

Toward Hermeneutical Community and Hospitality **A caminho da Comunidade Hermenêutica e da Hospitalidade**

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ABSTRACT:

This article sketches a dialogue between philosophical hermeneutics and deconstruction concerning two important concepts both for Philosophy and International Relations: community and hospitality, which have to do with the Kantian ideas about cosmopolitanism. They are crucial for the description and comprehension of what is called the “international society”. The analysis aims to show that both can achieve a better productivity if guided by the paradoxical idea of “strangeness”. This idea could “deconstruct” both community and hospitality by constantly showing their particular “closure”. Then, we can start to see the interactions between them and their philosophical productivity to analyze “international society”.

KEYWORDS:

Community. Hospitality. Strangeness. Hermeneutics. Deconstruction.

RESUMO:

Esse artigo delinea um diálogo entre hermenêutica filosófica e desconstrução no que tange dois conceitos importantes tanto para a Filosofia, quanto para as Relações Internacionais: comunidade e hospitalidade, as quais têm a ver com as reflexões kantianas sobre cosmopolitismo. Eles são cruciais para a descrição e compreensão da chamada “sociedade internacional”. A análise busca mostrar que ambas podem alcançar uma melhor produtividade se guiadas pela ideia paradoxal de “estranheza”. Essa ideia poderia “desconstruir” tanto a comunidade, quanto a hospitalidade ao constantemente mostrar as suas “clausuras” particulares. Então, podemos começar a ver as interações entre eles e sua produtividade filosófica para análise da “sociedade internacional”.

1. Introduction

The title of this essay echoes one of Kant's most famous texts: *Toward perpetual peace*. This is surely one of the touchstones not only for philosophy of politics, but also for the actual political framework of current "international community", with its practices, goals, challenges, mistakes etc. In this text, Kant proposes and discusses, so to say, the conditions of possibility for everlasting peace among nations and their people. Peace is an idea which serves as an end for human (as a species) praxis, leading us to a possible future governed by true liberty and justice. Of course, it is a harsh sketch of Kantian ideas made by me, but I hope it serves as a good preamble for our dialogue here.

In truth, I am particularly interested in discussing the very idea of community, which animates a significant part of our challenges regarding international politics. It is the old problem of how arranging an intangible number of different societies (that contains in themselves uncountable differences) into a functioning, harmonical and peaceful international community. We can face it from multiple perspectives, but I will try to give a specific philosophical account of it. In this case, it means that, speaking in a Kantian way, I will discuss one of the conditions of possibility for an international community to exist. This condition has to do with the linguistical dimension of human experiences and practices, and inform the very capacity of understanding each other and, from that, achieving possible agreements and new forms of life. My guiding line will be that of a relatively recent philosophical branch called Philosophical Hermeneutics, but I will also give some accounts from other important line of thought known as Deconstruction. The general purpose is to outline some features of what I am currently thinking as a Hermeneutical Community in a way that it can be seen as a source for international political thought.

However, I am not a native English speaker, as I think many of the readers of this website are not too. In a certain sense, at least we share a common strange, foreigner, ground. Some would venture to say "an international ground", and, therefore (is there someone who dares to conclude it?), safe and transparent place. English is, we might not doubt that anymore, the world language, especially for science, and even more for the Natural Sciences. But, on the other hand, being the world's language does not mean that everyone feels at home within it. On the contrary, maybe it both stresses the universal experience of strangeness of our time, and above all our essentially strange, dislocated living in the world with others. Maybe it is starting to get more tangible not only the linguistical problem of the idea of Community, but also the necessity to think its ground in terms of a kind of space proper for a common language to be exercised. In fact, this concrete space of linguistical happening has to be thought, which also has to do with the old idea of Hospitality.

