospitality stems from the idea that within the realm of human interaction, which always unfolds under certain conditions, there exists an unconditional moment: the encounter itself, the unpredictable and uncontrollable appearance and presence of another person in their uniqueness and finiteness. To which the unconditional response of the host is to let them be, to be present as they are, in their absolute otherness. Any demand that ties the acceptance of the other to a condition of exchange immediately annuls hospitality. This is evident when, for example, we expect payment for our reception or, more broadly, when we expect anything in return (whether it is a symbolic gesture or the promise of future reciprocity, whether these are hopeful or calculating thoughts). If we impose conditions – dictating what the other should do, say, how they should speak, behave, what qualities they should possess or lack, etc. – we are already engaged in a transaction, and although the reception may take place, and the welcoming and acceptance of the other may occur, it does not happen within the realm of unconditional hospitality, as it fails to meet the essential requirement of hospitality: the ability to receive the other person *despite all circumstances*, before and outside any contractual relationship or legal formalism. If the ritual introduces an “if... then...” scheme, some form of

human interaction and relationship is established – if the encounter even becomes ritualized, as the hyperbolic gesture of unconditional reception goes beyond and shatters any ritual – however, this will not truly correspond to hospitality (e.g., *if you have documents, if you state your name, if you speak my language, if you adhere to our customs and laws, then you can stay at my place*). The essence of this lies in the fact that we offer hospitality without regard for any prerequisites, requirements, roles, or choreography. Such hospitality precedes or surpasses all legal regulations and relates to the other person not only lawfully but justly.

If such a thing exists. One can doubt it, and it is equally possible to affirm its possibility. However, if there is unconditional acceptance of another person, it is certainly not dictated by legislation but by an absolute command or law beyond conditions. Some argue that Derrida, in a somewhat schizophrenic manner, dreams of this, while others consider it a utopian fantasy of human relationships. The question “does it exist?” in his case, much like Ricoeur’s reflections on forgiveness, shifts into a testimony of “it must be”:

[...] 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.<sup>3</sup>

The testimony is adequate in this situation not only because Derrida finds traces of archaic institutions of hospitality preserved in major religious traditions. This is not coincidental. The unconditional elevates us to the transcendent realm. It is as if Derrida aims to present a transcendental experience not necessarily tied to religion or religious thinking and concepts. The sanctity of human dignity, which cannot be taken away or denied even from a person deprived of everything, and the sanctity of existence unifies the human and non-human, the divine, the animal, the plant, and everything that exists.

What may seem schizophrenic is instead a reckoning with the fact that humans can exist only at the border of two worlds, where the absolute as transcendent demands of normativity and morality become the measures of social actions, the ethical and political world. We can detach from the representations of religious

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<sup>3</sup> J. Derrida, A. Dufourmantelle, & R. Bowlby. 2000. *Of Hospitality* (Cultural Memory in the Present) (1st ed.). Stanford: University Press. 25.

beliefs, but the experiences embedded in them are connected to the deep structure of human existence. The unconditional welcoming and acceptance of another person is not the fictional desire of an outdated religious tradition or a meaningless and self-serving act of kindness (*action gratuite*), but a gesture exemplary for every human action, in harmony with the essence of morality; a generous, free gesture, expecting no reciprocity, a gracious act (*acte de grâce*), which, not incidentally, is a moment of our salvation (“...I was a stranger, and you welcomed me...”) and therefore of our duty to ourselves. At this point, we will only mention how little attention Derrida pays to the gospel parables of hospitality (as he generally shows little connection between the gestures of Jesus and hyperbolic ethics). Nevertheless, these parables do not fit into the genealogy of legal-formal hospitality – of Greek-Roman origin, extending to Kant and today’s asylum laws (contractual relationship) – nor into the Abraham paradigm found in Abrahamic religions (“you never know whether it is God visiting you”), although it naturally encompasses this. However, they are very much in line with the idea of hospitality without conditions, devoid of calculation, opening up to the uniqueness and finiteness of the other (even the finiteness of God or a finite God in the person of Jesus), not just as an ethical parable or foundation of ethics but as the sole criterion of salvation at the last judgment.

