

# Humanity and hospitality

## An approach to theology in the times of migration

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In contrast to discourses on the relation between religion and violence, this project focuses on the biblical commitment that God can be understood as the one who 'loves the stranger' (Deut. 10:18). With regard to this central passage it will be asked what are the implications that this image of God can offer? In what way can monotheism be interpreted as 'a school of xenophilia' (E. Levinas)? What does the inclination of God to the stranger mean for the understanding of humanity, metaphysics, and migration? Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) has suggested that we understand metaphysics, in the context of the thinking of Levinas, as 'an experience of hospitality' (Derrida 1999a: 46). With regard to this idea, I would like to ask what role can (the question of) God play within the political, sociological, ethical, etc. discourses of diversity and migration?

### Introduction

In the following contribution, I will not discuss the negative effects of religion (cf. Assmann 2003, 2015; Schieder 2014); instead, I will ask what one can – positively – learn from the biblical narratives concerning God with regard to the wide field of the issue of migration – and the other way around. Migration is, without any doubt, one of the most urgent issues of a common and coming society of Europe. In Germany, as well as in other European countries such as the Netherlands, Hungary, Austria, and Finland, we can observe a tendency towards an acceptance of nationalist and right-wing parties. Xenophobia, that is, the fear, and sometimes even hatred, of strangers, is the expression of a politics of national self-isolation and what one refers to, with a German term, as *Angst*. The opposite conception, that is xenophilia (Deecke and Drost 2010),<sup>1</sup> seems to be the word for a utopia beyond recall. Therefore, a new interest in the concept of hospitality that is taking place in very recent philosophical debates might be astonishing

1 The German term *Liebe zum Fremden* is ambivalent and means 'love to the stranger' as well as 'love to the strange or: strangeness'.

(cf. Burkhard 2016, Balch 2016, Bulley 2016). Regarding the situation of migration, I want to ask if hospitality has to be seen as the condition of the possibility to be, or to behave as, a human? Do there still remain limits to hospitality? (cf. Friese 2014). These questions lead to a debate that shows two different sides of the same coin: these two sides will be identified in what follows in texts by Jacques Derrida and Richard Kearney which are concerned with the question of conditional and unconditional hospitality or, in other words, with the possibility and impossibility of hospitality.

1) In the *first step*, I will outline the argumentation of Jacques Derrida, who has worked explicitly on political and ethical questions of justice, responsibility, and hospitality since – at least – the 1990s (Bischof 2004). As the aporias between conditional and unconditional hospitality constitute the meaning of hospitality itself, the focus of Derrida's argumentation is to deconstruct the laws and rules of hospitality in order to get a new, and indeed better, understanding of what hospitality means.

2) This tension leads to the differentiation between a possible and an impossible hospitality, that I will reconstruct in a *second step*. Richard Kearney attends to Derrida's position and tries himself to develop a hermeneutical approach to hospitality. Therefore, he takes into account not only philosophical arguments but also the biblical tradition of hospitality.

3) In a *third and last step*, I will concentrate on these two approaches and try to demonstrate that theology can contribute a new perspective to this debate. Important, from a theological point of view, is the biblical background, as well as the philosophical interpretation. My overall question in this article is, if the deconstruction of the conditions of hospitality (Derrida) and the concentration on the hermeneutics of hospitality (Kearney) imply innovative ways of speaking about God.

'Pas d'hospitalité' (Jacques Derrida)

As Jacques Derrida's text 'A Europe of hope' (2006)<sup>2</sup> was published posthumously in December 2004, this testimony for Europe can also be read as a testament. Derrida speaks not only about a coming Europe of hope but also about his hope for a coming Europe. What he is interested in is 'a creed or

2 This article appeared under the title 'Une Europe de l'espoir' in the December 2004 issue of the monthly *Le Monde diplomatique*.

act of faith for an ethics, law and justice, for a politics of our time and for the future of our world' (408) and his statement is clear when he writes:

