

The Risk of Hospitality: Selfhood, Otherness, and Ethics in Deconstruction and
Phenomenological Hermeneutics

by

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Abstract:

This thesis argues that attitudes of inhospitality operate subtly in our politics, in our religious beliefs and practices, and in our understandings of who we are. Consequently, the question of hospitality – what it is and what it signifies – is an urgent one for us to address. In this thesis I examine and outline the hermeneutics-deconstruction debate over the experience of otherness and what it means to respond to others ethically (or hospitably). In the first two chapters I defend the importance of properly understanding the ethics of both Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida. Against the concerns of Paul Ricoeur and Richard Kearney, I maintain that a Levinasian and Derridean insistence on answering to the call of an unconditional hospitality is the best way forward in our attempt to respond with justice to strangers. Next, by engaging Martin Hägglund's objection to an ethical reading of Derridean unconditionality, I give attention to the theme of negotiation in Derrida's later work, a theme which I take to be the central feature of his account of hospitality. I conclude by proposing five theses concerning hospitality. These theses provide an overview of the main themes discussed in this thesis and once more address the various tensions internal to the concept of hospitality.

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I dedicate this work to my wife, Erin, to our daughter, Charlotte, and to our son, Søren. Their unconditional love and affection have been a constant source of inspiration and motivation over the last three years.

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations will be used in the main body of the text. They will be followed by page number to the English translation.

Works by Jacques Derrida

- OCF *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Trans. Michael Collins Hughes and Mark Dooley (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2001)
- OH *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, Trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000)
- RO *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005)

Works by Richard Kearney

- SGM *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Ideas of Otherness* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2002)

Works by Emmanuel Levinas

- ENT *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, Trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998)
- OTB *Otherwise Than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998)
- TI *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969)

Works by Paul Ricoeur

- OA *Oneself as Another*, Trans. Kathleen Blamey (University Of Chicago Press, 1995)

Introduction

Insofar as it has to do with the *ethos*, that is, the residence, one's home, the familiar place of dwelling, inasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners, *ethics is hospitality*.

– Jacques Derrida (OCF 16-17)

The term 'hospitality' evokes a variety of images. For some of us the first image that comes to mind is that of our mother preparing to host a dinner in her home. One may also think of the 'hospitality industry' associated with hotels, resorts, and restaurants. Perhaps for others, the word 'hospitality' carries with it more political connotations. Images of injustice and inhospitality surface in their minds – ships of refugees being turned away at a harbour, the neglect of the poor by the affluent, stories of excommunication, religious violence, and so on. Nevertheless, most of us, I imagine, think of hospitality as the act of welcoming friends and guests into our home with kindness and charity. The idea of welcoming others into one's home and into one's country has received a considerable amount of attention in recent years, both in the media and in the academy.¹ This can be attributed to a number of factors. First, as Judith Still notes in her book, *Derrida and Hospitality*, the West is currently experiencing an influx in population partly due to "the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees."² With thousands of individuals and families

¹ The following is a list of some more recent examples of work devoted to the theme of hospitality: Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch, ed., *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011); Michael Naas, *Derrida From Now On* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); Judith Still, *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Richard Kearney and James Taylor, ed., *Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2011); Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010); Gideon Baker, *Politicising Ethics in International Relations: Cosmopolitanism as Hospitality* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2011); Jacques de Ville, *Jacques Derrida: Law as Absolute Hospitality* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2011).

² Judith Still, *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 1.

seeking to migrate or be granted asylum, nation-states, especially in the West, continue to seek effective ways of managing their own immigration processes. In addition, since our world is increasingly global in that there are millions of people ‘on the move’, crossing borders, seeking a better life, etc., we, now more than ever, have direct access to countless stories both of hostility and hospitality. One witnesses both explicit and implicit forms of *xenophobia* everywhere from watching the news, to family gatherings, to riding the subway. In Canada, for example, many Canadians are concerned that our immigration policies are too lenient and that we may be in fact harbouring terrorists as a result.³ In the United States, there exists an ongoing discussion of how to handle ‘illegals’, not to mention the contentious debate over building a security wall between the U.S. and

³ See for example the public responses to a CTV news article which explains that according to a report conducted by the United Nations Capital Development Fund, Canada is one among a short list of nations that has “generally fair and open immigration policies.”
http://toronto.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20091005/migration_091005/20091005/?hub=TorontoNewsHome While the comments given in response to this article are generally positive, many Canadians express resentment towards immigrants, saying things such as: “It is unfair to our people to admit so many immigrants into Canada.” One person writes, “In the last couple of years I’ve noticed the tolerance of the Canadian people abating. I’m seeing more post on keeping immigrants out of Canada.” For a more scholarly account of issues related to immigration and xenophobia in Canada (particularly in Quebec) see Charles Taylor and Gérard Bouchard’s extensive report given to the Quebec government entitled: “Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation.”

<http://www.accommodements.qc.ca/documentation/rapports/rapport-final-integral-en.pdf> Chapter 11, entitled “Inequality and Discrimination” provides an overview of several recent surveys conducted in Canada concerning immigration and examines accounts of racism, islamophobia, and discrimination in Quebec. For example, the authors write:

Aside from incidents of an openly racist nature, the most eloquent information is drawn from testimony and individual experience. The combined findings of recent studies lead us to conclude that between 20% and 25% of Quebecers say that they have been the victims of discrimination within the past three to five years, mainly in the workplace. Discrimination reveals itself just as surely (although less directly) in different types of behaviour. A number of studies have clearly highlighted the rejection of certain housing requests and employment applications from racialized groups and, in particular, Blacks (235).

At the end of Chapter 11, Taylor and Bouchard propose different ways to combat discrimination such as: education, enforcing remedial measures to counter exclusion and the violation of rights, government follow-up with ethnic minority organizations, and proximity. In regard to proximity, Taylor and Bouchard argue that false ideas about those who are different from us can be dismissed by intentionally encountering others: “It is not the proximate Other who disturbs or annoys but the remote, unknown, imagined or virtual Other, so to speak. It is the latter that must be dispelled from the imagination. In this matter, our forums have made an important contribution by revealing immigrants in all their diversity and, perhaps even more importantly, by showing what they are not” (238).

Mexico. These and other popular political debates bear witness to the need for philosophers and social theorists to continue to reflect on the complex relations between individuals (self-other) and individuals and the state (the personal-collective).

An early philosophical treatment of hospitality (or theorizing of the stranger) can be found in Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace* (1795). First, Kant insists that for a society to properly form, each member of that society must acknowledge "the right of men under public coercive law, through which each can receive his due and can be made secure from the interference of others."⁴ The external laws or principles of human right are coercive, Kant explains, in that they limit the free will of another and thereby ensure equality among every member of society. Second, Kant proposes that independent individuals or nation-states inevitably enter into relations with other persons or groups of people because they cannot by themselves meet their own ends. "Such accommodation," Ted Humphrey writes, "takes the form of recognizing that all parties involved have rights that accrue to them just because they, like oneself, are ends in themselves, who cannot rightfully be used as means to one's own ends, i.e., takes the form of acknowledging them to be persons."⁵ For Kant, the goal of "a universal civil society" depends on "law-governed external relations among nations."⁶ Perpetual peace among nations, he argues, comes into existence when nation-states engage each other with the mutual recognition of *right*. In the context of hospitality, Kant states an alien possesses the right "not to be treated as an enemy upon his arrival in another's country."⁷ The condition we are told for

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace, and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*, translated by Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 72.

⁵ Ted Humphrey. "A Note on the Text" In Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace, and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*, translated by Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 13.

⁶ Kant, *Perpetual Peace, and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*, 33-34.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

this universal treatment is that the visitor must both be a citizen of another country and behave peaceably. In Kant's view, everyone has the "right to visit, to associate" essentially because "of their common ownership of the earth's surface."⁸ In other words, the right of hospitality is not a matter of 'philanthropy', as Kant notes at the beginning of the section entitled 'Cosmopolitan right shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality' – rather it is a matter of citizenship and moral universalism.

Derrida is of the opinion that there are problems with the right of hospitality as Kant conceives it. Kant's notion of cosmopolitan hospitality, Derrida argues, ensures that the host "controls the threshold, he controls the borders, and when he welcomes the guest he wants to keep the mastery."⁹ Since the right to visitation is a conditional right, the host ultimately exercises the right to select who enters. In contrast to Kant, Derrida maintains that only an "unconditional hospitality can give meaning and practical rationality to a concept of hospitality" (RO 84).

While this thesis at times gives attention to Kant's concept of cosmopolitan hospitality, I will be primarily turning to discussions related to otherness, selfhood, and ethics found in twentieth-century continental philosophy (phenomenology, hermeneutics, and deconstruction). Specific to the question of hospitality, Derrida's two lectures given in 1996, entitled "Foreigner Question" and "Step of Hospitality/No Hospitality," will function as the starting point for my examination of hospitality.¹⁰ These lectures are of seminal importance to discussions of hospitality; indeed, it is extremely unusual to find

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida", In *Questioning Ethics: Debates in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, edited by Mark Dooley and Richard Kearney (London: Routledge Publishing, 1999), 69.

¹⁰ These lectures were translated into English in 2000: Jacques Derrida & Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, translated by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

contemporary philosophical and theological writings on the theme of hospitality that do not address these lectures in some manner. Throughout *De l'hospitalité (Of Hospitality)*, Derrida seeks to answer the question concerning where hospitality begins. He writes, "Does it begin with the question addressed to the newcomer: what is your name? ... Or else does hospitality begin with the unquestioning welcome, in a double effacement, the effacement of the question *and* the name?" (OH 29). In other words, does hospitality begin with conditions such as requiring identification, or does it begin with the unconditional welcome? While these lectures primarily introduce the various tensions inherent within the concept of hospitality, they also offer a critique of the limited, or conditional, hospitality found in Kant's thought, and in the thought of many others his thought has influenced. In the end, Derrida's concept of absolute or unreserved hospitality challenges the Kantian right to hospitality and calls us to be actively attentive to the other.

The Question of Hospitality

But what exactly is hospitality? What does it mean for a host – whether an individual or a nation-state – to welcome the stranger? How do we identify who is a stranger? Why are so many of us xenophobic? How ought we to live with others and to encounter difference? The desire to address these and other related questions forms the impetus behind the present work. As our exploration into the question of hospitality will show, there are risks to welcoming the stranger, to opening the doors to one's border or home. We often encounter the strange in terms of hostility (instead of hospitality) precisely because offering hospitality involves risks that many of us are not willing to take. How

do I know if the person knocking at my door is a madman seeking to harm me, or the Messiah in disguise? With continual reference to Ricoeur, Levinas, Kearney, and Derrida, *I intend to elaborate the idea that our experience of the stranger puts into question the sovereignties of the 'ego', the state, and religious institutions – if not also religious beliefs such as the belief in the sovereignty of God.*¹¹ The phrase 'putting into question' denotes a kind of *rupture* in one's identity and priorities – one becomes displaced and transfigured by the other. Once this event has taken place one begins to understand oneself differently. This experience, I believe, can also occur on the political level. It is crucial, as Judith Still asserts, to move "beyond moral and social relations between individuals, to recognize that hospitality can be, and *is*, evoked with respect to relations between different nations or between nations and individuals of a different nationality."¹²

Following Emmanuel Levinas, I will argue that the 'face' of the stranger makes a moral demand upon us. The stranger forces us to respond to her in ways that give priority to her well-being over our own. In the words of Levinas, "To expose myself to the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to existence into question."¹³ In addition, at the beginning of *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Levinas speaks of 'dwelling' as "the very mode of *maintaining oneself*" that is, the sense of being 'at home' in which "everything belongs to me; everything is caught up in advance with the primordial occupying of a site, everything is comprehended" (TI 38). In contrast with

¹¹ In *Anatheism*, Kearney explains that anatheism is not a new religion, but rather is an attitude which has shown itself throughout history whenever a person has "suspended her certainty about a familiar God and opened the door to the stranger" (167). Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹² Still, *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice*, 2.

¹³ Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics of the Infinite" in *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, edited by Richard Kearney (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 75.

this image, Levinas contends that it is “the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself” (TI 39).

Additionally, this thesis will argue that our present situation in history necessitates a proper treatment of the theme of hospitality. Since attitudes of inhospitality pervade Western culture, the question of hospitality – what it is and what it signifies – is an urgent one for us to address. Indeed, attitudes of inhospitality operate subtly in our understandings of who we are, in our politics, and in our religious beliefs and practices. I maintain that inhospitality is a direct result of the persistence of a repressive sovereignty visible in all three of these dimensions (the subjective, the political, and the religious). In short, ‘repressive sovereignty’ (or sovereignty as repression) denotes any attitude of autonomy or self-mastery which perceives others as undesirable and ultimately as a hostile threat to one’s domain (home, church, or nation-state). In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida explains that xenophobia surfaces when the ‘home’ is threatened – either by an “anonymous technological power” or by actual persons (flesh and blood) (OH 53). The approach of conditional or traditional forms of hospitality, he writes, can be heard in the following: “I want to be master at home, to be able to receive whomever I like there. Anyone who encroaches on my ‘at home’, on my ipseity, on my power of hospitality, on my sovereignty as host, I start to regard as an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy” (OH 55). The following discourse on hospitality seeks to challenge such attitudes of autonomy, sovereignty,¹⁴ and totality, while at the same time acknowledging the various tensions inherent in welcoming others.

¹⁴ See Simon Morgan Wortham, “Sovereignty,” in *The Derrida Dictionary* (New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 2010), 191: “While Derrida is always interested in the highly singular and specific operations of power, politics, or law, there is a more general sense of the term ‘sovereignty’ in his writing that goes somewhat beyond its limited common usage, for instance in connection with the historical forms

I contend that Derrida's understanding of the weak force of hospitality is crucial for offering an alternative vision to a world often driven by sovereign attitudes. Examining the theme of hospitality, I believe, will better enable us to combat and deconstruct the ways in which we close others off from our lands, our homes, and our churches. In *The Weakness of God*, John D. Caputo states that the question, "Who is in and who is out?" is "one of humankind's most pointed, poignant, and painful questions."¹⁵ Together the thinkers discussed in this thesis provide an attentive and crucial way forward in negotiating the enduring tensions of hospitality on the subjective, political, and religious levels.

The Structure of the Following Work

All of the thinkers I engage agree that *hospitality defines our ethical posture towards others*.¹⁶ They differ, however, with regard to how one goes about encountering and welcoming others. My intent in this thesis is to present and examine the different approaches that continental philosophers Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Richard Kearney, and Jacques Derrida take in outlining what it means to respond to others hospitably (or ethically). In short, the following deliberation is positioned at the intersection of deconstruction and phenomenological hermeneutics. The hermeneutics-

taken by kingship, or the self-determination of a nation-state. The question of sovereignty arises wherever an entity is imagined in terms of its power of mastery, whenever it is deemed capable of authoritative self-expression, or whenever the ostensible unity, self-identity and self-sufficiency of a being is forcefully imposed at the expense of difference and the other." While the word 'sovereignty' has many connotations, I follow Derrida by speaking of sovereignty as the exercise of self-mastery and self-sufficiency.

¹⁵ John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 266.

¹⁶ See Derrida's *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 17, cited in the epigraph to this introduction.

deconstruction debate over the experience of otherness has many voices and is ongoing.¹⁷ Its general question is: what does it mean to hear the call “to explain oneself, one’s actions or one’s thoughts, to respond to the other?”¹⁸ In many ways, much of the contemporary debate is indebted to the lifelong discussion between Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Levinas. While there are many similarities between Ricoeur and Levinas, they differ in regard to how the self is summoned or assigned to responsibility. For Ricoeur, this ‘summoning’ does not occur through the radical passivity of the ‘I’, as it does for Levinas; on Ricoeur’s account, the self finds itself summoned by linking its own ‘self-esteem’ to an attentiveness to the other (solicitude).

Chapter One, “Hospitality With/Out Ontology – Re-examining Paul Ricoeur’s Criticisms of Emmanuel Levinas,” introduces some of the general insights and difficulties in phenomenology in regard to subjectivity and alterity. In this chapter, I explore how Ricoeur and Levinas hold contrasting views with regard to the position of initiative within the ethical response to the voice of the other. Whereas Ricoeur insists that any ethical initiative begins with the self, Levinas contends that the power of initiative belongs to the alienating work of the other. While Ricoeur is right to point out that he and Levinas take different angles with respect to the initiative of exchange between the self and the other, I contend that he misrepresents Levinas’s account of ethics (or hospitality) when he asserts that Levinas’s ethics eliminates ontology.

Chapter Two introduces the debate between Richard Kearney and Jacques Derrida, students of Ricoeur and Levinas, respectively. Chapter Two assumes a similar structure to that of Chapter One, in that I first present the positions of each thinker, and

¹⁷ See in particular Chapters 3 & 4 in Brian Treanor’s *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 150-270.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago University Press, 1993), 3.

then question one thinker's reading of the other. In Chapter Two, I argue that although Kearney does bring to light many of the complexities of Derrida's position, he overlooks two important aspects of Derrida's account of hospitality, namely, the *aporetic nature of hospitality* and *the role of negotiation* involved in making ethical and political decisions. Essentially, Kearney is of the opinion that the deconstructive analysis of hospitality is problematic because "it undervalues our need to differentiate not just legally but *ethically* between good and evil aliens" (SGM 70). Following Ricoeur, Kearney contends that the notion of practical discernment (or *phronesis*) is central to the discussion of hospitality. In Kearney's view, we must be able to exercise the power to "critically discriminate between different kinds of otherness, while remaining alert to the deconstructive resistance to black and white judgments of Us versus Them" (SGM 67).

