Hospitality, Game Theory and Religious Life:
From Interfaith Dialogue to *Intrafaith Energetics*

Charles Mabee
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Hospitality as Invitation to the Ethical

Human behavior runs on a continuum that moves from the ethical treatment of others, determined regardless of benefit to us, to the moral evaluation of their worthiness or value. While everyone deserves ethical care and love, others do not—they can evoke either our moral praise or condemnation. By high-lighting the inherent rights of one, ethics provides for the intrinsic oneness of all, since all share the very same individual rights that transcend culture and particular social norms and mores. Morality, on the other hand, cultivates categories of separation, delineation, and hierarchy. Morality not only evaluates and judges the social transactions of society, it itself helps establish the boundaries that define it. As such ethical rights transcend the moral boundaries of all groups, whether they be nations, religions, organizations, institutions, or families. By prioritizing the worth and dignity of the other, and maintaining our responsibility to or for him/her regardless of social standing, the business of ethics is to set forth behavioral goals and thereby delineate the highest ideals of human thought and action. As a result, ethical obligation to other does not provide for compromise: it is absolute in its call to replace the ego from the center of our being, and to replace it with an awareness of our responsibility for the other. Appeals for ethical behavior transcend all cultural specificity; morality, on the other hand, is filled with the ambiguity that it intends to cover up with illusions of grandeur and perpetuity.

Every culture has some sort of moral posture, certain values that it prioritizes over others. In social life it is often held in place through the application of measured force. The police and the judiciary enforce the moral order of a given society: its own behavior only sometimes held in check by the same moral principles that it seeks to uphold. Whereas ethics knows no enemies (Jesus: "love your enemy"), morality goes about the business of identifying enemies to the public order: it traffics in the affairs of rogues, thieves, traitors, criminals, cowards and other neer-do-wells who are ego-driven. Ethics speaks about love and caring; morality speaks about purity and goodness—and identifying the ones deemed unworthy of dignified treatment. We may say that the social order is the world of the ego where the confluences of self-interest that make up society are somewhat "capped" and managed. The goal here is justice, a term that points to the minimizing the collateral damage caused by the self-interests that make up society. The underlying ideological framework of this order is provided by *moral* principles that solemnly establish its legitimacy. By dividing human behavior into dualistic categories, such as "good vs. evil," "holy vs. unholy," "pure vs. impure," "ally vs. enemy," and the like, morality underwrites the potentially slippery slope of the "divide and conquer"

system that controls through acts of categorization. The goal of the moral world is to separate and distance segments of society from one another: divide and rule. As Michel Faucault recognized, the prison system is the perfect metaphor for the ideological framework of the larger moral society: all live under its watchful eye where continuous judgment and evaluation prevail (Cf. his classic *Discipline and Punishment)*.

I want to argue here that hospitality exists exactly on the boundary between the ethical and moral worlds suggested above. While the origins and motivational energies of hospitality lie at the base of ethical concern for the other, concrete hospitable acts take place in the moral, ego-driven world.   In this blended fashion, hospitality meets the ego "half-way" so to speak, and beckons it to rethink its boundaries and definition over against others. It does not demand that the ego forfeit its claims; it carries no obligation or reciprocal demands beyond the simple act of hospitality itself, an act that is viewed as pure gift. The intention is not to convert to an ethical-based concern for other, rather it is to make *transparent*—to manifest ethical care within moral garb by morality itself "ethically translucent."   In this way, within the transaction of hospitality, the host tends toward the ethical end of the behavioral spectrum, and the guest toward the moral. It is not too far-fetched to say that the hospitable event *dramatizes* the potential move from a moral universe, to an ethical one. It has something of the theater involved within it, illustrating that the society will not collapse upon the cessation of moral order. No hospitable act is revolutionary in intention: it does not portray the end of society as we know it. Yet, at another level, the practice of hospitality *is* revolutionary because it calls into question the *absoluteness* or the moral code that necessarily undergirds it. The host beckons the ethical spirit in the guise of altruism to become manifest in the world of obligation and judgment, but it does so only on the basis of gifting. Any reciprocal obligation that is experienced in the hospitable act is experienced only at the level of the guest: no such obligation exists on the side of the host. Hospitality betrays its origins in ethical life through this cessation of reciprocal demand: it is its *sign*. To summarize: by reflecting the non-reciprocal world of ethics, hospitality mimetically points to a new way of life that transcends moral obligation and judgment. As this mimetic spirit moves out into the moral world of reciprocating egos, its function and purpose is to be "seen through", both to reveal that which the ego cannot know on its own, nor believes possible.

From Interfaith Dialogue to Intrafaith Energetics

Religious life occurs in the moral world of reciprocating egos: it influences, and is influenced by, the totality of all moral, human experience. But, like acts of hospitality, authentic religions also point to the ethical character of the universe that exists prior to the humanly-constructed moral order. Ideally, religious communities eschew participation in the power-based political order: they fly so-to-say "above it all." This is not to deny that historically religious communities develop power structures in their own right, but in advanced societies, the sanctioned power distributions of the broader social order—such as the judicial system, police,