Unconditional hospitality, therefore, serves as a precondition for encountering the other, preceding all legal institutions and creating an ethical situation even before any regulations or rules. In this sense, ethics is more fundamental than law, and hospitality is more fundamental than ethics, because it is more foundational than any social, political, or legal relationship. Every society, every ethics, and every politics is built upon hospitality. At this point, there should exist concrete ethics and politics derived from hospitality. However, it does not take much research to ascertain that not only do existing ethics and politics not have their foundations in hospitality, but unconditional hospitality can never have its ethics and politics because they are embedded in the conditions of actual human existence.

Let us assume (...) that there is no assured passage (...) between an ethics or a first philosophy of hospitality, and a law or politics of hospitality (...). Let us assume that one cannot deduce from Levinas’s ethical discourse on hospitality a law and a politics (...). How, then, are we to interpret this impossibility? Does this impossibility signal a failing? (...) *If there is no lack here, would not such a hiatus in effect require us to think law and politics otherwise?*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida. 1999. *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: University Press. 20–21.

However, it is impossible to conceive of law and politics differently (from the perspective of hospitality) without reconsidering our relationships to existence and the existent. Derrida interprets hospitality not only as an ethical but as a fundamental ontological relation, which already becomes an openness to the arrival of what is to come, a readiness for the arrival of the other, and the encounter with the other. Unconditional openness to the other signifies a trust in existence that fully unfolds in relinquishing oneself to being, a releasement (*Gelassenheit*). If the mere fact of existence elevates every existent to an absolute in its uniqueness and finiteness, then the absolutely other is not exclusively a human but can equally be another existent, living being, or an inanimate object. Hence, the sufficient relationship to every existent can be understood as hospitality. In the coexistence of existents, the absolute is their mere presence, which at all times poses questions to, and expects answers from, every existent. In human relationships with each other, this question-answer structure organizes itself into ethics. Can we say that human relations with all existents are inherently ethical? Can ethics be extended to every existent by interpreting our ontological relationship as hospitality?

#### 4. The characteristics of our ontological perspective

Our ontological perspective (whether it is a philosophically elaborated theory of existence or the unexamined and unreflective way of relating to our everyday life) fundamentally shapes our way of being. Neither needs to become thematic; our perspective on being, known or unconsciously influencing us, permeates our thinking, speech, actions, relationships, institutions, aspirations, and goals, reflecting the distinctiveness of a given era, culture, or civilization. The way humans exist, and the possible and distinguished dimensions of their existence, are interrelated, coexisting, and changing together with the characteristics of their perspective on existence.

Today's (globalized European) human condition is determined by the privilege that humans have secured for themselves within the order of *creation* as *zoon logon ekebon*, allowing them to regard themselves as *the masters and possessors of nature*. (The formulation illustrates how the fundamental moments of ancient Greek philosophy, Judeo-Christian religious thought, and modernity merged in the tradition of the Europeans' self-definition.) This conception of existence supports the occupation of the Earth as much as it diminishes the guilt resulting from actions against living beings. It provides a basis for interventions in the natural environment as well as aspirations to explore and conquer the cosmic environment beyond our earthly surroundings.



Human beings differ from other existents and stand above them, and everything that exists serves the unfolding of this privileged human existence, subordinated to humanity. The hierarchical order creates privileges; privileges generate power; power generates rights, primarily the right to sovereign self-determination; sovereignty determines the right to dispose of others; and in relationships with strangers, it shapes the historical forms of hospitality and the right to hospitality.

An ontological view of existence and a way of being based on unconditional hospitality would fundamentally rewrite this ontological perspective and reorganize the way we exist in the world today. In what follows I will examine the conditions that make such a view possible and meaningful, and what – at first glance, difficult to accept – changes it leads to in our fundamental relations to beings. If it makes sense to talk about a non-anthropocentric hospitality in which, *ad absurdum*, non-human existents could become part of law, ethics, and especially politics. This still seems impossible today. However, the same question arises as before: Does not the impossibility of extending hospitality to non-human beings, which, without consciousness or intentionality, cannot be legal subjects or ethical and political subjects, encourage us to rethink our anthropocentric legal system, ethics, and politics instead? For example, in the context of an ecological coexistence theory in which *the unconditional recognition* of the singular and finite existence of *every being* is at its center. The impossibility of this may be due to cultural determinism, which is also indicated by the fact that there are cultures and subcultures (increasingly marginalized due to Euro-Atlantic globalization) in which the unconditional recognition and respect for the existence of beings is self-evident. At the same time, it also poses the task of uncovering and deconstructing the cultural determinisms that prevent hospitality from becoming a general ontological attitude.

## 5. Hospitality is human. Or not?

Derrida's questioning in this regard emerges right at the beginning of his seminar titled "*Hospitalité*". The seminar starts with an analysis of Kant's famous text, in which, according to Derrida, the legal understanding of hospitality achieved its most complete and formal development. In the *Third Definitive Article for Perpetual Peace*,<sup>5</sup> the right to universal hospitality restricts the cosmopolitan right to the

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant. 1795. *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*. "Third definitive article for a perpetual peace. The Law of World Citizenship Shall Be Limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality". [http://fs2.american.edu/dfagel/www/Class%20Readings/Kant/Immanuel%20Kant,%20\\_Perpetual%20Peace\\_.pdf](http://fs2.american.edu/dfagel/www/Class%20Readings/Kant/Immanuel%20Kant,%20_Perpetual%20Peace_.pdf)

conditions of universal hospitality. Every human being, Kant writes, “has the right to become a fellow inhabitant for a certain length of time” on the finite surface of the earth. As long as they behave peacefully, no one can reject them, at least not directly or indirectly. The right to visit (and not to settle) derives from the natural condition that the earth is spherical, and on this finite surface curving back on itself, one cannot isolate oneself from the presence of other humans. However, Kant continues, “originally, no one had more right than another to a particular part of the earth” because the surface of the earth is “our common possession” and we have “the common right to the face of the earth, which belongs to human beings generally”. Hospitality, in this sense, is ordained by nature; we may violate it, but we cannot ignore, eliminate, or abolish it. Inhospitability is not the abolishment of hospitality but rather its modification. Unfriendliness can be directed toward or initiated by both hosts and guests. Kant provides extreme but illustrative examples opposed to natural law. The robbery of travelers or the enslaving and plundering of nomadic tribes by the inhabitants of coasts or of the deserts are instances of the *denial of the host’s duties*; and the injustices of the civilized and especially of the commercial states, which visited but also in fact conquered foreign countries demonstrate the *abuse of the right to hospitality*. These extremes also reveal the minimum conditions of hospitality: the obligation not to harm the other and to abstain from causing their demise, and the right to hospitality does not extend beyond peaceful coexistence.

The meeting of humans is a result of the natural necessity on the spherical earth, but does it follow that this meeting is immediately inscribed within *the order of hospitality*? After all, there must be more to hospitality than just a meeting compelled by physics! What makes a visit immediately part of the scene of welcoming and hosting? The answer lies in the functioning of the *own* and the *non-own* (of home). The guest’s right to appear arises from the fact that “the common right to the surface of the earth” cannot be expropriated. Unlike all my other property, the inappropriability of the earth imposes the obligation to share. Not the obligation to give up one’s own, since one’s own home is the basis of hospitality, but the obligation to open and share this home. And to this the guest can form a right, unlike everything else that is my property. In this case, what is mine becomes also yours because the earth’s surface belongs to both of us, or, more precisely, to neither of us exclusively. This is also the source of the obligation to host. On earth, we are all newcomers, and in our home, we are guests. By offering hospitality, one guest welcomes another guest. In the selflessness of his hospitality, the host makes an experience of himself and all of us as guests. The newcomer elevates the host to the

guest that he has always been, revealing to him the anachronism at all times of the presence as existence in time.

