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Ways of Relating

Hospitality and the Acknowledgement of Otherness

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Progress in Human Geography

Abstract

This paper considers the relevance of the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida to geography's engagements with both mainstream moral philosophy and poststructuralist theory. This relevance lies in the way in which their work unsettles the ascription of normative value to relations of proximity and distance. Distance is usually understood to be a medium of moral harm or indifference. In contrast, Levinas presents distance as the very condition of responsibility. Grasping the significance of this argument requires an appreciation of the temporality of responsibility and responsiveness that both Levinas and Derrida emphasise. They present an alternative way of understanding the relationality of subjectivity and social processes. Through a schematic exposition of key themes in Levinas' work, prevalent understandings of the spatiality of relations are shown to harbour their own forms of indifference and moral harm. The full effect of Levinas' reconsideration of the value of relations between proximity and distance is bought out in Derrida's recent writings on hospitality. For both thinkers, there is no natural geographical scene for the cultivation of responsibility. Rather, their shared focus upon temporality emphasizes the degree to which responsibility is motivated in response to the activities of others. The implication of this argument is that critical analysis should be reoriented towards practices that shape individual and collective dispositions to acknowledge the claims of others.

Keywords

Derrida Levinas Relationality Hospitality Temporality Acknowledgement

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“Responsibility remains a task of responsiveness”
Stanley Cavell (1990, 25)

I). DECONSTRUCTING PROXIMITY AND DISTANCE

In both geography and moral philosophy, the tension between a partial ethics of care and an impartial ethics of justice is often mapped onto a spatial distinction between responsibilities to proximate others and responsibilities to distant others (see Chatterjee 2003, Smith 1998). On the one hand, there is a set of arguments that ethical competencies are inevitably learned *in situ*, and that place serves as the necessary basis for any extension of concern over larger scales (Sack 1997). On the other hand, there is the argument that there is no good reason to privilege responsibilities to those who are close by (and by implication, those with whom one shares an identity). This argument is perhaps most famously developed by Peter Singer (1972), and has been invoked to argue for the extension of geography’s ‘scope of concern’ (Murdoch 2003). Both sets of arguments share an implicit understanding of proximity in terms of identity, shared interests, and partiality. Thus, the recurrent theme of ‘caring at a distance’ revolves around the question of whether concerns for people in close proximity can be transformed into active concern for distant strangers. Caring at a distance is supposed to be a problem because it is assumed that “distance leads to indifference” (Smith 2000, 93).¹

This paper considers the contribution that the work of both Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida might make to geographers’ engagements with moral philosophy and ethical theory. This contribution lies, I will argue, in the way in which their work unsettles the usual ascription of normative value to proximity and distance. Levinas’ work has become central to the ethical turn in poststructuralism (see Garber *et al* 2000). It has also begun to attract detailed attention from geographers (Bridge 2000, Howitt 2002, Popke 2003). Levinas’ phenomenology of care lends itself well to the problem that has come to serve as the paradigm of ethical reflection in geography, namely the question of how far moral obligations actually extend (see Corbridge 1998, Silk 1998, Smith 1998). Levinas’ work places considerable emphasis upon the ethical primacy of relations of proximity. But the value of this notion in his work does not depend on the annulment of distance, and nor is distance even understood as the primary source of moral harm. Firstly, then, Levinas provides an entry point for rethinking the equation of proximity with partiality, and of distance with impartiality. By extension, he helps us reassess the problem of how to reconcile an ethics of care with an ethics of justice. Secondly, I also want to demonstrate the extent to which any treatment of Levinas’ work needs also to consider Derrida’s inflection of that work. The relationship between these two thinkers is well-enough known these days. Levinas stands as one of the paternal thinkers who prefigured what we now recognise as poststructuralism. However, Derrida’s work is far from straightforwardly derivative of Levinas’. There is an oblique dialogue between the two that shapes the work of each one (see Bernasconi 1991). Finally, while asserting the relevance of this tradition of thought to geography’s concerns with moral philosophy and ethical theory, I also want to argue that a respectful consideration of Levinas’ and Derrida’s writings on responsibility throws into question some of the cherished assumptions of geography’s received interpretation of poststructuralism.

Derrida’s (1999) recent reflections on Levinas’ legacy are concerned with questions of the reception of guests and generosity towards strangers – with questions of hospitality. Hospitality appears at first sight to be a geographical theme. The geographical interpretation of hospitality is encouraged by the connections made by Derrida and others between this idea and current political debates about migration, asylum, and post-national citizenship (see Amin 2003, Ben Jelloun 1999, Derrida 2001, Rosello 2001). In

this paper, I argue that we should resist a temptation to read the theme of hospitality as immediately pertaining to geographical concerns. I demonstrate the extent to which what is most at issue in the encounter between Levinas and Derrida is the temporality of inter-subjective relations. Figures of temporality – of memory, inheritance, anticipation and surprise – are central to the alternative, non-hierarchical evaluation of the value of proximity and distance that emerges in this line of thought. And the focus upon temporality is significant because it emphasizes the degree to which responsibility is motivated in response to the activity of others.

II). ON THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF OTHERING

In contemporary critical theory, and in particular in work inflected by poststructuralism, there is an axiomatic understanding of the ethics of identity and difference. This understanding depends on a critique of ‘essentialist’ understandings of identity. Essentialist understandings present identity as natural, stable, or freestanding. In contrast, anti-essentialist understandings consider identities to be malleable and constructed – through codes, practices, and performances. To be more precise, identity is constructed in relation to other identities, in a simultaneous process of identification with and differentiation from selected ‘others’. According to this view, if identity is relational, then identity-formation works primarily by excluding some element that takes on the role of the Other, setting up an image of non-identity that confirms the identity of the self or the collective community. But in turn, this excluded element always threatens to undermine the appearance of self-contained identity that it supports.

