Jacques Derrida and the Paradox of Hospitality

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Using the logic of pure excess, the article presents the philosophy of Jacques Derrida as it overturns the concept of hospitality beyond the host-guest relations of duty and obligation. The implications of which could reach beyond philosophical considerations; it could reverberate in a reality with an apparently increasing need for hospitality.

Introduction

Our increasingly interconnected world has made the question of the visitor/stranger/foreigner/immigrant/refugee a pressing and urgent one. More than ever, the "destiny" of the visitor has overlapped with that of the host. It is this type of human condition, that urges us not only to understand the legitimate differences among peoples of various cultures and traditions, but it similarly calls us to confront the question concerning the proper treatment due the stranger or the visitor. Concisely stated, the presence of the foreigner brings into a sharper focus the question of hospitality. It is the burning issue of hospitality borne out of the concrete reality of the "displaced" persons that Jacques Derrida develops his notion of unconditional hospitality.[1] For him, this form of hospitality befits every unexpected guest who comes

[1] In his work *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Derrida looks at hospitality both as ethics and culture. It is also in this work that he outlines what we call a new cosmopolitics of the cities of refugee in response to issues of asylum rights and refugee problems of France. This new cosmopolitics actually refers to his notion of pure hospitality. See Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 5 and 16-17 respectively. Henceforth, *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness.*

suddenly knocking at our doors.[2] His crucial questions, related to hospitality are articulated in the following way:

> Does hospitality consist in interrogating the new arrival? Does it begin with the question addressed to the newcomer...what is your name? Tell me your name, what should I call you, I who am calling on you, I who want to call you by your name? What am I going to call you...? Or else, does hospitality begin with the unquestioning welcome, in a double effacement, the effacement of the question and the name?[3]

The above quoted text is a key to understanding Derrida's notion of hospitality. Hence, in this short exposition, this key passage will be further elucidated in order to unlock his wager on hospitality and the modalities that it takes, as well as, the challenges it presents to us.

OF HOSPITALITY

In hospitality, there are two parties involved, i.e., the host and the guest. The host is the one who invites and welcomes, and the guest is the one who is welcomed and received by the host. The "transaction" in hospitality involves some expected attitudes or emotions such as warmth and generosity on the part of the host, and a sense of gratitude from the invited guest. Hospitality may be a personal initiative or a state-sponsored one. It is assumed that when the proper protocols or rules of engagement in hospitality are

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[2] See Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* and also his interview in Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida," in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Continental Philosophy* eds. Mark Dooley and Richard Kearney (London & New York: Routledge, 1998): 65-83, (Accessed on June 12, 2012). http://www.scribd.com/doc/89410281/Derrida-and-Others-Hospitality-Justice-and Responsibility. Henceforth, "Hospitality, Justice."

[3] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowldy (Standford, CA: Standford University Press, 2000): 27-28. Henceforth, *Of Hospitality.*

religiously observed then it is presumed that its goals and causes are served. Jacques Derrida, however, raises a formidable challenge on the logic of hospitality as it is understood and practiced in this way. He brings into a focal point the "performative contradiction" or *aporia* apparent in it.[4] For him, the hospitality conundrum is articulated as follows: "as we offer hospitality (its possibility) its conditions of impossibility seep in." As it were, a deconstruction takes place.[5] As hospitability is being defined and practiced in concrete ways, its very existence and essence are brought to question. Succinctly expressed, in the gesture of hospitality, one is always made to ask if such an enthusiastic offer of hospitality is authentic or not. This paradox is what Derrida sought to explain.

AN ANTINOMY

Derrida directs our attention to an underlying essential antinomy that makes up the general concept of hospitality. This antinomy needs to be constantly negotiated, he argues. So he explains these internal dynamics in hospitality in the following way:

> There would be an antinomy, an insoluble antinomy, a non-dialectizable antinomy between, on the one hand, the law of unlimited hospitality...., and on the other hand, the laws (in the plural), those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional,...[6]

[4] See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 65 and also Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality," trans., Barry Stocker with Forbes Morlock, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 5, no. 3 (December 2000): 4. Henceforth "Hospitality."

[5] Derrida writes: "Hospitality is a self-contradictory concept and experience which can only self-destruct <put otherwise, produce itself as impossible, only be possible on the condition of its impossibility> or protect itself from itself, auto-immunize itself in some way, which is to say, deconstruct itself – precisely– in being put into practice." See Derrida "Hospitality," 5

[6] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 77. See also 135; 148-149.

A sharp distinction is made between the *law* of hospitality and that of the *laws* of hospitality.[7] The former brings about unconditional and unlimited hospitality. The latter offers conditional and limited forms of hospitality. While, the law of hospitality eschews juridical imperatives from its discourse, the laws of hospitality, however, court the language of rights, duties and obligation.

THE HYPERBOLIC DEMANDS OF THE LAW OF HOSPITALITY

On the one hand, we discern the daunting requirements for unconditional/absolute hospitality. Derrida stipulates these requirements,

> Absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner..., but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights. Just hospitality breaks with hospitality by right;[8]

One already senses the "hyperbole" that this kind of hospitality involves.[9] One is even tempted to ask about the viability of this form of hospitality in actual terms.

[7] Derrida speaks about the two regimes that constitute hospitality, i.e., "the unconditional or hyperbolical on the one hand, and the conditional and juridico-political, even the ethical, on the other". See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 135-137.

[8] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 25.

[9] Derrida sometimes refers to unconditional or absolute hospitality as hyperbolical hospitality, ibid., 135.

HOSPITALITY OF A "MODEST" KIND

On the other hand, we discover a more practicable and controllable prerequisites for conditional hospitality. Conditional hospitality involves duties and obligations enshrined in our laws and ethical systems. Derrida locates them in the "Greco-Roman tradition and even the Judeo-Christian one, by all of law and all philosophy of law up to Kant and Hegel in particular, across the family, civil society, and the State."[10] These responsibilities are "governed by duty" and "conforming to duty" or to use the Kantian distinction, they are "out of duty."[11] Derrida would often refer to Immanuel Kant's cosmopolitan law as written in Kant's *Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* which pertains the protection of the foreigner. In this work, Kant holds that for peace to exist and violence to cease, the creation of a world order governed by cosmopolitan laws is necessary. One of the essential laws in it is the Universal Law of hospitality which contains the proper treatment of strangers based on the rule of law. "Universal hospitality arises... from an obligation, a right, and a duty all regulated by law;..."[12] It may present itself as a welcome development and a necessary step to hospitality, but for Derrida, the "juridicality involved in Kant's discourse" makes Kant's offer still very conditional and conditioned by the host and does not constitute a radical break from the regime of rights and obligations.[13] Hence he writes:

[10] Ibid., 77.

[11] Ibid., 83.

[12] Derida, "Hospitality", 4.

[13] Derrida, *Of Hospitality,* 70-72, where he explains the implications of the Kantian view. He opines: "Does this mean that the Kantian host therefore treats the one who is staying with him as a foreigner? Yes and no. He treats him as a human being, but he sets up his relationship to the one who is in his house as a matter of the law, in the same way as he also does the relationships linking him to murderers, the police, or judges. From the point of view of the law, the guest, even when he is well received, is first of all a foreigner, he must remain a foreigner. Hospitality is due to the foreigner, certainly, but remains, like the law, conditional, and thus conditioned in its dependence on the unconditionality that is the basis of the law."

> Hospitality is certainly, necessarily, a right, a duty, an obligation, the greeting of the foreign other [l'autre étranger] as a friend but on the condition that the host, the Wirt, the one who receives, lodges or gives asylum remains the patron, the master of the household, on the condition that he maintains his own authority in his own home,... thus limiting the gift proffered and making of this limitation, namely, the being-oneself in one's own home, the condition of the gift and of hospitality.[14]

A PARADOXICAL LAW

When these regimes of hospitality, in manner of speaking, fuse horizons, then the relationship becomes not only problematic and paradoxical but even a vicious one. He contends that,

> The law of hospitality, the express law that governs the general concept of hospitality, appears as a paradoxical law, pervertible or perverting. It seems to dictate that absolute hospitality should break with the law of hospitality as right or duty, with the "pact" of hospitality.[15]

Derrida then, seems to drive a wedge between the two regimes, implying a radical separation of one from the other. Put differently, Derrida steers away from a legal or juridical frame of reference on hospitality. But most of the time, however he insists on a continuous need for negotiation between these interweaving forms of hospitality. The reason for this is so that gestures of hospitality are refined and purified in their purest forms or at least expressions of hospitality appropriate the more ideal or pristine form. For him, they (two regimes of hospitality) are interlaced and constitutive of one another. They make up the two faces of a coin, or better still; the relationship may be compared to a double- edged sword reality.

[14] Derrida, "Hospitality," 4.
[15] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 25.

The *law* of hospitality needs to be contextualized for concreteness and relevance while the *laws* of hospitality have to be constantly open to the horizon of the former for it to be more encompassing and daring. Hence, the paradox consists in the law of hospitality "forced" to don the garb of "rights and obligations" in order to exist and become concrete, but in the process endangers and violates its very nature. So then, what he proposes is a playful balance of this double imperative. Concisely expressed, the "impossible"/ unconditional hospitality is marked by a horizon of continuous openness. This safeguards hospitality from being confined to or hijacked by encumbering legal narratives that hamper its potential for pure perfection. Oscillation then, on both poles allows one to test the degree and depth of responsible hospitality that one can offer to a guest or a stranger.

In short, a tug-of-war happens between these two extreme poles to test each other's limits and strengths. The relationship is such for the law of hospitality and the laws of hospitality are both irreducible and indissociable from one another. It may be said then that Derrida's concern is not just simply the shift from the language of rights and obligation to that of the language of "excess" and pure gift. For him, it is actually about pushing the limits of hospitality that is at issue. More will be said about this later.

HOSPITALITY AS A PURE GIFT

As pure gift, absolute hospitality requires sheer gratuity on the part of the host. Derrida ascertains this when he said that "[f]or to be what it "must" be, hospitality must not pay a debt, or be governed by a duty: it is gracious..."[16] For if hospitality is done "out of duty" and expects something in return from the visitor then "it is no longer graciously offered beyond debt and economy."[17] Hence, if it were a question of duty, it violates the logic of utter gratuitousness of the gift.

Elsewhere, he similarly reflects on its utter gratuity and broaches the danger of losing it (giftedness) as soon as the host

[16] Ibid., 83.
[17] Ibid.

projects unto his guests familiarizing legal and judicial categories. He posts the questions as follows:

> Does one give hospitality to a subject? To an identifiable subject? To a subject identifiable by name? To a legal subject? Or is hospitality *rendered*, is it *given* to the other before they are identified, even before they are (posited as or supposed to be) a subject, legal subject and subject nameable by their family name, etc.[18]

Therefore imposition of expectations and creating a "quid pro quo" situation (something done in exchange for something or merely returning a favour) to the guest subverts the logic of absolute hospitality. An attitude of "unquestioning welcome" is what is advocated for by Derrida.

THE INSECURE HOST

Insecurity causes the host to adopt convenient mental and physical scaffoldings like notions of family, nation, citizenships or language. As mentioned already, this violates the very being of the guest/the foreigner because of the non-recognition of his/her distinctiveness and uniqueness. Compelling a guest to speak the language of the host as a pre-condition to be invited is accordingly, the first act of violation of hospitality because it assimilates and co-opts the guest to the culture of the host, thus disregarding his/her heritage.[19]

On another level, labels and designations demarcate boundaries and put constraints on hospitality. This "act of naming" not only assures the host that his guest respects the rule of law and subjects himself or herself to it,[20] but more importantly, to reassure the host that he is still the "master of the house"; as such, is the one

[18] Ibid., 27.

[19] Ibid., 15-16.

[20] "In telling me what your name is responding to this request, you are responding on your own behalf, you are responsible before the law and before your hosts, you are subject in law" See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 27.

who is in command and in power (despotic sovereignty and the virile mastery of the master)[21] when he allows the visitor into the comforts of his home. Derrida expounds on this:

> ...that the host, he who offers hospitality, must be the master in his house, he (male in the first instance) must be assured of his sovereignty over the space and goods he offers or opens to the other as stranger. This seems both the law of laws of hospitality and common sense in our culture. It does not seem to me that I am able to open up or offer hospitality, however generous, even in order to be generous, without reaffirming: this is mine, I am at home, you are welcome in my home, without any implication of "make yourself at home" but on condition that you observe the rules of hospitality by respecting the being-at-home of my home, the being-itself of what I am.[22]

As soon as the host perceives an encroachment to his sovereignty, then he begins to consider the guest as a nuisance, a parasite[23] or as "an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy.[24]" Here hospitality becomes hostility.[25]

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[21] Derrida describes the sense of power that reassures the host that he is still in control in the following way: "I want to be master at home *(ipse, potis, potens*, head of house, we have seen all that), 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. This other becomes a hostile subject, and I risk becoming their hostage." The notion of hostage here is understood as an encroachment on the host's sovereignty and not in a positive sense that will be discussed later in relation to the view of Levinas. See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 54. See also "Hospitality," 15.

[22] Derrida, "Hospitality," 14.

[23] A guest is considered a parasite when he or she does not have the legal protection accorded to him or her by the State as a foreigner. A parasite is "illegitimate, clandestine, liable to expulsion or arrest" by virtue of the fact that he/she does not have the right to hospitality. See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 59.

[24] Ibid., 53-54.

[25] According to Derrida, etymologically, the Latin word for *hostis* which means guest or stranger can also take the meaning of an enemy. The interplay of

A "TERRIFYING" GIFT

While a pure gift, absolute hospitality nonetheless is terrifying because of its "unimaginable demands." Derrida argues that "[i]t 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."[26] When control and calculation set in, it manifests in strict immigration controls, locked doors or security systems to screen and weed out undesirable aliens or visitors. Unconditional hospitality for Derrida as a gratuitous gift entails for the host "to accept the risk of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing everything, or killing everyone. That is the risk of pure hospitality and pure gift, because a pure gift might be terrible too."[27]

The images of door-less houses and borderless states inform the ethos of unconditional hospitality. These images stand in stark contrast with the images of locked doors, secured keys and protected thresholds accompanying conditional hospitality. Commenting on this, Derrida notes:

> ...[t]o take up the figure of the door, for there to be hospitality, there must be a door. But if there is a door, there is no longer hospitality. There is no hospitable house. There is no house without doors and windows. But as soon as there are a door and windows, it means that someone has the key to them and consequently controls the conditions of hospitality. There must be a threshold. But if there is a threshold, there is no longer hospitality.[28]

usage is significant for Derrida because in the shift of meaning, he calls our attention to the fact that hospitality can take the form of hostility, meaning, a guest (hostis) can be considered a hostile enemy (hostis). See Derrida, *"of Hospitality,"* 15.

[26] Ibid., 71.

[27] Ibid., 71.

[28] Ibid., 14.

PARALYSIS OR OPENNESS

Because absolute hospitality is terrifying, it may lead to paralysis that immobilizes the host. When paralysis takes hold protectionist attitudes, such as xenophobia, ethnocentrism and the perpetuation of nationalist agenda gain ground. With absolute hospitality, however, fortified walls of security must come crumbling down. Confronted with a "door-less" and "wall-less" situation, the host feels vulnerable, powerless and anxious. The fear of the unknown and the distressing thought of the imminent danger that lurks in the background cause the host to freeze at the threshold. For Derrida the antidote to this kind of paralysis is not to start erecting and constructing more defences but in the unconditional embrace and welcome of the stranger. With the doors gone, the host can now with open arms let the uninvited visitor enter in his unprotected space or turf. So we find Derrida pushing the agenda of pure hospitality to the extreme.[29] He argues his case in the following way:

> ... I am saying that this apparently aporetic paralysis on the threshold "is"....what must be overcome.... If there is hospitality, the impossible must be done..., this "is" being in order that, beyond hospitality, hospitality may come to pass. Hospitality can only take place beyond hospitality, in deciding to let it come, overcoming the hospitality that paralyzes itself on the threshold which it is.[30]

THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

Absolute hospitality brings pleasant surprises to the host and may even lead to his "conversion" and awakening as he encounters the unexpected visitor. In light of this, Derrida distinguishes the concept of *visitation* from *invitation*. "In visitation there is no door. Anyone can come at any time and can come in

[29] Ibid., 70.
[30] Ibid., 14.

without needing a key for the door. There are no customs checks with a visitation. But there are customs and police checks with an invitation."[31] Thus, selection and filtering of invitees happen in invitation.

Likewise, this element of surprise comes out in his concepts of *messianism* and *messianicity*.[32] *Messianism* is like conditional hospitality because it projects certain ideals on the "other" so that they conform to one's expectations about them. "When imagining the coming of the Messiah the host attributes a new kind of origin and centrism to a divine other and assumes the latter suits their imaginative picture."[33] The other's "otherness" then dissipates in the empowering shadow of the host. Unlike *messianism*, *messianicity*, lets the other be or lets the messiah be. Like unconditional hospitality, one has no *a priori* expectations on the other. It is open to unexpected surprises brought about by the encounter with the uninvited other, taken in his/her otherness or difference. *Messianicity* is not limited only to the religious context but may "apply to a friend, someone culturally different, a parent, a child; where the issue arises of whether we are capable of recognizing them, of respecting their difference, and of how we may be surprised by them."[34]

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[31] Ibid.

[32] In his interview, Derrida expounds on these themes: "I try to dissociate the concept of this pure hospitality from the concept of 'invitation'. If you are the guest and I invite you, if I am expecting you and am prepared to meet you, then this implies that there is no surprise, everything is in order. For pure hospitality or a pure gift to occur, however, there must be an absolute surprise. The other, like the Messiah, must arrive whenever he or she wants. She may even not arrive. I would oppose, therefore, the traditional and religious concept of 'visitation' to 'invitation': visitation implies the arrival of someone who is not expected, who can show up at any time. If I am unconditionally hospitable I should welcome the visitation, not the invited guest, but the visitor. I must be unprepared, or prepared to be unprepared, for the unexpected arrival of any other." Ibid., 70.

[33] See Kevin O'Gorman, "Jacques Derrida's Philosophy of Hospitality," *The Hospitality Review* 8, no. 4 (October 2006): 53.

[34] Ibid.

BEING "HOSTAGED" BY THE WHOLLY OTHER

It is in the visitation and messianicity that the host experiences being "hostaged" by his/her guest in the comfort of his/her home. Hostage here is not understood in a negative sense as that of being captured (hostage taking) by a criminal or a terrorist asking for specific demand for ransom. Rather "being hostaged" in this context pertains to the discourse of Emmanuel Levinas. Accordingly, for Levinas "**....** the exercise of ethical responsibility begins where I am and must be the hostage of the other, delivered passively to the other before being delivered to myself..."[35]

Hence, in this "hostage" situation, a process of reversal takes place. The host becomes the guest of his house and the guest becomes the host of the house. It is the guest who makes the host at ease and feels that he is at home. As the host is confronted with the face of the other, and allows the guest to be who he is, then, the host takes on the perspective of the other and is able to respect and speak with the other on equal terms. "[I]t is through the condition of being a hostage,"..., "that there can be pity, compassion, pardon and proximity in the world..."[36]

Therefore, the face of the truly *Other* guest summons us to transformation and conversion. It is an interruption of the self.[37] The guest teaches us something about our insecurities and our finitude as contextual human beings. Thus, it is by looking beyond the self and letting our secured world be disturbed by the presence of the other that we salvage ourselves from our bigotry, narrow-mindedness and chauvinism. These life–alterations come about when real hospitality takes place. So Derrida explains the task that a host must perform in a condition of pure hospitality:

> ....the master of this house, the master in his own home, the host, can only accomplish his task as host, that is, hospitality, in becoming invited by the other

[35] Derrida, "Hospitality," 9.

[36] Ibid.

[37] See Mark W. Westmoreland, "Interruptions: Derrida and Hospitality," *Kritike* 2, no. 1 (June 2008): 1-10.

> into his home, in being welcomed by him whom he welcomes, in receiving the hospitality he gives.[38]

In an unexpected turn of events, it is now the visitor that makes the host truly at home.[39] Derrida writes:

> The Laws of Hospitality, one which describes the contradiction in the essence of the hostess, the other, a conclusion, which tells of the final reversal of the roles of host and guest [*de l'hôte et de l'hôte*], of the inviting *hôte* as host (the master in his own home) and the invited *hôte* as guest, of the inviting and the invited,... of the becoming-invited, if you like, of the one inviting. The one inviting becomes almost the hostage of the one invited, of the guest [*hôte*], the hostage of the one he receives, the one who keeps him at home.[40]

BEYOND TOLERANCE

Instead of hospitality, some political and social theorists have instead advocated for tolerance in dealing with foreign guests.[41] Tolerance is viewed as those which will make members of a cosmopolitan society live peacefully together amidst differences. While there are various conceptions of tolerance, the most common understanding relates to what is referred to as its *permission conception*.[42] In this view, tolerance relates to the limited and conditional permission granted by a dominant group to a small minority group in society. This is in matters of the practices and

[38] Derrida, "Hospitality," 9.

[39] The French word *hôte* takes or may take two meanings, namely it can mean both the host and at the same time the guest. For Derrida this distinction is important to express the "hostage" taking experience that happens when a host becomes infinitely open to welcome the guest. Cf., footnote 39.

[40] Ibid.

[41] See Jürgen Habermas, "Religious Tolerance-The Pacemaker for Cultural Rights," in, *The Derrida-Habermas Reader,* ed. Lasse Thomassen, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 195-207.

[42] See the various understandings of tolerance in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy online. Access at https://plato.stanford.edu.

expressions of their cultural beliefs provided that the minority confines it within the private realm and follows the rules governing this limited expression. The dominant authority adopts this approach for pragmatic and principled reasons. Pragmatic because rather than encounter resistance from minority group, it is better to give them some space for expression. This will also ensure civil peace in society. Principled, because tolerating "unconventional" and odd cultural practices of the minority group is preferred than forcing them to give up deeply rooted and well entrenched cultural practices. This is a top-down approach because the dominant group sets and determines the conditions and creates the rule of exchange.

Derrida criticizes this notion of tolerance and insists on the need rather for an unconditional hospitality in our times. Our present day conditions are very different from the conditions in which the idea of tolerance arose, claims Derrida. The term actually has a Christian origin derived from the elevated and "privileged" position occupied by Christianity as a dominant religion in the past. Accordingly, as a form of Christian charity, toleration must be given to non-Christian groups which occupy minority position.[43] While tolerance is preferable to intolerance (censorship, marginalization, distortion, expulsion, control, etc) this discourse however is "most often used on the side of those with power, always as a kind of condescending concession...,"[44] given to the weaker party. Hence, Derrida warns us not to easily adopt this ideal as a solution to our present predicaments. Tolerance understood in this manner runs counter to the spirit of unconditional hospitality he is advocating. He maintains that:

[43] "The word 'tolerance' is first of all marked by a religious war between Christians, or between Christians and non-Christians. Tolerance is a *Christian* virtue, or for that matter a *Catholic* virtue. The Christian must tolerate the non-Christian, but, even more so, the Catholic must let the Protestant be." See Giovanni Barradori, eds., *Philosophy in a time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Haberman and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 126.