Conversely, in his writings on hospitality, Derrida questions whether we should rely upon our capability to discern between strangers when making ethical or political decisions. He insists that the power of the subject to discern must be challenged by the 'impossible' ethics of absolute hospitality. Derrida's analysis of absolute hospitality is complex, as he insists that, even as the other beckons us to heed the call of unconditional hospitality, we cannot avoid excluding others. In other words, we always remain caught in an economy of violence. Nevertheless, examining the concept of hospitality, for Derrida, involves the continual movement between the two imperatives of hospitality. Derrida explains in *Of Hospitality* that the aporia of hospitality is identified as the "insoluble antinomy" between unconditional hospitality and "those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional" (OH 77). This continual movement or negotiation between unconditional and conditional forms of hospitality is the

consequence of acknowledging the ‘incalculability’ of hospitality or justice. In *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, Derrida states that when “one *knows* what path to take, one no longer hesitates” (84). Hesitation and constant transaction ensures that our calculating, our decision-making, our cutting away from negotiation, does not depend on programming, but always necessitates risk. One can never discern with certainty. On Derrida’s account, “There is no decision without the undecidable.”¹⁹ Similarly, Derrida asserts, “A decision is something terrible.”²⁰ In the end, Derrida and Kearney differ in regard to the function of knowledge (or criteria) in hospitality, yet they both emphatically contend that hospitality involves risk. For example, Kearney repeatedly claims that there are risks in discerning between strangers. He writes, “When we discern – as we wager before the face of the stranger – we always run the risk of being mistaken, of getting it wrong. But such risk is not groundless. Love – as compassion and justice – is the watermark.”²¹

Chapter Three might be construed as a ‘Ricoeurian’ detour – here I engage a young Derridean scholar, Martin Hägglund. One of the most provocative arguments in Hägglund’s book, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, is that Derrida’s notion of the unconditional describes the non-ethical opening to the unpredictable or unknowable

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, edited by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 31.

²⁰ Derrida, “Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida,” 67. Derrida is referring to the phrase ‘the instance of decision is madness’ taken from Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard writes that Abraham had faith “by virtue of the absurd, for all human calculation ceased long ago” (36). Briefly, Kierkegaard considers Abraham to be a knight of faith because he made the movement of faith by trusting God despite the absurdity and cruelty of God’s command. The decision to respond and sacrifice his only son is made in the madness of faith and not in the clarity of knowledge: “Faith itself cannot be mediated into the universal...the single individual simply cannot make himself understandable to anyone” (71). Kierkegaard suggests that an authentic decision will always be bound to secrecy and madness. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition: Kierkegaard’s Writings, VI*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

²¹ Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God*, 47.

future. In Hägglund's view, when Derrida uses the phrase 'unconditional' in his lectures and books, he is not using it in such a way that the unconditional signifies an ethical ideal, "as something toward which we can 'aspire' but never quite reach."²² Working through several sections of Derrida's *Rogues* and engaging the debate between Hägglund and two established Derridean scholars, Derek Attridge and John D. Caputo, I assert that Derrida's unconditional does in fact have an ethical concern. Since I seek to defend an 'ethical' reading of Derrida, it is necessary to address Hägglund's challenge. In contrast to Hägglund, I maintain that Derrida's unconditionality is not simply descriptive but a compelling force possessing a normative dimension. The end of Chapter Three engages Derrida's "On Cosmopolitanism" to discuss one of the difficulties of writing on the theme of hospitality in the continental tradition, namely: "How does one avoid establishing norms while speaking of hospitality and responsibility for others in terms of obligation?" Here I argue that Derrida's ethic of negotiation is the most helpful and fruitful response to that question. For Derrida, the practice of hospitality is context-dependent – one must negotiate between unconditional hospitality and conditional hospitality in singular contexts, without assurance of the outcome or knowing definitively if one has acted correctly.

Lastly, I conclude by offering *five theses on hospitality* that will address ways in which the host, the guest, the friend, the stranger or foreigner can attempt to respond to the complexities of hospitality. I will do this by proposing that we conceive of hospitality as the continual *negotiation, crossing, and dialectic* between the different thresholds considered in this work (between self and other, inside and outside, individual and

²² Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 100. In addition, Hägglund argues that this 'aspiration' position is a misunderstanding of the deconstructive thinking of otherness.

collective, personal and political, generous and economic).²³ These theses are motivated by Derrida's understanding of hospitality, as I contend that Derrida offers us the best way forward in understanding what hospitality is and how to practice it. In many ways, my thesis is a sympathetic exposition of Derrida's texts on hospitality. These theses flow out of the three chapters that make up this thesis and remind us once again of the various risks involved in welcoming the stranger. Finally, it is my hope that this work will both evoke ways in which we can traverse and put into question the inhospitable patterns through which we habitually relate to each other on the subjective, political, and religious levels.

²³ Part of this list of 'thresholds' is taken from Judith Still's book *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 4.

Chapter 1

Hospitality With/Out Hospitality: Re-examining Ricoeur's Criticisms of Levinas

I have much admiration, as you know, for Paul Ricoeur. In all of contemporary philosophy, he is a spirit of both audacity and perfect honesty. But there is a small disagreement between us regarding good relations with the other.

– Emmanuel Levinas¹

In an interview conducted by Salmon Malka, Ricoeur says the following regarding the disagreement Levinas mentions above: “I am more and more apprehensive about this supposedly head-to-head opposition between us that some have tried to establish. For Levinas, one begins with the Other, I am told, whereas for you, you are still attached to the subject, or to reciprocity. But one begins where one can!”² As Ricoeur’s apparent frustration shows, there are many similarities between his work and that of Levinas, both philosophically and personally. While both thinkers were companions and colleagues for many years, they held differing views when it came to issues related to subjectivity and otherness. In essence, the two thinkers differ in their account of how the self is summoned or assigned to responsibility. In Levinas’s view, being summoned by the other or the stranger is a matter of finding oneself inescapably bound to the other in responsibility. For Levinas, the other destabilizes our conception of her and reconstitutes us primordially as responsible subjects. In *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Levinas writes: “The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my

¹ “Le Quotidien de Paris,” Monday, 10 February 1992. Quoted in Richard A. Cohen’s essay, “Moral Selfhood: A Levinasian Response to Ricoeur on Levinas,” 127.

² Salomon Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas: His Life and Legacy*, trans. Michael Kigel & Sonja M. Embree (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), 195.

spontaneity, as ethics” (43). Ricoeur, for his part, emphasizes the role the self plays in offering hospitality to others. For him, the self-other relation is not characterized by passivity, since a subject’s capacity to act and judge is inextricably linked to the suffering of others.³ As Ricoeur writes, “the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other” (OA 3). Thus, the self, in Ricoeur’s view, is an acting self affected by the other.

My overall aim in this chapter is twofold. First, I will show that Levinas’s account of ethics does not reject ontology, but rather calls into question the freedom implicated within any ontological constitution of selfhood. Levinas holds firmly to the notion that ethics precedes and redefines ontology. Ultimately, for Levinas, to take responsibility for the other, “even hostage oneself to the other, is the vocation of true selfhood.”⁴ Second, my intent is not necessarily to show how and why Ricoeur’s criticisms of Levinas “miss their mark,” but rather to demonstrate that, while these thinkers differ, their differences often hide a close proximity.⁵ The differences between Ricoeur and Levinas – that is, “between absolute and relative accounts of otherness” – may possibly be resolved by recognizing that their “nearly identical concerns for the other” are merely articulated

³ In Chapter Two I will show how Kearney and Brian Treanor adopt the position on agency and capability that Ricoeur advances. Each of these thinkers, I suggest, are indebted to Ricoeur in that they too contend that the self possesses the capacity to respond hospitably to others. In short, one must be capable of responding if one is to properly attend to the needs of others.

⁴ Michael B. Smith, *Toward the Outside: Concepts and Themes in Emmanuel Levinas* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 23.

⁵ Richard A. Cohen, “Moral Selfhood: A Levinasian Response to Ricoeur on Levinas” in *Ricoeur As Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity*, edited by Richard A. Cohen and James L. Marsh (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 127. This conviction is motivated by Adriaan Peperzak, who at the end of his essay, “Ricoeur and Philosophy: Ricoeur as Teacher, Reader, Writer,” asks: “Does their difference hide a close proximity? A deep agreement?” Adriaan Peperzak, “Ricoeur and Philosophy: Ricoeur as Teacher, Reader, Writer” in *Ricoeur Across the Disciplines*, edited by Scott Davidson (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2010), 28.

from a different angle.⁶ Although these thinkers take different angles on the theme of the role of initiative in the exchange between the self and the other, they share a very similar aim, namely, reorienting ontology.⁷ Put differently, both Ricoeur and Levinas are concerned with how responsibility affects an ontological understanding of the self.⁸ Ricoeur states at the beginning of the tenth study of *Oneself as Another* that his task is to answer the question: “what sort of being is the self?” (297). For Ricoeur, the notion of *attestation* becomes the basis for speaking of the self in the mode of being.

Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics of the Self

In much of his work on subjectivity, Ricoeur attempts to steer a middle path between the “exalted subject” and the “humiliated subject” by proposing a hermeneutics of the self (OA 16). Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self is characterized and mobilized by the dialectic of selfhood and otherness. According to him, this dialectic between the self and other resists both the notion that all knowledge “can be articulated within a single horizon,” and “the forgetting of oneself” that can occur when we excessively privilege the other over the self.⁹ In seeking to bridge the gap between “the apology of the cogito”

⁶ Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 201. Treanor is speaking here of the differences between Gabriel Marcel and Levinas, however, as Treanor notes, Ricoeur proposes that we think of otherness in relative terms instead of in absolute terms.

⁷ Levinas associates ‘ontology’ with the primacy of a self-constituting ‘ego’. For example, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas relates ontology with power in Heidegger’s thought: “Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power” (TI 46). In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas critiques ontology by emphasizing that the condition of subjectivity must not be articulated in terms of self-presence (the said). What needs to occur is a process of retrieval (unsaying) in which the subject’s origin is put into question by a prior commitment. This process is what Ricoeur explains as the *saying* freeing “itself from its being captured by the *said*” (“Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony” 121).

⁸ Put plainly, although responsibility is a significant component of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self, responsibility has a more profound implication for Levinas, since, in Levinas’s view, responsibility creates a new subject. Thus, responsibility has different ontological implications for Ricoeur and Levinas.

⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 282.

and “its overthrow,” Ricoeur continually refers to the word “attestation” (4). Ricoeur defines attestation as “the *assurance of being oneself acting and suffering*” (22).

Furthermore, attestation of self, for Ricoeur, includes “a trust in the power to say, in the power to do, in the power to recognize oneself as a character in a narrative...” (22).

Ricoeur connects a narrative understanding of the self with the notions of suffering and solicitude. Essentially, attestation of self, that is, a subject’s capacity to act and judge, is, for Ricoeur, inextricably linked to the suffering of others. In the introduction to *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur explains that the dialectic of oneself and the other, when examined from an ethical viewpoint, will result in the following formulation: “The *autonomy* of the self will appear then to be tightly bound up with *solicitude* for one’s neighbour and with *justice* for each individual” (18). Throughout his writings Ricoeur argues that the self must be a ‘self-as-present’ in order to properly respond to the needs of the other. In addition, Ricoeur insists that the other, in constituting one as responsible, causes her to be “capable of responding” (336). “In this way,” Ricoeur asserts, “the word of the other comes to be placed at the origin of my acts” and not from an origin which “lies outside of me” (336).

Levinas and the Responsible Self

Levinas, on the other hand, contends that the subject is summoned to responsibility in and through being reconstituted primordially as a responsible subject. For Levinas, responsibility sets the condition for the very identity of the subject. “To be myself,” he writes, “means, then, to be unable to escape responsibility.”¹⁰ According to Levinas, the

¹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 73.

power of the ego is overcome primarily when it is called into question by the other, who is not reducible to thought or possession. In his essay “Transcendence and Height,” Levinas writes, “...the *I* loses its hold before the absolutely Other, before the human Other, and, unjustified, can no longer be powerful.”¹¹ Essentially, on Levinas’s account, “ethics redefines subjectivity” so that a person’s identity is formed in affirming the freedom of the other over her own.¹² In “Ethics of the Infinite,” he articulates the view that one’s autonomy is displaced in responding to the other in the following terms: “The ethical ‘I’ is subjectivity precisely in so far as it kneels before the other, sacrificing its own liberty to the more primordial call of the other. For me, the freedom of the subject is not the highest or primary value. The heteronomy of our response to the human other, or to God as the absolutely Other, precedes the autonomy of our subjective freedom.”¹³

Throughout his later writings Levinas connects the inescapability of responsibility to the notion of substitution. In *Otherwise Than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, Levinas describes substitution as a process of persecution in which one is unable to return to oneself: “The more I return to myself, the more I divest myself, under the traumatic effect of persecution, of my freedom as a constituted, wilful, imperialist subject, the more I discover myself to be responsible.... (112). For Levinas, constituting the subject as inescapably responsible before the other results ultimately in perceiving the self as being hostage to the other: “the subjectivity of the subject is its subjection.”¹⁴ In addition, the role of the other in Levinas’s thought is that of oppressor or persecutor – to which “the

¹¹ Emmanuel Levinas, “Transcendence and Height” in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 17.

¹² “Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics of the Infinite” in *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, edited by Richard Kearney (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 63.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate*, 37.

persecuted one is liable to answer” (OTB 117). In essence, Levinas argues that in order to respond to the call of the other the subject must become radically passive and take on “full responsibility, even to the point of substitution.”¹⁵

The Use of Hyperbole in Levinas’s Ethics

Ricoeur’s criticisms of Emmanuel Levinas are quite detailed and complicated. His criticisms center on the lack of “attestation of self” in Levinas’s ethics as well as Levinas’s portrayal of the other solely as a figure of oppression and radical exteriority (OA 340). While both Ricoeur and Levinas agree that the other summons me to responsibility, Ricoeur is concerned with the disappearance or non-representation of the other that occurs in depicting otherness as entirely transcendent. Throughout much of his commentary on Levinas, Ricoeur seeks to challenge Levinas’s insistence on the distance or break between the two genres of being, the Same and the Other. In addition to the themes of separation and absolute otherness, Ricoeur also critiques Levinas for his use of hyperbole, which he asserts is a part of Levinas’s strategy as a philosopher. One month after Levinas’s death, Ricoeur delivered a speech at the Sorbonne in honour of Levinas in which he speaks of Levinas’s philosophical method of hyperbole and excess.¹⁶ There he attributes Levinas’s hyperbole to his great admiration of Russian literature. Ricoeur says, “When he says ‘I am guiltier than others,’ in my opinion, this is not Jewish but Dostoyevsky, it is *The Brothers Karamazov*.”¹⁷ Ricoeur goes on to confess that he does

¹⁵ Ibid.,129.

¹⁶ Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas: His Life and Legacy*, 194.

¹⁷ Ibid.

not always understand Levinas's radical approach: "That was part of my little debate with him over the use of hyperbole. Say more in order to say less..."¹⁸

Although long intrigued by Levinas's work, Ricoeur waited many years before engaging it.¹⁹ In 1986, he concluded his 1986 Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh with a discussion of Levinas's ethics. These lectures, along with another piece, "What Ontology in View?," were published two years later as *Oneself as Another*.²⁰ Thus, there are two sections of *Oneself as Another*, specifically the beginning of Chapter Seven and the end of Chapter Ten, that take up the dialectic of selfhood and otherness in dialogue with Levinasian ethics. In 1989, Ricoeur published an essay "Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony" in which he seeks to navigate between the privileging of fundamental ontology in Heidegger,²¹ on the one hand, and Levinas's excessive position of substitution, on the other. In this essay, Ricoeur proposes that "Jean Nabert occupies a middle ground between Heidegger and Levinas."²² It is in this essay that Ricoeur searches for a glimpse of ontology in Levinas's ethical formulations. Ricoeur's last essay on Levinas, which was published in 1998, is entitled "Otherwise: A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas's *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*."²³ A text of two lectures, "Otherwise" was originally published in French as a small book.²⁴ Similar to "Emmanuel

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Peperzak, "Ricoeur and Philosophy: Ricoeur as Teacher, Reader, Writer," 24.

²⁰ See Cohen, "Moral Selfhood: A Levinasian Response to Ricoeur on Levinas," 127. Cohen notes that chapter 10 was given as a free-standing lecture at Cericy-la-Salle in 1988, two years after Ricoeur's Gifford lectures. He also asserts that the criticisms of Levinas function as the culminating critical moments of both lectures, which ultimately reveals "the importance of Levinas for Ricoeur" (137).

²¹ In "Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony," Ricoeur summarizes Heidegger's philosophy as follows: "An exteriority without otherness corresponds to this height without transcendence" (110).

²² Paul Ricoeur, "Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony" in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, edited by Mark I. Wallace (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1995), 120.

²³ Paul Ricoeur, "Otherwise: A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas's *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*" in *Yale French Studies 104: Encounters with Levinas*, edited by Thomas Trezise (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

²⁴ Peperzak, "Ricoeur and Philosophy: Ricoeur as Teacher, Reader, Writer," 25.