This understanding presents identity-formation as a process of controlling boundaries and maintaining the territorial integrity of communities or selves. It therefore entails an automatic calculus of the rights and wrongs of different modes of relating. The assumption is that moral harm arises primarily through the failure or refusal to recognise the reciprocal and co-constitutive characteristics of subjectivity. This failure is often presented in terms of spatial exclusion or separation, that is, as working through the putting of certain things (e.g. people, nature, animals) at a distance. From this perspective, classical philosophical notions of moral agency can be criticised on two related grounds (see Popke 2003). Firstly, notions of moral agency and ethical autonomy apparently depend on the ‘othering’ of certain categories of person – on the grounds of class, gender, race, sexuality, and so on. This argument reiterates one of the maxims of poststructuralist theory. This is the idea that difference is the condition of the identity of subjectivity. Secondly, it is argued that the identity/difference, self/other relation is organized in fundamentally spatialized ways – around tropes of here and there, inclusion and exclusion, presence and absence, in-place and out-of-place. These two axioms of poststructuralist theory suppose that to develop values of mutuality, inclusion, and responsibility, it is necessary to bridge distance or extend the scope of recognition.

This generic poststructuralist theory of cultural othering is prone to a series of conceptual and normative slippages. This follows from the tendency to run together two quite distinct understandings of otherness. One is based upon the empirical analysis of the ways in which identities are constructed through exclusion or denigration. The second is based upon a set of theoretical resources drawn in particular from Lacanian psychoanalysis, in which the movement between identity and difference is understood to be ontologically constitutive of any and all subjectivity (Osborne 2000, 107-8). By running these two understandings of otherness together, the uncovering of exclusion becomes the taken-for-granted manoeuvre of critical analysis for poststructuralized geography, according to which the cultural other is necessarily posited as the unstable foundation of hegemonic identities. This conception remains true to a longer tradition of thought in which the relationship of Self and Other is contained within a circle of

recognition and mis-recognition, according to which a subject only exists in so far as it exists for another subject. At the level of normative evaluation, this sort of approach affirms openness over closure, inclusion over exclusion. But at the ontological level, it ascribes priority to closure and exclusion in processes of subject-formation. This generic poststructuralism is therefore condemned to reiterate the banal truism that all identities and institutions are founded on repression, or denial, or exclusion, and yet are always permeable to disruptions by these exclusions that define them.

There is no good reason to suppose that the logic of exclusion that is essentialized by generic theories of cultural othering exhausts all the possible ways of relating to alterity (see Isin 2003, Oliver 2000). Lois McNay (2000, 3) neatly captures the problem with this prevalent conceptualisation of subject-formation:

“Following a relational theory of meaning, the assertion of the subject’s identity is explained through a logic of the disavowal of difference; the subject maintains a sense of self principally through a denial of the alterity of the other. While this might be a foundational moment in the formation of coherent subjectivity, it does not provide a comprehensive explanation of all possible ways in which the subject may relate to the other or deal with difference. When this exclusionary logic is extended to explain all aspects of subject formation, it results in an attenuated account of agency which leaves unexplored how individuals are endowed with the capabilities for independent reflection and action such that their response, when confronted with difference and paradox, may involve accommodation or adaptation as much as denial. In other words, it leaves unexplained the capabilities of individuals to respond to difference in a less defensive and even, at times, a more creative fashion”.

By essentializing the logic of exclusion as the ontological foundation of all modes of subjectivity, poststructuralist theory generates an epistemological and ethico-political impasse for itself. It becomes extremely difficult to either *account for* or to *justify* observed practices of accommodation, generosity, or solidarity from within the standard interpretation of cultural othering. In contrast to the theoretical axioms of received poststructuralism, I want to argue that a different model of relational subjectivity emerges when one reads Levinas and Derrida alongside one another. In this alternative account, subjectivity is formed in opening-up towards otherness in a relation of welcome.

III). THE HYPERBOLE OF ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

In this section, I want to clarify what is most distinctive about Levinas’ discussion of otherness. Levinas criticizes what he argues is the long-founded tendency in Western philosophy to subordinate ethics to ontology and epistemic reasoning, so that moral responsibility is derived from a definitive knowledge or comprehension of Being. Rather than modelling human relations on structures of knowledge of some sort, which depend on relations of identity, Levinas argues that there is a structure of responsibility built into human relations that precedes other forms of relating such as knowing or perceiving. Levinas asserts the primacy of the ethical in human relations – this is what he means by ‘ethics as first philosophy’. But he presents the ethical relation as irreducibly asymmetrical. His argument holds that any attempt by a subject to rationalize or to calculate their obligations to others negates the ethical relation itself, by re-centering these commitments in the self-assured good conscience of an autonomous self. In contrast, Levinas’ account of the ethical relation affirms an absolute and inviolable responsibility for the Other. Subjectivity is formed in a radically passive relation of hospitality towards the Other (Levinas 1969, 168-174).

By breaking the assumed connections between subjectivity, consciousness, and intention, Levinas’ account of ethical responsibility seems to render impossible ‘responsibility’ as it usually understood. However, it might not be best to take Levinas’

work too literally as an account of practical conduct. The guiding trope of Levinas' account of ethical responsibility is hyperbole, that is, the "the systematic practice of excess in philosophical argument" (Ricouer 1992, 337-341). This observation suggests that Levinas is intent on recalling a forgotten dimension of human relations. Levinas goes so far as to suggest that this ethical substratum of human relating cannot be represented in the idioms of philosophical discourse at all. In response to Levinas' claim to escape the vocabulary of classical philosophical reason, Derrida (1978, 111-113) observes that when it comes to discuss relations of difference, identity, otherness and alterity, Levinas' *Totality and Infinity* inevitably has recourse to a spatial metaphoric of insides and outsides. Derrida argues that this spatialization of concepts is a problem for any account of ethical responsibility. This is because it reproduces a model in which subjectivity is founded through a hostile dynamic of incorporation and expulsion. On the face of it, Derrida reiterates the form of argument made against philosophical scepticism, suggesting that Levinas' effort to elaborate ethics as first philosophy is self-defeating. The attempt to articulate a sense of ethics that escapes the philosophical vocabulary of ontology, knowledge and certainty necessarily makes use of that very vocabulary in order to remain comprehensible. Levinas' allusive response to this argument is to argue that scepticism (and by implication his own thought), plays two distinct temporal registers off against each other: the Said, which refers to the content of a discourse; and the Saying, which refers to the event of enunciation itself (Levinas 1981, 167-171; see also Levinas 1991). The relation of ethical responsibility is not so much *represented* as it is *shown* in the performative temporality of the Saying. This is the scene for a singular experience of exposure without reserve to the Other.