For Kant, the nature-ordained encounter immediately rises above its natural state. He only considers the institutionalized aspects of human interaction as suitable for grounding rights. Thus, Kant attempts to exclude from the rights of hospitality any elements that cannot be institutionalized: namely the uncertain, vague, and unclarified aspects of emotions. Although our entire being is attuned, and our encounters are never devoid of emotions, he emphasizes that hospitality is not philanthropy but a right belonging to human beings, a duty incumbent upon every human being, regardless of the emotional charge of the encounter. Neither hospitality nor rejection derives from love or hate for humanity, even when the other is personally likable or dislikable (due to their presence, personality, behavior, requests, demands, etc.).

And it is at this point that Derrida poses the question that interests me:

By specifying that it is a matter of right and not philanthropy, Kant does not intend to suggest that this right should be misanthropic or even ananthropic. It is a human right, the right to hospitality – and for us, this already announces a serious question: the question of the anthropological dimension of hospitality or the right to hospitality. What should we say, or can we speak of hospitality towards the non-human, the divine, for example, towards animals, and plants, to use these three conventional categories? Must we offer hospitality, and is it the right word when it comes to welcoming – or being welcomed by – the other and the stranger, as God, as an animal, as a plant? We will keep returning to the horizon of these questions.<sup>6</sup>

Derrida, therefore, takes Kant's proposition in a different direction, one that Kant did not explore extensively. He shifts the emphasis away from the distinction between law and emotion (if we assume that love is not something more than an emotion) and directs it toward the "antropos". Although hospitality does not entail love for humanity, it is only a human right, and this necessarily implies that it cannot be extended to non-human entities – a suggestion Kant's statement leaves open according to Derrida.

<sup>6</sup> "En précisant qu'il s'agit ici de droit et non de philanthropie, Kant ne veut pas marquer, bien entendu que ce droit doit être misanthropique, ni même ananthropique, c'est un droit humain, ce droit à l'hospitalité – et c'est déjà pour nous l'annonce d'une grave question que celle de cette dimension anthropologique de l'hospitalité ou du droit à l'hospitalité: que dire ou peut-on parler de l'hospitalité à du non-humain, à du divin, par exemple, à de l'animal, à du végétal? Doit-on l'hospitalité et est-ce le bon mot quand il s'agit d'accueillir – ou de se faire accueillir par – l'autre et l'étranger, comme dieu, comme animal, comme plante, pour se servir de ces trois catégories conventionnelles? Nous ne cesserons de revenir vers l'horizon de ces questions..." (Derrida 2021–2022/I, 22.) (My translation from French – L.K.)

## 6. Non-human hospitality

This raises the question of non-human hospitality in every sense: the hospitality offered to non-human entities and the hospitality required from non-human entities. If this is not merely an emotional relationship, then we might consider institutionalizing our relationships with non-humans (Derrida mentions beings, living beings) – which means a system of rights and obligations could be established in our relations with non-human entities as well. If this is possible, then some form of hospitality (or precisely the same form of hospitality as for humans) might exist for both human and non-human entities.

There is much debate around the question of whether this could become a legal institution. However, there is nothing absurd in the idea that I can be (or consider myself as) a host and offer (consider myself as offering) hospitality to a divine being, an animal, or a plant. I can seek to leave them to stay peacefully in my presence, and our presences thus merge into a common, harmonious presence, and they can expect me to do so, without which there would be no meeting between us. But whether I can be their guest, and expect their hospitality, remains meaningless. The same holds true for obligations: I might feel obliged to host non-human entities as a guest and also feel obligated to behave as a guest in their presence, but it is difficult to interpret whether these entities would have such obligations. Kant certainly would argue that in these cases offering hospitality can be my duty towards myself, which extends *regarding* non-human entities, but *not towards* them, they cannot be in a guest-host relationship with me because conscious reciprocity cannot be established.

However, when we look at the cases we can consider as examples of *inhospitality* with non-humans, we do not find the same relationship. It is harder to situate them within the bounds of my duty to myself. Harming and killing non-human beings such as gods, animals, or plants that visit the territory of my “own” home is just as much a violation of hospitality *towards* them as subjugating, plundering, or depriving them within their own terreneum. The radical instances of inhospitality mentioned above involve our full responsibility *towards* divine, animal, and vegetative beings (or any other existent). Thus, if I kill or cause suffering to others, it is not about neglecting my duties toward myself regarding them, but neglecting my duty toward them, which is to let them be in peace. Moreover, with these creatures, the demarcation of my own home from their territories is even more problematic how can I own that which not only cannot be expropriated, but which is the most *naturally* common, and which has to be the most naturally shared? Therefore, it is senseless and unjust to claim that depriving non-human beings of their habitat and life is merely a breach of my duty

towards myself. My duty *towards* the other is also at stake. If the cases of inhospitality towards non-human beings point to the fact that I have a responsibility towards them, it is reasonable to conclude that I have duties towards them.

Kant restricts mutual responsibility and obligations only to rational beings, and thus integrates the moral content appearing in relation to non-rational beings in the “duty towards oneself”. However, we could approach this differently: responsibility arises from responding to each other, and beings are in constant communication with each other. In this sense, the responsibility of beings towards each other exists, regardless of whether this applies to rational or non-rational beings, but first becomes recognized, acknowledged, and desired by rational beings. Whether the responsibility of humans towards non-human beings becomes a duty towards them and is enshrined as a right continues to depend on whether non-human beings are capable of recognizing my duty and forming a right based on it. Before hastily assuming that non-human beings, being non-rational and unconscious, are incapable of such recognition, we have to consider that recognition (though not in terms of duties and rights) is essential for them to distinguish between useful and harmful, nourishing and poisonous, and more. Essentially, between self and other. Such differentiation guides the immune system in every living being, resulting in the integrity and lasting existence of the living organism. Therefore, living organisms inherently organize their experiences in their communication with their environment: by differentiating and recognizing, they seek out acceptable and accepting encounters, and avoid unwanted and rejecting ones.

We assume that in the context of hospitality, one of the participants must always be human. Partly because it is challenging for us to imagine that the initiative or interaction would come from non-human entities or that they would relate to each other in this way. However, we are familiar with scenes in the relationships between non-human entities, animals, and plants (beyond individuals of their own species) that have the meanings of acceptance, reception, mutual recognition, tolerance, and care, among other things. Their hospitality is a reality. Therefore, it is not absurd to consider non-human entities in the role of hosts; the phenomenon of caring for offspring, caring for fellow species, and nurturing offspring is widespread in the animal kingdom, and even the plant world is not devoid of nurturing offspring and promoting and ensuring life conditions in the communication with fellow beings. After all, this community of life consists of a variety of species of plants and animals. And of humans and gods, too, as long as they do not exclude themselves from or elevate themselves above it.

If extending hospitality to every being implies mutual recognition, then it seems that the harmony of ecological systems, these enduring, functioning systems, are great witnesses to hospitality.

Clearly, this idea destroys the very conditions enabling the possibility of hospitality when it relativizes the own, the stranger, the home, etc. But it also destroys the very foundations of morality, of ethics, when it extends duty and responsibility to non-human, or more precisely, non-rational beings. In unconditional hospitality, does unconditionality also mean the overriding of these conditions? Perhaps. Remember that we are in a thought experiment. We might just learn from the extension of hospitality what the essence of human-to-human hospitality should be. By contemplating whether it is possible – and if so, how, and if not, why not – to not only speak about hospitality in relation to gods, animals, and plants, but also to relate to them as with humans, in accordance with the institution of hospitality. By imagining what kind of human way of being would emerge if we approached every being with the unconditional giving and receiving of hospitality.

## **7. Communicative, cooperative, and copoietic co-existence**

“Offering hospitality to non-humans, plants, animals, or the divine, does it make any sense? A huge question.” This question permeates the atmosphere of Derrida’s seminar without thematic discussion. After its initial appearance, it fades into oblivion, only to reappear in the second part of the seminar (Derrida 2021–2022/II, 55)<sup>7</sup>, still without elaboration. We do not intend to oversimplify this immense question with a straightforward answer. However, it is also clear from what we have seen so far that our competition-centered ontological approach is fundamentally different from our hospitality-centered ontological approach. The Heraclitean “polemos” and the Anaximanderian “adiké” define the original relation of beings to each other. Out of them evolved an ontology based on the principle of “all against all”, a theory of evolution driven by competition and the quest for domination. Even if we accept these two ontological premises, does it follow from them that beings can only strive not to accept each other, but to defeat each other? Does not the moving of “atonement of injustice” and the “creating war” suggest that, despite all the inherent