Levinas: Thinker of Testimony,” “Otherwise” discusses Levinas’s notions of the ‘Said’ and ‘the Saying,’ yet surprisingly with a more severe and passionate tone.²⁵

In the seventh study of *Oneself of Another*, entitled “The Self and the Ethical Aim,” Ricoeur develops his notion of a responsible self in relation to the idea of the “good life.” The study is divided into three subsections; each section is a component of Ricoeur’s overall attempt to define “ethical intention.” “Let us define ‘ethical intention,’” Ricoeur suggests, “as *aiming at the ‘good life’ with and for others, in just institutions*” (OA 172). The phrase “with and for others” reveals the inseparable connection Ricoeur draws between one’s capacity as a self and one’s orientation towards others. In addition, Ricoeur uses “self-esteem” to convey a sense of how the subject is capable of evaluating herself and her actions as good (181). The capacity to judge and act, Ricoeur argues, is placed in a dialectical relation to the notion of realization. Concern for the well-being of others arises from this dialectical relation: “It is in connection with the notions of capacity and realization – that is, finally, of *power* and *act* – that a place is made for *lack* and, through the mediation of lack, for *others*” (182).

Ricoeur proposes that Aristotle’s conception of friendship is crucial for addressing “the problematic of the self and the other than self” (182). Ricoeur draws from Aristotle in describing the relation between the self and the other in terms of friendship, mutuality, and reciprocity. He writes, “From Aristotle I should like to retain only the ethics of reciprocity, of sharing, of living together” (187). According to Ricoeur, the ideas of mutuality and reciprocity avert “any subsequent egoistic leanings,” since they occur on the plane of ethics and are thus governed by the ‘good’ (183). In a similar fashion as his critique of Heidegger, Ricoeur points out that friendship, for Aristotle,

²⁵ Ibid.

“works toward establishing the conditions for the realization of life” without any “straightforward concept of otherness” (186, 187). To this Aristotelian conception of friendship, Ricoeur adds “the idea of reciprocity in the exchange between human beings who each esteem themselves” (188). By insisting on the idea of self-esteem as “the primordial reflexive moment of the aim of the good life,” Ricoeur balances Levinas’s hierarchy of other and self (188). Importantly, Ricoeur argues that basing the relation between human persons on the principles of equality and mutuality ultimately “places friendship on the path of justice” (188). In the end, this conception of friendship is linked to the dialectic of selfhood and otherness in two ways. First, friendship constitutes “a fragile balance in which giving and receiving are equal,” and second, each human person in an exchange of reciprocity ought to esteem themselves (188).

It is from the discussion of equality and “the mutual character of friendship” that Ricoeur turns to the thought of Levinas (188). In short, Ricoeur places Levinas among those thinkers who emphasize “the ethical primacy of the other than the self over the self” (168). In contrast to his desire to balance self-interest and interest for the other, Ricoeur suggests that Levinas offers an unbalanced conception of the ethical relation by privileging the other “in the initiative of exchange” (188). In fact, in Ricoeur’s view, the initiative of the other in Levinas’s work actually “establishes no relation at all” since the other for Levinas “represents absolute exteriority with respect to an ego defined by the condition of separation” (188). As Ricoeur sees it, Levinas, by characterizing the other as separate from the ego, sets the condition for the other to absolve “himself of any relation” (189). Additionally, Ricoeur contends that Levinas falsely believes that to represent “something to oneself is to assimilate it to oneself, to include it in oneself, and hence to

deny its otherness” (336). In contrast, Ricoeur contends that representation is not inherently violent.

Is Ricoeur right to say that the severe distance Levinas creates between the ego and the other results in the other absolving itself from any relation? In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas explicitly states that “the relation between me and the other commences in the inequality of terms, transcendent to one another” (251). For Levinas, the relation of a self with another cannot result in “a representation, for the other would therein dissolve into the same....” (38). It is imperative for Levinas that the other be encountered qua other, otherwise the freedom of the self would be maintained. Put differently, in Levinas’s view the self must exist as separated or else it would exist as a totalization. The question Ricoeur seems to ask in his criticisms of Levinas is: ‘Why is it impossible for ontology to account for alterity?’ We can imagine Levinas, in turn, replying: ‘Relating to the other from the place of ontology is merely the self relating itself back to itself. The other must be encountered as other.’

Ricoeur, then, is right to speculate that Levinas would interpret any attestation of self in the self-other encounter as the “certainty of the ego” (OA 340). It is because Levinas insists that the subject has no power over the other that Ricoeur concludes that Levinas’s self is “a stubbornly closed, locked up, separate ego” (337). Throughout the seventh and tenth study of *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur argues that “the self must be defined in terms of openness rather than isolation.”²⁶ Richard A. Cohen, however, argues that Ricoeur misunderstands “the passivity of the self that responds to alterity” in

²⁶ Eftichis Pirovolakis, *Reading Derrida and Ricoeur: Improbable Encounters Between Deconstruction and Hermeneutics* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 107.

Levinas.²⁷ He contends that Levinas's emphasis on ethical obligation and alterity does not lead to an understanding of the self as unaffected or self-enclosed: "The Levinasian self is not so separate as to be inviolate, simple, passive, or, as Ricoeur would have it, the (im)possible object of violence and war."²⁸ Importantly, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas claims that "[i]t is not the insufficiency of the I that prevents totalization, but the Infinity of the Other" (80). Therefore, it is the in-breaking of the alterity of the other, appearing from a dimension of height and transcendence, which enacts a reconfiguration of the 'I'.

The very structure and force of Levinas's ethics relies upon the "unrelating relation" between the same and the other: "The same and the other at the same time maintain themselves in relationship and *absolve* themselves from this relation, remain absolutely separated" (TI 295, 102). Thus, the ethical relation in Levinas's philosophy is unique, as it insists that the self and the other "are both out of relation and in relation," as Richard Cohen writes.²⁹ In a few places in Levinas's writings, he speaks of "a relation without relation" or of love as "a relation with that which always slips away."³⁰

Already Responsible: Levinas's Pre-Originary Ethics

In *Aspects of Alterity*, Brian Treanor explains that the ethical relationship with the other is primordial for Levinas; however, this does not rule out the fact that one will engage others on a political level as well: "Levinas is not denying that we are in reciprocal relations with others, and that others are responsible to the self in a sense. However, such

²⁷ Cohen, "Moral Selfhood: A Levinasian Response to Ricoeur on Levinas," 134.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

³⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 80; *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 67.

structures are derivative rather than original.”³¹ Throughout *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas speaks of the assignment of responsibility as an injunction prior to the will, to any beginning, and “to any free commitment” (109).³² Importantly, for Levinas, before I can speak of capacity or begin to interact with others, I am already bound to others – who are not my equals – in responsibility. Levinas summarizes this point clearly in *Otherwise Than Being*, when he claims, “The ego is not an entity ‘capable’ of expiating for the others: *it is this original expiation*” (118, italics mine). While Ricoeur comes close to this formulation when he says that “the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other,” he nevertheless prioritizes a self to which responsibility is added or incorporated or onto which it is grafted (OA 3).

One of the main concerns Ricoeur draws attention to in the seventh and tenth studies of *Oneself as Another* is Levinas’s tendency to offer us “just one of the figures of the Other” (339). For Levinas, the other can only appear “to the self as moral alterity, the alterity of moral command.”³³ In short, Ricoeur interprets Levinas’s other, who appears as a face which “eludes vision... hearing, [and] apprehending voices,” as a master of justice (189). Thus, the other is the face that instructs and “forbids murder and commands justice” (189). What strikes Ricoeur to be problematic about this way of viewing the self as a responsible self is the way in which the other operates solely in an *accusative* mode. In other words, the injunction to responsibly respond to others comes from the other,

³¹ Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate*, 201. In *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, Levinas states that “[a]s citizens we are reciprocal, but [this] is a more complex structure than the Face to Face” (107).

³² He also writes, “The self before any initiative, before any beginning, signifies anarchically, before any present” (164) and “This responsibility appears as a plot without a beginning, anarchic (135).

³³ Cohen, “Moral Selfhood: A Levinasian Response to Ricoeur on Levinas,” 143.

rather than arising from the symmetry inherent in authentic friendship: “Taken literally, a dissymmetry left uncompensated would break off the exchange of giving and receiving and would exclude any instruction by the face within the field of solicitude” (189). For Ricoeur the other must meaningfully appear if we are able to hear her instruction (189). Conversely, Levinas asserts, “To hear his destitution which cries out for justice *is not to represent an image to oneself*, but is to posit oneself as responsible” (215 italics mine). In response to Levinas, Ricoeur argues that, in order to properly act on behalf of others, solicitude must be given the status of “benevolent spontaneity” over “obedience to duty” (190).

Ricoeur essentially compensates for the dissymmetry in Levinas’s thought by initiating a reversibility of the other as master of justice and persecutor of the ego to the other as “a suffering being” (190). Viewed this way, the self is no longer passive but rather is a “being-able-to-act,” a self “who *gives* his sympathy, his compassion, these terms being taken in the strong sense of the wish to share someone else’s pain” (190). In short, for Ricoeur it is my ability-to-act with compassion and benevolence that brings a sense of balance to Levinas’s disproportioned ethical perspective.³⁴ The difference between Ricoeur and Levinas in regards to responsibility, as Treanor notes, is that Levinas “is not satisfied by sympathy or empathy for the other, but by actual, concrete sacrifice.”³⁵ At the end *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, Levinas speaks of responsibility for the other person as “the taking upon oneself of the ultimate gift of dying for another.”³⁶

³⁴ Henry Isaac Venema, *Identifying Selfhood: Imagination, Narrative, and Hermeneutics in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 155.

³⁵ Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate*, 37.

³⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 163.

Ricoeur's New Dialectic

In the tenth study of *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur writes that for Levinas, “the identity of the Same is bound up with an ontology of totality that my own investigation has never assumed or even come across” (335). In contrast to Levinas’s account of absolute otherness, Ricoeur establishes a “new dialectic of the Same and the Other” in which “the Other is not only the counterpart of the Same but belongs to the intimate constitution of its sense” (329). In essence, Ricoeur desires that we think of otherness in relative terms instead of absolute terms. Put this way, the other is “not condemned to remain a stranger, but can become *my counterpart*, that is, someone who, *like me*, says ‘I’” (335). Significantly, Ricoeur states that the other “is other than the self only because he or she is another self, that is, like, a self” (187). Not only does Ricoeur believe that the self must be present in the self-other encounter, but the other – as another self – must also visibly and audibly appear. To be a being-assigned we must be able to hear “the voice of the Other in the Same,” Ricoeur asserts (339). In addition, the voice of the Other ought not to come from outside in the accusative mode, but rather perform in the self a strong concern for the other: “...must not the voice of the Other who says to me: ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ become my own, to the point of becoming my conviction, a conviction to equal the accusative of ‘It’s me here!’” (339). In the end, as a thinker committed to ontology or selfhood, Ricoeur is concerned that if responsibility becomes “a responsibility to the point of substitution and captivity,” then the self disappears and therefore lacks the conviction or capacity to respond to the other by saying “Here I stand!”³⁷

Finally, throughout his essay, “Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony,” Ricoeur struggles to find a way to assert that Levinas’s philosophy is a philosophy of

³⁷ Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate*, 129.

selfhood. Ricoeur essentially asks: “Is there any account of subjectivity in going beyond Being or in understanding oneself as a hostage to the other?” Ricoeur links testimony to subjectivity by suggesting that the subject in Levinas’s thought, although in an asymmetrical relation to the other, remains a consciousness or retains a sense of self: “The condition – or noncondition – of subjection still says something about the subject.”³⁸ Thus, in characterizing identity as “hostage to the other,” Levinas transforms the coherent self into a responsible self. Ricoeur concludes that “responsibility, however passively assigned it may be, requires a ‘who,’ a self, that will not be thematically identifiable... but that nevertheless will be a self.”³⁹ It is difficult to say whether Ricoeur is critiquing Levinas in this essay or searching for a less scandalous Levinas. He seems to agree with Levinas that any account of subjectivity that stresses “self-positing consciousness,” or concern principally for its own existence, needs to be transformed into a subjectivity-for-the-other (121). Although Ricoeur appreciates elements of Levinas’s project, he finds Levinas’s notion of the self as constantly in “the state of being a hostage” to the other to be excessive and hyperbolic (OTB 117).

Ultimately, Ricoeur, by describing the relation between the self and the other in terms of friendship, mutuality, and reciprocity, claims to be offering an ethics *with* ontology. As a dialectical thinker, he seeks to avoid both ontology without ethics (a position Ricoeur attributes to Heidegger) and ethics *without* ontology (i.e., Levinas). The question, however, that continues to surface is: “Does Levinas reject ontology or does he reinscribe it in depicting the self as hostage?” For reasons I will explore in the next

³⁸ Ricoeur, “Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony,” 125.

³⁹ Ibid.

section, I contend that instead of rejecting ontology, Levinas offers his readers a reorientation, a “*way of existing*” characterized by the ethical relation to the other (TI 5).

A Retrieval of Identity and a Relation of Holiness

In *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, Levinas states that “[h]uman subjectivity, interpreted as consciousness, is always activity” (58). Levinas explains here that when one becomes aware of consciousness one has the capacity for understanding one’s actions and decisions in the world. “Thus, everything happens,” Levinas writes, “as if I were at the beginning; *except at the approach of my fellowman*” (58, italics mine). Thus, when it comes to this encounter between myself and another, I am, on Levinas’s account, “recalled to a responsibility...inscribed in the face of an Other” (58). Levinas continues to explain that the event of being called or questioned by the Other results in a “counter-consciousness” or “reversing consciousness” (58). Once the subject is displaced, she finds herself “in a state of guilt...in accusation” (58). This “accusation” is not connected to the moral law but to the face of the other. Levinas goes on to say in the same essay that “[t]he fact of exposing oneself to the charge imposed by the suffering and wrongdoing of others posits the oneself of the *I*” (60). Therefore, one comes to acknowledge in Levinas’s writings the impossibility for an individual to be absolved of guilt or of responsibility, since ethics – which has been instigated by the other – has created a new subject, or rather, has enacted a retrieval of identity. The meaning of the ‘I’ is understood anew as conferred to the other. The ‘I’ is *affected* by the other and becomes *affection for* the other. The outcome of this event is that suddenly “I have things to account for” (86).

Finally, it is important to note that Levinas explicitly addresses Ricoeur's criticisms in two interviews he gave in 1990 and 1992. In the first interview, Levinas seeks to clarify his position by referring to a subjectivity of "subjection" as being "born to a new autonomy."⁴⁰ He states: "I recall that Ricoeur would say to me, 'Your 'I' has no esteem for itself'. One thus reproaches one's freedom for losing itself in the burden of responsibility for oneself and others; and concern for others can, of course, appear as a form of subjection, as an infinite subjection."⁴¹ In response to Ricoeur's objection, Levinas goes on to ask the following question: "Is freedom not that which is most remarkable in the mortal, finite, and interchangeable being who then raises himself to his unique identity as a unique being? This is the meaning of the notion of election. To be aware of it, to be able to say 'I', is to be born to a new autonomy."⁴² Second, in an interview conducted by Michaël de Saint Cheron in 1992, Levinas states the difference between him and Ricoeur on the matter of reciprocity in the following terms: "Paul Ricoeur follows me on a lot of points, but here he believes that the suppression of reciprocity is to lack something, that there's a kind of injustice committed against oneself in this way of thinking. I perfectly understand his reasons, but I thought precisely that at the basis of the pure relation, of the generosity toward the other, there's a relation that one can call a relation of holiness."⁴³ Exactly what does Levinas mean by 'a relation of holiness'? In short, Levinas equates the position of hostage to that of holiness. He admits, "The word 'holiness' is more flattering than the word 'hostage.'"⁴⁴ Levinas describes

⁴⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, "In the Name of the Other (1990)" in *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by Jill Robbins (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 193.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Emmanuel Levinas, "Interviews, 1992, 1994" in *Conversations with Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by Michaël de Saint Cheron, trans. Gary D. Mole (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2010), 22.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 24.

holiness as a unique kind of loss or nothingness that nevertheless has value and a positive element: “If holiness is thoroughly analyzed, there really is nothing, but it is precisely this capacity to bear the nothing and to want to bear it that is already a positive quality.”⁴⁵

“Ultimate holiness,” Levinas explains, “is the acceptance of justice or death without resistance, accepting this nothingness and yet nevertheless having this reflex of goodness, of value.”⁴⁶ Similarly, he states that “willingly accepting the hostage’s condition is an act of holiness.”⁴⁷ Importantly, Levinas states that his discussion of holiness “is all one criticism for Ricoeur.”⁴⁸

How so? First, Levinas is saying that holiness includes the capacity for a self to accept the condition of hostage, that is, to accept her own re-constitution as a being-for-others instead of a being-for-oneself. On Levinas’s account, one bears witness to holiness when one accepts the condition of being the other’s hostage. In addition, to act in holiness is to go beyond the economy of exchange. In Levinas’s view, Ricoeur does not go far enough – his ethics remains trapped within an economy of exchange. In contrast, Levinas is looking for “a relation in which my obligation, my awakening toward the other, my attachment to the other are not in any way an attachment or a form of generosity that brings a reward.”⁴⁹ Levinas ultimately proposes that I relate to others and give myself to others unconditionally, that is, *beyond* norms and laws and without expecting reciprocity or reward. As we will see in the next chapter, this logic of holy madness becomes significant for Derrida and other deconstructionists in their discussions of various themes such as hospitality, the gift, forgiveness, and justice.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 22.

In the end, while Ricoeur identifies some challenging aspects of Levinas's work, his conclusion that Levinasian ethics is not concerned with ontology or does not offer us a theory of subjectivity is not entirely on the mark. Yet a tension arises as a result of engaging these two thinkers: although articulated from different angles, are not both Ricoeur and Levinas both saying that selfhood directed towards the other in responsibility is true selfhood? And do not both thinkers seek to challenge the egological tradition by conceiving of responsibility for the other as characteristic of being a self? Ricoeur's account of subjectivity involves the transformation of the coherent or foundational self into a responsible self who subsequently commits itself to acts of justice, acts which are offered within an economic model of giving and receiving. When speaking about Levinas in an interview, Ricoeur states, "[E]verything depends on... how one encounters the Other, and where one encounters her. So I encounter the Other in reciprocity..."⁵⁰ As we have seen, Levinas, on the other hand, insists that the ego is transformed by appealing to the other, who lies outside the self, and by recognizing that one's responsibility for others is a prior commitment. In the end, both Ricoeur and Levinas contend that the subject is summoned to responsibility by the other; the question however, becomes how one responds to that voice.