This sensitivity to the distinctive temporalities of relating is pivotal to grasping the normative significance of Levinas' insistence on the asymmetry of the relationship between Self and Other. For Levinas, subjectivity is derived from a traumatic exposure to alterity. The scene of this exposure to the Other is the Face-to-Face relation. This is not understood to be a scene of reciprocity, but of radical asymmetry and subjection. The privileged modalities of ethical selfhood are suffering, vulnerability, persecution, or accusation. On these grounds, Levinas develops an account of subjectivity as always-already responsible to and for the Other, prior to any calculation or reflection by a self-conscious subject. The subject is, as he puts it, always One-for-the-Other (Levinas 1981, 135-140). Feeling responsible or being obliged therefore arise 'inadvertently', in so far as they escape the intentionality of the subject (see Marais 1991). Rather than responsibility being actively chosen or consciously accepted by a subject, Levinas suggests that it only ever something that can be assumed in response to the approach of otherness. There is an irreducible degree of passivity inscribed within responsibility, a 'passivity beyond passivity' that is not a warrant for inaction, but is the very condition of responsiveness in the first place.

This understanding of subjectivity as response-ability (see Oliver 2001) belongs to a broader tradition of thought that shares the idea that ethics "begins with the experience of a demand to which I give my approval" (Critchley 2000, 16). This tradition is characterised by a commitment to affirming the heteronomous constitution of human subjectivity. This emphasis helps us to see that Levinas' usage of 'the Other' and 'otherness' is not best read in the terms suggested by the generic analysis of the cultural politics of othering outlined in the previous section. It is important not to read the word 'Other' in Levinas (nor indeed in Derrida) as straightforwardly referring to another person, another self, or indeed, another entity at all. It would be better to interpret Levinas' 'Other' in strongly phenomenological terms, where this refers to the elaboration of the modalities through which entities appear. Understood in these terms, 'otherness'

refers not to what appears, but to a particular way of appearing (Large 1996, 49-50). The ethical relation, for Levinas, is a modality of appearing that has been forgotten or suppressed by the predominant norms for apprehending the self and the world. More precisely, in his account it is a mode of appearing that is not wholly cognitive, since 'otherness' refers to the event of being placed under an obligation that is not modelled on either conceptual thought or sensory perception. This is a scene of exposure and rupture of the self. And it is important to underscore that, for Levinas, time is the medium of this ethical relation to otherness (1987b). A specific sense of temporality is privileged by Levinas – his emphasis is upon patience, postponing, and deferring. Or, as Critchley (1999a, 155) puts it, the emphasis is upon *temporalisation*. These favoured temporal figures are suggestive of a sense of subjectivity that does not rely on a notion of active self-constitution, but is formed in a relation of radical passivity (see also Clark 2003). Understood in this sense, otherness refers to the dimension of surprise that overtakes the self. Responsibility is therefore not understood as an attribute of an autonomous subject able to legislate obligations for itself. For Levinas subjectivity is anarchic, by which he means that it is formed in a relation of obligation that precedes law, principle, or conceptualisation (Levinas 1987a, 127-139). And this is the source of the idea that ethical responsibility is *assumed* rather than *accepted*. Levinas suggests that ethical responsibility, as the withdrawn origin of subjectivity itself, is not formed in a relation of re-cognition, nor by calculating the validity of claims made on the self. Rather, responsibility begins in the absence of such criteria.

IV). INTIMATE DISTANCE, STRANGE PROXIMITY

Levinas' thought encourages us to think more carefully about the precise meaning of assertions concerning the 'relational' qualities of identity, subjectivity, or community. The stake in post-Kantian philosophy is not whether subjectivity is relationally constituted or not. It is, rather, just how 'relational' subjectivity is to be understood (see Taylor 1995, 76-78). As Gasché (1999, 7-11) observes, being-toward-another is the "essential peculiarity of relation". In this light, Levinas provides a particular account of what being-toward-another involves. He argues that from Hegel through to Husserl, the movement of mediation through which the identity of a subject is formed in relation to others is conceptualized in terms of a circuit of reciprocity that, in the final analysis, recuperates and destroys "the radical alterity of the other" (Levinas 1969, 35-6). For Levinas, by contrast, the Other is the figure for a relation to alterity that exceeds a reciprocal dynamic of dialogue or (mis-)recognition. Levinas' account of ethical responsibility therefore turns on a very distinctive notion of the relational constitution of subjectivity, in which Self and Other relate across an unbridgeable distance, bound together in a relation of exteriority (Levinas 1969, 40-42). This is a relation almost without common terms, and therefore hardly a relation at all (Ricoeur 1992, 338-9). Levinas affirms the separation of Self and Other, a separation that is not to be mistaken for isolation. This idea that separation is formative of ethical responsibility is underscored by the way in which Levinas presents otherness not simply as difference, but as *transcendence*, as the apprehension "of existing apart, of being beyond and surpassing" (Joplin 1993, 222). This differential separation, whose medium is temporal as much as it is spatial, is the very condition of being moved by other people or events.

Levinas' discussions of proximity focus upon those kinds of intimate relationships that depend upon the maintenance of separation. Levinas' privileged figures for describing this sort of relationship are tropes of contact and touch, such as the caress (Levinas 1981, 81-94). But proximity is a temporal figure as much as a spatial one. More precisely, it is a figure of diachronic, differential temporality (*ibid*, 85). Proximity is presented throughout Levinas' thought as a relation of non-synchronous and non-coincident approach. His

usage of proximity should therefore be distinguished from any sense of synchronicity, coincidence, or simultaneity implied by understanding this term simply in terms of spatial contiguity. Levinas refers to “the dehiscence of proximity” (ibid., 84), to underscore the sense of rupture rather than fusion that this theme is meant to invoke. Thus, proximity is not a figure of communitarian familiarity, but a figure for the most intense and singular experience of difference. In this scene of proximity, the neighbour is also the stranger.