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<sup>7</sup> “.. vous vous rappelez qu’au début du séminaire l’an dernier (...), nous nous sommes demandé si l’hospitalité était le propre de l’homme; autrement dit, s’il y avait un sens à offrir de l’hospitalité à du non-homme, à des plantes, à de l’animal ou à du divin. Est-ce que cela a du sens? Énorme question.” (Derrida 2021–2022/II, 55) (The English version is my translation – L.K.)

antagonisms of beings, existence unfolds in harmonious arrangements? And does this not refer to another principle of organization, which can be called hospitality?

“All things must in equity again decline into that whence they have their origin for they must give satisfaction and atonement for injustice each in the order of time.” – Anaximander set the course not only for our philosophical understanding of existence but also for our relationship with beings when he stated that beings commit injustice against each other simply by existing. Therefore, they must be punished, and their punishment is annihilation (decline), which they pay as compensation or reparation (satisfaction and atonement) for the injustice they committed against each other. What does this injustice, stemming from mere existence, consist of? We only need to consider what happens to beings during their necessary and punitive annihilation: they pay for their existence with their existence. They are deprived of everything that enabled their ascent into existence, and they decline to the boundless and infinite, *Apeiron*, where spatial and temporal relations and forms are unknown. Accordingly, injustice lies in the fact that during their (temporary) existence, things expropriate something that is not theirs. By temporarily expropriating shape, space, and time, each being deprives other beings of these possibilities, compelling them to compete and fight for these opportunities.

However, this does not only or necessarily imply a conception of existence as competition and struggle for domination. If the decline of beings is a form of retribution, then they are already in debt when they enter existence: to exist is to be inherently indebted to something that is not a prior loan, unless we consider as a loan the possession of something that is not our own.

The ontological extension of hospitality does not necessarily seek to contradict those ontological interpretations and theories that view existence through the lens of rivalry, perpetual struggle among beings, conflicts, battles, power-seeking, and the principle of “the war of all against all.” Instead, it reveals an essential aspect of existence that invalidates the meaning of this power struggle: the fact that in our existence, we own something that cannot be expropriated, and will not encourage us to compete, if we admit that we possess nothing, yet we owe.

The hospitality offered to non-human beings is restrained. Spending time together in (co-)existence, and refraining from letting mere functionality, deterministic expediency or self-interest decide the other. The manifestation of abstention and also the condition of possibility is abstention from destroying the other. To leave-to-be is not indifference or disinterest, not passive toleration, but very active participation in the other’s existence by not interfering in their existence.

Abstained togetherness is respecting the other's conditions of being: place, time, form, and environment, supporting its survival or continued existence. Even the modes of evasion, avoidance, and moving on, which are by no means deficits, are not the result of indifference or neglect: evasion and avoidance require serious attention, and moving on requires resoluteness.

In the context of Anaximanderian ontology, an extended view of hospitality allows entities to rectify the injustices committed against each other through their mere existence by engaging in a mutual act of abstention. The ultimate "truth" of their existence lies not in the inevitable punishment, in their decline *but in the opportunity inherent in existence to rectify the injustices through affirmative abstention*. In essence, existence is a reciprocal, gratuitous gift.

Their existence already places the entities in a relationship where their presence becomes togetherness. Within co-presence, every entity in their absolute (or sheer) presence addresses a question to and waits for a response from each one. The temporally enduring and affirmative abstention becomes a communicative coexistence. In this coexistence, flow, movement, transmission, transportation, and exchange all collaborate to establish a lasting, stable, and harmonious community—cooperative and copoietic *communitas*. In human-to-human relationships, the question-and-answer dynamic organizes itself into ethics. However, every entity in its ability to respond bears responsibility in its relationship with every other entity.