This debate between Ricoeur and Levinas sets the stage for our discussion of hospitality in the next chapter. In many ways, Richard Kearney carries on Ricoeur's hermeneutical project, showing similarities with Ricoeur both in his understanding of otherness and in his emphasis on the subject's capacity to act and judge. Similarly, Jacques Derrida has drawn many of his insights from Emmanuel Levinas's account of ethics and alterity. While Derrida certainly offers several criticisms of Levinas in his

⁵⁰ Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas: His Life and Legacy*, 195.

works, primarily in his earlier essay, “Violence and Metaphysics,” he remarks quite candidly, in response to André Jacob, that “[f]aced with a thinking like that of Levinas, I never have an objection. I am ready to subscribe to everything that he says. That does not mean that I think the same thing in the same way, but in this respect the differences are very difficult to determine.”⁵¹ Many years later, Derrida, in commenting on one of Levinas’s Talmudic readings, suggests that the theme of unconditionality originates with Levinas: “This same meditation also sets to work... all the great themes which the work of Emmanuel Levinas has awakened in us, that of responsibility first of all, but of an ‘unlimited’ responsibility that exceeds and precedes my freedom, that of an ‘unconditional yes.’”⁵²

In the next section we will see how the debate between Levinas and Ricoeur concerning the nature of ethical response is taken up by Derrida and Kearney. While both Derrida and Kearney operate out of the same general approaches to that of Levinas and Ricoeur (hermeneutics and deconstruction),⁵³ the content of the debate shifts slightly to issues related to discernment, criteria, and negotiation. The two underlying aims of Chapter Two are: (1) to evaluate Kearney’s objection to Derrida’s absolute hospitality, and (2) to introduce the theme of negotiation in Derrida’s thought, which I take to be the essential feature of Derrida’s understanding of hospitality.

⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, *Altérités* (Osiris, Paris, 1986). Quote taken from Simon Critchley’s *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 9.

⁵² Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 201.

⁵³ It is unclear whether Levinas would have considered himself to be a deconstructionist. Nevertheless, what I intend to point to primarily when employing this term to both Levinas and Derrida is their shared concern of justice for alterity.

Chapter 2

Discernment and Negotiation: Kearney's and Derrida's Accounts of Hospitality

“[P]ure 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.”¹

“But while recognizing the double nature of hospitality, deconstructionists lack, in my view, an adequately critical means of judging between just and unjust ‘others’.

There is no real room or rationale, in their books, for ‘discernment of spirits’.

Derrida says that when someone knocks on your door you cannot know in advance if it is a mass murderer or a messiah who is about to enter. The arrival of the other is always a complete surprise which shatters and confounds any of our efforts to question or differentiate one kind of other from another kind of other.”²

Richard Kearney seeks to chart a third way between various extreme ideologies and dogmas. His project is mobilized and given shape by the method of the in-between. In *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, Kearney explains that his ‘metaxological approach’ looks for “an intermediary course between the simplistic polarities advanced by Lyotard (and others): anti-essentialism versus essentialism, alterity versus consciousness, silence versus speech, ineffability versus representation, paganism versus globalism, micro-narratives versus master-narratives” (SGM 187). Kearney, however, in seeking to identify a way between two extreme binaries, has to properly present these binaries to his readers. In regards to his criticism of deconstruction, Kearney has to show how Derrida’s accounts of absolute otherness and absolute hospitality are too extreme or too excessive.

¹ Jacques Derrida, “Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida” in *Questioning Ethics: Debates in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, edited by Mark Dooley and Richard Kearney (London: Routledge Publishing, 1999), 70-71.

² Victor E. Taylor, “A Conversation with Richard Kearney” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 6.2 (Spring 2005): 17-26.

In short, to go ‘between’ two accounts, one must engage these accounts as faithfully as possible. While Kearney does bring to light many of the complexities of Derrida’s position, I believe he neglects two important aspects of Derrida’s understanding of hospitality, namely, the *aporetic nature of hospitality* and *the role of negotiation* involved in making ethical and political decisions.

In several of his writings, Derrida presents two concepts of hospitality, unconditional hospitality and conditional hospitality.³ 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. Furthermore, hospitality, Derrida argues, is found in the negotiation between two imperatives, the imperative to extend hospitality “to all who might come, without question or without their even having to identify who they are or whence they came,” and the inevitable restraints operative in governing and sustaining a nation (OCF 18). Derrida’s hospitality is not merely absolute however, in the sense of being the radical and unconditional welcoming of the other; it is rather an examination of the irresolvable tensions built into the concept of hospitality. For Derrida, as discussed above, an ethical decision is made in the midst of the to-and-fro between the two imperatives of hospitality. As he states in *Paper Machine*: “It’s between these two figures of hospitality that responsibilities and decisions have to be taken in practice.”⁴ Similarly, in *Of Hospitality*, Derrida asserts, “[w]e will have to negotiate constantly between these

³ Primarily these works include: *Spectres of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge Publishing 1994); *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993); *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000, French edition 1997); *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999, French edition 1997); *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Michael Collins Hughes and Mark Dooley (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2001).

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 66.

two extensions of the concept of hospitality” (OH 135). I suggest that, in his objection to Derrida’s account of hospitality, Kearney overlooks this feature in Derrida’s writings.

Hermeneutical Critique: Kearney Reading Derrida

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate Kearney’s objection to Derrida’s absolute hospitality, one of the many ‘extremes’ he identifies as being in need of hermeneutical critique. On Kearney’s account, there are three aspects of deconstruction that require re-evaluation: (a) the non-representation of the other, (b) the melancholic self, and (c) the risk of absolute hospitality.⁵ Each of these concerns stem from Derrida’s perspective on the self’s relation to otherness. For Derrida (and Levinas), justice is the openness to the other “beyond the Same” (SGM 67). In other words, the relation to the other is always one of non-appropriation and radical alterity. In their views, the other must escape the searching gaze of the ego or of the sovereign state. Every other, Derrida famously states, is ‘wholly other,’ “without and before determination.”⁶ Thus, alterity for Levinas and Derrida sets the condition for the ‘impossible’ relation with the other, “a relation without relation” or “a relation with that which always slips away,” as Levinas writes.⁷

In contrast to Derrida and Levinas, Kearney argues that the condition for the experience of otherness is relative and *not* absolute. A relative account of otherness

⁵ This essay will focus primarily on Kearney’s objection to absolute hospitality. Regarding deconstruction and the melancholic self, Kearney believes that deconstruction often is debilitating – it offers an unhelpful view of empowerment and remains in a melancholic and passive state. See chapters seven and eight in Kearney’s *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*.

⁶ The phrase “tout autre est tout autre” (every other is wholly other), Derrida explains means “simply that the every other, without and before determination, any specification, man or woman, man of God, man or animal, any other whatever is infinitely other, is absolutely other” (307). Jacques Derrida, “Desire of God” in *After God: Richard Kearney And the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy*, edited by John Manoussakis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 80; Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 67.

involves ontology or agency and the inevitability of the other's appearance. On Kearney's account, when we encounter a person we inevitably configure them in some way. In his book, *The God Who May Be*, he proposes a way of encountering the other which evades the two absolutes of presence and absence. Kearney writes, "To configure the other as a *persona* is to grasp him/her as present in absence, as both incarnate in flesh and transcendent in time. To accept this paradox of configuration is to allow the other to appear as his/her unique *persona*."⁸ In other words, though we may see the "otherness of the other" in the "face of the person," they are never fully revealed because they exceed "the limit of our capturing gaze."⁹ It is important to note that Kearney is equally concerned about the tendency in Western philosophy to demonize and reduce alterity; nonetheless, he insists that the hermeneutic work implicated in encountering otherness is an inescapable aspect of our reality. As Treanor argues, "[a]nything to which I relate in any way must show itself to me, even if this revelation is minimal or indirect."¹⁰

Supplementing Deconstruction with Phronetic Understanding

Both Kearney and Derrida speak of hospitality as the appropriate response to the stranger, to those victimized by injustice. For Derrida, as explained above, our response to the stranger is an infinite command given without calculation and knowledge, and thus is an absolute risk. Derrida's hospitality necessarily entails a responsible blindness and a lack of knowledge, what B. Keith Putt calls, "loving agnosticism or agnostic loving."¹¹ While

⁸ Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰ Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 206.

¹¹ B. Keith Putt, "A Love That B(1)inds: Reflections on an Agapic Agnosticism" in *Transforming Philosophy and Religion: Love's Wisdom*, edited by Norman Wirzba and Bruce Ellis Benson

Kearney equally contends that our ethical relation to the other cannot be actualized merely by applying existing laws or norms, he maintains that the practice of hospitality necessitates some level of interpretation and practical ‘knowledge’ – what Kearney calls phronetic understanding. This is precisely what he finds missing in the deconstructive approach to the subject of hospitality. For Kearney, the problem with the deconstructive analysis of hospitality is “that it undervalues our need to differentiate not just legally but *ethically* between good and evil aliens” (SGM 70).

To present Kearney’s criticism of Derrida’s absolute hospitality in further detail I will be primarily engaging Chapter Three of *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, entitled “Aliens and Others.” In response, I will attempt to offer a quasi-defence of Derrida’s hospitality by referring to both Derrida’s *Of Hospitality* and a roundtable discussion between Kearney, John D. Caputo, and Jacques Derrida entitled “Desire of God.” I use ‘quasi’ here because I believe Kearney’s engagement with deconstruction has legitimacy. In fact, Kearney tells the story of how Derrida once graciously intervened at a conference by stating, “Richard Kearney’s difficulties with my work are my own difficulties with my work.”¹² Kearney, therefore, is certainly on to something in his reading of deconstruction, at the very least, he has identified the difficulties involved in its claims.

Although Kearney expresses reservations about deconstruction, it is evident that his work is indebted to Derrida and the deconstructive attitude or posture. In the preface to *Anatheism*, Kearney states that his philosophical approach has been nourished by

(Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 123. In this essay, Putt examines the thought of Jean-Luc Marion, Jacques Derrida, and Slavoj Žižek to discuss how we love the Divine Other, “who cannot be perceived as visible phenomena,” in loving blindness. I have used the phrase ‘responsible blindness’ instead of ‘loving blindness’ simply because Derrida and Levinas typically avoid using the word ‘love’ and opt instead for ‘responsibility.’

¹² Richard Kearney, “Foreword” in *Traversing the Imaginary*, edited by Peter Gratton and John Manoussakis (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), xii.

“modern theories of phenomenology and existentialism, on the one hand, and by postmodern ideas of poststructuralism and deconstruction, on the other.”¹³ From the former, Kearney gleans “an irrevocable respect for personal responsibility, choice, and agency,” while the latter offers him a conception of “human selfhood and identity” that emphasizes the human subject’s relationship to linguistic-cultural processes and alterity.¹⁴ It is evident throughout his writings that Kearney seeks to find a middle way between these two theories, while drawing from both. Kearney has sought to navigate between agency and ontology on the one hand, and radical alterity on the other, by presenting and developing such insightful themes as: *persona*, *micro-eschatology*, *diacritical hermeneutics*, and *anatheism*. In many ways, each of these explorations are a response to deconstruction, or, more specifically, a response to the work of Derrida. In fact, Kearney considers Derrida to be one of his primary dialogue partners. In the foreword to *Traversing the Imaginary*, he writes that his intellectual exchanges with Derrida “took on a dialectical guise from the start.” In 1982, Kearney interviewed Derrida in Paris, their first “spirited conversation on the theme of deconstruction and the Other.” Kearney explains that this “initial engagement was deepened and expanded over the years through a number of written and recorded face-offs.” Each of these encounters, Kearney writes, “were always cordial and congenial, if candid about the differences between us.”¹⁵

Whether Kearney speaks about psychoanalytic postmodernism or deconstruction, he repeatedly claims that hermeneutics offers an alternative approach, one which “addresses the need for critical practical judgments” (SGM 100). Although we must be

¹³ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), xv.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xvi.

¹⁵ Kearney, “Foreword” In *Traversing the Imaginary*, xi.

open to alterity, that is be open to that which is ‘other’ in its various forms, Kearney argues, we “must also be careful to discern, in some provisional fashion at least, between good and evil” (100). “Without such discernment,” Kearney states, “it seems nigh impossible to take considered ethical action” (100). Thus, for Kearney, in order to act ethically, it is necessary that we know to whom or what we are responding – we must have the ability to see the face of the other. Conversely, deconstruction asserts that to act justly one must unconditionally welcome the stranger/foreigner. Derrida’s hospitality, Kearney writes, is “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*)” (68).

One of the primary aspects of Derridean ethics that Kearney finds troubling is the notion of *undecidability*. In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida asserts that responsibility involves “decisions made outside of knowledge or given norms,” “beyond...certainty.”¹⁶ In addition, Derrida states that responsibility is “made...through the very ordeal of the undecidable” and “is a venture into absolute risk.”¹⁷ Kearney actually comes close to sounding like Derrida in this regard 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.¹⁸ In Kearney’s view, it is crucial that we find a “hermeneutic capable of addressing the dialectic of others and aliens” if we are to properly discern between strangers and properly address “the human obsession with strangers and enemies” (SGM 67). In “Aliens and Others,” Kearney argues that collective identities are often constructed “in relation to some notion of alterity” (66). He states that

¹⁶ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 5.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God*, 47.

Levinas and Derrida name this prejudice ‘ontology of Sameness’ (Levinas) and ‘logocentrism’ (Derrida). In response to this discrimination against the other, Levinas and Derrida elevate the other above interpretation and representation. Consequently, we are left with the question of discernment. For Kearney, addressing this problem involves supplementing undecidability with critical hermeneutics.

Before directly engaging Derrida’s thoughts on hospitality, Kearney proposes that we distinguish between the terms ‘other’ and ‘alien’. He states that he uses the term ‘other’ “to refer to an alterity worthy of reverence and hospitality,” and the term ‘alien’ to refer to “that experience of strangers associated with: (a) discrimination; (b) suspicion; and (c) scapegoating” (67). Recognizing that there are different kinds of otherness, Kearney argues, enables us to discern more justly “what *kinds* of otherness we have before us” (81). A key refrain Kearney uses to give flesh to this idea is: “Not all ‘selves’ are evil and not all ‘others’ are angelic” (10). Thus, there are crucial moments, Kearney asserts, when we need “to discern the other in the alien and the alien in the other” (67). Derrida, on the other hand, does not give precedence to this type of hermeneutic. He connects the work of hermeneutics – the acts of selecting and evaluating – to the xenophobia of the sovereign host. For deconstructionists, the right of the host to extend or deny hospitality is simply unjust. It is for this reason that conditional laws of hospitality cannot be identified as ‘true’ hospitality. In exercising sovereignty over home and state, conditional laws of hospitality prohibit justice and hospitality from taking place. *As a result, these laws need to be superseded by something beyond, namely, the justice of absolute hospitality.* To go beyond the traditional laws of hospitality, Derrida writes,

unconditional hospitality must break “with the right to or pact of hospitality.”¹⁹ This *new* law, which cannot be made into a law, insists that the host must answer to the infinite demand to “...say yes to *who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*.”²⁰

The Unconditional Prefigured in Kierkegaard

This demand to welcome the other without distinction is similar to Søren Kierkegaard’s call to love one’s neighbour in blindness. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard reminds his readers that “God obligates the individual to love in blindness,” to close her eyes “to weakness and frailty and imperfection” in the other.²¹ On Kierkegaard’s account, “one sees the neighbour only with closed eyes, or by looking away from the dissimilarities.”²² “The neighbour,” he writes, “is the utterly unrecognizable dissimilarity between persons or is the eternal equality before God – the enemy, too, has this equality.”²³ It is for this reason that Kierkegaard contends that “love for the neighbour makes a person blind in the deepest and noblest and most blessed sense of the word....”²⁴ Thus, both Kierkegaard and

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Derrida, in his essay, “Force of Law,” contends that our decision to welcome the other can never be ensured by “the generality of a rule, a norm or a universal imperative.” Significantly, Derrida’s unconditional law of hospitality while appearing as a law cannot be made into a law since it is always directed to the singular other and is context-dependent. Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’” in *Acts of Religion*, edited and with an introduction by Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2001), 245; Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 77.

²¹ Putt, “A Love That B(1)inds: Reflections on an Agapic Agnosticism,” 137; Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard’s Writings XVI, ed. and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 163.

²² Ibid., 68.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 69. Kierkegaard offers the following analogy to speak of human equality: “But when the curtain falls on the stage, then the one who played the king and the one who played the beggar etc. are all alike; all are one and the same – actors.” (87).