military, media, as well as the prevailing economic system operative in a given society—are independent, or quasi-independent, of the reach of ethical concern. Religious systems that operate within the greater social order attempt to go beyond dualistic moral justice: they do not seek simply a "just" world, rather they point to a potentially *hospitable* one. In this way, hospitality itself is both dualistic (guest and host) *and* monistic (the underlying unity incorporating both). It does not rely on the same system of power differential that prevails throughout society, thereby seeking to dissolve justice into the unconditional love of altruism. Whereas the dualistic, tit-for-tat moral world remains part of the *context* of the guest-host relationship, hospitality seeks visible ways to manifest the more basic truth of ethical responsibility for the other. Religions mirror this concern for "the other" in a multitude of ways; including care for the marginalized and disenfranchised, crafting sanctuaries for withdrawal from the overt conflicts of the prevailing social order, producing a language and literature of individual self-renewal, as well as developing a symbolic liturgical life that prefigures a more hopeful future. In the modern world this habit of embracing the other has led to the interfaith movement, an approach to religious diversity that initially *prioritizes* the other by suspension of one's own belief system and practice. The interfaith movement is characterized by "listening" to the other, non-judgmentally valuing the varied stories and ideas that are encountered through open engagement and encounter. Such practices move the search for human community a step beyond political life because they embrace others in a way deeper than is possible in political life. Interfaith dialogue stems from this *habit of thought* in embracing the other that religions have developed over the centuries as they have embraced the hospitable ideal. The failure of this approach to bring about the actual revolution that religions portend for the human experience is the ultimate failure of religions to transcend moral dualism. The distance between the various religions promoted by interfaith dialogue is simply too great to effect the necessary change in human thought—the situation simply remains too cloudy to embody the needed transparency.

In this way, the failure to achieve a more global unified expression of the religious experience is not simply an historical failure, but a structural one. In interfaith dialogue, one is not required to recalibrate and change one's own perspective: justice and tolerance are enough. It is quite possible to encounter the religious other and be reconfirmed in the superiority of one's own worldview and perspective: such an approach does not break "house rules." The hierarchical quality of the moral universe in which we live remains unbroken and untamed. In a word, what is lacking in interfaith dialogue is *"religious altruism,"* expressed now not toward the world, but toward one another. The ethical truth at stake here is as simple to understand, as it is difficult to embody: one can only *have* one's own religious faith when one gives it away. Therefore, whereas interfaith dialogue may achieve enlightened understanding and acceptance, it rarely achieves a single resolution or resolve. The dynamic of gift-giving that lies at the heart of hospitality points us toward the deeper ethical standard: we cannot settle simply for accepting the other, but need to move to the deeper truth that we somehow already *are* the other. It is a major step beyond the moral world of justice, a world still rooted in

demand and *reciprocity.* The challenge of the dynamic of hospitality is to embrace and empower the host without diminishing her/himself in the act of giving*:* in the hospitable dynamic gift-giving does not take from the giver, but the very act of giving serves to *enlarge* her/him. In simple terms: we grow and change through giving, not receiving. It is a counter-intuitive perspective: how can giving away make one richer? But, after-all, isn't religion itself counter-intuitive? This counter-intuitive insight is the well-spring of spiritual life in general. In political life, which runs far more by intuitive means rather than counter-intuitive ones, such a human dynamic is nearly unattainable. In modern times for example, Mohatma Gandhi tried, but his very success in the political arena to achieve a gifting community through marrying political and spiritual means, led to his assassination. His martyrdom is a sobering lesson in delineating the challenge of integrating spiritual with political life. The environment of self-interest that pervades the latter causes us to recoil at such efforts of integration. It is, as they say, like mixing oil and water.

Game Theory as the Grammar of <u>Intrafaith</u> Hospitality

The task before us is to understand better the dynamic of hospitality: to understand not simply *that* it works as a community change agent, but *how* it does so. It is precisely at this point that game theory enters our search for effecting transparent hospitable communities—the ultimate goal of spiritual life. Before outlining the argument in more detail, it is important to dispel some negative connotations associated with game theory. Both terms, *game* and *theory*, are somewhat misnomers. *Game* seems to conjure up something of unimportance: after-all, "it is only a game." Life is serious business, games can only pretend to be serious; games are *played*, life is *lived*. We might also argue that games promote *deception* rather than truth and honesty. The point of a game is to win, and the means that one employs to do so may engender *cheating*, and while cheating may not be an admirable quality, on occasion it can be an effective strategy. Similarly, the term "theory" itself carries a problematic connotation. If it is only a theory, it is tenuous and not proven. As those who decry global warming shout out their demands for more study of the "theory", the term acts as a brake for generating change and motivating behavior. Similarly, Darwin's "theory" of evolution has thus far failed to de-legitimize the machinations of the "intelligent design" community who demand "proof", not theory; etc., etc. But properly understood, game theory points to a fundamental truth of life: we all live in a dramatic Shakespearian world, "all of life is a stage, and we are actors upon it." This means that we live by making calculating decisions that determine our response to the vicissitudes of life: we strategize, and imagine the responses of others as we make those choices of our lives that define who we are, and what we may become. Game theory presents us with a grammar, a kind of language, that details and clarifies the internal dynamics of those decisions. It is not oriented toward the manipulation and control that many non-practioners assume. It is not designed to control others, but to better understand them, and to encourage us to make better decisions that emerge as a result of that understanding.

From Morality to Strategic Thinking

Rather than manipulation and control, game theory functions to find and clarify the authentic equilibrium that exists in all relationships. Finding this equilibrium is the goal, not manipulation and control. Game theory simply asks the question: where is that equilibrium, that harmonious relationship that maximizes the self-interest of all game players—the Shakespearean actors upon the stage. What becomes diminished in this "game playing" ecosystem that fosters evidential strategic thinking, rather than emotional response, is morality itself. Rather than goals being defined by goodness (Jesus: "Why do you call me good?"), they are defined in terms of mutual benefit and pay-off (Jesus: "Love others, as you love yourself"). By venturing toward mutual benefit, game theory teases out the hypocritical underbelly of absolute morality by proposing a form of honesty of which morality alone is incapable. Any dissection of the hospitality dynamic already lays the foundation for the dissolution of morality: justice is moral, gift-giving is hospitable. Justice builds political community: gift-giving builds spiritual community. