

University of Nevada, Reno

Global Migration and the Ethics of Hospitality

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
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by

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Abstract

The goal of this thesis is to use an ethical theory of hospitality to address the contemporary global backlash against immigration and forced migration. This thesis traces the development of an ethical theory of hospitality through the work of three major figures, Edmund Husserl, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida. I explore how Husserlian phenomenology reveals the cognitive disposition to categorize through acts of intentionality. I then turn to a Levinasian account of ethics to show that being hospitable amounts to a non-totalizing relation to the other, which renders all intentional relations inhospitable. The expository component ends with a look at how Derrida draws out the paradox inherent in ethics as hospitality. Derrida's deconstruction of ethics as hospitality shows reductive exclusion to be especially pernicious because paradoxically indispensable to any act of hospitality. Finally, by examining popular attitude toward the immigrant and the refugee, I argue that our political tendency toward reductive exclusion—the practice of categorizing and discriminating as an ethical and political necessity—undergird and even promote structural violence against the migrant other.

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Global Migration and the Ethics of Hospitality: Introduction

Thinking ethics as hospitality reveals that justice and injustice are facilitated through a common mechanism. That mechanism is intentionality, which takes the self as sovereign and overlooks a crucial fact of subjective development—that human beings occupy a fundamental social condition. This work will explore the equivocation at the heart of ethics, which precedes and resists the power of ontology but also depends upon ontology for its normative force. The equivocation is what Derrida identifies as the paradox within hospitality. This paradox helps both to explain the pervasiveness of unwelcoming attitudes toward foreigners and to critique such attitudes. The itinerary of this thesis is first, to trace the development of an ethical theory of hospitality through the work of three philosophers, Edmund Husserl, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida. Second, to address the theoretical and practical challenges that arise from an ethical theory of hospitality. Third, to show the implications of this theory for contemporary issues concerning immigration and forced migration. This will be accomplished by looking at a philosophical theory of hospitality built around the notion of alterity, focusing primarily on the paradox of hospitality raised by Jacques Derrida, which is largely a response to, and development of, the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas. I will engage with Levinas's conception of ethics found in *Totality and Infinity* and I will respond to Levinas's criticism of Husserl found therein. Therefore, I will begin with an exposition of Husserl's phenomenology in order to show how it paves the way for Levinasian ethics.

The exposition will be followed by an examination of Levinas's ethics and a look at Derrida's deconstruction of that theory. I will end with a look at the sociopolitical implications of ethics as hospitality for both the guest—the non-citizen who seeks membership—and for the host—the nation or country, and its constituents, in which the non-citizen seeks membership. More specifically, I will provide examples of the propagandizing tropes which occlude hospitality by drawing a picture of the immigrant as a parasite and the refugee as a threat. I will demonstrate how the cognitive disposition to categorize is a tool for violence and is the primary channel through which discriminatory exclusion takes place.

In constructing his notion of ethics, Levinas addresses problems with previous ontological perspectives, specifically targeting Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, and develops a metaphysical theory of relating to another person that does not do violence by categorizing her, but instead recognizes her as essentially exterior to any conceptual framework. Levinas wants us to see that the categories through which we ordinarily group and understand our experience do not capture the other's singularity. At the root of alterity ethics, which grounds a theory of hospitality, is the requirement that we take the other not as an object—a thing that can be described and summed up by a finite list of characteristics—but as irreducibly singular. It is the goal of the first chapter to show both how Husserlian intentionality paves the way for an ethical theory of hospitality and also how intentional consciousness is an instrument of social and political discrimination.

Levinas focuses on the ethical impulse that compels me to welcome the other unconditionally and fills me with a sense of responsibility for the other; however, as Derrida points out, this impulse can only be realized through concrete action. It follows that my ethical impulse must be grounded politically and so depends upon the same impulse that leads me to preserve my sovereignty at the expense of the other. In such an instance of self-preservation, what I may fail to see is that sovereignty depends upon hospitality. To that point, this work will show that there is an interdependence between the host and guest that means one cannot be wholly sovereign any more than one can be wholly for-the-other. Because it is not possible for one to be purely ethical or purely political, one's imperialist tendencies must be checked by an attitude of hospitality while one's ethical impulse is at the same time supplemented by political measures of self-preservation. The challenge is always to bear in mind that ethics and politics are, in fact, inextricably linked and avoid letting self-preservation overshadow one's ethical responsibility. The objective is to eradicate the misunderstanding that sovereignty is an absolute right and can be pursued without regard for the other.

Employing Levinas's distinction between the ethical and the political, I hope to reframe the discussion of global migration around responsibility and suggest that current policies and practice emphasize a responsibility to the self, or the state, while overlooking the responsibility to the other, or the migrant. This is done through what I am calling "categorical violence," a concept used to capture the sense in which our cognitive disposition to make the world intelligible through categories, that is, Husserlian

intentionality, places constraints on the objects of our intention. When the object of our intention is an irreducibly singular person, those constraints violate the other's singularity. To be hospitable is to take responsibility for the other, which involves welcoming the other beyond categories. Ultimately, this work will offer a new way to understand the practice of receiving the foreigner and show that exclusion is rooted in the categorial violence of our intentional consciousness.

I. The Root of Hospitality

The ethical theory of hospitality that is the focus of this work has its roots in early phenomenology with a special indebtedness to Edmund Husserl. This chapter is devoted to elucidating Husserl's theory of intentionality in order to show both how it is indispensable to Levinas's ethics and also to show on what grounds Levinas sets himself in opposition to Husserl.

Husserlian phenomenology is in part a response to the Cartesian influence over Western philosophy and is critical of the representational theory of knowledge that had been largely taken for granted. Husserl's work is also a rejection of the view that consciousness is a passive receptacle for ideas impressed upon it by some external and separate object. Instead, Husserl argues that consciousness is intentional, which for him means that consciousness is actively engaged with objects of experience through sense-bestowal. This theory of intentionality brings self and object closer together by showing consciousness to be something that necessarily transcends itself. Husserl grounds this view in the observation that there is an incongruity between what is immediately given in perception and what is actually experienced. Mere perception cannot grasp an object in its totality and consciousness overcomes this inadequacy by bringing meaning to the

experience.¹ Consciousness totalizes the object by filling in what does not immediately appear so what is experienced is an intelligible whole. Generally speaking, this theory of intentionality highlights the constitutive role that consciousness plays in the way the world appears, which serves as a foothold for Levinasian ethics.

To be more specific, Husserl's work paves the way for an ethics of hospitality in two ways. First, it does so by revealing that consciousness is always object-directed. This gets us out of subject-object dualism by showing that objects do not stand over against consciousness as something inaccessible and unknowable. Instead, Husserl offers a new understanding of subjectivity as precisely where consciousness and world come together. This enables Levinas to conceive of an ethics based on directedness outward, toward the other, that is, an ethics of hospitality. Second, Husserl galvanizes Levinas toward an ethics of hospitality by showing that object-directedness is always by way of a pre-conceived meaning. This gives Levinas the material needed to expose what he thinks of as the violence of relating to another person as one relates to other objects, namely as something reducible to a category.

Husserl does recognize that persons have a dimension that sets them apart from other objects and that the difference in the way they are experienced is something in need of explanation. In other words, Husserl acknowledges that the other is an absence in a way that objects are not. Yet he contends that this difference fits within the framework of

¹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*, trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998). Husserl addresses various acts of consciousness, for example, memory, judgment, thought, belief, etc., as well as their respective inadequacies. For the sake of simplicity, I will be using the example of perception almost exclusively throughout this work.

intentionality, which is the primary point of contention for Levinas. Husserl explains intersubjective and interpersonal experience by his theory of “pairing,” where my experience of another subject is only possible because I have an understanding of myself as a subject.² Despite Husserl’s efforts to set the other apart from objects of ordinary experience, he is unsuccessful in achieving the degree of transcendence that Levinas calls for. Intentionality necessarily involves placing the objects of conscious experience into categories drawn from one’s personal horizon of experience. Therefore, if I intend an object as a subjective experiencer like me, I set them up as an object with a meaning that I have assigned, rather than as an alterity completely separate and non-appropriable to my understanding. In other words, Husserl’s object-directedness reduces the other to the Same, while an ethics of hospitality requires an object-directedness that respects alterity and responds to, rather than sums up, the other.³

² I wish to distinguish between “intersubjective” and “interpersonal.” The former refers to the experience of anything that is *shared with or by* others. In this instance the other is only indirectly implicated. For example, if I am sitting in a teahouse, I experience it as a place where people gather socially, a place where people are employed, a place where people come to write, etc. So my experience of the teahouse involves an intersubjective component. By contrast, “interpersonal” refers to an experience *of* another. In this instance the other is directly implicated. For example, if I am sitting across the table from someone and I observe them working, if I wonder whether they are actually working or spending time on social media, if I engage them in conversation; in all of these instances I am having an interpersonal experience. This distinction will be useful later in the paper when I discuss Husserl’s account of direct and indirect experience of the other.

³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 126. “Same” is a term Levinas uses to refer to the Self or the Ego. Reducing the other to the Same means setting the other up as something graspable by my understanding. In doing this I metaphorically incorporate the other into my Self. The objective of Levinasian ethics is to respect the other as something that I cannot grasp, something utterly exterior.

II. The Mechanics of Intentionality

Husserl focuses on the structure of conscious experience at the level of immanent processes. By “consciousness” he is referring to all subjective experience and he maintains that all such experience is intentional, meaning that consciousness is always of some object. Husserl uses “object” in a broad sense to refer to anything that lends direction to consciousness. For instance, perceiving a log obstructing my path, imagining the possible outcome of a job interview, remembering reading with my mother as a child, judging the quality of a student’s work—all of these are instances of intentionality where the log, the outcome of the job interview, reading with mom, and the student’s work are properly objects. I can also take the very act of consciousness itself as an object of consciousness, as when I reflect on the act of judging, remembering, imagining, perceiving, etc. To be sure, Husserl does not mean for intentionality to be understood as one aspect of consciousness or a mode of consciousness. Rather, “...to have sense or ‘to intend to’ something, is the fundamental characteristic of all consciousness....”⁴ For Husserl, consciousness is by its very nature intentional which simply means that consciousness, or what he sometimes calls the Ego, is always object-directed.⁵ One does not merely love, fear, see, or judge; one loves a beloved, fears a threat, sees a thing, and judges a state of affairs. Taking consciousness to be directed outward, as Husserl does, lays a foundation for Levinas, whose ethics is based in the respect for alterity.

⁴ Husserl, *Ideas*, 217.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

Briefly, intentionality as the structure of conscious experience works in the following way. Inherent in every act of consciousness is what Husserl calls the noesis (the mental process or act of consciousness itself, for instance, perceiving, judging, remembering, etc.) and the noema (the sense or meaning by virtue of which consciousness relates to objects). Husserl writes, “Such noetic moments are, e.g., direction of the regard of the pure Ego to the objects ‘meant’ by it owing to sense-bestowal....”⁶ He sometimes refers to noesis as “noetic content” or the “mode of givenness” of an object. He will sometimes call the noema, “noematic content,” or “noematic correlate.” If, for instance, the mental process is that of perception, Husserl will speak of the noema in terms of “perceptual sense,” as in the following passage:

Perception, for example, has its noema, most basically its perceptual sense, i.e., the perceived as perceived. Similarly, the current case of remembering has its remembered as remembered, just as its <remembered>, precisely as it is “meant,” “intended to” in <the remembering>; again, the judging has the judged as judged, liking has the liked as liked, and so forth.⁷

The intended object (the perceived as perceived) is in part constituted by consciousness through sense-bestowal but it is not contained in consciousness as some ideal thing. The noema, which enables perception *as...* is an abstract entity not identical with the object simpliciter, nor is it completely separate from the object simpliciter. Rather, it is the mediating component of the act (perceiving, judging, etc.). As Husserl says quite plainly, “...*there can be no noetic moment without a noematic moment specifically belonging to*

⁶ Ibid., 214.

⁷ Ibid.

it.”⁸ These two elements—noesis and noema—unite consciousness and world in subjectivity.