Derrida maintain that for love and hospitality to take place the other must be welcomed unconditionally – in loving blindness.²⁵

Although Derrida does conceive of ‘pure’ hospitality as the unconditional welcoming of the other, he makes clear in “On Cosmopolitanism” that absolute or unconditional 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” if it proceeded without “the conditional laws of a right to hospitality” (OCF 22-23). Thus, in Derrida’s view, absolute hospitality cannot proceed without negotiating with the existing laws – laws which exercise sovereignty by discriminating, filtering and selecting who will be granted asylum or hospitality (OH 55). Additionally, Derrida asserts that if unconditional hospitality did not have to become “concrete, determined” it would “risk being abstract, utopian, illusory, and so turning over into its opposite (OH 79). Consequently, even though the law of unconditional hospitality destabilizes and deconstructs existing conditional laws of hospitality, it is *necessary* that there be a determinate space, a political space that sets the condition for unconditional hospitality to appear. As Michael Naas writes, “absolute hospitality has its chance only in the impure or conditional hospitality,” which both “conditions and threatens it.”²⁶ Absolute hospitality, thus, cannot escape its relationship to the concrete conditions of our political reality. Derrida insists, “In order to be what it is, *the* law thus needs the laws” (OH 79). In one sense then, absolute hospitality is impossible as it depends on the limiting and concrete institutions of border, state, nation, and public or political space (OCF 21). And yet for

²⁵ It is interesting to note that deconstructionists often appropriate Kierkegaard’s radical leap of faith found in *Fear and Trembling*, but rarely do they make this connection between Kierkegaard’s call to ‘shut your eyes’ in *Works of Love* to the subject of hospitality in Derrida’s thought.

²⁶ Naas, *Derrida From Now On*, 23.

Derrida, it is always a matter of absolute hospitality putting into question the conditional forms of hospitality. Derrida explains somewhat paradoxically that “the two antagonistic terms of this antinomy are not symmetrical. There is a strange hierarchy in this. *The law is above the laws*” (OH 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. As Derrida writes in “On Cosmopolitanism,” “It is a question of knowing how to transform and improve the law and of knowing if this improvement is possible within a historical space” (OCF 22).

For the most part, Kearney is aware of this tension and logic. “If absolute hospitality requires us to break with the accredited hospitality of right,” he says, “this does not necessarily mean repudiating the latter out of hand” (SGM 69). Kearney, however, suggests that Derrida and the deconstructionists only preserve conditional laws of hospitality in order to influence their mutation (70). Indeed, Derrida contends that the aim of unconditional hospitality is to render conditional hospitality more hospitable. As we have noted, for Derrida, *the law*, that is, “*the Great Law of Hospitality*” is “above the laws” (OCF 18; OH 79). The vigilance of unconditional hospitality is required in order to identify and put into question the perversions of conditional hospitality. Derrida writes that absolute hospitality “*interven*es in the condition of hospitality in the name of unconditional hospitality, even if this pure unconditional hospitality appears inaccessible... (OH 149). In the end, the aim of unconditional hospitality is to interrupt processes of conditional hospitality by identifying the various ways in which our ability to welcome the other is hindered by conditional economies of exchange and reciprocity.

Is Every Act of Discernment Inherently Violent?

One of the presumptions Kearney seeks to challenge is the notion that any act of appropriation of phenomena is inherently violent. In “Aliens and Others,” he states that deconstruction not only “downgrades – without denying – our legitimate duty to try to distinguish benign and malign strangers, between saints and psychopaths,” but it relegates “the requirement of ethical judgment to a matter of selective and calculating legislation invariably compromised by injustice and violence” (SGM 70). In other words, Kearney objects to the notion that any desire to distinguish between strangers is inherently an act of violence. Certainly, this is how Derrida and Levinas conceive of conditional laws of hospitality – as injustice to alterity. Also, the primary agent of violence for these thinkers is the host or the master of the home.

It is important to reiterate, however, that for Derrida if either concept of hospitality (the unconditional or conditional) is privileged over the other, then a true decision cannot be made. Kearney insists that despite the nuances and paradoxes that Derrida throws into the mix, absolute hospitality, on Derrida’s account, suspends “all criteria of ethical discrimination” (72). As mentioned above, in response to the logic of undecideability, Kearney argues for “a hermeneutics of practical wisdom which might help us better discern between justice and injustice” (72). Yet exactly what does Kearney mean by a hermeneutics of practical wisdom or “a *diacritical* hermeneutics of action?” (77). Kearney undoubtedly recognizes the importance of respecting and remaining open to alterity, however on his account there are different kinds of otherness which need to be discerned by the self. To ethically discern between strangers, a “minimal quotient of self-esteem” is necessary (79). For how can a self “be faithful to the other,” Kearney writes,

“if there is no *self* to be faithful?” (80). Thus, Kearney follows Ricoeur (and others) in construing “otherness less in opposition to selfhood than as a partner engaged in the constitution of its intrinsic meaning” (80). The hermeneutical approach, Kearney suggests, consists of a self relating to another self in mutuality and symmetry. In addition, central to the hermeneutic-chiastic model is the notion of narrative identity. To encounter others from a particular community or discourse does not inevitably lead to the objectification of the other. According to Kearney, no relation to the other can remain entirely absolute; there is “no way for the other to find its way into the hermeneutical circle without entering the web of figuration” (80). For ethics to take place there ought to be receptivity and communion between a visible other and “a self capable of recognition and esteem” (80). To return briefly to Kierkegaard, Jamie Ferreira, in her commentary on *Works of Love*, anticipates such criticisms of Kierkegaard’s (and Derrida’s) proposed ethic. She presents similar questions to those that Kearney asks of Derrida: “Can we see anything at all with closed eyes? Could the other be anything to us but an abstraction in such an ethic? The question is whether Kierkegaard’s affirmation of equality and his recommendation of such blindness preclude or undermine any genuine appreciation of genuine otherness, that is, difference, distinctiveness, and the concrete.”²⁷ Ferreira explains that Kierkegaard’s requirement of ‘blindness’ or ‘closed eyes’ “can only be properly evaluated if one recognizes that it occurs in a strategic location – in the particular context of formally clarifying the scope and unconditionality of the commandment.”²⁸ This same explanation, I believe, can be applied to Derrida.

²⁷ Jamie Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 55.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Significantly, Kearney's hermeneutical objection to the vision and calling of deconstruction is not to be viewed as a break from deconstruction but rather as a supplement. Even though Kearney's critique of Derrida's undecidability and Levinas's notion of substitution appears at times to be quite scathing, he repeatedly expresses his great sympathy and respect for his teacher (Levinas) and close friend (Derrida). Despite the fact that Kearney critically engages deconstruction, he often works hard to remind his readers that both deconstructive and hermeneutical approaches are infused with the ethical. Kearney's ethical vision, in the end, is metaxological; it construes the ethical relation between the self and the other as relative. It continually resists thinking of the self as entirely present and the other as wholly absent. "In the ethical relation," Kearney writes, "I am neither master nor slave. I am a self before another self – brother, sister, neighbour, citizen, stranger, widow, orphan: another self who seeks to be loved as it loves itself" (SGM 81). The view that the self maintains itself while being open to the other is, in Kearney's final analysis, *real hospitality* (81).

The 'Desire of God' Debate

The leading question throughout this brief comparison of Kearney's and Derrida's accounts of otherness and hospitality has been: 'Does Kearney adequately present Derrida's position?' The argument thus far has been that Kearney does not give enough emphasis to the inseparable relationship between unconditional hospitality and conditional hospitality in Derrida's thought. Directly related to the relationship between the two laws of hospitality is the claim that justice and hospitality are always bound to negotiation. In her introduction to a collection of essays and interviews with Derrida

entitled *Negotiations*, Elizabeth Rottenberg writes, “Although justice . . . is outside the law of negotiation (it transcends negotiation), it nonetheless requires negotiation and the strategies of negotiation.”²⁹ Similarly, Derrida states, “[o]ne does not negotiate between exchangeable and negotiable things. Rather, one negotiates by engaging the nonnegotiable in negotiation.”³⁰ Thus, absolute hospitality does not function as a ‘universal’ which parts with singularity, as Kearney often suggests,³¹ but rather absolute hospitality is that which seeks to improve conditional laws of hospitality in singular contexts. For Derrida, it will *always* be a matter of negotiating between *the* Law of unconditional hospitality and the conditional laws of hospitality. This point, along with Kearney’s desire for criteria, is addressed by Derrida and John D. Caputo in a dialogue with Kearney recorded in *After God*, a volume dedicated to Kearney’s work. This dialogue is helpful for our present task in that it offers a synopsis of the hermeneutics-deconstruction debate over the issue of hospitality.

After Kearney begins the dialogue by pointing out that Derrida admits that he has no rule for telling the difference between “messiahs and madmen,” Caputo responds insightfully, saying, “I am worried about your desire for criteria . . . there comes a moment when all of our knowing, all our study of norms and standards, fails us. Then there comes the moment that I understand deconstruction to be describing, that moment of singularity

²⁹ Elizabeth Rottenberg, “Introduction: Inheriting the Future” in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, edited by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 3.

³⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, edited by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 13.

³¹ In *Anatheism*, Kearney states that Derrida’s “messianic universality . . . forfeits the flesh-and-blood singularity of everyday epiphanies” 64. Conversely, in “Force of Law,” Derrida writes, “One must know that this justice always addresses itself to singularity, to the singularity of the other, despite or even because it pretends to universality.” “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority,’” 248.

in which we need to choose.”³² In reply, Kearney states that he agrees, however he still maintains that there “is a certain madness of decision, a holy madness,” which is invoked by deconstructionists “that needs the counterbalancing gesture of prudence, of law, of reading.”³³ “Pure hospitality, pure openness to the in-coming of the other,” Kearney states, “is dangerous unless it invokes certain criteria, unless it is dependent, as Kant insisted, on certain *conditions* of hospitality.”³⁴ Importantly, Kearney acknowledges that the demand for criteria is, in a way, the refusal of hospitality: “Now that is already not very hospitable, because you are laying down certain criteria.”³⁵ In short, Kearney’s insistence on criteria and discernment is a response to the implications of practicing absolute hospitality: “we might be opening the door to the monster who destroys our house, to wild war and aggression.”³⁶ Essentially, he is fearful of the potential harm that may occur when discernment between strangers is nullified.

Just before Derrida is given the opportunity to speak, Kearney asserts that he believes that there is “something utterly radical in deconstruction that calls... for the countervailing and the counterbalancing gesture of hermeneutic interpretation and prudence.”³⁷ This statement reveals that Kearney understands that some level of interpretation is operative in the deconstructionists’ account of hospitality. Furthermore, in making this statement, Kearney hopes that Derrida will concede this point, but he does not do so. Derrida enters the discussion by addressing the hermeneutical claim that absolute hospitality is a ‘universal’ which is politically problematic. “I am aware that you

³² “Desire of God” in *After God: Richard Kearney And the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy*, edited by John Manoussakis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 303.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

cannot found the politics of hospitality on the principle of unconditional hospitality, of opening the borders to any newcomer. I am aware of those problems,” he states.³⁸

Derrida continues by clarifying that finding criteria to distinguish or “discriminate between the enemy and the friend” is indispensable to controlling a border; at the same time, however, it is also always a way of limiting hospitality.³⁹ “We have to be aware,” Derrida says, “that, to the extent that we are looking for criteria, for conditions, for passports... we are limiting hospitality, hospitality as such, if there is such a thing. *I’m not sure there is pure hospitality*. But if we want to understand what hospitality means, we have to think of unconditional hospitality, that is, openness to whomever, to any newcomer.”⁴⁰ Derrida here is giving voice to the aporetic nature of hospitality. On the one hand, to speak of hospitality and for hospitality to occur, it must be unconditional; it must suspend the demand for criteria. On the other hand, hospitality as such never exists separate from the *here and now*. Pure hospitality has not yet arrived even if it has appeared to have arrived, as Derrida states in “On Cosmopolitanism” (OCF 23). The issue again for Derrida is the improvement of the conditional laws of hospitality. To do this, Derrida says, “I have to refer to pure hospitality.”⁴¹

The difficulty of deconstruction, to which Derrida continually attests, is the double movement of resisting a certain presence or appearance of phenomena (God, justice, hospitality, forgiveness, etc.), and the necessity and urgency of making ethical and political decisions.⁴² In Derrida’s view, true decisions cannot be made without “the

³⁸ Ibid., 304.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 305.

⁴² Ibid.

experience of some undecideability.”⁴³ In *Rogues*, Derrida writes that the decision which depends on knowledge “no longer decides anything but it is made in advance and is thus annulled” (84). In other words, a person cannot make a decision if he or she has access to certain criteria and norms. On Derrida’s account, not having all the necessary information at hand does not preclude one from making an ethical decision. In “Desire of God,” Derrida suggests that Kearney is not in a position to make a genuine decision about the stranger if he is unwilling to relinquish his desire to have available criteria. “So to welcome the other as such,” Derrida says, “you have to suspend the use of criteria.”⁴⁴ But can we ever make decisions that are not in some way based upon criteria? In his book, *Trouble with Strangers*, Terry Eagleton points out that even if Derrida insists “that moral choices cannot be ‘insured’ by a rule,” this does not mean that “they cannot be guided by one.”⁴⁵ Eagleton’s critique of Derrida resembles Kearney’s in that he questions Derrida’s suspension of criteria in making ethical decisions. He argues that if a person were really “to choose a course of action independently of all norms or criteria, it is hard to know in what sense it could be called a decision.”⁴⁶ The question for Kearney and Eagleton becomes: Is there a criterion for discerning between strangers that can do justice to others as well as escape our reductionistic tendencies? In other words, is not the act of interpretation and establishing criteria just as dangerous and risky as opening the door to whoever knocks?⁴⁷

⁴³ Derrida, “Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida,” 66.

⁴⁴ “Desire of God,” 305.

⁴⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Trouble with Strangers: A Study of Ethics* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 249.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Making an ethical decision is often not merely a matter of identifying normative criteria and then applying them to a specific situation in a calculative or algorithmic fashion (since a particular ethical situation may bring several norms to bear, some of which may be in conflict with each other). Such cases still require discernment and do not remove risk, for in the end there is no ethical system that can provide a

Derrida's Ethic of Negotiation

Deconstructionists are ultimately afraid that hosts will discern strangers (alterity) incorrectly or unfairly. For example, according to Levinas, if the other appears on our horizon, he or she may become a victim of our totalizing interpretation. How then do we know, as Kearney asks, “when the other is truly an enemy who seeks to destroy us or an innocent scapegoat projected by our phobias?” (SGM 67). In *Rogues*, Derrida states that the “non-dialectizable antimony” of justice (and of hospitality) “risks paralyzing and thus calls for the event of the interruptive decision” (RO 35). Contrary to what many critics of deconstruction believe, Derrida does in fact contend that a decision must be made. On his account, however, our decision-making – our cutting away from negotiation – does not depend on programming, but always necessitates risk: “The decision to cut or not to cut the Gordian knot is never certain. If one were sure of the calculation, it would not be an action or a decision; it would be a programming.”⁴⁸ Thus, even if negotiation must be interrupted by decision, we can never possess certainty in regard to our chosen action. Since, as Derrida states, decisions are made in the to-and-fro between “two positions, two places, two choices,” we cannot think that by acting or making a decision we have somehow rendered justice present.⁴⁹ In place of criteria, Derrida offers risk, the refusal of calculation, and the continual negotiation between two imperative laws, between the universal and the particular. Since the circumstances of the negotiation between the two laws of hospitality are each moment unique, “nothing can ever assure us that this

guaranteed pathway out of such dilemmas. So the insistence on the importance of establishing norms and criteria does not necessarily amount to the desire for a calculus that would take away our responsibility to make a decision, or make our decision for us. Deconstructionists fail to register such a nuance when they speak of norms as akin to rules in a computer program. I thank Ron Kuipers for pointing this out to me.

⁴⁸ Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, 31.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

negotiation will not go terribly awry, either for the host or for the guest.”⁵⁰ Additionally, as we have highlighted, Derrida’s ethic of negotiation is context-dependent; consequently, there can be no law or method, or general rule that can be applied to more than one situation: “[T]here is no general rule for negotiation. Negotiation is different at every moment, from one context to the next. There are only contexts, and this is why deconstructive negotiation cannot produce general rules, ‘methods’.”⁵¹ Finally, for Derrida, negotiation is “impure”; it is “the contamination of pure things, naturally, in the name of purity.”⁵² Derrida also contends that if one does not negotiate then “the thing will be even more impure.”⁵³ Therefore, negotiation entails that we never have direct access to pure justice or pure hospitality, and negotiation ensures that justice and hospitality do not remain in their present state of affairs with no hope for betterment. Briefly, negotiation implies the inevitability of contamination – acts of negotiation affect both orders of hospitality. In negotiation conditional laws of hospitality are “guided, given inspiration, given aspiration... by the law of unconditional hospitality” (OH 79). Similarly, negotiation necessitates the contamination of purity (of unconditional hospitality); that very impurity (i.e., the institution of conditional laws of hospitality) is necessary for the realization of any sort of justice, however provisional, on the ground. Derrida summarizes this last point in the following way: “But even while keeping itself above the laws of hospitality, *the* unconditional law of hospitality needs the laws, it *requires* them” (OH 79).

⁵⁰ Naas, *Derrida From Now On*, 26.

⁵¹ Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, 17.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵³ *Ibid.* To the idea that without negotiation conditional laws of hospitality will simply remain what they are Derrida says, “We will be even dirtier [salaud] if we do not negotiate” (14).

Conclusion: The Unavoidable Risk

Derrida's ethic of negotiation insists that we must interpret and calculate "as much as possible, but there must also be a nonintegratable, incalculable part."⁵⁴ In the "Desire of God" dialogue, Derrida states that criteria, politics, and ethics are necessary, but they must be put into relation or negotiation with "absolute non-knowledge and indeterminacy."⁵⁵ Conversely, for Kearney, indeterminacy must be put into relation with practical discernment – when it comes to encountering strangers, we must actually be capable of making a wager. Nonetheless, is not the importance of negotiation at the center of both of Derrida and Kearney's accounts of hospitality? In many ways, both Kearney and Derrida insist that hospitality occurs as a result of the to-and-fro between the impossible and the possible, the invisible and visible, perfect hospitality and imperfect hospitality. Similar to our discussion of Ricoeur and Levinas in Chapter One, the difference between Kearney and Derrida is the way each thinker prioritizes one of these categories or approaches over the other.