In so far as this theme of proximity refers to *scale* (Howitt 2002), it is not spatial scale but numerical scale that is most at stake. In Levinas’ writing, proximity is the figure for the restless encounter between the One and a singular Other. As distinct from this ethical relationship of asymmetrical responsibility for the Other, justice enters the story with the introduction of multiplicity into the dyadic ethical encounter. It is here that responsibilities for generalised others arise, and here too that all those questions of comparison, measurement, synchronicity, equality, and reciprocity that Levinas excludes from the purity of ethical responsibility are re-admitted. In the ethical relationship, the subject is One-for-the-Other, impossibly indifferent to its own care. The entry of the ‘Third Party’ into the scene of the Face-to-Face relationship transforms this ethical subject into an Other-for-others, that is, into an *object* of ethical responsibility. It is precisely this latter status that the One-for-the-Other is deprived of in the purity of the asymmetrical ethical relation (Levinas 1981, 158). The recurrent figure of proximity in Levinas’ thought therefore indicates the degree to which the guiding moral principle of this phenomenological ethics is the singular value of individuals *as* individuals. Levinas provides an account of human relations that affirms the absolute non-substitutability of individual persons. In proximity, “the substitution of the one for the other does not imply the substitution of the other for the one” (ibid.). The assumption of responsibility is not premised on reciprocity or symmetry. Or, to put it differently, the ethical relationship is characterised by a “surplus of my duties over my rights” (ibid, 159). In so far as Levinas affirms an un-abridgeable principle of infinite responsibility, it is because this sense of responsibility is, precisely, *infinite* - because it is a debt that cannot possibly be settled, and not because it extends everywhere or to everyone.

This account of ethics in terms of relations of asymmetrical delegation and substitution presents responsibility as a virtue that exceeds reciprocal obligations. In commentaries on this aspect of Levinas’ thought, it is common to suggest that the inviolable value ascribed to ethical responsibility for a concrete other must lead to a political impasse, in so far as practices of formalised justice that define responsibilities to generalised others seem to contravene the intense singularity and partiality that characterises the purity of the ethical relation. Levinas’ account of ethics and justice therefore has a certain degree of family resemblance to debates in moral philosophy concerning the consistency of an ethics of care with an ethics of justice, or of an ethics of virtue with an ethics of rights (e.g. Held 1995, O’Neill 1996, Tronto 1993). As I have already intimated, there is an imagined geography underwriting these debates, in which the tension between what Slote (2000) calls ‘intimate care’ and ‘humanitarian caring’ is transposed into an opposition between caring up-close and the problem of caring at a distance. My argument here is that in so far as Levinas, and in turn Derrida, communicate with this set of debates, then they do so by disrupting the homologies often drawn between spatial proximity, partiality, and care on the one side, and spatial distance, impartiality and justice on the other.

Levinas is careful to insist that justice, understood as the occasion of impartiality, comparison, and equality, does not simply degrade ethical responsibility (1981, 156-162). Without this relationship between multiple others the burdens of asymmetrical ethical response would be intolerable and lead to their own versions of ethical violence. Nevertheless, he does insist that justice on its own, stripped of the concerns of ethical responsibility, is abstract and violent:

“the contemporaneousness of the multiple is tied about the diachrony of two: justice remains justice only, in a society where there is no distinction between those close and those far off, but in which there also remains the impossibility of passing by the closest” (ibid., 159).

This passage indicates that, for Levinas, justice refers to a relationship in which the differential separation between singular persons is necessarily annulled. Relations of proximity - that is, relations in which subjects approach one another without merging or coinciding - are temporally distinct from relations of justice. The time of justice is *contemporary*, in the sense of aligning multiple subjects and claims into a relation of identity and comparison. The ethical relation is understood to be *diachronous* – it refers to a temporality of non-coincidence, patience, and surprise. For Levinas, the movement from the scene of ethical responsibility for the Other to a generalised responsibility for others (justice) needs to retain a reference to the experience of ethical proximity, otherwise it would be ‘justice only’. ‘Justice with responsibility’ is dependent on maintaining, rather than overcoming, the separation between the close and the far off. This separation is the condition of being affected, of being moved to responsibility.

The gist of Levinas’ argument is to contest the idea that ethical responsibility could consist simply in the unconditional extension of care to generalised others. For Levinas, the ethical relationship is by definition restricted to the relationship of proximity with a singular Other. This argument is a little unsettling when misconstrued as an account of practical conduct. But it should probably be interpreted as an effort to dispossess the centred subject of philosophical reason of the privilege of deciding both its own commitments and the identity of those to whom concern will be extended. It is, in short, an effort to account for the very possibility of *responsiveness* without which the practice of responsibility would remain the benevolent dispensing of favours without any acknowledgement of the finitude of the self.

The question which remains, after this clarification of Levinas’ understanding of the temporalities of responsibility and justice, is just how to suppose that justice can be inflected with the trace of the ethical relation without annulling what is distinctive about the value of that relation in the process. Is this just a forlorn hope, dependent on a plea to good conscience? Or is this account of ethics just a regulative ideal, against which to judge the necessarily compromised actualities of worldly power?

V). DISPOSSESSING THE SUBJECT OF GENEROSITY

Levinas develops an understanding of ethics, responsibility, and otherness that does not fit the generic story about cultural othering discussed above. From this alternative perspective, subjectivity is constituted in relation to an exposure to otherness that comes as a surprise, as an event that overtakes the self-possession of the subject. Subjectivity is neither the derivative projection of a prior will-to-identify, and nor is it formed through differential exclusion. The reason for emphasising the temporality of responsibility is to underscore the idea that ethical concern arises through a capacity for responsiveness to specific appeals for care. However, as already suggested, this insistence on the intense partiality of responsibility seems to undermine the possibility of institutionalising modes of justice. Justice is supposed to be governed by values of universality, equal treatment and impartiality that seem to negate the normative core of the ethical relation as Levinas sketches it. Levinas certainly does not straightforwardly affirm ethics over justice, but there remains in his work an implicit prioritisation of the dyadic ethical encounter even as he insists on the necessity for the generalisations of justice.