2. The theoretical basis: Strangeness and the linguistic dimension of Community

Hermeneutics is an odd word, and is often understood as the art of interpreting texts, or discourses in general. Much can be said from the history and the importance of Hermeneutics to western thought, but it is not the case here. Still, it is important to know the turning point for Hermeneutics in the 20th century. In fact, perhaps it begins with Wilhelm Dilthey and continues to an important appropriation by Heidegger, but it is a fact that Gadamer may be the main figure here. With him, Hermeneutics turns into a deep philosophical and phenomenological approach to human understanding. In truth, understanding is enlightened as a fundamental way to be in the world. From now on, to be in the world is seen as to be always in the way to the comprehension of a totality of things, the world itself. However, Philosophical Hermeneutics (this is the new status for Hermeneutics) also tells us that we comprehend the world itself from a previous “image” of the world in which we are all immersed (this may be called an aspect of tradition). It is to say that we have a pre familiarity with things. It can be said though that, as Philosophical Hermeneutics is immersed in the facticity, it assumes for itself the task of better understanding and clarifying this existential dimension of the human being and its possibilities.

The important is to make clear this immersion of Philosophical Hermeneutics into human experience in itself, and therefore in its *familiarity*. In *Being and Time*, for instance, Heidegger presents us this immersion of the *Dasein* (being-there, presence, existence: the being of the human) into familiarity as an improper, yet constitutive and inevitable way of being of human beings. This immersion into familiarity goes as far as the “*Das Man*”, which is the everyone-nobody (or “they”, the “one”) (HEIDEGGER, 2010, p. 112). So, familiarity turns into a problem, because each being-there is caught in this hurricane of indifference for itself and for the others. Therefore, it is needed a way to awaken human being to a more proper experience of itself and of the world by turning familiarity into unfamiliarity-strangeness (HEIDEGGER, 2010, p. 178). This is the important step for retrieving the question of Being. Yet, for Gadamer this is not exactly the point or the goal of his own philosophy, although he clearly shares important insights of *Being and Time*. We could say that one thing that Gadamer aims in *Truth and Method* is to “recover” an ethical (practical) disposition of the human towards the world, which could provide a non-exclusively technical relation with it. This technical relation is represented in general by the methodic disposition of natural sciences, in a way that even social and human sciences are affected by it (GADAMER, 1998, p. 3).

Starting from this state of affairs, we can see that the point for Gadamer is that the methodological approach of natural sciences and its unrestricted application by social-human sciences is

leading us to a strangeness in relation to the world of life. It can be seen not only in the actual practice of these sciences, but also in our everyday social practices. This methodological approach and its effects can be summarized as our disposition of domination (and now, more than ever, of annihilation) towards the world. It is true that science has changed since then, but it is not wrong to say that important effects of that attitude are still present in our time. In fact, it is more than necessary to notice such effects. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer offers us his first main “theoretical” portrait of this situation that presents itself to us. But, after that, he is more and more involved into making explicit concrete images of the effects of this contemporary disposition towards the world. The destruction of nature; new political methods of domination and oppression that use more and more technology for it; our ever growing and renewing capacity for indifference; political bureau-technocracy; the, sometimes, uncritical obedience to the “experts” etc. It is true that Gadamer is not exactly longing for a paradise lost in the past – for every epoch has its dramas and challenges –, or simply demonizing science. However, he strongly believes that there are important contributions of the past that can enlighten our present and future (GADAMER, 1990, 1991).

Asking again: how can we build community from this overwhelming strangeness (which shows itself as indifferent familiarity) to things and others? Now it must be explained that Gadamer is not against strangeness. In fact, strangeness is a basic experience that allows every encounter with the Other. The fact is that there is a “ill” strangeness, which curiously has to do with a “ill” familiarity. This one goes like this: I already know who you are; I am already totally *familiar* and there is nothing strictly new; we share the *same* world; we form a community and so on. In this case, community is an image under which an “I” represent objects and other people. There is no possibility to be amazed with the world or a genuine encounter with the Other (Gadamer names this Other as a “Thou”) (GADAMER, 1998, p. 355; 1986, p. 67). Very often, the reaction to any difference is that of violence, repulse.

