

# On hospitality here and now

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*“Love ye therefore the stranger”*  
(Deuteronomy 10:19)

The ancient custom of hospitality – hospitium – was already an organic part of life in Ancient Greece. They believed that strangers are under the protection of Zeus, and whoever is kind to newcomers will be well liked by men and the gods. The traditionally obligatory friendly attitude dictated that the host welcomes the stranger, the wanderer coming to his home as a guest, providing shelter, protection, and help, and the mutual friendship and alliance that came of this act applied and was passed on to their children, too.

Beyond the Ancient Greek and Roman practice, hospitality is one of the most meaningful Biblical concepts, which explains, deepens, and expands the relationship between people, and beyond that, the one connecting us to God. The travelling stranger and guest asking for refuge (Prov. 27:8; Eccles. 29:21) primarily reminds Israel of the time when its ancestors lived as slaves in a strange land (Exod. 19:33), but also of its current situation, when it is a stranger, spending its short journey on Earth as a pilgrim (Ps. 39:13; cf. Heb. 11:13). This guest needs shelter (Deut. 10:18) and loving care in the name of God who loves him.

Jesus not only spoke about the hospitality of God (Luke 14:15) but set an example himself: he calls sinners to his table (Mark 2:15), washes the feet of his guests (John 13:1), takes care of everyone in need (e.g. feeding the multitude in John 6:1–15). For him, hospitality is not just about compassion; he makes it a condition for and a measure of salvation (Matt. 25:31–46). Hospitality is given the deepest foundations in his speech about the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:31–46), where the guest is recognized as Christ: he who receives someone as a guest will not only become neighbours with him but as Jesus is present in the guest in some way, he receives or refuses, recognizes or ignores Christ in him. Thus, every believer of Christ receives those sent by Him (Joh. 13:20) – everyone, even the smallest (Luk. 9:48) – in “His name”.

For Christianity, the concept of hospitality – beyond its Biblical meaning of welcoming strangers – refers to the attitude towards fellow human beings, and so

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involves the innermost core of Christian spirituality, and that makes the way in which this concept – together with all its semantic fields and practical applications – became an especially exciting focus of interest in contemporary philosophy. Based on the idea that hospitality is an organic part of European culture, we would primarily like to investigate through the philosophical and literary studies of the first thematic edition of *Púzmány Papers* how humanities today understand this idea. To find our answer, we turn to the thoughts on hospitality of Jacques Derrida, a great influential thinker of contemporary European philosophy. From the '90s, the French philosopher's work is centred on fundamental ethical and political questions (donation, forgiveness, responsibility, loyalty, promise, democracy, etc.). Today, rethinking the problem of ethics builds in a way on the experience of facing the stranger, the other, and the ways in which we respond to it.

Hospitality is present in his oeuvre as the foundation of all ethics, as the ultimate, non-deconstructible horizon of any ethical decision and act. We plan to have a two-part thematic block in which leading international and Hungarian experts studying Derrida look at how deconstruction as free thinking can reopen the realm of ethics for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and, in connection to that, why any real ethical thinking and action can be considered essentially deconstructive, partly basing their investigation on Derrida's two seminars published posthumously (*Hospitality*, Volumes I & II) and partly looking at the entirety of his oeuvre in general. The different yet interconnected topics unifying the studies collected here are also presented in the context outlined above.