The next two sections show how Derrida deconstructs, in an ‘affirmative’ register, Levinas’ implicit purification of the ethical relation. If for Levinas, responsibility emerges in the proximity of the face-to-face relation, understood as a scene of intense separation,

then Derrida demonstrates that this relation cannot be contained at the scale of physical co-presence. In so far as the ethical proximity opened up in the Face-to-Face relation is a space of address in which the self is overcome by the Other, then the anonymity of this Other must be paramount. For Derrida, the space of such anonymous relations of address is typified by the drift of 'writing', where this refers to a spatiality in which any sense of convening together subjects who share an identity is sundered from the outset (see Barnett 1999).

Derrida's (1992) deconstruction of the gift relationship is the paradigm for understanding the ethical orientation of deconstruction. This reading of the logic of the gift is meant to expose *the conditions of possibility and impossibility* through which generosity works. Starting from the observation that authentic gift-giving is conventionally counter-posed to the alienation of exchange-relations, Derrida proceeds to show that, on these grounds, gift-giving turns out to negate its own principle. As soon as a gift is given knowingly as a gift, the subject of generosity is always anticipating a return, already taking credit of some sort, if only for being generous. This relationship between giving and taking, anticipation and return, therefore inscribes the gift within a circuit of utilitarian exchange that it is supposed to exclude. On this view, the ethical content of the generous act is annulled in the very moment of its enactment. Derrida's lesson seems to be that giving is not possible, at least not in any purity. An act of pure generosity, one that would vouchsafe any return at all, could not be knowingly or freely given, it could not be recognised as a gift by either party.

It is important to underscore that this deconstruction of the gift does not take as its target a scene of non-recognition, of non-reciprocity, or of exclusion. Quite the contrary, the focus of critical attention is an exemplary scene of reciprocal inter-subjective recognition, one that might be supposed to typify a non-allergic relation between Self and Other. The difference that is not honoured in this scene of reciprocity is the radical difference of the future as a space of the unanticipated event, of surprise. This argument about the gift is just one version of a recurrent impulse in Derrida's writing that attempts to disrupt understandings of human action that retain a strong elective affinity with values of mastery, sovereignty, and possession. The broader significance of this argument is, then, that established ways of thinking about the relational encounter between Self and Other – in terms of dialogical, reciprocal, dialectical, or symmetrical relations of co-implication - might actually obstruct rather than advance the cultivation of ethical responses to otherness.

Derrida's deconstruction of generosity bears directly on the question of how, and even whether, to translate Levinas' account of the ethical relation into an account of moral action and worldly justice. A crucial reference point for Derrida's encounter with Levinas is the observed relationship between the grammar of the gift and the grammar of hospitality (see Benveniste 1971, 271-80). In reiterative readings of the theme of hospitality in literature, policy, and theology, Derrida finds that hospitality is ordinarily represented as a gift in the conventional sense, offered in exchange for something (for example, for good conduct, or respect for the law). Hospitality is therefore offered conditionally, out of a secure sense of self-possession. Just as with the deconstruction of the gift, Derrida's reading of what he calls the 'laws of hospitality' finds them to be premised on a logic of un-relinquished mastery over one's own space. This common sense understanding of hospitality therefore amounts to an ethics of tolerance. And Derrida suggests that tolerance depends on a form of paternalism rooted in mastery and possession, and that it therefore runs counter to the imperatives of 'pure' hospitality (see Borradori 2003, 127-9).

This analysis seems to set up a clear opposition between two orders: tolerance, taken as a shorthand term for conditional hospitality; and pure, unconditional hospitality.

Tolerance is extended to a guest whose identity is already attributed. On the other hand, pure hospitality befalls the subject as a trauma, because it is a response to an unanticipated arrival, to a *visitation* without *invitation*. Derrida therefore presents invitation and visitation as two distinct but related dimensions of hospitality. They are distinguished as two different temporalities of arrival (Derrida 2002a, 362). The unexpected visitor, as a figure of alterity, overwhelms the self-possession of the subject. The idea that subjectivity is constituted in a passive relationship of welcome, one of unconditional hospitality, implies that responsibility is not straightforwardly an attribute of a subject at all.

So is this where both Derrida and Levinas leave us - analysing the conditions of possibility of being ethical all the way down to their formal purity, thereby showing that putting ethical principles into practice is actually impossible? The impression seems to be that the 'indissoluble but heterogeneous' relationship between unconditional hospitality and conditional hospitality simply devolves into a relationship between the ideal and the practical. In this way, we appear to be led inevitably towards resolving the tension between a highly formalistic account of ethical responsibility and the practical demands of collective living by making both Levinas' and Derrida's account of responsibility into a regulative ideal (cf. Borradori 2003, 133-136). However, this is to presume that the difference that Derrida elaborates between conditional hospitality and pure hospitality, or the difference between invitation and visitation, must be read as a synchronous relation of opposition, negation, or paradox. In the next section, I want to argue that rather than simply affirming Levinas' implicit prioritisation of unconditional responsibility over impartial justice, Derrida redistributes the relations between these virtues through a parasitical-supplementary analysis² of the connections between the discourse of hospitality and the discourse of sovereignty. And this reveals deconstruction to be much more *conservative* in its ethical and political implications than is often supposed.

VI. FINITUDE AND HOSPITALITY

It is tempting to interpret Derrida's deconstruction of hospitality in terms of an opposition between ethics and politics, where these two serve as figures for intrinsic and instrumental value. The question of whether a new arrival should be interrogated and questioned, or whether they should be offered unquestioning welcome, seems on the face of it to be analogous to the difference between the ethical relation and justice (Derrida 2000, 27-9). On this reading, the conundrum facing any worldly inflection of deconstruction is how the ethics of hospitality (the scene for the unconditional obligation to welcome the Other without question) is related to the politics of hospitality (the realm in which hospitality is conditionally extended as a right to certain categories of person, implying an apparatus of laws, states, and borders). This question echoes Levinas' distinction between ethical responsibility and justice. Some commentators are happy to present this distinction between the ethics and politics of hospitality as an *aporia* that can only be crossed at the cost of reducing the intrinsic purity of the ethical relation, contaminating it with the instrumental calculations of politics, law, and sovereignty (e.g. de Vries 2001). The ethical relation is thereby understood to be both normatively and logically prior to any collective form of related-ness, for which politics serves as the name. In these terms, the practical exigencies of political community require some form of closure, exclusion, and calculation. But these nonetheless offend against a norm of unconditional welcome that continues to serve as a principle of immanent critique of existing practices. On this interpretation, then, any ordered discourse of responsibility, organised infrastructure of laws and rights, or regulated arrangement of boundaries is thought to contravene a principle of unlimited responsibility towards otherness by introducing a degree of calculation into the practice of care.