Those things being said, I would like to propose the following notions of my own to comprehend the Philosophical Hermeneutics’ gesture on these affairs: strange-familiarity and familiar-strangeness. The first one is supposed to name the situation depicted above: we may be living within a familiarity which turns the world strange and distant to us: indifferent. The second is my “translation” of Gadamer’s general efforts, that is, to recover a positive strangeness which would *open* us to the fundamental and constitutive otherness of the Thou (the Other in general). It means to embrace strangeness (otherness) as a way to reconnect ourselves with the world of life. However, I am not trying to say that, in spite of this, we would solve once and for all our difficulties with things and others. On the contrary, it is said to realize that the world is not solvable, but is intrinsically problematic. To recognize

this can be seen as a way to be open to the constant need of de-construction and reconstruction of “our” world.

Embracing strangeness: that is a rather translucent idea. Nevertheless, it is an aspect of our everydayness even more stressed by the globalizing tendency of the world (notice that globe and world do not necessarily mean the same). But I am still cautious to use this notion of the Global and to discuss its aspects and effects on our lives. Only each one of us can testify about it, but it is also something that cannot be denied in its increasing universality. Still, we cannot say that this tendency brought for the first time this unceasing feeling of displacement. Perhaps we can say that for the first time we all experience it together, at the same disjointed *time*. This is our communality.

For this sake, the idea (or ideal) of dialogue is crucial. It brings forth the *ethical* core of Philosophical Hermeneutics. Dialectical dialogue is the path that comprehension has to take at each of its acts (*Ibidem*, p. 370). Its most explicit example is that of conversation between two people. In this case, for Gadamer the model for a genuine conversation is the one given by Plato’s Socrates – that’s why I name it “dialectical dialogue”. In fact, Socrates is pictured there as this strange guy who walks within the city talking with people about the most various topics, especially the ones which concern ethics and politics. But he is not exactly interested in winning the discussion, but in transforming his partners through it. His basic method is to *question*, which would seem to be the easier part of the conversation (Protagoras, for instance, argues that), but it is rather the most difficult one. In truth, to question is to put someone *in question* about *oneself*, i.e., to feel a stranger to oneself: it is like falling into vertigo.

The important thing is to realize from it that Philosophical Hermeneutics deals not with a totally pre-given and transparent *common* within tradition, but rather with our uneasy relation from and towards it. That is to say that strangeness is the fundamental experience which opens our being to the world, to others. This is the true element of Philosophical Hermeneutics, the one which truly turns possible to hope for the construction of understanding (not necessarily agreement). Realizing, assuming and becoming a stranger to ourselves show us a most urgent truth: we are finite, precarious beings that can only be among others (humans and every other being), and whose acts are always on the way of creating new possibilities: each time the chance for new communities.

3. Another Community: a space of Hospitality

Perhaps true community to come has something to do with another Kantian curious notion: humans have in itself a natural disposition for an unsociable sociability, as we can read as follows:

The means that nature employs in order to bring about the development of all of the predispositions of humans is their antagonism in society, insofar as this antagonism ultimately

becomes the cause of a law-governed organization of society. Here I take antagonism to mean the unsociable sociability of human beings, that is, their tendency to enter into society, a tendency connected, however, with a constant resistance that continually threatens to break up this society. This unsociable sociability is obviously part of human nature. Human beings have an inclination to associate with one another because in such a condition they feel themselves to be more human, that is to say, more in a position to develop their natural predispositions. But they also have a strong tendency to isolate themselves, because they encounter in themselves the unsociable trait that predisposes them to want to direct everything only to their own ends and hence to expect to encounter resistance everywhere, just as they know that they themselves tend to resist others. (KANT, 2006b, p. 6-7).