Rather than setting things in place, the hospitable relationship offers a place for them. Leaving entities to be is not a matter of leaving or ordering them in one place; it supports and facilitates their movement within existence. It does not merely let them exist where they are, but where they can be; it participates in their being and shares the possibilities of existence. It is not indifference but rather heightened, vigilant attention. It is not passivity but wholehearted engagement and caring activity. The phenomenological term for this concentrated attention is intentionality, which serves as the driving force not only in the process of theoretical cognition but also in the fundamental ontologic relationship to beings.

Derrida, within Lévinas's philosophy, places significant emphasis on reinterpreting intentionality. According to Lévinas, in our relationship with the other person, a unique form of intentionality operates; it is not the objectifying intentionality that strives for truth and knowledge. "It [intentionality, consciousness of] is attention of the face, hospitality and not thematization." The intentionality of hospitality is not objectifying; even in the most indifferent glance, in routine, calculating practices, it does not lack attention directed toward the other. In encounters, we are directed not



epistemically, but with an intention of attention toward the other. We do not objectify the other in understanding; instead, we lead them into their own being through reception. Intentional attention, without any prior judgments or presuppositions, affirms the existence of the other. Hospitable intentionality is a commitment to the eventful arrival and reception of the other, a predisposition for the future to come, so to speak, a continuous state of readiness for receiving the other as a guest. The mere fact of existence makes not only humans but every entity absolute. We owe it to ourselves to relate to others justly. We can repair the injustices committed against each other not through destruction but through just existence.

## 8. Primordial hospitality

Derrida, following Lévinas's philosophy, refers to a debt encoded in the temporality of existence "that precedes all forms of borrowing". He names this "anachronism of debt", surprisingly the primordial hospitality (Derrida 2021–2022/II, 95). The anachronism inserts a past never-present-before into the present moment and event of encounter, a precedentless antecedent. In the hospitable relationship, both the giver and the receiver (offering and accepting hospitality) stand in a state of temporal and ontic inequality, in an anachronistic-ontic relationship. This primordial hospitality, says Derrida, "the fact that I'm a guest in my own home means that I'm in debt even before a legal contract, even before I've contracted a debt, I'm in debt." (Derrida 2021–2022/II, 95) But each of them is in an anachronistic situation concerning themselves as well. Their shared destiny is that the existence from which they draw is a precedentless antecedent. Heidegger described it for human beings as follows: to be as the nothingness ground of oneself.

In a hospitable relationship, one must repay a debt that has never been a loan, and the other must shape the right to this gift without becoming in debt. Both are in debt; in their coexistence, they share something that doesn't belong to either of them. "A contracted debt is nothing because it's on a level of homogeneity: I know what I owe, I can pay it off, I can repay it, it's not a radical debt. The absolute debt – this is found in the tradition of Nietzsche, Heidegger, in another style – is a debt that I didn't even contract, that is older than I am, but for which I am responsible." (Derrida 2021–2022/II, 95)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Le fait que je suis hôte chez moi, c'est que je suis endetté avant même un contrat juridique, avant même d'avoir contracté une dette, je suis endetté. La dette que je contracte, au fond, ce n'est rien puisque c'est sur un plan d'homogénéité: je sais ce que je dois, je peux m'acquitter, je peux rembourser, ce n'est pas une dette radicale. La dette absolue – on trouve cela dans la tradition de Nietzsche, de Heidegger, dans un autre style – est une dette que je n'ai même pas contractée, qui est plus vieille que moi, mais dont je suis responsable." (Derrida 2021–2022/II, 95) (The English version is my translation – L. K.)

I am thus responsible for a debt that I did not create but simply found myself in by existing. At this point, existence itself is a debt; in this sense, I am not only a host; I, too, am a newcomer or a guest. This both removes my arrogance toward the newcomer and puts me in the newcomer's place. I must give, I must share everything with the other newcomer not as a host but as a guest of a greater Host. I must give not as an owner but as someone who has been given to. The guest elevates the host to guest.

Our debt without prior borrowing is something we want to consider our own, something that belongs to us yet is not ours. We received it, and gratitude and thanks are the only adequate form of reciprocation. We do not have to give it back; we have to share it. We cannot keep it for ourselves; we can only pass it on.

We owe this to ourselves and to others.

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