As already indicated, the recurring theme of geography's engagement with questions of moral philosophy and ethical theory has been the problem of caring for distant others (Smith 1998), or more broadly, of how far to extend the scope of moral concern, not just spatially, but also in terms of non-human beings (Whatmore 2003). Arguments around these issues tend to work on the principle that any restriction of concern is an expression of an allergic impulse to exclude others, an impulse that works by drawing boundaries and by putting 'others' at a distance. From this perspective, deconstruction is easily interpreted as affirming an unbounded responsibility for others, in so far as it is interpreted as providing a disobliging critique of the arbitrariness of seemingly watertight dichotomies. On the strength of this sort of interpretation, both Levinas and Derrida seem to recommend a 'deterritorialization of responsibility' (Campbell 1994), or an unconditional extension of concern to others in general. But the flip-side of this interpretation is that it renders deconstruction into a form of high-minded idealism, destined always to be disappointed by the stubbornness of worldly realities.

We should be wary of translating the Levinasian account of responsibility or Derrida's account of the laws of hospitality immediately into an ethics of irrecusable obligation to generalized others. If ethical responsibility is understood as an imperative to extend care to everyone or everything irrespective of identity, then it is made into a choice open to a subject to accept or reject. This presumes that responsibility is a kind of epistemic practice, precisely the idea that Levinas argues against. What is more, understood in this way, this model of responsibility is far too stringent in the degree of altruism its demands of ethical subjects. But more fundamentally, this understanding installs two forms of indifference at the heart of the account of ethical conduct. Firstly, it implies the complete malleability of the Self, able to slough off any and all existing commitments and relations at will, in favour of new ones. This implies an indifference to the web of relations into which any ethical subject is necessarily always-already woven. And secondly, in turn, it presumes that responsibility is accepted abstractly. This implies an indifference to the experience of being addressed by particular claims for acknowledgement.

For these reasons, we should resist any temptation to map the relationship between the ethics of hospitality and the politics of hospitality onto a dichotomy between idealized unconditional responsibilities and their necessarily conditional implementation. My argument here is that Derrida's mournful writings on Levinas' legacy indicate that the implicit privilege accorded to the purity of ethical responsibility be reconsidered. In Derrida's original engagement with Levinas' thought, he posed the question of whether the notion of ethics as unconditioned hospitality and undetermined responsibility, before law or concept, could possibly be expected to inform any action without "negating and forgetting itself" (1978, 111). In his more recent writings on this topic, the implied opposition between ethical ideals and practical action that this question presupposes is itself subjected to the force of a deconstructive reading. Derrida uses the topic of hospitality to re-inscribe conditionality and unconditionality into a different relation, one that is not governed by either the rule of negation or the tragedy of 'forgetting' and 'disclosure'. The thrust of Derrida's reading of Levinas is to find the latter's account of the ethical relation insufficient not just for thinking about politics and justice, but also in terms of its own criteria of ethicality.

Derrida engages in a characteristic double reading of Levinas, respectful and critical in equal measure. Firstly, he affirms Levinas' account, according to which hospitality cannot properly be conditioned – pure hospitality consists of a welcome extended without condition to an unanticipated guest. Levinas would seem to imply that attributing an identity to the guest contravenes the imperative of unconditional welcome. But in the second movement of Derrida's reading of Levinas, he suggests (Derrida 2000) that this imperative calls forth another, equally compelling one. In order to be hospitable,

hospitality requires that a guest be greeted, addressed, named as a singular individual. As Naas (2003, 159) puts it, hospitality requires that the guest be welcomed as a Somebody, not as a serialised nobody. Hospitality requires that one not be indifferent to one's guest. This is not a distinction between an ethical imperative of unconditional welcome and a political imperative to impose conditions, borne out of the empirical necessity to institutionalise rules and regulations. Rather, it is a distinction between two equally compelling ethical imperatives. The imperative to extend unconditional welcome without question and the imperative to impose conditionality on any such welcome by attributing identity are of equal weight within the ethical drama of hospitality. And this implies a different placement of the conditional and unconditional dimensions of hospitality:

“The problem is not that we can never live up to absolute, unconditional hospitality because we can never welcome everyone, because we must set limits to our hospitality. Obeying the law of conditions is not simply a concession to our finitude, to our limited capacities and resources, or else simply a concession to political expediency. It is recognition that hospitality, ‘real’ hospitality, consists in welcoming particular guests and not just anybody, particular guests and, as a result, not *others*” (ibid., 164).

This reading of the laws of hospitality undoes the lingering sense of logical and normative priority of pure ethical responsibility that pervades Levinas' work, as well as most commentary on it (ibid., 110). Accordingly, Derrida endorses the Kantian precept that *right* implies *effectivity*. He does so not simply as a pragmatic concession to worldly realities, but as an unbridgeable ethical principle called forward by the imperatives of ‘pure’ hospitality itself: “a law that doesn't exist *effectively*, a law that is not capable of ensuring, by force – by *its* force – that its decisions are respected, is not a law or right” (Derrida and Stiegler 2002, 75).

This affirmation indicates the significance of Derrida choosing the theme of hospitality as a topic through which to address questions of responsibility. The common rendition of the normative significance of Derrida's work holds that the deconstruction of conceptual dichotomies renders any form of boundary suspect. However, on the reading developed here, the intense suspicion of boundaries in generic poststructuralist theory can be seen to threaten to erase the very condition for any form of relation at all, and specifically for the form of responsibility valued by both Levinas and Derrida. This condition of responsibility is *radical separation* in the relation of proximity, a relation in which ‘passing by’ the other and being affected or moved to responsibility is made possible. To presume that distinctions, borders, or boundaries *per se* contravene principles of responsibility would threaten to install a degree of indifference into the understanding of responsibility that contravenes the specific sense of obligation that Derrida inherits from Levinas. In fact, Derrida (2000, 65) suggests that the complete erasure of boundaries would efface the threshold across which relating is made possible. Derrida's reading of hospitality is an affirmation that the condition of possibility of responsible action lies in divisibility of borders and finitude of boundaries, but not their erasure (Derrida 1993; see also Derrida 1979). Thresholds are the very scenes for the drama of responsiveness, hospitality, and responsibility.