However, I would like to adapt this idea to our discussion by saying that we have a disposition for uncommon community. In this regard, I think Derrida brings something interesting which can allow us to have a more concrete view of his horizon of discussion. Maybe the precise question may be: is international community a true space for the strangeness and the stranger? Is it really a community? It will show us the core of this idea of Hermeneutical Community, which stems precisely from the idea of Hospitality.

It begins with who establish(ed) the current international order and by what means. Nevertheless, let's restrict ourselves to the last aspect. The general "means", or instruments, are the treaties between sovereign nations. Treaties are in general a kind of contract. So, in great measure, the relations between nations, peoples, organizations are made by means of contracts. Therefore, it is not surprising that international law theory is, in some aspects, grounded on the contractualistic thought, even though I recognize that it has others sources and tendencies which are in fact taken seriously. Anyway, in this regard, I think that Martha Nussbaum (2007; 2019) has once marked well enough some problems that come from this tradition, which for her consist, among other reasons, in the fact that contractualists generally presuppose and demand specific objective and subjective conditions for the founding contract of a society, leaving a great deal of other personalities out of the process. Taking this argument from the particular sphere of the state-nation into the broader dimension of international community, we can easily see a similar approach. The international community is governed by contracts that legitimate its agenda. It has to be clear that I am using a broad sense of international community here that is not limited to, for example, something as United Nations, or European Union, Mercosul etc., but, instead, comprehend all these forms of organizations and other relations. However, on the other hand, these same *established* forms or organizations, leaded by one or some of their components, can be seen trying to overcome the very sphere of the international community. This manifests the tendency of the Law (treaties, contracts etc.) and, above all, the *enforcers* of the Law, to take over all sense of community for itself, restricting its necessities and capabilities to their (the enforcers) own interests. The Law and its enforcers stablish what is *common* and *possible*.

Then, we have to ask ourselves whether international community must submit itself to this state of affairs. This question contains another one directed to actual International Relations as a tradition of thought and action, which deals not only with legal affairs, but, in truth, much more with the possibility of construction of solutions among different nations, organizations and, most important, peoples. Must International Relations be overlapped by International Law? Of course, International Relations must consider law as an important feature for its practices, but it is not without purpose to see the core of its *praxis* guided by something else I am going to name here as *ethics*; ethics taken basically as the thinking of the Other. In this sense, ethics gain deeper perspective if understood from that hermeneutical standpoint which I simply sketched above. This is so, I believe, because hermeneutics really offer a good way for us to think ethics grounded in the dialogical disposition of human comprehension. In this sense, the *praxis* of International Relations must be characterized by the openness to the Other, to the stranger that defies the limits of the Law (DERRIDA, 1992). Ethics must surpass law so that either law itself may achieve sense, or be denounced as senseless, urging for the creation of new possibilities of actions.

Another important implication of this hermeneutical ethics is its historical dimension. Hermeneutics itself has to do with history, and Philosophical Hermeneutics deepened this very dimension. As soon as we consider the hermeneutical foundations of ethics (as much as the ethical foundations of hermeneutics), we may be able to see the historicity of ethics – of every ethical judgement and action. In the case of International Relations and Politics, it opens up the urging necessity of considering the historicity of every part at stake (peoples, nations, organizations, enterprises etc.) and of International Relations itself. In light of this, the decolonial thought is a great example of this historical task (MIGNOLO; WALSH, 2018). The presumption of enlightened rationality must give room to a rationality that do not ignore its historical condition and urgencies of present challenges deeply related with an acting and persistent past of domination, violence, erasure of peoples. This ethics disarrange and rearrange the historical thread of any actual international community. Therefore, any (im)possible international community has to take it very seriously in order not to repeat itself into old formulas. Surely, International Relations has already taken this path, and I am simply reminding things already known.

All this has to do with the necessity of rethinking international community not from the standpoint of the common, but from the strange and the stranger. From it, the logic that reigns may not be that of the recognition or subsumption into a rule, pattern etc. (the Law), but of Hospitality (DERRIDA, 2005). It is the final feature of the Hermeneutical Community, which may be a guiding idea for any international community to be thought.