In summary, Kearney firmly questions Derrida's dismissal of criteria and discernment while Derrida expresses concern over Kearney's demand for criteria. We are left then to decide which account best answers the question: 'How ought we to live with others and to encounter difference?' Whether one dismisses criteria or works with them, one simply cannot avoid the risks associated with acts of hospitality. With deconstruction, the host is vulnerable to the stranger at the door. Kearney's 'hermeneutical-pragmatic' account of hospitality, on the other hand, is risky in that the offering or refusal of hospitality ultimately depends upon 'my judgments'. In his essay

⁵⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁵ "Desire of God," 305.

“Strangers at the Edge of the World,” Ed Casey speaks to the difficulty of making decisions based on pragmatic grounds: “But then we are left with the precariousness if not the outright prejudice of individual judgement, which is certainly not reliable across a broad spectrum of cases.”⁵⁶ Deconstruction, as Kearney acknowledges, is suspicious of our ability to make ‘correct’ judgements. Even so, certainly Derrida’s ethic of negotiation is performative in that it entails ‘ability’, ‘action’, and ‘judgement’. To negotiate between the unconditional and conditional in singular contexts implies that one must be attuned to this tension itself and be capable of making a decision from within this tension.

In this chapter we have considered, in part, how Derrida’s account of hospitality consists of the continual negotiation between two incompatible imperatives. We have noted however, that the “two regimes of law” are not symmetrical and that unconditional hospitality is privileged in our acts of negotiation, according to Derrida (OH 79). For Derrida, *the law*, that is, “*the Great Law of Hospitality*” is “above the laws” (OCF 18; OH 79). In addition, we have said that unconditional hospitality has an ethical concern; it is concerned with exclusion, discrimination, and a type of sovereignty that is bolstered by the ‘right of hospitality.’ A recent and significant challenge has been raised with respect to the ‘ethical’ reading of Derrida that I have thus far depended upon and sought to defend. Martin Hägglund, in his book, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, claims that much of Derrida scholarship has conflated the “ultra-transcendental *description* of why we must be open to the other... with an ethical *prescription* that we

⁵⁶ Ed Casey, “Strangers at the Edge of Hospitality” In *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality*, edited by Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 48.

ought to be open to the other.”⁵⁷ In contrast to Hägglund, I maintain that Derrida’s unconditionality is not merely descriptive but a ‘compelling force’ possessing a normative dimension. Thus, in order to defend an ethical reading of Derrida it is necessary to address this challenge. Consequently, the next chapter seeks to address whether Derrida’s notion of the unconditional is ethical or non-ethical. In short, by ‘unconditional’ does Derrida mean simply an openness to the undecidable future, or rather a hyperbolic ethics to which we must aspire?

⁵⁷ Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 31. Hägglund’s overall project involves “[r]efuting the notion that there was an ethical or religious ‘turn’ in Derrida’s thinking” (1). For his engagement with hospitality see chapters, “Arche-Violence: Derrida and Levinas” & “Autoimmunity of Life: Derrida’s Radical Atheism”.

Chapter 3

Hospitality and the Unconditional: Questioning the Moralization of the Stranger

In the following chapter I will examine the theme of unconditionality in Part II of Derrida's *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, as well as various sections of Martin Hägglund's *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*. While we have found thus far that the 'unconditional' is essential to Derrida's ethics of negotiation, Hägglund has recently offered a different reading of Derrida's 'unconditionality.' In his chapter "Autoimmunity of Time: Derrida and Kant," Hägglund argues that Derrida's use of the word 'unconditional' "has led many readers to believe that he subscribes to an Idea in the Kantian sense."¹ On this reading, Hägglund explains, "unconditional justice, hospitality, or democracy would... designate an ideal that we can think and toward which we should aspire, even though it remains inaccessible for us as finite beings."² This can be seen for example in Michael Naas' *Derrida From Now On*, when he writes that "conditional hospitality can only ever be *called* hospitality and *experienced as* hospitality by means of the pure of absolute hospitality toward which it is drawn and by which it is inspired."³ According to Hägglund, this assumption has led many thinkers to ascribe "a normative dimension to Derrida's argument."⁴ He continues, "The ultra-transcendental *description* of why we must be open to the other is conflated with an ethical *prescription* that we ought to be open to the other."⁵ In contrast, Hägglund proposes that for Derrida "the

¹ Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 19.

² Ibid.

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

⁴ Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, 31.

⁵ Ibid.

relation to the other is inseparable from the coming of time, which means that it may alter its character at every moment.”⁶ In short, Hägglund considers Derrida’s position to be one of a “non-ethical opening of an undecidable future.”⁷ The question then becomes: ‘Is unconditional hospitality an ethical position or Idea one should hope for or aspire to, or is it by nature a ‘non-ethical’ acknowledgement of time, and therefore a kind of openness to the unpredictable future – to the ‘event’ as it were?’ We will begin first by exploring Derrida’s *Rogues*.

Unconditional Rationalism

In Part II of *Rogues*, entitled “The ‘World’ of the Enlightenment to Come (Exception, Calculation, and Sovereignty),” Derrida proposes “to save the honour of reason” (RO 118). To do this he turns, in part, to Edmund Husserl’s *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. In one of the lectures in *Crisis*, Husserl discusses the ‘sick’ condition of Europe and asks why Europe has not developed a “scientific medicine for nations and supranational communities.”⁸ Husserl contends that there has already existed a kind of ‘speculative knowledge’ that has “aimed to serve humankind and its life in the world (RO 118). However, this type of reason, namely, “universal scientific reason,”⁹ Husserl argues, creates an “amnesic evil called *objectivism*” (125). For Husserl, “[A] one sided rationality can certainly become an evil.”¹⁰ Derrida explains that Husserl was convinced that the “rational prejudices and presuppositions” produced by

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 102.

⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 270.

⁹ Husserl, *Crisis*, 283.

¹⁰ Ibid., 291.

'speculative knowledge' were partially responsible "for the sickness of Europe" (RO 125). Importantly, in *Crisis*, Husserl makes a distinction between "philosophy as a historical fact at a given time and philosophy as idea, as the idea of an infinite task."¹¹ Husserl describes this distinction in the follow way: "Any philosophy that exists at a given historical time is a more or less successful attempt to realize the guiding idea of the infinity and at the same time even the totality of truths."¹² Derrida interprets the philosophy associated with infinity, or the infinite task, as the *unconditional*. The unconditional, Derrida suggests "exceeds theoretical or scientific reason" even as it can be associated with "a certain honour of reason that governs" (RO 126). Therefore, the unconditional is characterized by a double feature of governance and excess. Put differently, even though the unconditional exceeds scientific reason, it has its own logic or rationality. Derrida states that this schema is taken from Husserl's attempt "to reject at one and the same time both irrationalism *and* a certain rationalist naïveté that is often confused with philosophical rationality" (RO 126).

At this point in the text, Derrida suggests that it is necessary to introduce the question of the event, "of the coming and of the to-come, that is, the future, of the event" in order to differentiate "the experience of the unconditional" from the "great transcendental and teleological rationalisms" represented by Kant and Husserl (RO 135). Here Derrida outlines the possibility of an *unconditional rationalism*, that is, a rationalism which is attuned to the event, to that which *happens* or *appears* "in an always singular, unique, exceptional, irreplaceable, unforeseeable, and incalculable fashion" (RO 135). Derrida continues to develop the possibility of an unconditional rationalism in the

¹¹ Husserl, *Crisis*, 291.

¹² *Ibid.*

second essay of *Rogues*, “To Arrive – At the Ends of State (and of War, and of World War).”

In this essay, Derrida speaks of the irreducibility of the relationship between sovereignty and unconditionality, in connection to reason. At the beginning of the essay he asks if it is possible to separate these two exigencies regardless of their unquestionable alliance. More specifically, he asks if it is possible to separate these two forms of reason “in the name of the event, of the arrival or the *coming* [*venir*] that is inscribed in the to-come [à-venir] as well as in the be-coming [de-venir] of reason” (RO 142). This openness to the future, to the be-coming of reason, Derrida suggests, implies a faithfulness “to one of the two poles of rationality,” namely, to unconditionality (142). To grant Hägglund’s point – which will be discussed further in what follows – one does not detect a sense of the unconditional as an ethical call and response to the other in Derrida’s formulation here. Nevertheless, Derrida consistently speaks of unconditionality as that which puts into question modes of thought driven by power, mastery, and sovereignty. Moreover, in *Rogues*, he contends that unconditionality conducts this type of questioning in a ‘rational fashion’: “For deconstruction... would remain above all, in my view, an unconditional rationalism that never renounces – and precisely in the name of the Enlightenment to come... – the possibility of suspending in an argued, deliberated, rational fashion, all conditions... and of criticizing unconditionally all conditionalities” (RO 142). In other words, even though sovereignty and unconditionality are inseparably coupled, unconditionality is that which operates in the critical or deconstructive mode. The unconditional, therefore, refuses to downplay its critical posture towards attitudes of self-mastery and inhospitality. Derrida elucidates this point in the following way: “It would be

a question not only of separating this kind of sovereignty drive from the exigency for unconditionality as two symmetrically associated terms, but of questioning, critiquing, deconstructing, if you will, one in the name of the other, sovereignty in the name of unconditionality” (RO 143). The structure of the conditional and unconditional (as antimony and as aporia), I insist, is the same in *Rogues* as in *Of Hospitality*; the difference is that in *Rogues* Derrida introduces the language of time and event. For Derrida, the event is unforeseeable and “announces itself as im-possible” (RO 144). He writes, “To the value of this unforeseeable im-possibility I would associate the value of *incalculable* and *exceptional singularity*” (RO 148). Again, for Derrida one cannot know in advance how to act or how to respond to another or to a particular situation. Thus, the act of hospitality is a “perilous transaction” that must invent, “each time, in a singular situation, its own law and norm, that is, a maxim that welcomes each time the event to come” (RO 151). The reason why Derrida connects exceptional singularity to the unforeseeable future is that the event (and demands) of hospitality may appear different from one moment to the next. It is the recognition of time that dismisses and deconstructs the concept of a pure or complete hospitality unaffected by time and history. Hägglund’s main point, in this regard, is that the unconditional is the unavoidable exposure “to what happens – to whatever or whoever comes – in order to deconstruct the concept of sovereignty.”¹³ Associated with the unforeseeable and the spacing of time, the unconditional is that which reveals the inability for the idea of sovereignty to exist in the form of presence. “The concept of sovereignty,” Hägglund claims, “is thus predicated on the exclusion of time.”¹⁴

¹³ Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

In Part II of *Rogues*, Derrida is ultimately concerned with the unconditionality of reason; he mentions that he has given attention to other examples of “unconditionality without sovereignty” over the years under the figures: the gift, forgiveness, and hospitality (149). This suggests that a continuity exists between the approaches to these themes, which Treanor describes as ‘liminal phenomena.’¹⁵ To be clear, my concern here is to determine whether or not the unconditional is in fact described as something that is non-ethical (descriptive as opposed to prescriptive), as Hägglund suggests. Since Hägglund turns to *Rogues* to support many of his claims, it has been necessary to examine how Derrida speaks of the unconditional in this context. Let us now turn to Hägglund’s text.

The Autoimmune Relation

Hägglund contends that Derrida does not adhere to “a Kantian schema,” and consequently the notion of the ‘unconditional’ possesses a different meaning for him than it possesses for Kant.¹⁶ Hägglund’s proposal is that for Kant, “the unconditional is the Idea of a sovereign instance that is not subjected to time and space,” whereas for Derrida, “the unconditional is the spacing of time that undermines the very Idea of a sovereign instance.”¹⁷ Importantly, Hägglund argues that “Derrida’s crucial move is to mobilize the unconditional exposure to *what happens* – to whatever or whoever comes – in order to deconstruct the concept of sovereignty. If there were a sovereign instance, nothing could

¹⁵ Brian Treanor, “Putting Hospitality in Its Place” in *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality*, edited by Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 49.

¹⁶ Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, 31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

ever happen to it since it would be completely given *in itself*.”¹⁸ Thus, the unconditional is the opening to that which arrives unexpectedly, an act which ultimately divides sovereignty. This relation or struggle between sovereignty and the unconditional in Derrida’s thinking, Hägglund asserts, can be described as an autoimmune relation.¹⁹ Carolyn D’Cruz explains that Derrida borrows the term ‘autoimmunity’ from biological discourses to describe “the process in which an organism turns against its own immune system as a mean of self-protection.”²⁰ D’Cruz asserts that autoimmunity points to both “the impossibility of any self-identity being proper to itself” and the continuous internal threat within any instance of sovereignty.²¹ Additionally, in *The God Who Deconstructs Himself*, Nick Mansfield writes, “In *Rogues*, the gift (with hospitality) will become the type of what within sovereignty turns sovereignty against itself, of sovereign counter-sovereignty.”²² In regard to self-identity, Mansfield claims that sovereignty “is both a logic of the selfsame and of unconditionality.”²³

To return more specifically to Hägglund’s argument, Hägglund interprets Derrida’s discussion of the autoimmune process as non-ethical and an inherent aspect of sovereignty. In essence, sovereignty will always have some element of itself that is turned against itself. It is the incalculable aspect of sovereignty as ‘openness to the unforeseeable’ that captures Derrida’s use of unconditionality in Hägglund’s view. On the contrary, I believe *unconditionality is a counter-sovereignty to sovereignty in the form of an ethical response to alterity*. In a conversation with Kearney, Derrida insists

¹⁸ Ibid., 29.

¹⁹ Ibid., 30.

²⁰ Carolyn D’Cruz, *Identity Politics in Deconstruction: Calculating with the Incalculable* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 93.

²¹ Ibid., 94.

²² Nick Mansfield, *The God Who Deconstructs Himself: Sovereignty and Subjectivity Between Freud, Bataille, and Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 107.

²³ Ibid., 126.

that “deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons, or motivates it. Deconstruction is therefore vocation – a response to a call.”²⁴ In addition, *pace* Hägglund, Derrida explicitly states, “[a]nd vice versa, conditional laws would cease to be laws of hospitality if they were not guided, *given inspiration, given aspiration*, required, even, by the law of unconditional hospitality” (OH 79, italics mine). Our examination of Derrida’s hospitality has shown that the concern for the other’s well-being, the response of justice that cannot avoid undecidability and risk, is built into the complex relationship between unconditional and conditional forms of hospitality.

Critiques of Hägglund: Attridge and Caputo

Two primary criticisms have been launched against Hägglund’s reading of Derrida, one by Derek Attridge and the other by John D. Caputo. While Attridge praises Hägglund’s book for its ability to name how the different versions of Derrida have arisen, he wonders if there “may be a problem of one-sidedness in Hägglund’s own thinking.”²⁵ Attridge suggests that this one-sidedness becomes apparent when considering Hägglund’s engagement with hospitality. Attridge takes issue with Hägglund’s reading for, according to Attridge, “[a] concern with the other permeates Derrida’s work from first to last.”²⁶ For Hägglund, on the other hand, the Derridean openness to the other “is a necessary fact; without it, nothing at all would happen.”²⁷ In short, on Hägglund’s account, welcoming others is just what occurs; it is not, as we have noted, a matter of ethical response or

²⁴ Richard Kearney, *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 149.

²⁵ Derek Attridge, “Radical Atheism and Unconditional Responsibility” in *Reading and Responsibility: Deconstruction’s Traces* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 140.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

obligation.²⁸ While Attridge agrees with Hägglund that welcoming the other “is an inescapable, and indispensable, feature of life,” he reminds us that in Derrida’s work the conditional is always presented as being insufficient without the unconditional²⁹: “[T]he inevitably limited hospitality that we exercise or receive in our lives is in some way informed by (set and maintained by, guided and given inspiration by, given meaning and practical rationality by, to repeat some of the expressions Derrida uses) the impossible, unthinkable, unconditional twin.”³⁰ To be sure, Attridge recognizes the difficulty of articulating the relationship between the two figures of hospitality, and states that he is not surprised that this relationship “often slips into the more easily apprehensible structures or regulative idea or dialectical interchange – indeed, Derrida’s own language often comes very close to these alternatives.”³¹ Hägglund, however, would warn us that in these cases Derrida is not invoking an ethical ideal. For him, “an ethics of unconditional hospitality is impossible for essential reasons, since it would require that I could not react in a negative or protective manner but automatically must welcome everything. An ethics of unconditional hospitality would short-circuit all forms of decisions and be the same as a complete indifference before what happens.”³² It is clear from these remarks that Hägglund has not paid sufficient attention to the theme of negotiating the non-negotiable in Derrida’s thought. As noted above, an ethics of unconditional hospitality is inseparable from and dependent upon conditional forms of hospitality. It is not, in practice, the blind acceptance of whomever or whatever may

²⁸ Attridge explains that ‘hospitality’ is one of several words “with strong normative associations to which Derrida gave increasing attention” 141.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, 103.

show up at one's door; conversely, it is the compelling force which questions any attitudes of self-mastery, and yet, is inescapably bound to acts of negotiation. Derrida describes this double feature of an ethics of unconditional hospitality by insisting that the work of unconditional hospitality is to improve the law and yet this desire for improvement always involves acts of negotiation which are context-dependent: "It is a question of knowing how to transform and improve the law, and of knowing if this improvement is possible within a historical space" (OCF 22). In *Radical Atheism*, Hägglund does not refer to *Of Hospitality or Negotiations*, but instead limits his discussion of hospitality to *Spectres of Marx and Rogues*. Attridge makes a similar observation when he concludes that "Hägglund's formulations make good sense, but they don't sound quite like Derrida's; they don't give the impression of grappling with an unthinkable relation, they don't struggle to articulate the necessary link between the unconditional and the conditional."³³

Let us now turn briefly to Caputo's engagement with Hägglund. In his lengthy essay, "The Return of Anti-Religion: From Radical Atheism to Radical Theology," Caputo states that Hägglund's book "has reinvented Derrida for the younger generation of restless realists and comes as a timely refutation of any attempt to reduce Derrida to an anti-realist or anti-materialist."³⁴ While much of Caputo's essay addresses Hägglund's attack on his reading of Derrida and religion, I would like to draw attention to Caputo's remarks on Derrida's 'ultra-transcendental ethics'. In *Radical Atheism*, Hägglund claims the following: "The ultra-transcendental description of why we must be open to the other is conflated

³³ Attridge, *Reading and Responsibility: Deconstruction's Traces*, 145.

³⁴ John D. Caputo, "The Return of Anti-Religion: From Radical Atheism to Radical Theology" (*Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 11.2 Spring 2011, 32-125), 32.

with an ethical prescription that we ought to be open to the other. However Derrida always maintains that one cannot derive any norms, rules or prescription from the constitutive exposition to the other.”³⁵ As we have seen, Hägglund is wary of deconstruction having a prescriptive or normative component or claim. In his view, deconstruction does not depend on a claim from a transcendental ‘beyond’; rather, deconstruction is an inescapable openness to the coming future. Caputo candidly contends that this perspective is misleading. In a humorous yet somewhat scathing response, Caputo writes: “Reading this book is like having a problem with the reception of a TV program; you can tell it is Derrida speaking but there is something wrong with the audio, the voice is funny, because Hägglund so often draws conclusions opposed to the ones made by Derrida.”³⁶ More generously, Caputo states that Hägglund’s ‘pure description’ hypothesis “is best read as an intellectual experiment...meant to make Derrida presentable to the new materialism.”³⁷

According to Caputo, Derrida introduces his own conception of ultra-transcendental “by *going-beyond-by-passing-through the transcendental*, by going through the prescriptive (ethical) to the “beyond,” to an ultra-prescriptive, an “ultra-responsibility” or “hyper-responsibility” beyond the prescriptive, an ultra-transcendental ethics he calls hyperbolic ethics.”³⁸ There are two points that can be drawn from this quotation. First, in deconstructing a concept such as hospitality, Derrida is not concerned with a final definition or essence but rather

³⁵ Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, 31.

³⁶ Caputo, “The Return of Anti-Religion”, 70.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 72

with uncovering the various tensions inherent within the concept itself. Second, drawing upon Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, Derrida argues that one's response to the other must go through the universal or transcendental; only then can one go 'beyond' the transcendental in the form of a singular response.³⁹ (We will be turning to this last point in our examination of Derrida's "On Cosmopolitanism").

In conclusion, I believe Hägglund misinterprets the aporetic nature of the relation between the conditional and unconditional figures of hospitality. In his reply to Caputo's essay, Hägglund states that the unconditional cannot have precedence in this relation or be considered a 'promise' or 'dream' for that would imply that the unconditional and the conditional would "belong to two different 'orders'".⁴⁰ However, in *Paper Machine* Derrida explicitly states: "The two meanings of hospitality remain irreducible to one another, but it is the pure and hyperbolic hospitality in whose name we should always invent the best dispositions, the least bad conditions, the most just legislation, so as to make it as effective as possible."⁴¹ Similarly, when Derrida speaks of the rationalities of sovereignty and the unconditional, he suggests that being open to the 'event' requires a faithfulness "to one of the two poles of rationality," namely, to unconditionality (RO 142). Therefore, even as these two orders of hospitality are irreducibly joined to each other, "the order of conditions is to be organized in the

³⁹ In speaking of democracy Caputo writes, "Over and above a description, and beyond any prescription, something is getting itself promised and enjoined in the word 'democracy' – in the middle voice", 74.

⁴⁰ Martin Hägglund, "The Radical Evil of Deconstruction: A Reply to John Caputo" in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 11 no. 2 (Spring 2011): 126-150. Hägglund quotes Caputo saying: "Derrida is dreaming of something unconditional, something for which the current conditions of being are no match, something that belongs to another order" (136).

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 67.

name of the unconditional.”⁴² Caputo concludes his criticisms of Hägglund’s account of Derridean hospitality by reiterating that the unconditional in Derrida’s thought is not merely descriptive but is hyper-ethical: “So when we actually consult this text and follow up the further references Derrida gives us in the notes it is clear that when Derrida speaks of unconditional hospitality he is not saying that it is a non-ethical ‘descriptive’ but that it is ‘hyper-ethical,’ the ‘hyperbolic’ injunction ‘in whose name’ we ‘should always’ construct ethical and political laws.”⁴³

Cosmo-Politics and the Overturning of Reciprocal Hospitality

What does Derrida’s account of hospitality offer us? And how can it be practiced? Drawing upon the various philosophical debates explored above, I would like to discuss the ‘right of hospitality’ that a sovereign host upholds in her encounter with others and to consider how Derrida’s cosmo-politics offers an alternative to this view of host-sovereignty. First, one must note the following difficulty involved in writing on the theme of hospitality: How does one avoid establishing norms when speaking of hospitality and responsibility for others in terms of obligation? What are the implications of saying that my engagement with other persons necessitates an ethical response that finds no rest in a ‘law’ of hospitality? Furthermore, what does my response to others look like once I become convinced that I ‘should’ persistently attempt to break free from the right of hospitality? As explained above, for Derrida, hospitality cannot rely upon a universal moral law; moreover, the only hope for hospitality to emerge is when one

⁴² Caputo, “The Return of Anti-Religion”, 77.

⁴³ Ibid.

experiences a lack of ready-made norms. However, does not the insistence that the face of the other demands of me a response of ‘absolute hospitality’ operate as a regulating norm? In *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, Derrida writes that the decision which depends on knowledge “no longer decides anything but it is made in advance and is thus annulled” (84). Yet, again, what is essential for Derrida is the immediate response to the call that comes from the other, who is “greater and older than I” (84). In their introduction to *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality*, Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch argue that “[i]t is difficult at times not to read Derrida as suggesting that absolute hospitality might well serve as a regulatory ideal, unachievable but desirable. One senses a tacit ‘ought’ whispering behind the deconstructive account.”⁴⁴

Turning to Derrida’s 1996 address to the International Parliament of Writers (IPW) in Strasbourg entitled “On Cosmopolitanism,” may provide us with a few helpful indications of how to approach this dilemma. Significantly, Derrida’s audience for this particular lecture consists of “intellectuals, scholars, journalists, and writers” who have experienced the injustice of “censorship and repression” (OCF 6). The lecture centers on the conviction Derrida and the IPW share that issues related to asylum rights and to responding to the displaced must be resituated or taken up by ‘cities of refuge’ a term taken from Numbers 35:9-32 in which Moses is commanded to appoint ‘cities of refuge.’ The new cities of refuge, Derrida contends, ought “to reorient the politics of the state” by re-evaluating and returning to the concept of hospitality (OCF 4). This return to the concept of hospitality represents much of Derrida’s task in his later work. In short,

⁴⁴ Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch, “At the Threshold: Foreigners, Strangers, Others,” in *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality*, edited by Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 12.

Derrida believes that it is necessary to re-conceive particular concepts that belong to the Western philosophical tradition (gift, forgiveness, cosmopolitanism, friendship, etc.) in order “to criticize what need(s) to be criticized in the name of a promise or secret harboured within the tradition itself.”⁴⁵ By disrupting or interrupting themes of the Western heritage, deconstruction resists closure and leaves a concept open to its possibility. Opening a space for possibility makes room for a phenomenon to appear on other horizons. In the end, Derrida conceives the work of deconstruction to be a process in which various phenomena are set free from the excessive and inadequate conditions placed upon them. Deconstruction vigilantly critiques how concepts are conditioned by institutions and it desires that we struggle with a given concept without “any particular, determinate horizon of expectation.”⁴⁶ In undoing the conditions in which a phenomenon is represented or constituted, one chooses to keep the phenomenon alive. In *For What Tomorrow*, Derrida speaks of his work as being concerned with reaffirming what has come before us. Reaffirming, Derrida asserts, “means not simply accepting this heritage but re-launching it otherwise and keeping it alive.”⁴⁷

Reinventing the traditional concept of hospitality in “On Cosmopolitanism” consists of giving *new hope* to the work of justice on the micro-level (city), since its work has been distorted on the macro-level (the international level). In other words, cities ought to challenge the sovereignty of the state by instigating counter-sovereignty.⁴⁸ Derrida asks: “Could the City, equipped with new rights and greater sovereignty, open up new horizons of possibility previously undreamt of by international state law?” (OCF 8).

⁴⁵ Naas, *Derrida From Now On*, 28.

⁴⁶ James K.A. Smith, *Jacques Derrida: Live Theory* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2005), 87.

⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, *For What Tomorrow*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 3.

⁴⁸ See Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, 68.

In addition, directing our gaze to the city is a response of *giving up hope* “that the state might create a new image for the city” (OCF 6). Derrida points to ‘The Charter for the Cities of Refuge’ as well as to ‘The International Agency for Cities of Refuge’ as two examples of an attempt to renew international law, to instigate “a new *cosmo-politics*” (OCF 4). Derrida writes that these ‘constitutions’ have come from the efforts of ‘cities of refuge’ that operate independently from each other. The task now, he suggests, is to invent the “forms of solidarity” that can connect each of the cities of refuge (OCF 4). The ‘form of solidarity’ Derrida subsequently proposes entails reflecting on the inherited concept of cosmopolitanism and the imperative call to propose a “new charter of hospitality” (OCF 5). “What then would such a concept be?,” Derrida asks (OCF 5). The rest of his lecture seeks to outline the “principal features” of the hospitality that is integral to this new *cosmo-politics*. In short, Derrida’s lecture suggests that one way of acting upon the demands of an unconditional or absolute hospitality without turning this demand into an actual law is to practice this form of ethics on the micro-level – that of the city.

Additionally, in this lecture, Derrida sketches the features of this new cosmopolitical-hospitality by briefly considering the history of hospitality. He suggests that the conception of ‘cities of refuge’ is drawn from several traditions. First, in the Hebraic tradition, God instructs Moses to set up cities whereby refugees and strangers would be welcome (Numbers 35:9-32). The unconditional hospitality in this passage (and others) is then contrasted with the ‘sovereignty of the city’ which is developed mainly in the medieval tradition. During this time in Western history, cities and nations began to control and condition unconditional hospitality. According to Derrida, the traditional law of hospitality is a perversion for it insists “on my power of hospitality, on my sovereignty

as host” and ultimately considers the other as “a hostile subject” (OH 54-55). Derrida maintains that injustice “begins right away, from the very threshold of the right to hospitality” (OH 55). It is this right to hospitality that must be put into question by absolute and unlimited hospitality.

In addition to showing us the various paradoxes inherent within hospitality, I believe Derrida’s fundamental task with regard to hospitality is to assert that *unconditional hospitality is that which haunts and destabilizes existing laws and their structures*. Surely we do not need to look too hard to find examples of nation-states exercising their right to hospitality. For example, even though Canada is generally considered a ‘welcoming country,’ on July 13, 2009, Immigration Minister Jason Kenney announced that all visitors and refugees entering Canada from Mexico and the Czech Republic will be required to present visas.⁴⁹ When asked why this would be the case, Kenney replied, “The visa requirement I am announcing will give us a greater ability to manage the flow of people into Canada.” Imposing this requirement, Kenney claimed, is a result of inauthentic asylum requests as well as a backlogged refugee determination system. He continued to clarify that many asylum requests are “rejected or abandoned” because these asylum seekers falsely contend that they face persecution in their home country. According to Kenney, the imposed requirement will help speed up authentic asylum claims. He ended his address by explaining, “[i]n addition to creating significant delays and spiralling new costs in our refugee program, the sheer volume of these claims is undermining our ability to help people fleeing real persecution.” This is actually a complicated issue. On the one hand, the Canadian government is undoubtedly practicing its right to hospitality by choosing, filtering and selecting who it will decide to grant

⁴⁹ www.nationalpost.com/news/story.html?id=1786835

asylum.⁵⁰ It is not saying ‘yes’ to whoever turns up; it is determining, anticipating, and asking for *identification* (OH 77). Yet on the other hand, by requiring citizens of Mexico and the Czech Republic to have a visa upon entering Canada, Canadian government workers are better able to direct their attention to the thousands of people who have already requested asylum status or residence status. The Canadian government has made a decision that excludes certain persons in order to more effectively manage the particular group of people who are waiting for their claims to be processed. The aporia of hospitality manifests itself in this case in the tension between conditioning one’s welcome to a certain group of people so that one can better respond to the thousands of existing immigration claims. As Derrida contends in *The Gift of Death*, “I cannot respond to the call, the demand, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other, the other others.”⁵¹

These two brief examples, Derrida’s lecture “On Cosmopolitanism” and the Canadian government refusing hospitality, evoke the following questions: (1) Is it possible for cities to go beyond the state by resituating law and justice under their own jurisdiction?; and, (2) Is not some form of discrimination involved in properly maintaining the safety of a country? In regard to the latter, is not exclusion, the refusal of hospitality, a necessary part of responding legally and ethically to those a host is already committed to protecting? Ultimately, one is struck with the vigilance that is required to negotiate between absolute hospitality and conditional hospitality in singular contexts. Even in singular events, one cannot know definitively whether one has done the right thing. Perhaps the Canadian government does desire to welcome all who knock on the

⁵⁰ See *Of Hospitality*, pages 55 for Derrida’s discussion of the selecting and filtering which is part and parcel of practicing the right to hospitality.

⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago University Press, 1993), 68.

door of her borders, yet to offer asylum to all who knock on her border's doors – which is to operate without calculation – could ultimately lead to jeopardizing the safety of those already living in Canada. In the end, there are inescapable restraints and limits to our welcoming of others on both subjective and political levels. In every situation we are faced with the risk of hospitality.

At the beginning of this section we asked what Derrida's ethic of negotiation offers us and how it can be practiced. In many ways, "On Cosmopolitanism" is the clearest presentation of Derrida's ethic of negotiation. Ultimately, Derrida's address points to the difficulty of immigration as well as the necessity for negotiating between two (or more) positions. As he notes, his proposal that cities of refuge can become the sites of welcome, instead of nation states that are unable to respond properly to violence and discrimination, may appear "utopian for a thousand reasons"; nonetheless, cultivating and mobilizing an ethic of hospitality on the micro-level can, "over the lengthy duration of a process," affect "the axioms of international law" (OCF 8). In other words, Derrida's analysis of hospitality must be first implemented on the micro-level, by various communities and institutions, before it can affect politics on the macro-level.

It is evident in "On Cosmopolitanism" that Derrida conceives of unconditional hospitality as the call of justice. Importantly, in "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" Derrida distinguishes between the law and justice. The law refers to the discourse of right and to legal systems, and the law can be deconstructed, whereas "justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible."⁵² In a similar way, in "On Cosmopolitanism," unconditional hospitality is not deconstructible.

⁵² Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'" in *Acts of Religion*, edited and with an introduction by Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2001), 243.

The undeconstructibility of unconditional hospitality is what creates the impulse to transform and improve the law: “Justice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the movement to improve the law, that is, to deconstruct the law. Without a call for justice we would not have any interest in deconstructing the law.”⁵³ As argued above, the unconditional in Derrida’s thought is not merely descriptive, as Hägglund would have us believe, but rather it is hyper-ethical, it is beyond the law, and it operates in a destabilizing and complicating mode. Finally, unconditional hospitality or justice is a ‘call’ and not a ‘thing’: “Justice is not a present entity or order, not an existing reality or regime.”⁵⁴ In the end, the tension in Derrida’s thought centers on the issue of normativity. On the one hand, a genuine decision cannot depend upon established norms; every decision must be ultimately haunted by undecidability. On the other hand, unconditional hospitality appears as a law, it forcefully puts into question conditional laws of hospitality, it works to create a new cosmo-politics; and yet unconditional hospitality, like justice, is not a law (a ‘thing’) but rather a call or claim.

Derrida and Kearney on Configuring the Other (Via Hägglund)

In Chapter Two we noted the importance of negotiation for both Derrida and Kearney. Both thinkers insist that hospitality occurs in the midst of the to-and-fro between the impossible and the possible, the invisible and visible, perfect hospitality and imperfect hospitality. In *Radical Atheism*, Hägglund helps bring Derrida’s and Kearney’s positions closer together by attempting to disentangle Levinas’s ethical metaphysics from Derrida’s

⁵³ Jacques Derrida, “Response in ‘Villanova Roundtable’” in John Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 16.

⁵⁴ John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 131.

thought, particularly, his understanding of alterity. In “Arche-Violence: Derrida and Levinas,” Häggglund correctly notes that from the perspective of deconstruction “all decisions of justice are implicated in the logic of violence.”⁵⁵ On Häggglund’s account, “[A] rigorous deconstructive thinking maintains that we are always already inscribed in an ‘economy of violence,’ where we are both excluding and being excluded.”⁵⁶ As a result, the desire is not to struggle for absolute peace or hospitality but only for “lesser violence.”⁵⁷

The deconstructive hope for lesser violence is distinct from Levinas’s ethical metaphysics, Häggglund maintains, simply because the hope for lesser violence presupposes an appropriation of the other. Here Häggglund argues that Levinas and Derrida differ in their descriptions of alterity. An encounter with the other, in Derrida’s view, inevitably involves figuration or mediation on the part of the self:

I believe that without a movement of narcissistic reappropriation, the relation to the other would be absolutely destroyed, it would be destroyed in advance. The relation to the other – even if it remains asymmetrical, open, without possible reappropriation – must trace a movement of reappropriation in the image of oneself for love to be possible, for example. Love is narcissistic.⁵⁸

Thus, for Derrida, appropriation and mediation set the very condition for there to be a relation to the other. Häggglund’s argument that the “necessity of discrimination is at the core of Derrida’s thinking” is helpful for us in that it demonstrates Derrida and Kearney’s proximity.⁵⁹ Although from different directions, both thinkers contend that one’s relation to the other would be

⁵⁵ Häggglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, 83.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 82

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Points...Interviews, 1974-1994*, edited by E. Weber, trans. P. Kamuf and others (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 199.