It follows that the deconstruction of hospitality therefore has ambivalent implications for how we judge received discourses of sovereignty and autonomy. As was suggested above, hospitality is a virtue that depends upon retaining a semblance of both sovereignty and autonomy, not their negation. Derrida (1999, 32-33) insists that the absence of law, politics, or the state would threaten to unleash the double possibility of violence that inheres in the asymmetry of the ethical relation. Firstly, the affirmation of absolute asymmetry harbours within it the exposure of the self to harm. It implies that the ethical subject should be indifferent to its own happiness or well-being. Secondly, to

actually honour this singular responsibility to a concrete Other would threaten injustice by ignoring the claims of other subjects. It is here, in the internal possibility of violence and injustice that remains undiminished within the apparently non-violent purity of the asymmetrical ethical relation, that Derrida critically addresses the Levinasian inheritance.

Derrida's reading of Levinas revolves around the classically supplementary motif of the parasite. Levinas is able to admit the necessity of justice to ethics without admitting that calculation, measurement, comparison must thereby be inscribed within the purity of the ethical relation of asymmetrical proximity. But from a deconstructive perspective, responsibility is necessarily 'contaminated' by law, system, and calculation, and this contamination is emphatically not understood as an unfortunate loss of ideal purity (Spivak 1994). Derrida argues that the shift from ethical responsibility to justice is not a contingent movement. It actually belongs to the supposed purity of the Face-to-Face relationship that Levinas privileges as the scene of responsibility (Derrida 1999, 110). Therefore, ethics-as-hospitality is always already 'becoming political'. To put it another way, the border between the ethical and the political is not taken to be an indivisible limit (ibid., 99). Any idealized purity of unconditional hospitality is undone by the need for this imperative to become effective, and this is not merely a practical or empirical necessity. It is itself an ethical imperative (Derrida 2000, 79, 81). The 'corruption' of the unconditional law of hospitality is therefore not an accident. It is the opening up of an equally compelling imperative to develop effective, conditional laws of 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 2001, 22-23).

This reading of the internal necessity of organised power called forth by the apparent purity of ethical responsibility might seem to run counter to the general impression that deconstruction is unrelentingly disruptive of all systems, structures, and sovereignties. But deconstruction is actually a rather conservative line of thought. I mean this in the sense that it continues to respect the salience of inherited discourses of rights, sovereignty, justice, and so on, while also insisting on the equally pressing imperative to critically think through the limits of these traditions. In this respect, Derrida certainly expresses the hope that it might be possible to imagine the operation of unconditional imperatives without sovereignty (Derrida 2001, 59-60). But this expression of hope is not to be too quickly conflated with a disobliging critique of all forms of sovereign autonomy, whether personal or territorial. Derrida affirms the hope of re-ordering the territoriality of claims-making and obligations without abandoning the promise of responsibility to the an-anarchic chance of unmediated goodness between persons.

VII). ACKNOWLEDGING OTHERNESS

I have argued here that there is, in what has become poststructuralist orthodoxy, a tendency to derive the normative significance of relations of identity and difference from a story about the politics of cultural othering. In this story, the relational qualities of subject-formation are understood primarily in relation to a set of spatial tropes of exclusion, expulsion, and constitutive outsides. On this axiomatic understanding of difference, moral harm is primarily rendered by excluding or disavowing otherness. Having also determined that there are no certain criteria for evaluating knowledge claims, this understanding of the sources of moral harm is led to embrace a variety of cultural relativism that encloses us within our own moral communities, able to affirm pluralism only in terms of highly abstract principles of tolerance (Mohanty 1995).

Assuming that that the philosophical critique of Western norms of autonomy and universality simply confirms the relational qualities of subject-formation is to miss the full force of these critiques. The key question is how to understand different modes of

relating. My argument here has been that, by reading Derrida and Levinas up against one another, one can glean an understanding of relational subjectivity that departs from the received reading of poststructuralist theory. The sense of temporal relating that is central to both Levinas and Derrida's writings is systematically repressed by the continuing presentation of deconstruction as poststructuralist, that is, as turning primarily upon an spatialized tropic of insides and outsides, determination and contingency. This vocabulary reduces the conceptualisation of time to the succession of punctual moments held together by nothing other than hegemonic conventions or a vitalistic force of will.

The alternative understanding of relational subjectivity outlined in this paper emphasizes the heteronomy of responsibility. It does so in order to de-centre the self-assured subject of moral judgement. And the emphasis upon the temporality of being obliged, of being moved to respond, is crucial to this de-centering. For example, Derrida's distinction between *invitation* and *visitation* indicates that the category of the Other in deconstruction is not primarily understood with reference to a position in space. The topic of hospitality is not simply a story about inclusion or exclusion. Rather, the figure of the unexpected guest, the *arrivant*, is in a relation of temporal approach. From this alternative perspective, subjectivity is formed in a temporised relation of responsiveness to the surprise of otherness.

The question I want to end on is whether, by prising open the links between knowledge and action, Levinas and Derrida between them leave us only with a purely individualized and vitalistic model of ethical or political action (see also Barnett 2004). This view would hold that the continuing imperative to act in the world is sustained only by the cultivation of a wholly autonomized sense of existential authenticity. In the tradition of thought indebted to deconstruction, there is certainly a resilient strain of thinking that embraces the pathos of what Derrida calls 'undecidability'. At its simplest, and most formal, undecidability points to the dual observation that decisive action always involves the suppression of certain possibilities, and that the outcomes of any decision are not completely guaranteed in advance. In suggesting that this idea is not quite so novel as is sometimes supposed, Prendergast (2000, 76) suggests that the interpretation made of this maxim "depends on how the point about the absence of secure foundations is made and how its implications are handled". With this in mind, one can identify two ways of interpreting the philosophical critique of foundationalism, of which deconstruction is just one variant. According to one way of handling the absence of secure foundations, it remains necessary to act, to decide, but this is rendered as a wholly personal act of blind volition. This rendition of undecidability is strongly supported by Derrida at his most messianic and Kierkegaardian. It makes ethico-political decisions into acts of pure faith, where faith is itself understood as necessarily blind and impenetrable to reason (e.g. Derrida 2002a, 40-101). This is the implication of the Derridean incantation that the 'madness of decision' is necessarily made in the 'night of non-knowledge'.

But perhaps this overdoes things a little, as well as giving a little too much credence to Derrida's own self-dramatization of the implications of deconstruction. Maybe the critique of foundationalism should be interpreted in more mundane ways. If everyday practices are not strongly grounded in an epistemological way, then this does not imply they are infinitely malleable. Perhaps it means that their observed durability is due to their being embedded in habitual routines that might be extremely difficult to change (see Zerilli 2000). Or it might just mean that the experience of living without foundations does not need to be disclosed, nor that its implications are especially radical. Perhaps living with doubt is ordinary.

In short, there is no need to presume that the limitations of certain knowledge as a model of human relating justifies a tragic retreat into individual pathos, enclosed cultural

relativism, or invocations of an aestheticized radicalism. The insistence on the asymmetry of ethical responsibility in both Levinas and Derrida is indicative of their endeavour to elaborate ways of relating which are made possible by the absence of criteria of certainty. Herein lies the importance of affirming the sense of responsibility as something assumed rather than accepted. As Critchley (1999b, 285-6) puts it, the limit of certain knowledge is the point at which considerations of certainty end and questions of trust, fidelity, and sincerity begin. And in this respect, we can see that the implications of the critique of foundationalism in either ethics or epistemology are not really radical at all. They just require reading old problems in new and less tragic ways. As noted above, Levinas' response to Derrida's original reading of *Totality and Infinity* was to suggest that scepticism, as the implied mode of relating to the world that distinguishes much of the Western philosophical tradition, should be redeemed rather than rejected. The intuition of separateness that underwrites the sceptical attitude remains of value precisely because it implicitly acknowledges styles of relating that cannot, in the final analysis, be modelled on either certainty or contingency. In this argument, Levinas' work converges with that of Stanley Cavell (see Hammer 2002, 142-147). Both share a redemptive attitude towards philosophical scepticism, the moral of which, for Cavell (1979, 241), is that "the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing". For Cavell, what exceeds knowledge in human relations is what demands acknowledgement. Acknowledging refers to a mode of relating to others that supplements the traditional privilege accorded to knowledge as the primary medium for relating to the world and others. Acknowledgement is therefore best understood as an 'inflection of knowledge' that arises in relation to appeals to which the appropriate response is not recognition, but rather the acknowledgement of suffering, the showing of sympathy, or just listening (Cavell 2002, 238-266).

If Levinas and Derrida indicate that subjectivity is formed in a temporised relation of response to otherness, we can now splice this idea together with Cavell's distinction between knowing and acknowledging. Accordingly, responsibility would be understood as being formed in a mode of responsiveness to claims for *acknowledgement* (of pain, or suffering, distress, etc.) rather than mere *recognition* (as the same as you, or as wholly different from you). And this also implies that subjectivity is not always and everywhere organised through modalities of exclusion, hostility, or anxiety. The idea of acknowledgement takes us beyond choosing between a false universalism or an indifferent relativism. It does so by placing the emphasis upon the constitutive receptivity of selves or communities to otherness.

And one of the more important implications of the deconstructive reading of Levinas' notion of proximity developed in this paper is that there is no reason at all to suppose that claims for acknowledgement necessarily takes place in a space of contiguity or propinquity. Proximity refers to any scene of being addressed by the appeal or accusation of the Other. Derrida's original point against Levinas' *Totality and Infinity* is that, in its own terms, for the ethical dimension of the Face-to-Face encounter to have any force as an imperative, then it must be breached from the start by the possibility of an interruption or distancing that exceeds this scene of One-to-Other relating. Derrida's affirmative deconstruction of Levinas re-inscribes the singularity of the ethical relation, now understood as always already traversed by a spacing towards anonymous addressees, to third parties. The either/or choice between equally compelling, undecidable ethical imperatives – to honour one's responsibility for a singular Other or to generalised others – is thereby thrown forward into spaces of public relating which make possible the temporalization of responding, representing, witnessing, judging, deciding, giving reasons, and justifying to others (see Barnett 2003, 2004).

The reading of Levinas and Derrida developed in this paper therefore implies the re-orientation of our attention towards the myriad practices through which dispositions towards public acknowledgement of the claims of others are worked up and maintained. This paper has insisted on thinking of relationality in temporal as well as spatial terms, in order to maintain the sense of separation without which any notion of relation loses its force. This insistence has been informed by a conviction that this emphasis on separation better allows for the analysis of power as it is actually embedded in everyday life. It does so by opening up two sets of questions. Firstly, it restores a sense of the agency of those 'others' to whom responsibility, care, or justice might need to be extended, by focussing upon where appeals for concern, justice or care come from, and how they are articulated. Secondly, it brings into view a set of questions about the differential capacities and dispositions of individual or collective actors to be affected by and moved to respond to certain claims and not to others.³ Developing this critical agenda requires laying aside both the orthodoxies of generic poststructuralism (caught as it is in the bind of a circular model of cultural othering), as well moral philosophy's persistent binaristic framing of distance as an impediment to responsible action.

Notes

1. For a counter-argument to the primacy often accorded to local relations and to place in discussions of the sources of ethical concern, see Massey (2004).
2. According to the 'strange logic of the supplement', what appears to be a secondary, unnecessary, or superfluous addition to a seemingly authentic and natural form (i.e. a *parasitical* element) turns out to be necessary and essential to it, marking the "the originality of the lack that makes necessary the addition of the supplement." (Derrida 1976, 214).
3. For a contemporary account of 'the politics of responsibility' that builds on some of the theoretical resources outlined in this paper, see Young (2003).

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