... I believe that, without Eurocentric illusions and pretensions, without the slightest pro-European nationalism, without even much trust in Europe as it is or in the direction it is taking, we must fight for what this name represents today, with the memory of the Enlightenment, of course, but also with a guilty conscience for and a responsible awareness of the totalitarian, genocidal, and colonialist crimes of the past. Thus we must fight for what Europe remains irreplaceable for the world to come, for it to become more than a market or a single currency, more than a neo-nationalist conglomerate, more than a new armed force.  
(Derrida 2006: 410)

It would be a step too far to presume to analyse the meaning of this statement for our time, more than ten years later; but we can readily note its great relevance. Europe, or more precisely *what it represents today*, still has to be defended against *Eurocentric illusions and pretensions* as well as against *pro-European nationalism*. And we have to ask what Europe stands for. Europe is, as Derrida puts it, rooted in the *memory of the Enlightenment* and in the *guilty conscience for, and a responsible awareness of, the totalitarian, genocidal, and colonialist crimes of the past*. Both aspects have to be considered when we think of a coming Europe. Migration, that is to say the movement of people who have lost nearly everything except their bare life and who come to Europe in the hope of improvement, is one of the biggest ethical, political, and sociological challenges today. We as Europeans have to ask ourselves in which Europe do we want to live in in the future? One cannot be surprised that the philosophical debate concerning hospitality is absolutely important. But what does the concept of hospitality mean? And what are implications it has for contemporary society?

Jacques Derrida devoted himself to the philosophical idea of hospitality very intensively (Derrida 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2000, 2002, 2005; cf. Kakoliris 2015). Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that '[m]uch current philosophical and theological interest in the phenomenon of hospitality ... stems from the work of Jacques Derrida' (Meskin 2011: 55) But where does Derrida's interest in hospitality stem from? In an interview Richard Kearney asked Derrida about the relationship between his studies on the gift and on hospitality, and Derrida answered:

In fact it is the same logic which is at work in both cases. How could we relate briefly the gift and hospitality? Of course, it is obvious that hospitality is supposed to consist in giving something, offering something. In the conventional scene [sense?] of hospitality, the guest gives something in gratitude. (Derrida 1999b: 69)

As in his considerations of the gift – that ‘supposes a break with reciprocity, exchange, economy and circular movement’ – Derrida tries to show that hospitality, too, ‘implies such a break’ (Derrida 1999b: 69). Derrida distinguishes between a conditional and an unconditional form of hospitality. *Conditional hospitality* that is in some way a ‘normal’ way of thinking and practising hospitality accepts and reaffirms the roles of the participants. The host remains the host, the guest remains the guest. Derrida: ‘The host remains the master in the house, the country, the nation, he controls the threshold, he controls the borders, and when he welcomes the guest he wants to keep the mastery’.

This understanding of a conditional hospitality has, as Derrida admits, several examples in our cultural tradition. His own interest focuses on Immanuel Kant and his work *Perpetual Peace (Zum ewigen Frieden, 1795)*, where Kant entitles the ‘Third Definitive Article of a Perpetual Peace’ as follows: ‘Cosmopolitan Right shall be limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality’ (‘Das Weltbürgerrecht soll auf Bedingungen der allgemeinen Hospitalität eingeschränkt sein’) (Derrida 2000: 3). Derrida summarises the idea of the ‘Conditions of Universal Hospitality’ as the ‘condition of perpetual peace’ (Derrida 1999b: 70). Without several conditions – ‘first, being a citizen of another nation-state or country, he must behave peaceably in our country; second, he is not granted the right to stay, but only the right to visit’ (*ibid.*) and so forth – peace cannot be guaranteed. In 2017, after the very recent and still ongoing experiences with refugees that are coming to Europe we clearly see what Derrida is speaking of. The new nationalisms in many European states and countries are rooted in this conditional mode of hospitality.