In the essay called *On cosmopolitanism*, Derrida urges himself to think about what is a proper city of refuge. In this case, “the/a city of refuge” is a symbol that defies the power of any state, sovereignty

and Law. This fantastical city names a space without specific place, so it represents above all an uncommon communal *attitude* of welcoming the displaced ones in any place and time. At the same time, by this welcoming, it displaces oneself from oneself. It is to say that the host does not mingle the guest in the given and known common. Instead, 1) the host becomes the guest, and the guest, the host; 2) in fact, there is no proper host and guest; 3) the common becomes uncommon; 4) the community shows itself as the possibility and necessity of new forms of relations. In this sense, this is the opportunity to bring the idea of Community and Hospitality away from the positive conditions of Law, because they, as ethics, surpass the expectations of a given law, custom, practice. With this, any *impossible* International Community shows itself, in each time and action, as the free space for hope.

But what language is spoken in this space of hospitality? Which is *the* language of hospitality? It brings us back to our prior discussion. In few words, I may say that it is not about *an* existing language, but the universal capacity for language. In the Hermeneutical Community, every language becomes uncanny for itself and for the other. It happens both between two native speakers of the same language (Portuguese-Portuguese, English-English, Japanese-Japanese), and between two speakers of different systems of language. Immersed in this uncanniness, language appears simply as the capacity for the creation of itself – a poetics. In these terms it might appear as a fantastical enterprise, but in fact it is a very common experience of our everyday life that is merely obscured by our tendency for turning everything *common*. Nevertheless, every day we are struggling toward understanding with each other, even with someone we know for a long time. This is part of what I called the dialogical disposition of our understanding, which was what I tried to clarify in this essay. It is a calling, a reminding of the perpetual need to rediscuss the already taken as known and rediscover ourselves as beings among others.

POST-SCRIPTUM

However, what does it mean *to build such an international community or a space of hospitality*? It brings us the urgency to think seriously about another set of problems concerning *spatiality*, in general, and the way human being *lives* spatially and sets up intended communal spaces. A possible and rich approach can be found in the very phenomenological tradition, as Batista (2023) reminds us in a seminal text about the experience of *dwelling*, *inhabiting* and *housing*. In fact, he argues that the phenomenological (and hermeneutical) reflections about the “house” shows us that it surpasses the mere fact of occupying an undifferentiated space. According to him, the “house” is, in its concreteness, a “home”, which means that it is a space *lived* as a center of configuration of practical meaning, that is to say, where humans can encounter *itself* (the proper – Heideggerian approach) and the *others* (the ethical space – the Gadamerian and Levinasian approach) (*Ibidem*, p. 6ss.).

Therefore, such perspective can amplify the scope of the questions brought in the present article, specially by bringing together spatiality (enlightened by the living experience of *dwelling*) and language. Nevertheless, it also urges us to think critically about the implicit violence of this *dwelling* as the condition of possibility for encountering *others*. It is to say that building the *space of community and hospitality* radically open to the *otherness* has to deal with that lurking violence, which has to do with the previously mentioned tendency of turning everything *common*.

In this sense, an interesting approach is proposed by Marques Kussler (2023, p. 2): the *dwelling of Hermes* before *uncomfortable forms of lives*. This corresponds to the effort to imagine ways of constructing communities in the context of the [international] challenges imposed by the so called “Anthropocene”. It encompasses the problems concerning not only human relations, but also necessarily Human-Nature relations (an extreme form of otherness of our times), which brings all humankind before the *same* perils, although in singular “conditions” and “possibilities”. In short, the basic questions are: 1) how to establish a common ground for recognizing (or more precisely, how to *receive*, to *welcome* – a matter of hospitality) and understanding or comprehend (in the core, a matter of language) the general situation and its singular expressions in each form of life? 2) at the same time, how to develop common orientations and, from it, actions to such *uncommon* situations?

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