⁵⁹ Häggglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, 95.

abolished if the other remained completely distant and out of sight. Thus, both Kearney and Derrida recognize that we are always caught in an economy of violence or, put differently, engaged in hermeneutics. As we have seen, Derrida's ethic of negotiation is performative in that it entails active decision-making, which often incorporates configuring the other. Importantly, for Derrida, any instance of negotiation is precarious, while one may desire 'lesser violence,' one is not absolved from the possibility of violence.

One difference between Derrida and Kearney is that Derrida does not think a set of criteria can help one know in advance what decision to make. Hägglund notes this difference in his discussion of Kearney's desire for substantive criteria: "When Kearney asks for criteria that would relieve this problem, he asks for criteria that would allow us to decide *once and for all* whether the other is good or evil. But such a final identification is incompatible with the relation to the other, since the other may always change."⁶⁰ Derrida points to the possibility of the other changing when he describes the experience of inviting a good friend to one's home: "[t]he experience might have been terrible. Not only that it *might* have been terrible, but the threat remains. The perversity is not an accident which could be once and for all excluded; the perversity is part of the experience."⁶¹ In other words, inherent in each act of hospitality is the potential for the guest to become a threat. While Hägglund's interpretation here reinforces his argument that Derrida's account of hospitality is merely the exposure to the coming of the other, he rightly remarks that "Derrida does not

⁶⁰ Ibid., 125.

⁶¹ Jacques Derrida, "Perhaps or Maybe: Jacques Derrida and with Alexander der Garcia Düttman," *PLI: Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 6 (Summer 1997): 1-18.

provide substantive criteria for how to distinguish between whether the other who comes is good or evil. But this does not mean that he underestimates the need for identification, recognition, and discriminatory decisions.”⁶²

In conclusion, although Hägglund warns us not to conflate Derrida’s ethics with Levinas’s, thereby neglecting the intersubjective dimension of Derrida’s understanding of ethics, I contend that Derrida’s appeal to unconditional hospitality is motivated and guided by Levinas’s injunction of unconditional responsibility. Against Hägglund, I do not think Derrida’s unconditional is merely the openness to the unforeseeable coming of time or the unavoidable vulnerability to the visitations of others, whether evil or good. Derrida’s unconditional is implicated within the active process of negotiation which assumes an agent. This agent navigates through the double bind of hospitality with both vigilance and the acknowledgement of risk. The possibility of a responsible decision rests on the negotiation between two laws or orders, one of which functions as a call to respond hospitably, a call which orders and directs one’s actions without becoming a ‘categorical imperative.’⁶³ I will develop this idea further in my third and fourth theses on hospitality below, with which I end this present work. The five theses proposed encapsulate the main themes discussed in this thesis and once more bring to light the aporetic nature of hospitality. In conclusion, it is my hope that the various contemporary

⁶² Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, 124-25.

⁶³ In her book, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, Diane Perpich argues that implicating Levinas’s thought “in a certain understanding or articulation of normativity is not, however, to suggest that his philosophy provides direct norms of action. His philosophy is not and cannot be in the business of telling us what we ought to do” (126). Perpich asserts that Levinas’s ethical account of “how we come to be bound to respond to others’ claims” has “normative force” (126). This ‘normative force’ is, however, a kind of “*normativity without norms*.” I contend that this same understanding of ‘normativity without norms’ can be applied to Derrida’s thought. Perpich summarizes her position as follows: “In short, for a Levinasian, every particular norm is contestable, but the moment of normativity – *that the other makes a claim on me to which I cannot be entirely indifferent* – is incontestable” (147-148). Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

debates explored in this thesis have uncovered for the reader the philosophical puzzles or aporias of hospitality – aporias that do not paralyze action, but rather enable one to respond to the call of unconditional hospitality with the acknowledgement of risk.

Conclusion: Five Theses on Hospitality

In conclusion, I wish to propose five theses concerning hospitality. These theses provide an overview of the main themes discussed in this work and once more address the various tensions internal to the concept of hospitality. In the introduction, I stated that all of the thinkers I engage agree that *hospitality defines our ethical posture towards others*.

Accordingly, each of these theses is an attempt to describe what Derrida calls, in *On Cosmopolitanism*, an “ethic of hospitality.” Derrida considers the expression an ‘ethic of hospitality’ tautologous since hospitality is “not simply one ethic amongst others”, but rather “ethics is hospitality” (OCF 16).

I

Hospitality, particularly from the perspective of deconstruction, is not universalizable, but is concerned with addressing a particular someone or something. If unconditional hospitality is understood as a call given to the host, then the question of the name becomes crucial. Asking for a name is necessary for welcoming a stranger; however, such a request also limits hospitality. Derrida points out this contradiction when he suggests that “[t]he foreigner..., who has the right to hospitality in the cosmopolitan tradition which will find its most powerful form in Kant..., is someone with whom, to receive him, you begin by asking his name” (OH 50). Thus, the question becomes: Does hospitality consist in asking, “What am I going to call you?” or does it consist in beginning “with the unquestioning welcome”? (OH 28-29). Derrida, in an interview in *Le Monde*, insists that hospitality “consists in doing everything to address the other,” while

preventing the question, ‘what is your name?’ from “becoming a ‘condition.’”¹ We must, therefore, allow the singular other to appear or arrive without turning his or her appearance into an interrogation. The aporia of hospitality, for Derrida, is found in the tension created when, in order to welcome the other, we must both *address an identifiable other* and *offer hospitality without requiring identification*. Derrida’s question “Is it more just and more loving to question or not to question?,” reveals the need for attentiveness on the part of the host (OH 29). Asking for the foreigner or guest’s name is necessary, but it is an act that can very easily turn into an examination associated with the desire to filter and select who may enter one’s home.

II

In order to welcome the stranger, one must have a home or some territory. A host cannot offer hospitality without having sovereignty over her home, yet in exercising sovereignty over her home the host can prohibit hospitality from taking place. An ethics of hospitality insists that the sovereign host give place to the stranger that arrives unexpectedly.² Gates, borders, and doors outline territories, demonstrate ownership, and demarcate collective identities. An irreducible feature of hospitality is that there will always be determinate sites or spaces – cultural, religious, and political spaces – that provide the condition for identity and difference. An ethics of hospitality, as advanced by Derrida and Levinas, does not do away with identity, regulations, and borders, but rather seeks to challenge the persistence of self-mastery (whether conscious or not) on the part of those who are

¹ Jacques Derrida, “Il n’y a pas de culture ni de lien social sans un principe d’hospitalité” *Le Monde*, December 2, 1997, translated by Michael Naas and cited in *Derrida From Now On*.

² In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida states that absolute hospitality “requires that I open up my home...to the absolute, unknown, and anonymous other...that I *give place* to them...without asking of them either reciprocity or even their names” (25).

already on the inside. Writing on ethics and international relations, Gideon Baker states that cosmopolitanism as hospitality does not seek to defend either deterritorialization or territorialization, that is, it does not “seek an end to the inside-outside quality of world politics,” but rather cosmopolitanism as hospitality works with “political communities rather than political community; with boundaries rather than one-world; and with politics of inclusion rather than visions of no more outside.”³ The possibility of hospitality is contingent upon the preservation of one’s home, border, or nation. As Baker puts it, “Thus while the ethics of hospitality unsettles all territorial holdings, the politics of hospitality calls for a space.”⁴ Therefore, unconditional hospitality, as that which draws and motivates all conditional acts of hospitality, is at the same time dependent upon concrete, existing conditional laws of hospitality – laws that both threaten unconditional hospitality from taking place and enable it to take place.

III

Hospitality in its ‘purest’ form is unconditional, without limit. Since unconditional hospitality sets the measure for all acts of hospitality (or inhospitality), there is a certain sense in which we understand what hospitality is and requires. And yet Derrida would have us think of hospitality as that which is still ‘to come,’ not yet arrived, elusive and beyond our complete grasp. Perhaps it only appears as a call (not as a foundation). Additionally, the call of unconditional hospitality can be heard as a demand in need of an urgent response. At the end of his essay, “On Cosmopolitanism,” Derrida asserts that cities of refuge “cannot wait,” but must respond justly and immediately “to crime, to

³ Gideon Baker, *Politicising Ethics in International Relations: Cosmopolitanism as Hospitality* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2011), 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

violence, and to persecution” (OCF 23). This response must be and *is* more than the response of any existing laws. Absolute hospitality, then, destabilizes existing laws and their structures and compels us to challenge our ready-made judgements and our sense of self-mastery. Take for example the ending of D.H. Lawrence’s poem ‘Song of a Man Who Has Come Through’:

What is the knocking?
What is the knocking at the door in the night?
It is somebody who wants to do us harm.

No, no, it is the three strange angels.
Admit them, admit them.⁵

It is precisely this second move of ‘No, no, it is the three strange angels’ that speaks to the weak force of absolute hospitality. At first we are certain the person at our door is an enemy or someone seeking to harm us, but then something happens, something occurs – perhaps an event in the way that Alain Badiou speaks of it in his book *Saint Paul*⁶; we experience an ‘event’: in this context we experience the ‘face of the stranger’ who subsequently puts into question our sovereignty, our tendency for comfort and safety, and beckons us to heed the call of unconditional hospitality. When we come to accept that *ethics is hospitality*, then our engagements with others will always aspire to the unconditional welcoming of the stranger – ‘Admit them, admit them’ will echo with force in our minds.

⁵ *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*, eds., Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1993), 250. Garry Watson quotes Lawrence’s poem in his book, *Opening Doors: Thought from (and of) the Outside*, but he does not provide much commentary on the poem itself.

⁶ See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, translated by Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

IV

In their introduction to *Morality, Rules and Consequences: A Critical Reader*, Brad Hooker, Elinor Mason, and Dale Miller contend that ethical theory should seek to identify an “authoritative set of moral rules” to determine whether “an action is morally wrong.”⁷ In addition, they state that one could know whether an action is right or wrong if the established set of moral rules were universally applied since these principles (once applied) would result in the best consequences.⁸ This utilitarian option is perceived as atemporal by poststructuralists, an “ethico-political absolutism,” as Jack Reynolds notes.⁹ In contrast, following the thought of Derrida, let us assert that all ethical and political decisions are haunted by incalculability even though it is equally true that the ethics of hospitality is an orientation which is mobilized by a decision. We said in Chapter Two that the theme of negotiation is central to Derrida’s work and to thinking about hospitality. As we noted above, for Derrida, ethical responsibility has an element which is non-negotiable. For him, *the negotiation between the non-negotiable, namely, the unconditional and the calculative or negotiable sets the condition for the possibility of a responsible and genuine decision*. Without these act(s) of negotiation, one could claim to have direct access to ‘pure’ justice or ‘pure’ hospitality, but such a claim is untenable since negotiation implies contamination. Similarly, without negotiation the thing one is theorizing about (justice, hospitality) would remain as it is with no hope for betterment. In other words, an ethic of negotiation views the task of obtaining a ‘pure’ justice or hospitality futile, and yet at the same time promotes a kind of striving for the

⁷ Brad Hooker, Elinor Mason, and Dale Miller, eds., *Morality, Rules and Consequences: A Critical Reader* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2000), 1.

⁸ Ibid. These thinkers deem this position as Rule Consequentialism.

⁹ Jack Reynolds, *Chronopathologies: Time and Politics in Deleuze, Derrida, Analytic Philosophy, and Phenomenology* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2011), 62.

actualization of this purity, namely, absolute hospitality. The theme of negotiation therefore, encapsulates the admittedly contradictory statement that ethical and political decisions, in the view of deconstruction, are both incalculable and calculable. Therefore, one cannot avoid the “necessity of contamination,” as Hägglund puts it.¹⁰

In his book *Chronopathologies*, Jack Reynolds asks, “How does Derrida think that we should calculate, accepting his suggestion that we must?”¹¹ Reynolds continues, “[t]here is very little indication of this in his work. Although he regularly insists that there is no pure ethics, no pure justice, any hints as to what kinds of political calculations are better or worse than others is left opaque.”¹² While Derrida may not constructively tell us how to act politically, he does offer an ethical framework of negotiation which: (1) privileges absolute hospitality, (2) is always an experience of the undecidable, and (3) “always arises in relation to the singularity of the other.”¹³ The “normative thinness” of Derridean-Levinasian ethics is certainly problematic for Richard Rorty who thinks it is “pointless hype to dramatize our difficulties in knowing what to do by labelling our goal ‘indescribable,’ ‘unexperiencable,’ ‘unintelligible,’ or ‘infinitely distant.’”¹⁴

As I have endeavoured to demonstrate in this thesis, albeit in agreement with deconstruction, practicing hospitality involves recognizing that the decision on the welcome is always risky and that each act of hospitality is augmented by the ‘impulse

¹⁰ Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, 36.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Simon Critchley, “Deconstruction and Pragmatism – Is Derrida a Private Ironist or a Public Liberal” in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, edited by Chantal Mouffe (London: Routledge, 1996), 16.

¹⁴ The phrase “normative thinness” is taken from Gary Cutty’s book, *Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Richard Rorty, “Response to Simon Critchley” in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, edited by Chantal Mouffe (London: Routledge, 1996), 47. Rorty continues, “[u]nlike Critchley, I don’t think we need a ‘supreme ethical principle’, any more than we need to ask whether we have a pre-reflective and pre-sentient set of responses to other’s pains.”

and movement' of absolute hospitality to that we must negotiate in singular contexts.¹⁵ This dialectical structure is not an essential negation, but it is rather an affirming attentiveness to the complexities of hospitality and even more to the compelling force of an absolute hospitality. This position does not afford the ability to know in advance how to act and, since the circumstances of negotiation between the two laws of hospitality are each time unique, "nothing can ever assure us that this negotiation will not go terribly awry, either for the host or for the guest," as Derrida states.¹⁶ Finally, if one emphasizes the impulse in deconstruction to interpret, negotiate, and make decisions, then the traceable conflict between Derrida and Kearney disappears.¹⁷ In Kearney's view, neither hermeneutics nor deconstruction seeks to provide "totality or closure" (SGM 10). In the end, by drawing attention to Derrida's ethic of negotiation through an examination of his understanding of hospitality, I have brought Derridean deconstruction closer to a Kearneyean hermeneutics of discernment.

V

The theme of hospitality is a central aspect of many of our world religions today. For example, Kearney states that "[t]he entire Bible, it could be said, is a story of struggles

¹⁵ In response to a question posed by Dennis Schmidt about justice and the law, Derrida says, "[j]ustice is not the law. Justice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, the movement to improve the law." Jacques Derrida, response in "Villanova Roundtable", in John Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 16.

¹⁶ Naas, *Derrida From Now On*, 26.

¹⁷ That being said, in *Aspects of Alterity*, Treanor describes the distinction between deconstruction and hermeneutics in the following way: "Deconstruction judges because it *must* rather than because it *should*. Deconstruction views judgement as a (unfortunate) necessity rather than as a (fortunate) gift...[i]f deconstruction does not overtly embrace a hard relativism, it covertly supports a soft, but still dangerous, version of relativism" (249-250).

between different ways of responding to the alien.”¹⁸ Additionally, at the heart of religion is absolute uncertainty – a wager – which depends on others to give it its meaning. In “Hospitality and the Trouble with God,” Caputo proposes that ‘non-knowing’ “is constitutive of the stranger.”¹⁹ In this vein, if God cannot be comprehended then God must remain a stranger. If, as Caputo insists, “[h]ospitality arises in response to a call we did not expect, coming from I know not what or where, whose outcome we cannot know in advance,” then perhaps God, like the stranger, cannot be known in advance.²⁰ God is not a knower of all my choices in the world, nor is God known in advance by us rather he welcomes our creativity and agency and is ‘made known’ by our enactments of his message of hospitality. In addition, God appears at the juncture of our attentiveness to the stranger. As Levinas puts it, “‘Going towards God’ is meaningless unless seen in terms of my primary going towards the other person. I can only go towards God by being ethically concerned... for the other person.”²¹ Levinas echoes this theme again in his later work, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*: “The sentence in which God comes to be involved in words is not ‘I believe in God’... It is the ‘here I am’ said to the neighbour to whom I am given over.”²²

Putting into practice the ethic of hospitality is a part of what it means to conceive of faith as a wager. In his book, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God*, Richard Kearney insists that the inability to ground our faith(s) in knowledge should translate into

¹⁸ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 20.

¹⁹ John D. Caputo, “Hospitality and the Trouble with God” in *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality*, edited by Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 85.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics of the Infinite” in *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, edited by Richard Kearney (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 74.

²² Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 75.

a disposition of openness toward the stranger. For Kearney, exposure to the stranger “prompts us to begin all over again, to surrender inherited sureties and turn towards the Other – in wonder and bewilderment, in fear and trembling, in fascination and awe.”²³ Thus, in the religious context the wager of faith is directly connected to the practice of hospitality. In the end, God is concretized and recovered in the face of the other who summons me to responsibility and hospitality.

²³ Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God*, 11.

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