Husserl wishes to emphasize the fact that in ordinary experience we do not infer or deduce meaning. For instance, I do not walk in and see an object that I only determine to be a computer after reflecting on its properties. I just come in and *see* a computer. Experiencing an object *as* something is an immediate, pre-reflective occurrence. It must be further noted that, according to Husserl, objects do not *offer up* meaning. Intentional consciousness is apperceptive; we as conscious agents bring meaning to everything we encounter and this meaning comes from a background of pre-established concepts, categories, beliefs, values, associations, etc. For example, a background of assumptions enables me to see a cellphone *as* a cellphone, to value a cellphone *as* an instrument of modern technology, to judge a cellphone *as* a distancing tool that simultaneously facilitates social detachment and social dependence. This background makes up the “horizon” of experience and allows consciousness to make sense of its world.⁹

To elaborate on the apperceptive character of consciousness, Husserl contends that one is never simply conscious of an object, one is conscious of an object in a particular way. On this account, object-directedness is possible through sense-bestowal. Objects of conscious experience don’t appear as brute data from which we infer meaning; they appear to us as already meaningful. Husserl uses the terms “meaning” and “sense” interchangeably and he asserts that sense-bestowal is responsible for the intelligibility of

⁸ Husserl, *Ideas*, 226.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

the world. I make sense of an object by assimilating it into a body of concepts and ideas already familiar to me. Husserl writes,

...apperception is our surplus, which is found in experience itself, in its descriptive content as opposed to the raw existence of sense: it is the act-character which as it were ensouls sense, and is in essence such as to make us perceive this or that object, see this tree, e.g., hear this ringing, smell this scent of flowers, etc. etc.¹⁰

Without this surplus of meaning and the assimilation of the object to pre-established ideas, experience, as we know it, is impossible. The way of intentionality is therefore one of appropriation. This is where Levinas becomes critical of Husserl. Levinas does not deny that intentionality plays a large role in how consciousness relates to its world but he does suggest that due to its appropriative nature, intentionality cannot yield an ethical relationship with the other.

III. The Unity of Consciousness and World Through Apperception

It has been demonstrated thus far that on Husserl's view, the mind doesn't make up the world, but it also doesn't simply mirror it. He sets himself apart from the Cartesian representational theory of sense perception, which maintains that objects themselves are not directly experienced; rather, what is experienced is an idea of the object present in the mind. Husserl offers an alternative wherein objects are directly experienced and the intelligibility of an object relies as much on what is given to consciousness as by what consciousness brings to the experience. Husserl describes perception as "the self-giving

¹⁰ Husserl, *Ideas*, 87-88.

of the actual present” and argues the intelligibility of an object goes beyond what is self-given.¹¹

To explain, we cannot perceive an object in its totality, only from a particular angle or perspective. Perceptually speaking, objects come in and out of one’s awareness, they enter the foreground and recede into the background, they show themselves one angle at a time, and yet objects are experienced as intelligible wholes. To take a simple example, we are presented with a content (the top of a desk) but what we intend is the object in its totality (the entire desk and all of its concomitant implications, associations, meanings). On Husserl’s view, this perceptual limitation is overcome by the constitutive nature of consciousness. I experience the object as a totality because I contribute something to the experience, namely my own pre-established sense of what a table is. It follows that there is a lack of coincidence between the given content and the intended object, between the mere perception and what is experienced.

I see a thing, e.g. this box, but I do not see my sensations. I always see one and the same box, however it may be turned and tilted. I have always the same “content of consciousness”—if I care to call the perceived object a content of consciousness. But each turn yields a new “content of consciousness,” if I call experienced contents “contents of consciousness,” in a much more appropriate use of words. Very different contents are therefore experienced, though the same object is perceived. The experienced content, generally speaking, is not the perceived object.¹²

¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, trans. James Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 60.

¹² Edmund Husserl, “Consciousness as Intentional Experience,” *Logical Investigations, Volume 2* (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul/Humanities Press), 104.

In experience we anticipate what is to come, even if it is never directly given. When the intended object is given to my perception and what is given differs from what I anticipated, it is said that the meaning-intention is unfulfilled. Meaning-fulfillment is achieved when demonstrative experience and logical investigation into the appearance yield precisely what was intended.

The takeaway is that experience is a progressive unfolding that transcends what is merely offered to the senses. To better understand the dynamic nature of subjective experience it will do to look at Husserl's discussion of time. The experience of time is not as a series of discrete moments but is a dynamic unity of the immediate past, the present, and the immediate future.¹³ Consciousness necessarily grasps more than what is given right now and does so thanks to its temporal horizon. Husserl writes, "...every mental process is... a continuous flow of retentions and protentions mediated by a flowing phase of originarity itself in which there is consciousness of the living now of the mental process in contradistinction to its 'before' and 'after.'"¹⁴ To take Husserl's preferred example when discussing time, consider the way that a piece of music is experienced. A piece of music has temporal extension; the different aspects of a melody cannot exist simultaneously but only appear across time. Nevertheless, I experience the piece of music as having what Husserl calls a width of presence. I experience it in its temporal duration. On Husserl's view we are at any given time, and particularly when observing temporally

¹³ Husserl, *Internal Time Consciousness*, 56, 60-81. The immediate future, through protention, and the immediate past, through retention, are inextricably linked to the present perception in a synthesized temporal experience.

¹⁴ Husserl, *Ideas*, 179.

enduring objects like a melody, co-conscious of what has just occurred and what is about to occur. Taking another example, if I move around a California Redwood in order to obtain a more exhaustive presentation of it, then the different profiles of the tree do not present themselves as disjointed fragments, but are perceived as synthetically integrated moments. The experience of temporal objects, as well as the experience of change, succession, and identity across time would be impossible if consciousness were only aware of that which is given in a punctual now.

This seems intuitive enough; Husserl wants us to appreciate that at the phenomenal level consciousness operates within this tripartite temporal framework. At every instant (primary-impression) I am carrying the experience of the moment before (retention) and anticipating the experience of what is to come (protention).¹⁵ This synthesis makes for my dynamic-progressive experience of the world as something that unfolds and reveals itself as meaningful. In one of his more poetic moments, Husserl frames intentionality by saying, “the foreground is nothing without the background.”¹⁶ We can thus understand internal time-consciousness as part and parcel of intentionality, where the intended object is always more than what is immediately given and the experience is possible by virtue of apperceptive consciousness.

¹⁵ Husserl, *Internal Time Consciousness*, 50-80.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

IV. Intentionality and the Other

What philosophical implications follow from a theory that places intentionality at the center of all conscious experience? Thanks to Husserl, we are no longer operating within the early modern paradigm that situates the “subject” over against the “object.” To say consciousness is fundamentally intentional means consciousness and its objects are united through subjectivity. The self and the world cannot be understood in isolation from one another. How does this relate to an ethics of hospitality? It suggests we are fundamentally related to what is outside of us. But it also suggests this relationship is one of appropriation and assimilation—a relationship that Levinas will argue is inherently unethical.

It is evident from Husserl’s examination of the structures of conscious experience that what I experience is always more than what I immediately perceive. I cannot see every part of a table at any given moment, nor do I need to, to experience it as a table. In the same way, I cannot see every part of a person at any given moment, nor do I need to, in order to experience them as another subject. The difference is that with a table, I can perceive every part separately and at different times. I can interact with a variety of tables, or at the very least observe others interacting with them, and become familiar with the function all tables share. This is how I come to understand the essence of the object and see it *as* a table, and it is also how I come to verify any intentional act and achieve meaning-fulfillment. Such verifiability and meaning-fulfillment are not possible with persons. True to the phenomenological method, Husserl addresses this problem by first

turning to the experience itself. He says that I experience others as worldly objects like any other, but not simply as worldly objects,

They are in fact experienced also as governing psychically in their respective natural organisms. Thus peculiarly involved with animate organisms, as “psychophysical” Objects, they are “in” the world. On the other hand, I experience them at the same time as subjects for this world, as experiencing it (this same world that I experience) and, in so doing, experiencing me too, even as I experience the world and others in it.¹⁷

Though a person exists as a bodily entity that I can perceive, each person is at the same time more than their bodily existence and this “something more” is in principle off limits to my perception.¹⁸ This presents a problem for intentionality. If I can never experience that element by virtue of which a thing is what it is, how do I appropriately ascribe meaning? What we are dealing with is an entity physically present to my perception the way that other objects are but that has its own subjective experience forever inaccessible to my perception—a radical absence. In the fifth chapter of his *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl attempts to square this fact with his theory of intentionality. I observe that this particular object, another person, is different from the other objects that surround me.

Nevertheless, Husserl writes:

Imperturbably I must hold fast to the insight that every sense that any existent whatever has or can have for me—in respect of its “what” and its “it exists and actually is”—is a sense in and arising from my intentional life, becoming clarified and uncovered for me in consequence of my life’s constitutive syntheses, in systems of harmonious verification.¹⁹

¹⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 91.

¹⁸ The dynamic, inaccessible interiority that defines the other is what Levinas calls “singularity.” This will be explained in greater detail in chapter two of this work.

¹⁹ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 91.

These systems of harmonious verification are, for Husserl, the meaning-intention and meaning-fulfillment involved in the progressive unfolding of subjective experience. The “what” of an object—that “it exists and actually is”—is accomplished intentionally, however, every person is at the same time a “who,” and the “who” of the person is not available for intentional experience.

Husserl devotes his fifth Cartesian meditation to the topic of intersubjectivity and interpersonal experience and he uses the notion of pairing to account for the anomalous encounter with another person. Here we find Husserl’s transcendental theory of experiencing someone else, or a transcendental theory of “empathy,” which involves taking the other to be a subjective experiencer like me.²⁰ Husserl queries:

How can my ego, within his peculiar ownness, constitute under the name, “experience of something other”, precisely something other—something, that is, with a sense that excludes the constituted from the concrete make-up of the sense-constituting I-myself, as somehow the latter’s analogue?²¹

In other words, if experiencing something as intelligible requires assimilation, how do I experience the other in its unassimilable otherness? Husserl’s answer is that every direct experience of another person occurs through the process of pairing. He says, “...ego and alter ego are always and necessarily given in an original “pairing” ...[where] pairing is a primal form of that passive synthesis which we designate as “association,” in contrast to passive synthesis of “identification.”²² Husserl effectively means that because I can

²⁰ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 93.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

²² *Ibid.*, 112.

understand a dimension of my own being that is thoughtful, emotive, willful, and private, then other entities like me must possess that same dimension. Any object intended as “other subject” will carry these qualities within its particular sense. Because I know myself as a subject, when I see another entity betraying a similar pattern of behaviors and possessing similar physical features to myself the experience will involve the sense that they are an experiencer-like-me.

Husserl also contends that the other is experienced indirectly. Even when we are not immediately confronted by another subject we carry with us the experience of the other by living in a world that is shared. Husserl takes the objective world as evidence for the intersubjective world, as he says that the sense of “Objective Nature” includes with it the sense of “thereness-for-everyone” and “this is always cointended wherever we speak of Objective actuality.”²³ In other words, part of the sense that accompanies my experience of anything whatsoever is that it is also experienceable by others:

In the natural, the world-accepting attitude, I find differentiated and contrasted: myself and others. If I “abstract” (in the usual sense) from others, I “alone” remain. But such abstraction is not radical; such aloneness in no respect alters the natural world-sense, “experienceable by everyone,” which attaches to the naturally understood Ego and would not be lost, even if a universal plague had left only me.²⁴

Husserl is suggesting that the world as we know it is already a shared world. Although Levinas challenges Husserl on the direct experience of the other, Husserl’s views on indirect experience serve as evidence for what Levinas will emphasize is the fundamental

²³ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 92.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

social condition of all persons. Although I do not realize it from within the natural attitude, I cannot detach myself or anything that I encounter from its sense of sociality and in that respect the other is built into my paradigm of understanding.²⁵

Returning to Husserl's account of direct experience, the other is never given as a primary perception so the experience of the other amounts to an intentional modification of my own self-understanding. The way I relate to the other is as something derivative. Husserl sees that the other's interiority is never uncovered so my intentional experience of the other cannot be fulfilled by perceptual verification. He therefore claims the other is "conceivable only as an analogue of something included in my peculiar ownness."²⁶ This is precisely what Levinas wants to get away from. We engage with and respond to the objects of our environment based on what we see these objects *as*—based on the meaning-intentions that we ascribe. It follows that if I engage with and respond to the other as an analogue of myself then I am engaging with and responding to the other in terms of a category that I place the other in.

²⁵ Husserl distinguishes between the natural attitude and the phenomenological attitude. The natural attitude is the mode that most people occupy most of the time. It is a pre-reflective attitude of acceptance toward the world as given to us, whereby one takes objects to exist alongside consciousness just as they appear. The phenomenological attitude is attained when one willfully directs their attention toward the mental processes themselves. In attending to the mental processes, one is able to sort through what is the contribution of consciousness and what is not. In the natural attitude we forget or overlook the active role consciousness plays in constituting the world. We lose sight of the process by which our world comes to us as meaningful. The phenomenological attitude, on the other hand, involves a shift in focus away from the given object and toward the appearance of the object, that is, the meaning we give it. It is a reflective attitude of recognition toward the world as constituted, in part, by subjectivity.

²⁶ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 114-115.

V. The Limits of Intentionality

The sense of the other in direct experience—what I intend whenever I encounter a subject—does not reach the degree of transcendence Levinas demands. Husserl’s position is that all experience is perspectival and knowledge is achieved by placing the objects of consciousness into preconceived categories. This is where Husserl’s phenomenology falls short for Levinas, who rhetorically asks:

Is all otherness (*altérité*) only qualitative, a diversity that allows itself to be collected under genera and forms brought back to the Same...? A deeper reflection on what is specifically human may, however, lead us to doubt the appropriateness of this line of thought. . . Otherness in the case of ‘indiscernibles’ does not refer them back to a common genus nor to a time that might be synchronizable in representations through memory or history.²⁷

The ‘indiscernibles’ Levinas speaks of are others qua otherness—the individual stripped away of all generalizable traits.²⁸ He is claiming here that indiscernibility, which he characterizes elsewhere as a person’s inner life, makes subjectivity impervious to “the regard of the pure Ego”²⁹ and so human beings cannot be made objects of intentional consciousness. Levinas rejects Husserl’s belief that his version of intentionality can account for the complete experience of the other. For Levinas, not everything that consciousness comes across is available to understanding in the way it needs to be in

²⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, “Beyond Intentionality,” in Alan Montefiore (ed.), *Philosophy in France Today*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 106.