[44] Ibid., 127.

> If I think I am being hospitable because I am tolerant, it is because I wish to limit my welcome, to retain power and maintain control over the limits of my "home," my sovereignty...[45]

Tolerance then is actually a limited concession granted to the minority group to appease them, worse, an attempt to co-opt the minority to the discourse of the majority group.

Moreover, Derrida notes that tolerance has biological and genetic connotations, too, which signify boundaries and threshold for "tolerating" the different. To use an analogy, a patient undergoing a kidney transplant has a certain threshold or limit in which his or her immune system can allow or permit a foreign body (in this case another kidney) to enter. In other words, the rhetoric on tolerance when applied to foreigners and immigrants betrays a certain political discourse where conditions are set and restrictions imposed on foreigners as they present themselves as visitors to other countries. Usually countries have certain threshold or limits in accepting foreigners/visitors. Beyond this threshold, rejection awaits the asylum seeker or the guest. Crossing the threshold is actually setting the conditions in which a stranger is allowed or tolerated to enter. Unlike Derrida's notion of unconditional hospitality were restrictions are not imposed, tolerance is conditional, restrictive and selective. Therefore Derrida holds that,

> ...tolerance remains a scrutinized hospitality, always under surveillance, parsimonious, and protective of sovereignty. In the best of cases, it's what I would call a conditional hospitality, the one that is most commonly practiced by individuals, families, cities or states. We offer hospitality only on the condition that other follow our rules, our way of life, even our language, our culture, our political system, and so on.[46]

[45] Ibid., 128.
[46] Ibid.

Absolute and unconditional hospitality welcomes the stranger with open arms.

CONCLUSION: HOSPITALITY AND ITS LOGIC OF PURE EXCESS

Upon reading Derrida's notion of pure and unconditional hospitality, one might be tempted to dismiss it easily on the grounds of its being unrealistic and unworkable politically and ethically. It also negates the proper workings of logical thought or even sane reasoning in its total attitude of sheer openness and embrace of the stranger notwithstanding the possible danger that he or she might bring with him or her. Who in his or her proper senses would welcome a potential murderer or terrorist in his or her home? Or who would want to share a table with one who is different and a "suspicious-looking" stranger? Logic dictates that the master of the house should guard his or her house vigilantly and screen out those who are perceived as threats to the security and peace of the household. But Derrida would consider this very cautious stance towards a visitor a mockery of the real meaning of hospitality. And here lies precisely the importance of Derrida's notion of unconditional hospitality in its transcendence or its logic of pure excess. For it forces us to closely consider our ideas and expressions of hospitality and dares us to transcend or go beyond calculative, limited and legalistic forms of hospitality. It compels us to an ever greater and more generous offer of hospitality even to the point of confronting our self-preserving convictions and beliefs. In other words, his idea of pure hospitality keeps the hope alive in our hearts that a better world is still possible especially in the treatment of strangers or visitors. The notion of absolute hospitality also safeguards the reverence given to the wholly *other* considered as gift rather than an unwanted alien or visitor. Even the total stranger, according to Derrida can bring about surprising transformation in the encounter process. Indeed Derrida's pure hospitality is a dangerous notion. But the dangerous and the different has a way of forcing reality to come into its proper senses. For as Derrida argues, "[w]ithout this thought of pure hospitality…we would not even have the idea of the other, of the

alterity of the other, that is someone who enters into our lives without being been invited. We would not even have the idea of love or of 'living together (vivre ensemble)' with the other in a way that is not a part of some totality or 'ensemble.'"[47] Aptly expressed, without this thought (pure hospitality), we will not even have the perspective to even correct our conditional and limited offer of hospitality.

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[47] Ibid., 129.