But Derrida does not stop his deliberations at this point; he asks furthermore, if there is, or can, or must be another, an *unconditional form of hospitality*. Very similar to his thoughts on the gift, he speaks about the ‘condition of unconditional hospitality’ that is not to ‘ask the other, the newcomer, the guest, to give anything back, or even to identify himself or herself’ (Derrida

1999b: 70). Derrida of course knows that this unconditional hospitality cannot be controlled anymore; he is aware of the risk that is combined with the unconditional hospitality: 'For unconditional hospitality to take place you have to accept the risk of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing everything, or killing everyone' (Derrida 1999b: 71). And he adds the question:

Why did Kant insist on conditional hospitality? Because he knew that without these conditions hospitality could turn into wild war, terrible aggression. Those are the risks involved in pure hospitality, if there is such a thing and I am not sure that there is. (Derrida 1999b: 71)

In addition to these thoughts one can of course ask, *why then did Derrida insist on the distinction of conditional and unconditional hospitality?* What is the purpose and the benefit of unconditional hospitality? In sum, Derrida pleads for unconditional hospitality in order to save hospitality, or, to put it the other way around, without unconditional hospitality there is no hospitality at all. To better understand this thought we have to reflect on at least two more texts by Derrida, where he explains his thinking on hospitality.

Jacques Derrida opened his fifth seminar, on 17 January 1996, with the words: 'Pas d'hospitalité'; to save the ambiguousness of this French expression these words are translated thus: 'no hospitality; step of hospitality' (Derrida 2000: 75). To speak about hospitality means in Derrida's eyes to proceed in thinking – even if we do not know *if there is such a thing* as hospitality. If we were to know for sure it would mean not to risk anything; hospitality then would be merely an idea among others. Only if we do not know, if hospitality is not a question of knowledge can we try to find ways of understanding and realising what hospitality could mean. This exactly is the reason why hospitality – or more precisely – unconditional hospitality is impossible.

It is as though hospitality were the impossible: as though the law of hospitality defined this very impossibility, as if it were only possible to transgress it, as though the law of absolute, unconditional, hyperbolic hospitality, as though the categorical imperative of hospitality commanded that we transgress all the laws (in the plural) of hospitality, namely, the conditions, the norms, the rights and the duties that are

imposed on hosts and hostesses, on the men or women who give a welcome as well as the men or women who receive it. And vice versa, it is as though the laws (plural) of hospitality, in marking limits, powers, rights, and duties, consisted in challenging and transgressing the law of hospitality, the one that would command that the 'new arrivals' be offered an unconditional welcome. (Derrida 2000: 75–6)

Hospitality that deserves to be called hospitality has to be unconditional and even more: impossible. Impossibility is being defined by hospitality because hospitality is more and different to just rule, law and order. Hospitality has to be impossible and this impossibility has to be performed in order to seek for hospitality. Hospitality, as Jacques Derrida argues, can be traced back to an immediate and non-dispensable obligation. We are obliged to be hospitable even if we do not know – and perhaps never will know – what hospitality is. Hospitality in this sense has to be impossible because if it were possible we would have nothing to decide. A possible hospitality would mean that we would follow to the rights and politics of hospitality as a machine, not as a human being. Derrida is convinced that only the impossibility of hospitality could open a space for the other. The impossibility does not simply mean a non-possibility but rather the search for an unknown, necessarily innovative form of hospitality that is open to a new world to come.

These considerations show very clearly that hospitality in this unconditional and therefore impossible way is a question of decidability and responsibility. It seems not to be too narrow to define it as follows: *Hospitality is a question of humanity; only human beings can overtake the responsibility of something that might be irresponsible and thus realize the impossibility.*

A hermeneutical approach to hospitality (Richard Kearney)

One of the most famous recipients and critics of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of hospitality is Richard Kearney, who is the Charles Seelig Professor in Philosophy at Boston College, Massachusetts. Kearney has published several studies of the phenomenon of the stranger and of hospitality (Kearney and Zimmermann 2016, Kearney and Semonovitch 2011, Kearney and Taylor 2011, Kearney 2014). Derrida's deconstruction of hospitality is an important reference for Kearney who has not only discussed this phenomenon (Derrida 1999b), but who has also edited contributions

written by Derrida (1997). The main point of disagreement is Derrida's differentiation between conditional and unconditional hospitality and between the possibility and impossibility of hospitality. At the very end of his *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* Derrida says:

It is a question of knowing how to transform and improve the law, and of knowing if this improvement is possible within an historical space which takes place *between* the Law of an unconditional hospitality, offered *a priori* to every other, to all newcomers, *whoever they may be*, and *the* conditional laws of a right to hospitality, without which *The* unconditional Law of hospitality would be in danger of remaining a pious and irresponsible desire, without form and without potency, and of even being perverted at any moment. (Derrida 1997: 22–3, italics in the original)

Derrida clearly distinguishes between '*the* conditional laws of a right to hospitality' that, as we have seen, keeps the difference between the host and the guest and the mastery of the one about the other on the one hand, and '*The* unconditional Law of hospitality' that is necessary even if impossible to enable at all the possibility of hospitality. Impossibility does not just mean a non-possibility; the impossibility is not only the negative form of the possibility to be hospitable, because in this case there would be no possibility to be hospitable at all. Hospitality would always remain within the conditions of laws. But hospitality, as Derrida wants to show, opens space to the other without asking who he or she is. Hospitality in this sense would be hospitality without the hierarchy between the one who is at home and the other who may stay – for a while. Of course, Derrida is aware of the *danger* of this unconditional and impossible hospitality; there is no guarantee that that the guest would be thankful in any way or – even worse – that the guest would not do any harm to the host.

It is this impossibility of hospitality and the implications of a risk that Kearney criticises. The starting point, however, seems to be similar or even the same: 'My wager', Kearney says, 'is the wager between hospitality and hostility' (Kearney 2015: 173). Kearney refers to Derrida's position and summarises it thus:

If you truly welcome a stranger, you don't ask where he or she comes from or for what purpose. You don't ask for an ID or passport. Pure hospitality, this argument goes, is not about a contract or conversation; it's about radical receptivity and exposure to the other, a welcome without why. When there is a knock on the door, you don't know whether the person is a monster or a messiah. (Kearney 2015: 174)

Kearney acknowledges this argument of a risk, but in the same time he wants to stick to ethical rules. Derrida's idea of a *pure hospitality* that tends towards, or is rooted or originated in, an impossibility of hospitality does not convince Kearney. Therefore, he asks – and here we see his main critique – how hospitality could be understood as a contribution to a better world. '... if one seeks to pursue pure hospitality to its hyperbolic "impossible" limit, how can one avoid the perils of extremism' (Kearney 2015: 174)? In other words: does not hospitality as unconditional, pure and therefore impossible hospitality tend to become inhuman instead of being the condition for humanity, as we have reconstructed Derrida's argumentation?

With regards to ethics Kearney asks for another understanding of hospitality; he pleads – referring to Paul Ricœur – for a 'hermeneutical' or 'linguistic hospitality'. Kearney inscribes hospitality in a thinkable form of hospitality that remains possible. If someone asks you for your help, this argument goes, you must have the choice to decide whether or not you want to be hospitable. Kearney puts it like this:

If the foreigner knocks on your door, you have a right to say: 'If I invite you into my host language are we both going to benefit or are you going to destroy me?' The ethical conditions of hospitality require that sometimes you have to say 'no'. (Kearney 2015: 177)

This quotation clearly shows a difference with Derrida: Kearney speaks about the *right* that you *have* if someone asks you for your help. The host has to be protected against possible attack; the difference between the one who is at home and the other who seeks for help has to be preserved in order to preserve law and order. Of course, hospitality is ambivalent. 'It is always a risk' – as Kearney admits. But the question remains how ethics – or humanity – can be guaranteed. Derrida hints that true humanity would mean that there is no guarantee. Of course not. Kearney speaks about *the*



*ethical conditions of hospitality*, ethics seems to require rules and conditions in order to be reasonable and responsible. Derrida, on the other hand, argues that there is no hospitality and no ethics at all if we only stick to *ethical conditions*. Describing the conditions would mean to clearly *know* what to do. Hospitality would then be a question of knowledge, not of a decision. Only if the decision is im-possible, only if there is an ‘undecidability’ would there be given the chance to act ethically. ‘Of course, we have to know as much as possible, but when we make a decision – if we make a decision – we don’t know and we shouldn’t know. If we know there would be no decision’ (Derrida 1999b: 68).

Beside this first difference between a possible and an impossible hospitality there is another – second – aspect that seems to be an implication of Kearney’s hermeneutical approach. While trying to better understand *the ethical conditions of hospitality* Kearney refers to biblical narratives. Whereas Derrida mainly discusses his thinking concerning hospitality in terms of philosophical texts, Kearney brings biblical stories of hospitality to mind. I want to refer to only one, very well-known story of Abraham and Sarah in Mamre (cf. Gen. 18), where both are welcoming three strangers. Interesting is Kearney’s summary, which I quote:

This is how the story goes: it is a hot dry day in the desert and Abraham is sitting under the shade of an oak tree at Mamre. His wife Sarah is inside the family tent sheltering from the mid-day sun. She is not happy. She is over 100 years old and she is barren. Her servant woman Hagar is younger and more attractive than she and more fertile. Abraham is brooding about his unhappy wife and the future of Israel when suddenly a shadow flits across the sunlit ground in front of him. He looks up to see three foreigners standing before him and he is filled with fear. Why have they come? he wonders. To kill him and his family? There are, after all, three of them and he has two women to protect, his wife and his servant girl. Should he fight the strangers? But instead of reaching for a weapon or closing his tent, Abraham finds himself running towards the visitors. He greets them, bows to the ground and invites them to a meal. He asks Sarah to knead three measures of the best flour for loaves while he catches a calf and prepares it with curds and milk. Then Abraham stands under the oak tree and watches his guests eat. When they have finished the strangers

announce that when they will return in a year Sarah will be with child. The barren Sarah, standing inside the entrance to the tent laughs when she hears this; for it is quite impossible for her to be with child.

But the visitors repeat the promise – nothing is impossible to God.  
(Kearney 2015: 179)

Even though it would be interesting to compare this short summary with the original text in the Bible in order to consider the differences (e.g. direct and indirect speech, interior monologue, characterisation of the protagonists) I want to focus only on two aspects.

1) Kearney emphasises Abraham's thoughts that show his *trembling and fear* and the possibility of 'hostility' which 'is never far off' (Kearney 2015: 180). Within this story remains a rest of an un-ethical and irresponsible decision, because Abraham and Sarah do not know anything of the strangers. Without referring to Derrida, Kearney interprets the warm welcome of the strangers by Abraham and Sarah as an 'ethic of absolute hospitality' (179).

2) The last sentence of the above quotation is: '... nothing is impossible to God'. It is interesting that both the promise as the reaction and the treatment of the strangers is situated in a context of God. Can Abraham trust the strangers because they *promise* God's will even if it seems to be impossible? Is the impossibility only an impossibility in our eyes whereas we should or even could know that *nothing is impossible to God*. Kearney does not pay attention to these thoughts but in the light of Derrida's deconstruction of hospitality they could be helpful.

*Nothing is impossible to God* – we know this phrase of course from Luke 1:37; in contrast to Gen. 18:14 it is not reformulated as a question. And in Luke 18:17 we even hear: 'What is impossible with man is possible with God.' But one can ask: Is this promise just as simple as it seems? Is theology, that is, speaking about God, nothing but the transgression of human boundaries? And is the impossibility only a negative form of God's possibilities? What would this theological answer mean for ethics and humanity in the times of migration?

## Hospitality as a question of metaphysics: theological consequences

The distinction between conditional and unconditional hospitality led to the difference between the possibilities and the impossibility of hospitality. Whereas Derrida demonstrates that *the conditional laws of a right to hospitality* necessarily presume – *a priori* – *the unconditional Law of hospitality* – even if he definitely does not know if *there is such a thing*. Kearney critiques this unconditional and impossible hospitality for the sake of ethics; but while summarising the story of Abraham he transforms the question as to whether anything could be too hard for God (cf. Gen. 18:14) into the statement that *nothing is impossible to God*. This return to the question of impossibility implies – as one can assume – a turn to a theological phrase. The question then is if the *impossibility* is just a *possibility* to God? What would be the consequences of this insight for an understanding of humanity? Why does the impossibility return? What have ethics and hospitality to do with impossibility and what is possible? Does the story about the possible impossibility of Abraham and Sarah becoming parents reaffirm that *there is no such thing*?

The story about Abraham and Sarah welcoming the three strangers has been interpreted in the context of the theory of virtues (Moyaert 2011). Like Kearney, Marianne Moyaert refers to Paul Ricœur and the hermeneutics of narrative hospitality. In the line of this interpretation, hospitality is regarded ‘as an ethical and theological virtue’ (99) and God appears as an actor who plays a special role. God is – like Abraham and Sarah – ‘one of the main characters’ (97). But would this appearance not be too much for the humiliation of God and too little for God as the creator of the world?

To get an adequate theological understanding of hospitality I want to proceed along two major steps: 1) we have to take into account another passage and another background to Derrida’s thinking concerning unconditional hospitality; 2) we will have to ask what might hospitality mean in a biblical-theological context?

1) To start with the first point, we have to consider that Derrida refers again and again to Emmanuel Levinas when speaking about hospitality. Levinas presents a radical interpretation of the other and focuses on ethics in his works. In one of his lectures on Levinas – ‘A word of welcome’ – Derrida called Levinas’s first major work *Totality and Infinity* ‘an immense treatise of hospitality’ (Derrida 1999a: 21) and he gives an interesting and convincing approach to the work of Levinas: ‘Has anyone ever noticed?

Although the word is neither frequently used nor emphasized within it, *Totality and Infinity* bequeaths to us an immense treatise of *hospitality*' (21). Derrida explains in very detailed re-readings of Levinas the difference between politics and the law of hospitality on the one hand and an eschatological or messianic ethics of hospitality. To get the fundamental meaning of hospitality, Derrida works out that for Levinas hospitality and rationality are linked, insofar as rationality and understanding signify reception: 'Reason itself is a welcome inasmuch as it welcomes the idea of infinity – and the welcome is rational' (26). The understanding of hospitality in the context of rationality and cognitive reception goes hand in hand with the ethical dimension. Hospitality, asylum, and the inn belong together; all three terms are called 'the place offered to the stranger' (68) by Levinas and even more: they constitute a 'figural scheme' that gathers three concepts together: fraternity, humanity, and hospitality: 'the welcome of the other or of the face as neighbor and as stranger, as neighbor *insofar as* he is a stranger, man and brother' (68).

Hospitality is not merely a concept or an idea among others. Derrida, who is re-reading Levinas, interprets hospitality in the context of ethics and shows that hospitality is an *experience of the alterity of the other*, and this understanding implies that metaphysics – not understood as ontology or onto-theo-logy – means nothing but *ethics or first philosophy*.

Hospitality assumes 'radical separation' as experience of the alterity of the other, as relation to the other, in the sense that Levinas emphasizes and works with in the word 'relation', that is, in its ferential, referential or, as he sometimes notes, deferential bearing [*portée*]. The relation to the other is deference. Such separation signifies the very thing that Levinas re-names 'metaphysics': ethics or first philosophy, as opposed to ontology. Because it opens itself to – so as to welcome – the irruption of the idea of infinity in the finite, this metaphysics is an experience of hospitality. (Derrida 1999a: 46)

This *irruption of the idea of infinity in the finite* is one of the main ideas of Levinas's thinking. Within our reconstruction of a radical thinking of hospitality, it not only reminds us of the *break* that Derrida mentions according to gift and hospitality; the *irruption of the idea of infinity in the finite* also throws light on the understanding of the impossibility of hospitality.

Impossible – that means an irruption of the impossible in the possible. Impossibility appears – like the strangers in the desert. This might be an appropriate approach not only to a radical interpretation of hospitality, but perhaps also to *theo*-logy.

2) We can deepen this approach to theology: the English term ‘hospitality’ stems from the Latin and has its Greek counterpart in the word ‘philoxenia’. Christoph Theobald has reminded us of this linguistic background of hospitality in the sense of *philoxenia* (Theobald 2015: 216; Theobald 2008). If one does not want to misinterpret holiness as sacrality, as Theobald puts it, and if we want to emphasise the humanitarian ground of a Christian lifestyle one has to combine and to confront the term of holiness with the biblical thinking of hospitality. In the texts of the Second Vatican Council, this combination has been realised only once: in *Presbyterorum ordinis*, No. 8., hospitality is understood in this context as *philoxenia* and therefore the text refers back to Hebrews 13:2.