²⁸ The use of ‘indiscernibility’ here is not to be confused with Leibniz’s identity of indiscernibles. As unhelpful as this word may be, Levinas uses ‘indiscernibility’ to describe what radically individuates persons—the singularity left over when all categorizable traits are stripped away. To discern something is to make sense of something such that you can compare, contrast, and measure it against other discernible things. What makes a person singular is that they are not comprehensible or measurable.

²⁹ Husserl, *Ideas*, 214, 257.

order for intentionality to be the very nature of conscious experience. I can have an experience of the singular other but how I relate to this other is not merely as something I “know.” Categories are the instruments of knowledge so my understanding cannot reach that which falls outside of all categories. Levinas writes, “the alterity of the Other does not depend on any quality that would distinguish him from me, for a distinction of this nature would precisely imply between us that community of genus which already nullifies alterity.”³⁰ If, as Levinas believes, the essential interiority of the other cannot be made available to my knowledge, then it follows that what I intend the other *as* will always be inadequate.

Levinas describes the other as “beyond being”—unintelligible and therefore not something that I can integrate neatly into my conceptual horizon.³¹ Any attempt to conceptualize and try to understand the other—to intend the other—is an act of violence. Levinas explains how intentionality is a violation of the other’s singularity by describing what is going on when one intends anything:

Intelligibility, characterized by clarity, is a total adequation of the thinker with what is thought, in the precise sense of a mastery exercised by the thinker upon what is thought in which the object’s resistance as an exterior being vanishes. This mastery is total and as though creative; it is accomplished as a giving of meaning: the object of representation is reducible to noemata.³²

³⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 194.

³¹ Emmanuel Levinas, “Beyond Being,” *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991).

³² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 124.

The noesis-noema structure of conscious experience results in adequation between the thinker and the thought. Levinas takes this as a form of conceptual imperialism, which seeks to eliminate anything foreign from experience. Levinas conceives of this imperialism with the metaphor of grasping; to grasp something with the mind, as with the hand, is to take possession of it.³³ Meaning is the currency of conscious experience and where a person “overflows its meaning” it also escapes my grasp.³⁴ To make this more concrete, I walk through my daily life and I can, for the most part, make sense of everything that I encounter. The ordinary objects that populate my world are not a mystery to me and when I do encounter something unfamiliar, I can familiarize myself with it by studying its physical properties, doing research into its function, and learning about its genealogy. An inquiry of this sort, when in an effort to understand a person, will only give me quiddity—“that it is exists and actually is,”—never singularity. In direct experience with a person, I am confronted by a resistance and made to realize the limits of my conceptual sovereignty. Levinas writes, “clarity is the disappearance of what could shock,” he goes on, “the same is in relation with the other but in such a way that the other does not determine the same; it is always the same that determines the other.”³⁵ Here Levinas is talking about the experience of anything whatsoever, not necessarily a subject, and he points out the asymmetry of determination by intentional consciousness. For intentional consciousness, nothing is foreign. My sense of true objectivity comes when

³³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 158-162.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

something resists me. I can make sense of objects by incorporating them into my horizon but for the reasons delineated above, I cannot do this with persons. Nevertheless, the other is still somehow experienced. Levinas will say this experience is not ontological in nature, but metaphysical, and it manifests itself in the face-to-face.³⁶

VI. Categorical Violence

Reimagining consciousness and world as united through subjectivity is the beginning of a movement in philosophy that takes the reality that is most significant to be the one that is unveiled in concrete experience. This is fundamental to an ethics grounded in the concrete experience of the other in the face-to-face. Husserl focuses on the progressive unfolding of one's experience in everydayness and this shift in emphasis is a jumping off point for Levinas, who takes up Husserl's groundwork on subjectivity and formulates an ethical theory of other-directedness. Levinas agrees that intentionality is the primary mode through which subjective human experiencers engage with the world. However, Levinas disagrees that the version of intentionality presented by Husserl offers a complete account of transcendental experience. What Husserl's theory of intentionality demonstrates is that the way of human understanding is one of classification, categorization, discrimination and organization according to what is already intelligible and familiar. What is missing from Husserl's philosophy is an account of singularity which is the basis for Levinasian ethics and central to ethics as hospitality. In what

³⁶ The concept of the face-to-face as well as Levinas's unique understanding of metaphysics and ontology are present throughout *Totality and Infinity* and will be brought to light in chapter two of the present work.

follows, I will show that Husserl gives Levinas the material needed to construct an ethical theory of hospitality by uncovering the basic and essential human tendency to discriminate. Levinas shows intentionality to be a violation of the other because it necessarily places constraints on what any intended object is or can be. Every instance of categorization subordinates the singular to the generalizable which, when directed toward persons, carves off an important part of subjective existence. I will refer to the type of violence stemming from intentional consciousness as “categorical” in order to distinguish it from other forms of violence such as symbolic, structural, or physical. As a result of the phenomenological and epistemological need to categorize uncovered by Husserl, humans are predisposed to take the world as something wholly available to understanding and thereby develop a sense of self as sovereign. Turning now to Levinas, I will show that categorization leads to prioritization, which gives way to the dehumanizing hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion that will be addressed in the final chapter of this thesis.

I. Hospitality as Non-Reduction

Emmanuel Levinas opens *Totality and Infinity* with an indictment of Western philosophy. His goal, he says, is to describe what Western philosophy has failed to account for. What he describes is an ethics of hospitality. In a contemporary global climate of hostility toward immigrants, few philosophers have done as much to shed light on the fear of the other, and the inhospitable behavior stemming therefrom, as Emmanuel Levinas. He locates the root of discrimination and violence in the distinction we make between “same” and “other.” This distinction ordinarily arises from perceived (or assumed) characteristics that set people apart from one another. “Otherising” is an expression often used in theories of oppression to point out instances where difference is marketed as a justification for exclusion and violence. Levinas uses the term “other” in just the opposite way. He takes otherness—radical alterity or singularity—to be what commands hospitality. My moral responsibility is for the other *qua* other; alterity contributes to my responsibility for other people rather than justifying my indifference. Levinas writes, “the fundamental fact of the ontological scission into same and other is a non-allergic relation of the same with the other.”³⁷ In other words, I am equipped with the ontological instruments to identify difference only because I am part of a community prior to, or beyond difference. It is not what I have in common with another person that makes me responsible for her. Instead, Levinas argues that the ethical relationship is

³⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 305.

established before commonality or difference. Levinas redefines otherness by having it denote every human person's resistance to categorization. Levinas equates ethics with "the welcoming of the other by the same" and "the calling into question of the same by the other."³⁸ Both of these descriptions invite us to understand ethics not as a system but as an orientation and an attitude. An attitude of hospitality emphasizes the ethical imperative to welcome the other *unconditionally*, which prioritizes the singular individual over the particularities of their existence.³⁹ To be hospitable is to welcome the other beyond categories.

Levinas launches his work with a response to Edmund Husserl, characterizing intentionality as reductive totalization and, thus, as inhospitable. Against the backdrop of reductivism, Levinas sets himself apart by stating "[*Totality and Infinity*] will present subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality."⁴⁰ Levinas argues that the Husserlian picture of human experience, which defines subjectivity as the unity of consciousness and its objects, leaves out a key element that is not only prevalent in the everyday experience of all human beings but conditions the very philosophy Husserl promotes. Levinas proposes that subjectivity is not defined by its directedness toward objects but by a prior directedness toward the singular other. Absent a theory of singularity, Levinas claims that "western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of

³⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 44-6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

being.”⁴¹ The middle and neutral term referred to here is something we are now quite familiar with—it is the sense or meaning that is extracted (albeit not deliberately) from one’s horizon and synthesized into an experience. Sense-bestowal, an essential feature of intentional experience, is reductive and inhospitable. Levinas uses the term “totality” to refer to the reductive tendencies of western philosophy which seek to establish a “panoramic” picture of the world as wholly graspable through human categories.⁴² To this he opposes “infinity,” which refers to the resistance of certain things—other people—to categorization. Ethics, for him, is a metaphysical relationship that welcomes alterity and responds to, rather than sums up, the singular other who cannot be captured by the panoramic of ontology. Ethics, therefore, is hospitality.

Levinas claims that despite Husserl’s efforts he does not achieve the full picture of what it is like to be a human in the world. The other is radically exterior to the self and will always escape the meaning-giving glance of consciousness. To dilute the other into something knowable is on Levinas’s view to promote power and freedom over hospitality. He writes, “‘I think’ comes down to ‘I can’—to an appropriation of what is, to an exploitation of reality. Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power.”⁴³ What Levinas calls ‘ontology’ then is any practice that lends meaning to the world by the application of concepts. It involves relating by generalizing, reducing, and comparing. The totalizing effects of the ontological method render the world as something contained

⁴¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 294.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 46.

and completely available to comprehension. Levinas claims that by fitting the intersubjective world into a framework of inter-referential categories, ontology pretends completion and thus does violence. As Levinas sees it, knowledge tries to reduce the other to a concept but the person who is absolutely other cannot be thus reduced. One might say that in knowing something, or in knowing anything, I permit no alterity—everything that I “know” is an object of my consciousness and, in a sense, becomes a part of me. For this reason Levinas charges philosophy, specifically ontology, with being an “egology.”⁴⁴ Its egoist endeavor is the reduction of every worldly object, including persons, to something knowable and familiar, to me.

II. The Event of Singularity

In response to the tradition of ontology, and specifically the work of his teachers, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, Levinas’s work highlights the presence of alterity—or singularity—which makes possible a social relation prior to concepts or categories. Singularity is not to be confused with particularity. Borrowing Plato’s concepts we might say that something is singular if there is no corresponding form under which it can be universalized. Levinas sees every human person as singular in this way. Although we can group individuals under certain categories (I belong to the category “American,” “philosopher,” “daughter” etc.), these categories do not capture the ability of the other to separate from universal themes and resist such categorization. As Levinas

⁴⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 44.

writes, “the ipseity of the I consists in remaining outside the distinction between the individual and the general.”⁴⁵ In addition to “ipseity,” Levinas talks about singularity in terms of “inner life” or “psychism,” which constitutes an “*event* in being,” rather than one characteristic among others that make up the complex identity of any given individual.

A helpful linguistic distinction for understanding singularity can be found in the French words “*autre*,” which means anything that is *other than myself*, and “*autrui*,” which means *other-as-subjective-experiencer*. Anything and everything that does not occupy my exact spacio-temporal position, that is, anything not identical to myself, is *autre*, but only other persons are *autrui*.⁴⁶ Being a subjective experiencer involves selection. I am always free to resist what I am immersed in or to focus on it and make it part of my inner life. To be singular is “to separate oneself, to not remain bound up with a totality...” and this creates a dimension of possibility and choice, which places the subject outside of collective ontology.⁴⁷

Levinas famously invokes the face as a metaphor for singularity. The face of the other, or better yet the presence of the other, affects me by resisting every attempt on my part to integrate them neatly into my conceptual domain. “The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face. This *mode* does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of

⁴⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 118.

⁴⁶ One might object that singularity itself is a category under which all humans fall and in that sense, singularity is a self-defeating concept. This is an issue that needs to be addressed but I believe it is a semantic problem that doesn’t impede the theory of hospitality.

⁴⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 175.

qualities forming an image.”⁴⁸ Phenomenologically, I encounter the world as a sovereign ego. That is because, as Husserl teaches us, intentionality has a monopoly on experience. The face of the other pulls me out of sovereignty. It disrupts my world and takes me out of my “at home.” For this reason, ethics is not ontological or even phenomenological. Ethics is a break from ontology and the worldliness produced from it. Ethics is a shock to the egoist system. It shifts me out of the solipsism of intentionality and into a heteronomous directness toward the other, whom I cannot contain.

Hospitality as a welcome of the other by the same is, then, preceded by a critique of the same by the other. In the ethical experience, I am called to respond to the other. This call serves as a critique of my own autonomy. Since, though, my interactions are almost always intentional in nature, the only true objectivity I encounter is the other. The other is the only object that resists my attempts to make sense of, and thereby control, what is before me. Levinas writes, “we call it ‘the same’ because in representation the I precisely loses its opposition to its object; the opposition fades, bringing out the identity of the I despite the multiplicity of its objects, that is, precisely the unalterable character of the I. To remain the same is to represent to oneself.”⁴⁹ The presence of another person, the face-to-face, reminds me that my conceptual reach is limited and my sovereignty is derivative.

According to Levinas, the meaning that I assign to the events, objects, and people that populate my world comes from an already instantiated totality; it comes from a

⁴⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 50.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

system of references, intelligible prior to the encounter, that is established through the intermingling of collective and individual history with private experience. This referential identity means any entity that abides in such a system has an identity constituted by the observer. This forces a limit upon these objects because they cannot be understood as anything more than their relations. Totalizing the other amounts to constituting the other on my own terms and therefore disregards the quality of indeterminate otherness that makes subjectivity.

Formally speaking, to be singular means to be a subject whose ego is formed both by separating oneself from and by reflecting on themes encountered in everyday experience. Making his point more concretely, Levinas writes, “Recollection in a home open to the Other—hospitality—is the concrete and initial fact of human recollection and separation; it coincides with the Desire for the Other absolutely transcendent.”⁵⁰ Hospitality is opening myself up and being responsive to the singular other that resists me. Singularity is significant for the ethical experience because, when I am confronted by something that resists me, I am made to realize the injustice of my supposed sovereignty. And when I realize I am not sovereign, I am in a position to receive. In this way, hospitality is tantamount to self-critique.

⁵⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 172.

III. Language and *Response-ability*

For Levinas, language is the locus of ethics because language enables relation without reduction. The other is reached not through knowledge but through the experience of metaphysical desire for the other *as* other and such desire is accomplished in discourse. This assertion seems counterintuitive considering Levinas's efforts to place ethics beyond the scope of reductive ontology and considering that language is an enabler of reductivism. However, Levinas identifies a double role of language; it is both an instrument of ontology and a metaphysical expression by which I relate to the absolute other. It is the latter mode—language as expression—that makes sense of the entire human enterprise of knowledge and meaning. Language as expression divests Husserl and Heidegger of their respective claims on first philosophy as Levinas argues that the metaphysical role of language, the “saying,” subtends every ontological mode in which it is employed, the “said.” Through direct address I can connect to the other without rendering him or her a mere theme for my apprehension. By speaking *to* the other, and inviting the other to speak to me, I engage in a non-reductive relationship that preserves the alterity of both parties. In other words, I engage in an act of hospitality. Language, in its metaphysical role, is discourse, which does not delimit by recourse to words that generalize, but is “speaking to... .” On Levinas's view, speaking to is the primary role of language.

However, as was previously mentioned, language is also the vehicle for reductive ontology. It is through themes, concepts, and categories—all of which are intimately

linked to language—that we gain an ontological grasp of the world around us. If used to reduce the other, the ontological role of language is a weapon that threatens alterity. However, constitutive language can also render a world offerable to the other. Words as signs allow for “the entry of the thing into the sphere of the other.”⁵¹ They make it possible for me to share my world with another person and for another person to share their world with me. My subjectivity is formed when I retreat and reflect. Reflection is done by way of the logical tools afforded me by my social existence. The other offers a world to me that I then use to form a self. Without the other, there is no same.

Although language is a way of exchanging ideas and conveying content, Levinas maintains that it nonetheless originates in the face-to-face relation, that is, the relation to the other *as* other. Response (viz. *response-ability*) and receptivity to the other are at the heart of language and ethics. Levinas claims that *all* language stems from the expressions and responses of the face-to-face relationship. And since there is something more going on in this relationship than a mere exchange of themes (I say this, you say that), then there must be something more to language than mere content. Levinas argues that language is founded by the metaphysical desire to connect to other people and in this way language facilitates social existence. It follows that language as an instrument of knowledge is its derivative mode. Levinas takes the primary mode of language to be expression through discourse. He says, “Language thus conditions the functioning of rational thought: it gives it a commencement in being,” he goes on: “Language conditions

⁵¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 209.

thought—not language in its physical materiality, but language as an attitude of the same with regard to the Other irreducible to the representation of the Other, irreducible to an intention of thought, irreducible to a consciousness of... , since relation to what no consciousness can contain, relating to the infinity of the Other.”⁵² Levinas is claiming that language, as the manifestation of the metaphysical desire to connect with the other, founds objectivity. Read “objectivity” as making something an object—something outside of me that I, and others, can relate to.

A meaningful world is one that I share with others in a society that is genuine plurality. When we thematize we are offering something to the other, but the thing I offer is not something *already* objective for me that I share by *putting it into* language. What I offer *becomes* objective, that is, accessible to the other, when it is put into language. The act of sharing is the act of objectification. Language takes what was interior and makes it exterior, thereby allowing me to share it with others. Levinas states, “utilizing a sign is therefore not limited to substituting an indirect relation for the direct relation with a thing.” In other words, signs do not just mediate, they give us a way of sharing things with others and of connecting to others. Signs “permit me to render things offerable, detach them from my own usage, alienate them, render them exterior”⁵³—and that is how we get the infrastructure of objectivity upon which communities, nations, and states are built. It is also that upon which subjectivity is built. Metaphysical desire reveals the fundamental relation that makes the Husserlian and Heideggerian frameworks possible.

⁵² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 204.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 209.

These philosophies fail to get at what makes such a community possible in the first place, namely, the presence of a singular other exterior to me. Levinas asserts, “the ethical, beyond vision and certitude, delineates the structure of exteriority as such. Morality is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy.”⁵⁴

IV. Fundamental Sociality

Ordinarily, we consider ourselves responsible to our friends and family because we stand in a definitive relation to them. By virtue of having a socially assigned connection to my sister, my child, or my friend I sign myself up for the responsibility of caring for and about them. Levinas argues that the ethical relation is not owed only to family and friends. In fact, my personally chosen social sphere is chosen for non-ethical reasons (all reasons are necessarily post-ethical; they come after the fact of metaphysical desire that enacts the ineluctable responsibility for all others). Ethics recognizes that the relation to all others is the source of my own subjectivity and gives rise to my ability to offer and demand reasons. To the question “why be moral?” Levinas replies that the question comes too late. The very imposition of such a question presupposes an indebtedness to social existence and to the other. If it were not for the other who opens the world to me, I would not be able to meaningfully occupy the skeptical position. The other introduces me to objectivity and so I am fundamentally *response*-able for the other. Sociality is the basis for all intelligible experience. It follows that my sovereignty is itself

⁵⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 304.

derivative of my social connectedness. I am bound to the other from the beginning. I can choose not to respond, but I cannot make the other a matter of indifference. I am responsible prior to norms, prior to truth and falsity, prior to justice. All reasoned systems for moral decision-making are possible only because of what makes us responsible prior to any encounter—our fundamental sociality.

The social condition which founds all human reason destroys the notion of the wholly sovereign ego. My most fundamental mode of existence is social connectedness, not separation and freedom (though separation and freedom play a crucial role in the formation of subjectivity). The other gives me what I need to separate and build a self; society equips me with the capital for my subjective economy. Prior to intentionality and discursive reasoning there is society. My ego is sustained by the other who gives me objectivity as well as themes from which to form my inner life. If social connection yields moral responsibility then I am responsible before reasons or justifications can even be conceived or demanded. Other people are not just there alongside me in the world. They are the condition for me having a world. To have a world and to reflect critically is already to have a relationship with an other. This condition of being a socially constituted subjectivity makes me responsible to every other just as we ordinarily accept being responsible to friends and family. My ethical responsibility is not reserved for those closest to me. Hospitality is owed to every other.

Levinas does not reject the philosophical contributions of his predecessors. He was among the first to champion the novel phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger.

However, Levinas wishes to show that the work these philosophers do is only possible because we are, at bottom, ethical. In the presence of another human being, we have a metaphysical desire to connect, and we do so by speaking to one another. Objective reality is born of people translating their interiority into symbols, which act as vehicles for sharing our inner lives with others. Language is the bridge between the same and the other which allows us to connect while remaining exterior to one another and not doing each other violence. Levinas writes, “The ‘at home’ [*Le ‘chez soi’*] is not a container but a site where *I can*, where, dependent on a reality that is other, I am, despite this dependence or thanks to it, free.”⁵⁵ Because of its double role as expression and as an instrument of knowledge, language is where the metaphysical and the ontological intersect. The face-to-face invites expression, which develops into discourse that makes interiority exterior and objective. Then objectivity allows for the generalizing, thematizing, and interpreting that make up the rest of human life. Behind every “said” of ontology, there is the primordial “saying” of the ethical relation.

V. Uprooting Sovereignty

Levinas’s significance for global migration is his challenge to traditional notions of sovereignty. Levinas observes that every intentional relationship I enter into allows me to maintain, and even promotes, my autonomy. Husserlian constitutive consciousness—the political relationship *par excellence*—enables my autonomy insofar as I play a role in

⁵⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 37.

how the world appears. But, as Levinas argues, autonomy is called into question by the other that escapes me. The way that I relate to other people when I am not totalizing—the ethical relation—is heteronomous and, although I fail to recognize it much of the time, gives rise to the autonomy that I experience in intentionality. All that I covet as a free, autonomous, individual is indebted to the other.

Levinas defines ethics by heteronomous other-directedness and he grounds all of the laws, practices, and institutions that make up one's world in the social relation. Alterity ethics is an ethics of hospitality both because it expresses a concern for the other and also because I can only be for-the-other if there is an *I* to begin with. Hospitality, in other words, involves giving to the other, but I can't be hospitable if I have nothing to give. Therefore, I feel justified in prioritizing my own interests over the other and in assuming the ego is fundamentally sovereign and only obliged to take the other into account when it doesn't interfere with my personal projects. In ordinary life we are not explicitly aware or focused on our ethical existence, which Levinas takes as primary. Our ethical existence is eclipsed by the totality within which we move on a daily basis and we lose sight of our basic responsibility to others. Levinas writes, "the imprisoned being, ignorant of its prison, is at home with itself."⁵⁶ Being at home in the world is blind to the fact that the ego is not primarily autonomous but heteronomous. Levinas continues, "To be separated is to be at home with oneself. But to be at home with oneself . . . is to live from . . ."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 55.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

All living is heteronomous insofar as all living is “living from....” Whether in sensibility, where I enjoy the “good soup” that sustains my biological existence or in intentional interaction where I enjoy the intelligibility that sustains my ontological existence, I am fundamentally dependent on something outside of me.⁵⁸ Levinas argues that the sovereignty I experience is derivative of a primordial dependence on the other. The fundamental human condition is one of social connection arising from a metaphysical desire to reach the singular other. Out of this desire comes the rest of ontology. Linking moral responsibility to social connection means that I am responsible for the singular other before I can have intentional awareness of this responsibility. Levinas concludes that because the social relation precedes ontology, it also precedes any conditions I may set for ethical commitment. I am committed to the other before I am free to commit or free to refuse commitment. This makes hospitality absolute and unconditional. Diane Perpich argues that the skeptic who asks for a justification of moral responsibility is making a category mistake. Perpich poignantly states, “they look to give reasons, when it is food that the other requires; to [give reasons] is to be on the lookout for the possibility of morally sanctioned indifference to the other.”⁵⁹ The ethics of hospitality is not a system, as this would require and entail definite terms and normative reasons, and that is the work of politics. Ethics is the orientation that gives rise to the system. Cruelty and injustice occur when one ignores the other and it is, in part, the

⁵⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 110.

⁵⁹ Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 89.

misunderstanding of my self as sovereign that leads me to cruelty and injustice.⁶⁰ Levinas writes, “The welcoming of the Other is ipso facto the consciousness of my own injustice—the shame that freedom feels for itself. If philosophy consists in knowing critically, that is, in seeking a foundation for its freedom, in justifying it, it begins with conscience, to which the other is presented as the Other, and where the movement of thematization is inverted.”⁶¹

VI. Ethics and Politics

The force of Levinas’s thought lies in his conception of the ethical and the political. These terms are rethought in distinctive ways that shift what is ordinarily taken as ethical into the realm of politics and raise the standards for what counts as ethics. On his view, all human attitudes and interactions can be understood as a negotiation between ethics and politics. If we take them as pure kinds, “ethics” refers to an unconditional, non-totalizing welcome of the other. Ethics is absolute hospitality—being-for-the-other and responding to the wants and needs of others without hesitation or deliberation. Alternatively, “politics” refers to the rational practice of adjudication by comparing and totalizing, reducing and categorizing.

On Levinas’s view, any time my treatment of another person is based on what I take the other person *as*, my engagement is political in nature. Any engagement with people that is political in nature necessarily is not ethical. Such engagement involves

⁶⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 52.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

intending the other in one way or another and placing conditions on my hospitality. This, in turn, sets the other up as a target for violence and exclusion, which are only ever justified on the basis of what we take the other *as*, that is, by way of a meaning that I assign. Ethics seems diametrically opposed to politics yet depends upon politics to manifest itself concretely. To be ethical requires that I act, but action is rooted in ontology and ontology is inherently unethical. To act ethically is to be hospitable, to offer a space wherein the other can be and to extend the offer free of the limiting conditions that do violence to singularity. Looking forward, in the arena of global migration this means that any policy that places conditions on who can and cannot enter a territory and who does and does not qualify as a citizen—something that every policy must do—is not ethical because it requires one to discriminate based on categories introduced for ease of political organization.

Considering the relationship between metaphysics and ontology, the ethics-politics binary cannot be neatly delineated. The terms are mutually exclusive while being mutually dependent. Politics serves ethics because it sets the other up to be able to receive, yet politics undermines ethics by violating the principle of non-reduction. It follows that there can be no purely ethical gesture nor can there be utter indifference to ethics (pure politics).

VII. Essential Ambiguity

The moves made by Levinas should not be confused with any attempts to reduce the problems of ethics to the articulation of a distinct concept of the good life, or to morality as some concrete set of rules that guide human action and interaction.

Levinasian ethics is not trying to arrive at a universal code of moral conduct. Levinas is driving at a more basic responsibility to others by showing how every theory in general, including moral theories, is derivative of this fundamental social relationship.⁶² To take the other as an object of my knowledge does violence to their singularity by “[reducing] the other to the same.”⁶³ For Levinas, the face is the site of ethics. The face does not *cause* my obligation but points toward it. Levinas roots our humanitarian impulse in the face-to-face encounter, where a conscious agent finds herself confronted by another subjectivity that is more than what appears and that escapes comprehension. The encounter with the other who calls on my ethical impulse involves a responsibility that is not conditioned by any knowledge I could have about the other person, or of the particular situation in which we are both involved. To put it another way, the “whatness” of the other plays no part in my metaphysical desire to connect. Simply by virtue of the other being a “who” that *counts as such*, that has a world of her own, and that is irreducible to concepts, I am called to my responsibility for her.

⁶² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, Section III, Part B. “Language and Objectivity.”

⁶³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46. The “Same” can be understood as my own concepts, ideas, meanings, etc. To reduce the other to the same is to take the other on my own terms, as nothing more than my own conception of them.

It follows that if I am morally responsible for the other by virtue of her singularity then ethics is not a mere fiduciary responsibility that is contractually conditioned. It goes beyond any shared interests, ideology, resources, history, or biology. To the question, “who are we responsible for and what do we owe them?” Levinas answers, “everyone and everything.” The skeptic might reasonably challenge such an implausible demand. After all, I am but one person. I have finite material and psychological resources. And what’s more, I have my own interests and well-being to attend to. The skeptic in this instance is not a rare breed of recalcitrant philosopher. We are all in the business of requiring justification for demands made on us, especially lofty moral demands. Levinas argues that the very act of demanding justification and the practice of reason-giving presupposes a fundamental social indebtedness, which founds ethical responsibility. My sociality makes me responsible for others before the rational structures that lead me to question and demand justification are even built. My nature as a social subject is passed over in intentional experience and my default mode of being in the world causes me to mistake myself as fundamentally sovereign rather than fundamentally connected. I come to realize my mistake when confronted by the singular other that resists me. Singularity points to radical separation and fundamental sociality points to radical connection—both of which are essential to the formation of subjectivity. The unbridgeable distance between me and the other calls me to a responsibility that has been there all along and that is founded by my sociality. For Levinas, ethics is not something we do, although it can (and

must) be cashed out in concrete action. Ethics is something to which we are bound. The onus is not on the one who demands hospitality but on the skeptic to justify turning away.

The work of Emmanuel Levinas is predicated upon the belief that each human being is irreducibly singular and that this points to an irrecusable moral responsibility for every person, by every person. Our moral responsibility is irrecusable because it is prior to reason and, as Levinas boldly claims, founds human reason. The terms Levinas uses to capture the enigmatic quality of the other—alterity, exteriority, radical otherness—tell of the ambiguity of Levinas's project. He is trying to describe something, the nature of which is incomprehensible and non-relational, yet he is forced to capture this idea using words, the nature of which seems utterly relational and in the service of comprehension. Even these words, carefully chosen to evoke a sense of incommensurability, carry a sense of derivation. Alterity is alterity to something, exteriority is exterior to something. As Derrida helps us to see, this ambiguity is an inescapable part of the ethical life. This issue is what Derrida calls the "paradox of hospitality." The paradox is not fatal to Levinas's project, however, but touches on the essential ambiguity of ethical life that appears throughout Levinas's own exposition. Rooting ethics in human singularity—that indiscernible condition of subjectivity—means I can never be ethically justified in offering hospitality to one while turning another away.

I. The Law of Hospitality

To be hospitable is to offer something to the other—food, shelter, comfort, safety, opportunity, rights. And it means doing so with no regard for the particularities of the other—beyond the contingencies of being. In Jacques Derrida’s words, the declaration of absolute hospitality states: “Let us say yes *to who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female.”⁶⁴ But if an ethics is to be more than ideal it must be cashed out in concrete action and this requires that one take particularities into account. Hent de Vries states that to understand ethics as hospitality “immediately raises the question of when, where, under which circumstances, [toward whom], and in what measure this general principle or rule, if that’s what it is, applies. Always? Everywhere? Immeasurably?”⁶⁵ To give anything, whether it be food, shelter, or citizen rights requires totalizing, limiting, and condemning certain individuals while including others. So how do we *act* hospitably? Ethics, for Levinas, is a matter of bracketing similarities and differences and welcoming the other unconditionally. The way we are understanding the

⁶⁴ Jacques Derrida. *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 77.

⁶⁵ Hent de Vries, *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida*, “Hospitable Thought”, pp. 293-398. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 309.

ethics of hospitality makes it akin to a human right—something that is owed to every human by virtue of something common in all humans. The issue that Derrida raises with respect to hospitality can be problematized in the following way: if we are to meet the Levinasian demand for absolute hospitality, then it seems that citizen-rights will inevitably come into conflict with human rights. How, then, do we decide “whom to give to”?

Derrida picks up where Levinas leaves off with the theoretical conclusion that unconditional and absolute responsibility, that is, hospitality based in Levinasian ethics, can't translate itself into concrete, empirical laws without paradox. This is because there is an insoluble antinomy between the law of hospitality—the law that demands unconditional welcome of the new arrival—and the laws of hospitality—those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional.⁶⁶ This antinomy characterizes the conflict between, on the one hand, one's ethical impulse that is guided by the law of hospitality, and on the other, the totalizing tendencies of one's political self that are necessary for the construction of positive laws. The insolubility comes from the interdependence between the two. Ethics requires positive laws in order to be made effective but positive laws can only come about through a violation of the ethical principle of non-reduction. If ethics and politics are essentially in conflict with one another, as this theory suggests, then we are faced with the question: can there be a sociopolitical manifestation of ethics as hospitality? If so, what does it look like?

⁶⁶ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 76.

II. The Paradox of Hospitality

In his deconstruction of Levinasian ethics, Derrida grapples with the conflict between the law of absolute hospitality as presented by Levinas, and the paradox that arises from its implementation. Derrida's primary treatment of hospitality is found in his works *Of Hospitality* and *The Gift of Death*, as well as his lecture "Hostipitality" published in, *Acts of Religion*. In each of these works Derrida appropriates ideas from Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* and engages in an examination that exposes the tensions that arise when a theory of hospitality is translated into practice. Derrida positions himself on the side of Levinasian ethics while at the same time calling attention to the aporia of such an ethic. Derrida does not wish to reject the theory of absolute hospitality, but rather, he wishes to preserve it as the goal of our intersubjective relationships while maintaining awareness of the ways that every engagement in hospitality involves a violation of hospitality.

Derrida builds on Levinas's ethical theory by upholding the idea of singularity and maintaining that every other is absolutely other: "*Tout autre est tout autre.*"⁶⁷ In Derrida's provocative and powerful eulogy, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, he invokes the ambiguity of the expression "Adieu" as a *movement toward* what is incomprehensible—God—and as a linguistic performance of the very ethic that Levinas teaches—speaking *to*, rather than speaking about, the deceased. Nonetheless, Derrida thinks that this theory

⁶⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, Part 3, "Whom To Give To (Knowing Not To Know)", 78 and Part 4, "*Tout autre est tout autre*," pp. 82-116. trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). The expression, *Tout autre est tout autre*, is meant by Derrida to be a play on words. *Tout* translates to "every" and "completely," while *autre* means "other." So this phrase means, "every other (one) is completely/absolutely/every bit other," or "every person is singular."

places an unachievable demand on interpersonal existence. Derrida points out that there is a paradox inherent to the ethics of hospitality in two respects. First, the law of absolute hospitality reveals that for every individual toward whom I am hospitable, there are millions that I must ignore. Second, hospitality involves offering something up, be it a space for the other to live or resources for the other's sustenance. But such things are limited and I can't be hospitable if I don't have something to offer. I cannot invite a stranger into my home without first having a home, and maintaining a home requires that I protect it and preserve it, which involves occasionally closing it off to the outsider. This shows that hospitality requires one to be from time to time and in a certain measure, inhospitable. Echoing Levinas, Derrida concludes that any host must reserve some degree of sovereignty, without it hospitality is impossible.⁶⁸

The paradox of hospitality shows that every attempt to satisfy one's ethical responsibility invariably betrays the principle itself. Derrida notes, "absolute hospitality must not be offered out of duty, but must be graciously offered beyond debt and economy."⁶⁹ When negotiating between the ethical responsibility to help others and the political limitations necessary for any functioning society, where do we draw the line between the self and the other? My social circles are, for the most part, chosen by me so any support I may provide for them, or any welcome that I extend to them, is not an ethical gesture but a political one—it involves discrimination and prioritization. The ethical gesture is extending a welcome and being receptive to those that do not

⁶⁸ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 55.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

necessarily belong to my chosen social circle. Hospitality occurs when I welcome the other beyond categories, common interests, shared history and ideology. The responsibility we feel for those close to us—our friends, family, or fellow citizens—is our ethical impulse constrained by personal (i.e. political) interests. It involves conceptualization, discrimination, and therefore a categorial violation of even the other to whom I extend a welcome. Not only am I behaving inhospitably toward those whom I shut out by reductive exclusion, I am also acting inhospitably toward my selected beneficiaries because the welcome I extend is conditional; it is based on how I understand the other in relation to me. We find ourselves in a constant state of tension between our ethical responsibility to help the stranger and the political requirements for practical sustenance of oneself and one's personally chosen allies. But this presents more than a mere contradiction. I am not just straddling two mutually exclusive yet equally imposing responsibilities. Rather, ethics and politics are mutually exclusive *and* mutually dependent. Levinas states, "politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself; it deforms the I and the other who have given rise to it, for it judges them according to universal rules, and thus as in absentia."⁷⁰ Ethics can't be realized without politics and politics doesn't exist without ethics.

⁷⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 300.

III. Guest as Parasite

In ordinary terms, hospitality involves making an offer to another person, whether material or symbolic. It stands to reason that I can only be hospitable if I have something to give. If I am hospitable to people who exploit my generosity and leave me with nothing to give, then I can no longer be hospitable. Furthermore, if I offer hospitality to more people than I have resources to support, then I can no longer be hospitable. The political, as Levinas conceives it, serves to regulate who receives hospitality, and how much, so as to preserve sovereignty and ensure the possibility of ethics and of future hospitality. Derrida states that “even while keeping itself above the laws of hospitality, *the* unconditional law of hospitality needs the laws, it *requires* them,” he goes on, “[unconditional hospitality] wouldn’t be effectively unconditional if it didn’t have to become effective,” that is, concrete and determinate.⁷¹ Without implementation hospitality is merely abstract and illusory. The problem we face is that the norms and conditions, duties and rights—the laws that are necessarily imposed upon the host as well as the guest—also corrupt and pervert the law of absolute hospitality.⁷²

Levinas’s law of hospitality demands that the welcome of the other be unconditional but, as Derrida points out, in order to preserve the space that makes hospitality possible it is necessary to place restrictions on hospitality. In order to protect one’s own and ensure hospitality in the future there must be constraints placed on who is welcomed. Derrida asks, “How can we distinguish between a guest and a parasite? In

⁷¹ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 79.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 81.

principle, the difference is straightforward, but for that you need a law; hospitality, reception, the welcome offered have to be submitted to a basic and limiting jurisdiction.”⁷³ To identify whether or not a guest is a potential threat we are forced to apply categories. What this means is that inhospitality is not only justified, it is necessary. The guest is always potentially a parasite and so to ensure the security of your home for future hospitality you must scrutinize the new comer. The recognition of this fact coupled with an ideology that takes anything alien or foreign to be a threat has produced a trope where immigrant is metonymic for parasite. According to this ideology, in order to ensure the protection *of* a certain chosen group of people there must be protection *against* certain others. If I pick and choose who I extend hospitality to based on what I know about them and what sort of assurances I can deduce from this information, I am not being hospitable. In Derrida’s words, “If I welcome only what I welcome, what I am ready to welcome, and that I recognize in advance because I expect the coming of the hôte as invited, there is no hospitality.”⁷⁴ But if I am not assured of my own safety and of the security of those resources that allow for hospitality then my very ability to be hospitable is at stake. Furthermore, by welcoming the other who is a stranger I place others for whom I am responsible at risk. My own safety and the safety of those around me is never guaranteed. This leads me to focus my attention on self-preservation.⁷⁵ I am disposed to see the other *as* a parasite and to take myself as sovereign. The inescapable possibility

⁷³ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 59, 61.

⁷⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, “Hostipitality,” ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 362.

⁷⁵ Conceiving of “self” broadly to incorporate my “political” allies.

that the guest will be a parasite (and thus a threat to hospitality) explains my tendency toward reductive exclusion. That we must vet our guests contributes to the misunderstanding that there is a greater responsibility to the self than the other. By reducing the other to a potential threat I feel justified in turning them away.

IV. Host as Guest

If we think of the host as the one in the position to give, the one extending the welcome, and the guest as the one in the position to receive, the one being welcomed, we think too simply. This way of understanding the Levinasian-Derridian theory of hospitality overlooks that the host—the supposedly sovereign individual in the position of power—is as dependent on the guest as the guest is on the host. Taking ethics as hospitality helps us break out of the liberalist paradigm of the sovereign, autonomous subject and reconstitutes society as a collective where each individual has their center of gravity outside of themselves. Restructuring our moral attitudes in this way requires not just seeing that our fundamental condition is social but also in seeing the ways in which the same who welcomes the other is also dependent upon the other—a dependence revealed in the moment of critique. In other words, the host is not only a host but always also a guest. Hospitality entails realizing that my very sovereignty is precarious. Being hospitable to the other—playing the role of the host—involves confronting my own limitations with respect to the other and my own dependence with respect to all others.

If the law of absolute hospitality requires that I respond to the other “beyond debt and economy” then it seems as though the dependence of the host on the guest should have no bearing on the responsibility of the host for the guest. One may object that if my ethical responsibility for the other comes from my dependence on the other then ethics is nothing more than giving back what is owed, which is precisely paying a debt within a circumscribed economy. This objection rests on a misapprehension of the nature of dependence. The relationship between the host and guest, the same and other, is one of indebtedness prior to the possibility of reciprocity and therefore without regard for reciprocity. It is not because I may need the other in the future that I extend hospitality to the other but because I am always already dependent on the other. The purpose of pointing out this dependence is that even within the rational structures by which we explain and justify turning away, the host appears not to be sovereign but to need the guest. Not only does the notion of sovereignty and self-reliance only make sense in relation to another from which I distinguish myself but my sovereignty is sustained by the other that I resist.

From Levinas’s vision of ethics as critique we come to understand that any host is at the same time the guest. In the face of the other I am reminded that I am not sovereign and being in a condition of fundamental sociality makes me a hostage to the other—*always already* beholden to my neighbor, the stranger. The state of being a hostage is a state of being “accountable for what I did not do, accountable for the others before the

others.”⁷⁶ The host depends on the guest, as sovereignty depends on the primordial social relation. Levinas writes that in hospitality “we offer ourselves as hostages” because subjectivity is maintained through contact with the other.⁷⁷

V. Host as Despot

With regard to immigration practices, conditions for citizenship ask how the invited guest can help the host. Disguised as hospitality, immigration policies are concerned primarily with the host nation. The conditions for entry serve the interests of the same and are, for the most part, not concerned with the other. Hosts don’t think of themselves as guests but, as I have shown, the host needs the guest just as the guest needs the host. It is not about the other but about how the same can be benefited by the other. When one thinks of themselves as nothing but a host, they are disposed to see the guest as a parasite. To explain, if the host thinks themselves fully autonomous, then when they see somebody else occupying certain spaces and using certain resources, those people are taken to be parasitic. We treat the immigrant well only insofar as the immigrant benefits us. There is an element of self-deception here; we think we’re being hospitable but we are engaged in a self-interested enterprise. Staging the immigrant other as a potential parasite equips the host nation with what it needs to justify reductive exclusion. When we

⁷⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), xxiii.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 376.

recognize the transitivity of host and guest then we can see that the immigrant is no more parasitic than anyone else.

Campaigning on the platform of hospitality, the host becomes a despot as it targets a group and justifies their exclusion by promoting the dehumanizing trope of the foreigner as a parasite and a threat. This propaganda eclipses pertinent empirical and theoretical facts, namely, the empirical fact of mutual dependence between the host and guest and the theoretical fact of hospitality as an inherently paradoxical notion. This eclipsing is maintained by rhetoric that reinforces reductive exclusion and creates a false sense of justice. The most pervasive examples at present are the labeling of Latin American immigrants as “illegals” and the islamophobia stemming from the September 11 terrorist attacks. The host is also a despot insofar as he uses the very ideal of hospitality in a way that undermines hospitality. The host says it is precisely because he is hospitable—because he has the interests of the other at heart—that he must let one person in but not another. The aporia of hospitality forges a territory wherein racism and classism can be cloaked in the disguise of justice and civil protection.

How do Derrida’s reflections bear on a Levinasian theory of hospitality? Together, Levinas and Derrida help us to see our way out of reductive exclusion. Through his deconstruction of alterity ethics, Derrida shows that even when we think we are being ethical, we are, in fact, not. This is because the political can never be separated from the ethical, nor the ethical from the political. Even when I open myself up to a particular group, focusing on that group closes me off to other groups. One may think they are

satisfying their ethical responsibility by attending to a person in need, an issue, or a movement, but ethical responsibility is never satisfied because one is always blind to other people, other issues, and other movements. Moreover, in choosing who to extend hospitality to I do violence to even my beneficiary by reducing them to a category. Such limitations put individuals and society in a perpetual state of ethical instability. As mentioned previously, Derrida's observations are not fatal to Levinasian ethics but serve to bring Levinas's own meditations on the complexity of ethical life into clearer focus. The paradox of hospitality presented by Derrida is just the ambiguity that, for Levinas, is constitutive of the relationship between ethics and politics. Ethics needs politics to become concrete and politics only exists because of ethics.

VI. Deconstructing Hospitality

What we are to take from this deconstruction is that if you have an obligation to every other as singular other, and every other *is* other, it follows that you have an obligation to everyone equally. But to attend to one you must ignore another. To put it differently, any law or practice that includes some and not others on the basis of contingencies violates the commitment to the equal worth of all human beings. Derrida writes: "I cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other Other, the other Others."⁷⁸ This is where we locate the central aporia of hospitality. If we have a responsibility to the other and we can't discriminate according to differences, to whom do we give our attention? To whom do we

⁷⁸ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 69.

offer our resources? Furthermore, how do we choose without compromising ethics? If we accept Levinas's demand for absolute hospitality then we are committed to the belief that the moment we begin to discriminate we cease to act ethically. Levinas's ethics suggests that, by virtue of singularity, hospitality is owed to every other and not just to certain others. This demand for unconditional hospitality leads Derrida to conclude that every gesture of hospitality is *a priori* inhospitable. For this reason Derrida says, "an act of [pure] hospitality can only be poetic."⁷⁹ If I am only hospitable to some then I violate the law of absolute hospitality, but if I try to be hospitable to everyone, I can be hospitable to no one. How, then, do we re-appropriate hospitality from the realm of ideal theory and make it more than merely poetic?⁸⁰

The possibility of hospitality, even if it can never be actualized in a pure way, comes out of self-critique. Unconditional and absolute responsibility can't translate itself into concrete, empirical laws without paradox. The result, then, is a vacillation between our ethical selves and our political selves—the self that is responsible for every other and the self that must choose "whom to give to" by way of positive laws.⁸¹ Derrida wants us to have the Levinasian commitment to unconditional hospitality while being aware of the limitations. To have confidence in one's ethical self is to overlook the ways that one is at the same time unethical. With regard to the immigrant as an outsider, we are presently

⁷⁹ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 2. I have qualified this statement by inserting the word "pure" in order to suggest that not all hospitality is impossible. One can enact hospitality in instances and to degrees, but as long as every act of hospitality entails some inhospitality then it can't be pure.

⁸⁰ "Ideal theory" is not in reference to John Rawls and the specific idealizing assumptions prescribed for political theory. I am using the expression more broadly to refer to any theory whose practical possibility has yet to be determined.

⁸¹ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 62, 67-69, 78.

overvaluing sovereignty and overlooking our responsibility to the other. Furthermore, the necessity for self-preservation is being propagandized as a justification for radical exclusion which feeds on dehumanizing tropes, such as the immigrant as a parasite and the refugee as a threat.

The goal of my own analysis is to draw attention to the apparent lack of ethical considerations in the discourse surrounding immigration policy and the refugee crisis.

Mae M. Ngai, contemporary scholar of nationalism, race, and ethnicity in 20th century U.S. history writes:

The centrality of sovereignty in immigration policy has had important consequences. For one, it has allowed Congress to create, as even the Supreme Court described, “rules that would be unacceptable if applied to citizens.” Second, it has marginalized or erased other issues from consideration in policy formation, such as human rights and the global distribution of wealth. Political theorists and other scholars have debated whether liberalism’s commitment to the irreducible equal worth of all human beings can accommodate nationalism’s presumed right to exclude. As K. Anthony Appiah wrote, dividing humanity into nation-states means that “all individuals in the world are obliged, whether they like it or not, to accept the political arrangements of their birthplace, however repugnant those arrangements are to their principles or ambitions—unless they can persuade somebody else to let them in.”⁸²

In terms of the ethical theory of hospitality with which we are working, Ngai is suggesting that immigration policy places greater emphasis on the political than on the ethical. The nation-state has mistaken itself for fundamentally sovereign. Derrida’s critique of Levinasian ethics serves to justify those consequences. Even if we strive for Levinasian hospitality it can never be pure. Through the paradox of hospitality Derrida

⁸² Mae M. Ngai. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). 12.

legitimizes, or at least explains, our failures to engage in hospitable practices. The problem with introducing hospitality into practical affairs is that we cannot honor a commitment to irreducible equal worth of all human beings while at the same time setting up constraints on membership. Calling back Derrida's own language, I cannot be hospitable and at the same time choose "whom to give to." But this does not mean that there can't be some sociopolitical manifestation of ethics as hospitality. Although absolute hospitality might always entail a violation of its own premise, and the most we can achieve is a precarious balancing act between our ethical impulses and our political interests, there is ground to be gained by exposing the dehumanizing structures at play.

I. The Image of the Foreigner

The contemporary global climate is one of hostility toward migrants. The displaced in need of protection and opportunity are met with resistance and are forced into a liminal existence. Syrian and Afghan refugees are living in tent cities outside of metropolitan Europe with only the minimal resources afforded them by grassroots humanitarian organizations. Undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are held in unsanitary and overcrowded detention facilities while they await deportation. U.S. residents, both documented and undocumented, are targets of discrimination by virtue of their physiognomy and the behaviors or motivations attributed to people marked by certain appearances. The Levinasian-Derridian theory of hospitality adds to the contemporary discourse on human migration by making sense of the ethical impulse to unconditionally welcome the singular other in need, and of the political limitations to such unconditional welcome. This final chapter will examine exclusionary attitudes toward the foreign other with a mind to hospitality. I will be using the term “foreigner” as a catch-all for those people and categories of people particularly vulnerable to reductive exclusion due to the ontological distance—perceived and produced—between them and the host or host nation. I will be looking specifically at two contemporary instances where hospitality is at issue, the case of U.S. immigration and the European refugee crisis.

Husserl makes evident that the intentional nature of cognitive processes predisposes people to notice the category. Thinking in terms of social organization, disadvantaged and vulnerable categories tend to be those that stray the furthest from the norm. In the case of receptivity toward immigrants in the U.S., categories of vulnerable people include those who are not phenotypically or culturally American. Anyone falling into an a-typical or minority category then becomes a target of discrimination and expulsion. As a result, the foreigner is not only regarded as the newcomer who wishes to make a space for herself in a territory to which she did not formerly belong, but the category of foreigner is also applied to anyone who is not typically “American,” that is, who does not have Western European features, whether or not they are culturally American, that is, have been socialized and educated in the United States. The foreigner is often seen as a parasite—an outsider coming to take resources from the true beneficiaries of American privilege—as well as a threat—an outsider with an ill-will and an objective to disrupt the status quo. Even those who have gained legal U.S. citizenship or who are U.S. citizens by birth are seen as potentially threatening outsiders if they belong to a racial, ethnic, or religious minority. In the interest of self-preservation, we stand on guard against the stranger whose actions we cannot anticipate or control, and even more so against the other to whom we have prematurely attributed nefarious intentions. Taking the other *as* a foreigner means ascribing to the other all the particularities of sense or meaning that have become concomitant with the intentional experience of other-as-foreigner. Derrida writes,

It is inscribed in the very meaning [*valeur*] of stranger, foreign, or foreigner [*etranger*], that is to say what is foreign to the proper, foreign to and not proper to, not close to or proximate to [*non proche à*]. The stranger is a digression that risks corrupting the proximity to self of the proper.⁸³

If, on the other hand, the other is taken *as* other, the ontological distance dissolves and the space where reductive exclusion can thrive disappears.

The epistemological tendency to categorize combined with the ethical and political necessity to use these categories and judiciously select who does and who does not qualify as a beneficiary of American citizenship amounts to harmful essentializing. This is because the foreigner poses a perceived threat to the “at home” of the resident-citizens, a threat which immediately sets the immigrant or refugee up as a hostile subject or a parasite.⁸⁴ This image of the foreigner is a bias that has become sedimented in the collective attitude of Americans. The bias eclipses the fact that the very sovereignty that we are at pains to preserve is in fact dependent upon the other. It is inevitable that the host must turn some away, but the host can turn them away with an awareness that doing so is an act of categorial violence and those who are welcomed, must be welcomed with an eye to receptivity, not hostility.

II. The Violence of Immigration Policy

Since the early 20th century, illegal immigration has been the central problem of U.S. immigration policy. The “illegal” immigrant didn’t exist prior to the 1920s and is a

⁸³ Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, “Hostipitality,” 402.

⁸⁴ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 53.

concept that has since been reified and stigmatized in public discourse.⁸⁵ Broadly speaking, persons are considered illegal if they reside in the United States without a current Visa and do not meet the qualifications for citizenship and naturalization. Introducing the concept of citizen-illegality came with significant consequences. To quote Ngai, “The regime of immigration restriction remapped the nation in two important ways. First, it drew a new ethnic and racial map based on new categories and hierarchies of difference. Second, and in a different register, it articulated a new sense of territoriality, which was marked by unprecedented awareness and state surveillance of the nation’s contiguous land borders.”⁸⁶ Ngai emphasizes that citizen-illegality was only introduced with the passing of the Immigration Act of 1924 for the purpose of maintaining the racial and cultural purity of American national identity. Illegality is an invented category hoisted upon the migrant, which commits categorial violence by marking a person as illicit and using that mark as a grounds for exclusion and expulsion. The U.S. systematically excludes undesirables from membership through both symbolic and material measures. Such measures include public attitudes that cast the foreigner as illegitimate and parasitic, institutions and laws that deprive undocumented immigrants of healthcare benefits and exclude them from other federal programs, and the violent

⁸⁵ “Historical Immigrant Admission Data, 1821–2006,” *Federation for American Immigration Reform*, last updated January, 2008. <https://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/our-history/agency-history/early-american-immigration-policies>.

The earliest forms of immigration policy emerged in the 19th century with provisions around the importation of contract laborers and the prohibited entry of prostitutes and convicts. The end of the 19th century brought the Chinese exclusion law, which curbed Chinese immigration and also excluded idiots, lunatics, convicts, and persons likely to become a public charge. Over the next several decades, immigration policy would be modified to exclude illiterates, alcoholics, persons of psychopathic inferiority, and anyone deemed to be entering for immoral purposes.

⁸⁶ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 3.

policing of borders to physically bar people from entry as well as the active policing of communities to expel undocumented individuals.

Immigration policy and the associated conditions for citizenship reflect the categories valued in the forming of a national identity. Immigration policy is indispensable to a functioning society while at the same time being an instrument of discrimination used to reinforce values on the lines of race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and most prominently in early the 21st century, class. In the early 20th century the identity of the U.S. was largely determined by race. The policies of the time regulated the racial demographics of the United States by implementing a quota system to determine which individuals were eligible for citizenship.⁸⁷ In her work, Ngai looks at the history of immigration in the U.S. and reveals patterns of exclusion that have reoccurred over the decades. At present, it is the socioeconomic value of an individual that is emphasized by conditions for citizenship. Ngai writes, “The controversies over immigration policy taking place at the beginning of the twenty-first century center on whether immigrants contribute positively or deleteriously to the nation’s economy and culture.” She goes on to observe that while the conditions for citizenship may shift, “there is virtually no political support for open or numerically unrestricted immigration.”⁸⁸ There is no support for unrestricted immigration because it would be self-destructive. For practical purposes—those laid out in Derrida’s critique—some degree of regulation is necessary and justified.

⁸⁷ See Chapter 1, Sec. 201 of the Immigration Act of 1924, Pub. May 26, 1924.

⁸⁸ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 5.

As I have mentioned, qualifications for citizenship in the United States began on predominantly racial grounds and have since been redefined in terms of national economic interests rather than overt racial bias.⁸⁹ To include some and not others on the basis of economic interests may not seem morally problematic; however, the structural violence that grounds economic motivations is of the same nature as that which grounded the racial motivations that would now widely be considered unacceptable. In both instances, the host is committing structural violence by way of reductive exclusion. In the beginning of her book, *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander adopts an idea put forth by legal scholar Reva Siegel. Siegel characterizes mass incarceration in the U.S. as a matter of “preservation through transformation,” which Alexander describes as “the process through which white privilege is maintained though the rules and rhetoric change.”⁹⁰ She is referring to the fact that, while Jim Crow laws may have been eliminated, the same discrimination still exists but has simply taken on a new form. Through the so-called “War on Drugs,” initiated by the Reagan administration and taken to extremes by President Bush and President Clinton, the powers-that-be found an instrument of racial discrimination and a justification for the mass incarceration of undesirables.

⁸⁹ “Immigration and Nationality Act,” *United States Citizenship and Immigration Services*, last updated February 2013. <https://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/SLB/HTML/SLB/act.html>. The October 1965 amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) distributed Visas according to seven categories of preference, prioritizing the reunification of families, immigrants who demonstrate needed skills, and refugees. Though this act abolished the national origins quota system, it still included a ceiling on immigrants from the eastern-hemisphere.

⁹⁰ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, (New York: New York Press, 2010), 21.

Although Siegel is referring specifically to racial discrimination against African Americans in the U.S., the same idea maps onto the ways the U.S. has re-formulated the “immigration problem” as a threat to resources and national security rather than a threat to the racial purity of the nation-state, as it was presented in the early versions of immigration policy. As Ngai notes, The Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 “placed numerical limits on immigration and established a quota system that classified the world’s population according to nationality and race, ranking them in a hierarchy of desirability for admission into the United States.”⁹¹ This immigration act unapologetically declared certain groups ineligible for citizenship based on their likelihood to assimilate into American culture. It is evident that such explicit racism has not been eradicated but has been replaced by a more subtle form of racial bias and justification for exclusion in the form of national security defense and economic interest. Alexander writes: “Since the nation’s founding, African Americans repeatedly have been controlled through institutions such as slavery and Jim Crow, which appear to die, but then are reborn in a new form, tailored to the needs and constraints of the time.”⁹² It seems that current immigration controls are just the newest iteration of a history of American exceptionalism that discriminates against the foreign “other” and attempts to preserve the familiar “at home” of the Anglo-American nation-state.

⁹¹ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 17.

⁹² Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 21.

III. Inclusion Entails Exclusion

It has been established so far that welcoming the foreigner is never completely hospitable because it is not unconditional. Even instances that seem welcoming, in fact, commit categorical violence through reductive *inclusion*. For instance, President Obama's 2015 immigration reform states that certain undocumented children and parents may obtain temporary legal status as long as they meet specific conditions.⁹³ All those who do not meet the conditions face deportation. The seemingly hospitable act of including some entails two corresponding moments of inhospitality—the inhospitable act of reductive inclusion of those deemed fit on the basis of ascribed categories, and the inhospitable act of reductive exclusion of all others. There is a further despotism involved in being a host. Because the host is the one with the power to decide membership, the host is always also a despot. This is demonstrated by the fact that the U.S. has contributed to the destitution of the many immigrants against whom it secures its borders. Ngai makes this point in saying that “Americans want to believe that immigration to the United States proves the universality of the nation's liberal democratic principles; we resist examining the role that American world power has played in the global structures of migration. We like to believe that our immigration policy is generous, but we also resent the demands made upon us by others and we think we owe outsiders nothing.”⁹⁴

⁹³“Executive Actions on Immigration,” *United States Citizenship and Immigration Services*, accessed April 23, 2015. <http://www.uscis.gov/immigrationaction>. The Deferred Action programs are Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for Parents of American Citizens or Legal Permanent Residents (DAPA).

⁹⁴ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 11.

I will take Ngai's point a step further and suggest that Americans' ethical attitudes are confused because they don't carry a concept of Levinasian hospitality. Learning to view the other as singular and not as reducible to a category, and moreover recognizing that our sense of sovereignty is derivative, will bring about the recognition that our generosity is limited and that we are not being generous when we grant citizenship, or some provisional version thereof. Derrida highlights our culturally influenced image of the foreigner and spurs us to develop a more hospitable immigration system. An ethic of hospitality forces us to question the supposedly natural and fixed categories currently informing attitudes toward immigrants. The hope is that this revision of attitude will lead to a revision of immigration policy through a reconsideration of the immigrant as singular other.

IV. Immigrant as Parasite

My argument is that self-preservation is being used to legitimize unnecessary and inhumane treatment of immigrants. Such mistreatment is buttressed by the belief that immigrants are parasitic on the host society as well as by the belief that the host nation is fundamentally sovereign and so is beholden only to itself. Derrida shows both of these beliefs to be false. A parasite is something that does not engage in a mutually beneficial relationship with its host but takes without contributing. It lives from... and gives nothing in return. This is powerful rhetoric for talking about immigrants. It suggests that immigrants are not paying their dues and thus not entitled to "live from..." But the

immigrant is no more parasitic than anyone is parasitic. As Levinas helps us to see, all living is living from.... Immigrants are not a special instance. The case could also be made that immigrants in the U.S., both documented and undocumented, are less parasitic than Americans born in the United States who are granted citizenship simply for being born within certain contiguous land border. Immigrants play a crucial and often unacknowledged role in the functioning of American society as cheap labor. In the present state of affairs illegal immigrants are the victims of structural violence through exploitation. The host includes the resident immigrant in order to benefit the national economy, yet deprives the immigrant of meaningful recognition. We see this interdependence play out every day in the United States:

Undocumented immigrants are at once welcome and unwelcome: they are woven into the economic fabric of the nation, but as labor that is cheap and disposable.... Marginalized by their position in the lower strata of the workforce and even more so by their exclusion from the polity, illegal aliens might be understood as a caste, unambiguously situated outside the boundaries of formal membership and social legitimacy.⁹⁵

The immigrant is a foreigner who is not entitled to the same benefits as those born in the U.S. unless they can prove themselves economically and socially beneficial. Even in cases where immigrant populations are economically productive and socially beneficial, as when they fill a void in the labor market, their illegal status works to the advantage of the host nation. This goes to further show that the sovereignty of the nation is not what it seems. The host nation depends upon the immigrant just as the immigrant depends upon the host nation.

⁹⁵ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 2.

It is worth repeating at this stage that hospitality requires one to make an offer beyond debt and economy. It is a non-reciprocal relationship with the other because it is prior to the instruments that allow us to define reciprocity. In being treated as a parasite, the immigrant is divested of her status as a singular other who *counts as such*. Setting it up as a condition that the guest earn their keep is inhospitable because conditional and self-serving. The seemingly commonsensical way of talking about immigrants in terms of benefit for the nation-state reinforces inhospitable practices by drawing an image of the foreigner as an other to whom nothing is owed but of whom much can be demanded. To think the immigrant other as parasite is also to imbue them with a sense of contamination, as if to say that the immigrant is infecting the nation and making it sickly. The trope of immigrant-as-parasite permeates the mainstream attitude toward the foreigner and leads to the mistreatment of anyone perceived to be a foreigner, whether that person is a natural-born citizen, a refugee seeking asylum, or a documented or undocumented immigrant.

Current immigration policy implies that someone can become a citizen so long as they benefit but do not hinder the country to which they are being naturalized. This measure, though perhaps necessary, is taken at the expense of hospitality for all parties. It casts the foreigner as a potential parasite but also implies that those who do “belong” only belong because they meet the conditions of membership, that is, they are individuals *of a certain kind*. To this point Derrida states, “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.”⁹⁶ Taking others as individuals of a certain kind is an inevitable part of understanding each other and of establishing rights and laws. However, the point that Derrida is at pains to express is that a welcome extended under these circumstances doesn’t qualify as a gesture of hospitality.

V. Refugee as Threat

The other case of global inhospitality that I would like to address is the refugee crisis. The largely inhospitable response to asylum-seekers, and specifically those migrating from Middle Eastern countries, can be explained by looking at how the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, have shaped Western attitudes toward the Middle Eastern other. Hours after the September 11 attacks, David Horowitz published an article in which he blamed the United States for being weak and over-concerned with cashing in on “peace dividends.” In the article he demands that the U.S. throw all resources into national defense and he promotes racial and ethnic profiling: “it’s time to tighten our security systems, beginning with airport checks. It’s time to let the profiling of potential terrorists—and that does mean Islamic and Palestinian terrorists—outweigh the objections of the ACLU and other leftists groups.”⁹⁷ He also claims the political left has

⁹⁶ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 71/73.

⁹⁷ David Horowitz, “Horowitz’s Notepad Special: This is War,” *FrontPageMag*, June 14, 2001. <http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=21191>.

“alliances with anti-American radicals at home and abroad” and calls to “step up the monitoring of all groups who have declared war on the United States.” This is one example of the broad-strokes rhetoric that is often employed by public figures and which paints Muslims as the other about whom the U.S. should be centrally concerned. Anti-Muslim sentiments are often packaged in pro-American and pro-Israeli terms and sold to the public as a concern for the interests of the nation. The fear inspired by the September 11 attacks has been leveraged into widespread Islamophobia through political rhetoric demonizing Muslims worldwide. This is not to say Horowitz is completely wrong. He has simply missed the forest for the trees. The answer to the threat of terrorism doesn’t seem to be simply less hospitality, as he and others suggest, but in certain respects, more.

Among the institutions inculcating discriminatory attitudes and practices is the F.B.I., which issued a report in 2006 outlining the radicalization process said to give rise to “homegrown terrorists.”⁹⁸ The report opens with the key judgment that “the radicalization cycle is generally composed of four steps: pre-radicalization, identification, indoctrination, and action.” Aside from the undeniably problematic way that this report implicates individuals as threats before being threats by calling the initial stage “pre-radical,” the report further offers identifying markers of a potential threat, including “wearing traditional Muslim attire,” “growing facial hair,” and “frequent attendance at a mosque or prayer group.” Protecting against a potential threat requires identifying the threat, which further involves isolating identifying features of those that may pose a

⁹⁸“The Radicalization Process: From Conversion to Jihad,” U//FOUO Federal Bureau of Investigation Intelligence Assessment, Counterterrorism Division, May 2006.

threat. It follows that self-preservation comes as the expense of hospitality. However, not all inhospitality is created equal. In Levinasian terms, justice is the ontological attempt at realizing ethics. The aim, then, should be to limit reductive practices that do violence to the other. All intentionality involves categorial violence simply by reducing the other to a category but reducing the other to an externally imposed category about which they have no say takes categorial violence to the level of injustice. This same pre-emptive discrimination employed in the F.B.I. report is promoted by U.S. Presidential candidate Donald Trump. At his campaign rallies, Trump reads the Al Wilson song, “The Snake.” The song tells the story of a trusting woman (viz. American) who saves a snake (viz. refugee) from freezing by inviting him into her home. As the woman “clutched him to her bosom,” he bites her. She asks the snake why he would do such a thing after she was so kind to him. Trump quotes the venomous snake’s reply, “‘Oh shut up, silly woman’ said the reptile with a grin, ‘you knew damn well I was a snake before you took me in.’”

The injustice of categorial violence is not only happening in the United States. Following the November 2015 Paris attacks and the subsequent 2016 attacks in Brussels, a worldwide attitude of inhospitality gained greater traction. France began shutting down mosques and policing Muslim communities.⁹⁹ The UK implemented a deradicalization scheme which involves profiling members of the community and subjecting anyone judged to be in a “pre-radical” stage to a deradicalization process. Among the nearly 4,000 people targeted for deradicalization in the UK was a 4-year-old who tried to say

⁹⁹ Rowen Scarborough, “France cracks down on Islamic radicalism after Paris attacks, shuts mosques,” *The Washington Post*, January 28, 2016. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/2016/jan/28/france-cracks-down-on-islamic-radicalism-after-par/?page=all>.

“cucumber” but was believed by nursery staff to be saying “cooker-bomb.”¹⁰⁰ Echoing Horowitz’s call to action a decade and a half earlier, politicians and leaders are pointing to terrorist attacks executed by resident citizens of Middle Eastern descent as justification for denying asylum to refugees. Republican Presidential candidate Ted Cruz suggested that the United States should “immediately halt the flow of refugees from countries with a significant al-Qaida or ISIS presence.”¹⁰¹ Islamophobia expresses a conflation of religion with extremist ideology and a reduction of anyone of Middle Eastern descent to the category of Islamic extremist, resulting in hostility toward the most vulnerable and the most in need of hospitality—those fleeing the same enemy against whom the U.S. and other European powers are trying to defend themselves. Conflict in the Middle East has forced the migration of millions of people seeking asylum in neighboring European countries. The influx of refugees hit crisis levels in 2015. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, Syrians are the first-largest group of asylum seekers worldwide, with 114,500 new asylum applications registered during the first six-months of 2015. This is followed by Ukrainians with 111,900 new applications and Afghans with 72,100. These figures are more than double what they were during the same period of 2014. Syria, Ukraine, and Afghanistan are only three of more than 190 nationalities represented

¹⁰⁰ Josh Halliday, “Almost 4,000 people referred to UK deradicalisation scheme last year,” *The Guardian*, March 20, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/mar/20/almost-4000-people-were-referred-to-uk-deradicalisation-scheme-channel-last-year>.

¹⁰¹ Stephen Piggott, “Meet the Anti-Muslim Leaders Advising Donald Trump and Ted Cruz,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, March 28, 2016. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/03/28/meet-anti-muslim-leaders-advising-donald-trump-and-ted-cruz>.

among forced migrants and other displaced individuals seeking asylum in 2015.¹⁰² The staggering increase in asylum seekers reflects the deteriorating situation in their countries of origin, where violence is generated by ideological wars, race and gender discrimination, and religious persecution.

The fact that the attackers were Belgian and French nationals of North African and Middle Eastern descent speaks of the inhospitality taking place even after the migrant is taken in.¹⁰³ What seems to be a gesture of hospitality—offering up a space for the migrant—is, in fact, inhospitable when that space is on the fringe of society. The host thinks he is getting away with something. He invites the guest into his home, which all the world praises him for, but then denies his guest the political capital and social recognition that allow for personal stability. Inhospitality disguised as a welcome of the other is self-destructive when it produces the very threat against which the champions of sovereignty are trying to protect themselves. It stands to reason that staunch inhospitality likely will not meliorate the situation. By confining immigrant families to slums and denying them the welcome that would enable their integration into society, the host alienates the migrant other and creates a hostile community within.

Derrida points out that the host-guest relationship always involves a transgression of the same by the other. The host is therefore always also a guest in the sense that

¹⁰² “Mid-Year Trends 2015,” *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, June, 2015. <http://www.unhcr.org/56701b969.html>.

¹⁰³ Nermeen Shaikh and Gilbert Achcar, “‘A Clash of Barbarisms’: After Paris Attack, How U.S. Policy in Middle East Helps Fuel Extremism,” interview by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*. http://www.democracynow.org/2015/1/8/a_clash_of_barbarisms_after_paris.

welcoming the other requires a certain vulnerability on the part of the one that welcomes. To draw on a different example, in June, 2015 Dylan Roof opened fire in a church in Charleston, North Carolina, killing nine people, all of whom were African American. Roof later confessed his intention was to incite a race war. This event illustrates the highest degree of vulnerability that a host exposes herself to in granting hospitality. Roof entered the church but did not immediately launch into an assault. He was welcomed into the bible study, he sat down, he participated in prayer, and he made himself at home before shooting. Offering hospitality means figuratively and literally laying oneself bare before the other. The risk that hospitality brings is often times a risk of losing one's life. When the cost of hospitality is life, how can we justify *not* closing ourselves off? The law of absolute hospitality does not permit the host to consider such risks, but the laws of hospitality—the concrete duties and responsibilities that stake a claim on justice—have come to consider such risks above all else. We must not forget that the consequences of inhospitality are equally critical. Domestic terrorist attacks committed by citizens who have been recruited and radicalized by terrorist organizations can often be traced to political and social marginalization and exclusion, to inhospitality.

VI. Destabilizing the Structures of Reductive Exclusion

Conditions for citizenship are the effective strategy for maintaining the sovereignty of a nation and preserving a desired national identity. In Levinasian terms, placing conditions on membership ensures the “at home” of the same. We cannot have a

non-judicial concept of membership because the very notion of inclusion implies exclusion, and determining who to include and exclude must be done on the basis of positive law dictated by categorial values. It follows that insofar as assigning membership entails conditions for membership, it can never be hospitable. Ngai writes, “Indeed, nationalism’s ultimate defense is sovereignty—the nation’s self-proclaimed, absolute right to determine its own membership, a right believed to inhere in the nation-state’s very existence, in its ‘right of self-preservation.’”¹⁰⁴ The presumptive right to sovereignty overlooks the fact that sovereignty is not fundamental, nor does it exist in the absence of the other.

What makes reductive exclusion especially pernicious is that certain forms of categorial violence are a necessary part of ordering our social world. As Husserl demonstrates, the mechanisms of conscious experience involve a cognitive disposition to categorize. On a social scale, the cognitive disposition to categorize manifests itself through the necessarily reductive parameters of social organization. To be more specific, society operates through a distribution of resources and this distribution always involves some criteria set up in advance to determine who gets what and how much. As a consequence, particularly vulnerable categories of people become targets for discrimination and expulsion. What makes an individual or a group of people vulnerable to categorial violence and reductive exclusion is, as previously mentioned, the

¹⁰⁴ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 11.

ontological distinction we make between “same” and “other.”¹⁰⁵ The more “other” I take a person or group to be, the greater ontological distance do I place between me/us and them. When we narrowly understand moral responsibility as owed only to those closes to us—our friends, family, and other personally chosen allies, the ontological distance felt between anyone who does not belong to my social circle results in a feeling of justified indifference toward them. The ontological distance is made greater by the dehumanizing tropes that have permeated public thinking—alien, parasite, threat.

As much as Levinas and Derrida emphasize the demand for hospitality, they also show that we have a reason not to give up our sovereignty. As a community, we welcome those who benefit us and place physical and symbolic barriers before those who do not. A theory of hospitality makes evident the demand for a limiting jurisdiction with regard to inclusion. However, this demand is exploited in the social and political arena to legitimize discrimination. Dehumanizing tropes are publicly circulated in the interest of protecting ideological biases. Ngai addresses the constantly shifting categories that are at any given instant treated as absolute and binding: “Illegal alienage [and clandestine migration] is not a natural or fixed condition but the product of positive law; it is contingent and at times it is unstable.”¹⁰⁶ As our interests shift, so too do our conditions for membership and thus our conception of what makes someone “other.” These divisive categories are the weapons of reductive exclusion. Destabilizing the historically

¹⁰⁵ “Other” is in quotes to indicate that I am using it in the non-Levinasian way described at the beginning of chapter 2.

¹⁰⁶ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 6.

sedimented cultural attitude that maintains the immigrant as hostile and parasitic, and encourages despotism on the part of the host, might require establishing a criterion for recognizing corruption in our cognitive bias, which can be aided by the Levinasian-Derridian notion of ethics as hospitality.

Global Migration and the Ethics of Hospitality: Conclusion

The aim of this analysis is to suggest that the practitioners of immigration policy, and everyone with the power to be hospitable, should be more self-critical. One is never acting purely ethically, even when it seems to be so. As Derrida claims, “I am positioned so as to abandon the other, so as never to give him enough, and thus to leave him abandoned.”¹⁰⁷ Levinas already addresses the paradox of hospitality to a degree when he characterizes the ethical self as coming out of a moment of self-critique.¹⁰⁸ In the moment of self-critique, my sovereign, political self is struck by the presence of the unknowable other and I am made to recognize my own injustice. But once it is recognized that my primary mode of relating to the world involves violence, how do I proceed? Can this reductive violence be escaped? It seems that the answer is ‘no’—or at least not entirely. I can come to realize the injustice that I am doing to the person standing before me and take measures to be hospitable. However, every instance of hospitality necessarily involves being inhospitable. By turning toward one person I necessarily and inevitably turn away from another. Furthermore, as Levinas himself admits, any degree of hospitality requires that one produce and protect their home. In terms of the state, this home in need of protection is the national identity produced through acts of sovereign will.

¹⁰⁷ Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, “Hostipitality,” 381.

¹⁰⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 83.

The translation of hospitality into the realm of rights and laws requires that ethics find its empirical expression in the state and its institutions. In other words, we have to somehow marry ethics and politics. This is the relentless aporia that Derrida spells out, and with it comes great consequence for Levinasian ethics. What we have here are two relational terms that mutually imply and mutually exclude one another—the law of hospitality as an ideal of ethics and the politics of hospitality in its empirical manifestation. When exclusion is legitimized by economic interests, the immigrant becomes the human cost of contemporary liberalism. When exclusion is legitimized by the threat of domestic terrorism, the refugee may become the human cost of propagandized fear. As I have emphasized throughout this thesis, if we take up a Levinasian ethic, then there will always be a conflict between one's ethical impulse and one's political priorities. However, acknowledging the conflict not only brings hospitality into clearer view but also has potential to inspire more hospitable practices, however imperfect.

The challenges of sanctioning membership with regard to immigration law can tell us something about the import and limitations of absolute hospitality when put into practice. Conversely, the ethics of hospitality can tell us something about how our political tendencies—acts of categorizing as an epistemological and ethical necessity—undergird discriminatory practices. Due to the nature of hospitality, there is no negotiation that will reconcile ethics and politics. Absolute hospitality is an ethical imperative but a political impossibility and politics is a practical *and* ethical imperative

while at the same time being an ethical impossibility. Nevertheless, ethics as hospitality is an especially useful model for critiquing discriminatory attitudes toward the foreigner. A theory of hospitality is valuable to the discussion of global migration because it reveals the violence of our reductivist, political tendencies and reimagines the relationship to the other, specifically to the migrant, beyond this reductivism.

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