‘Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares’ (Hebr. 13:2). Obviously, this phrase alludes to the abovementioned text about Abraham and the three strangers (Gen. 18). Philoxenia, hospitality in this sense, is nothing else but love to the stranger. If we now ask in which way the Bible presents an understanding of God, it is no wonder that we find exactly this definition for God. In the last of the five books of Moses, the book Deuteronomy, God is called a God ‘who loves the stranger’ (Deut. 10:18). Hospitality, philoxenia is not just an ethical exhortation; we as human beings are supposed to be hospitable because God himself has to be understood as hospitable. Hospitality means God’s love to the stranger, means to give the stranger ‘bread and clothing’ (Deut. 10:18). From this perspective, the ethical exhortation in Matthew 25 comes to be understood as an imitation of God.<sup>3</sup>

For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me... Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. (Matt. 25:35–36, 40)

3 Cf. Ebach (2014: 194): ‘Weil Jhwh den Fremdling liebt, soll auch Israel ihn lieben. Die Liebe zum Fremdling wird hier zur *imitatio dei*.’ Cf. Welz 2016.

If this theological interpretation of hospitality is convincing, it implies something else. In the radical understanding of hospitality mentioned here it would not only be a virtue among others, but also be a step towards God or God's step towards us. *Pas d'hospitalité* – as Derrida put it – in the double meaning of no hospitality, and a step of hospitality. We can approach God – step by step.

## Conclusion

One may ask, of course, about what theology can contribute to the socio-political discussions concerning migration. In what way would it be helpful to think about migration in theological terms? Does not religion, and especially monotheism, play a tragic role in a worldwide setting of violence, hatred, and terrorism? In other words, is the belief in God not part of a problem that should be solved by tracing back to this belief in God? Would it be less harmful to avoid speaking about God than doing so? On the other hand, one may ask, if it is not a first and necessary step to talk about God because of the differences within especially the monotheistic religions? Is it not unavoidable to speak about the different approaches to God in whose name murder and crimes are being performed?

Perhaps Derrida's thinking and Kearney's critique of it are regarded as a consequence of theological deliberations; there are, of course, interpretations that suggest we are speaking about a religious turn in phenomenology. But perhaps, and I would prefer this interpretation, it is just the other way around: theology would then be a consequence of the insights into human being that Derrida, Levinas, Kearney among others have worked out. The contributions may have shown that to speak about God cannot be avoided. Especially if we want to consider the question of humanity. Even if it sounds paradoxical, the discourse on hospitality has shown that in order to be, or to become, human we must do the impossible.

Humanity and hospitality are linked to each other, as we have seen. And they have theological implications insofar as they recall the 'Word of God'. In an analysis of a talmudic text Levinas wrote:

Fraternity (but what does it mean? Is it not, according to the Bible, a synonym of humanity?) and hospitality: are these not stronger than the horror a man may feel for the other who denies him in his alterity? Do

they not already bring back a memory of the ‘Word of God?’ (Derrida 1999a: 69)

The theo-political discourse that is opened up by this thinking has not ended yet. Furthermore, the theological perspective is the approach to an understanding of the Biblical God who is presented as ‘God who loves the stranger’ (Deut. 10:18). Derrida, who quotes this Biblical verse, which is important for Levinas, adds the following thought:

‘God loves the stranger’, rather than shows himself – is this not, beyond being and the phenomenon, beyond being and nothingness, a God who, although he literally *is* not, not ‘contaminated by being’, would destine the à-Dieu, the salutation and the holy separation to desire as ‘love of the stranger?’ ... The Saying à-Dieu would signify hospitality. This is not some abstraction that one would call, as I have just hastily done, ‘love of the stranger’, but (God) ‘who loves the stranger.’ (Derrida 1999a: 104f.)

What I have wanted to demonstrate is that a radical thinking about hospitality gives a glimpse of humanity and offers the chance for a new approach in theology in times of migration.

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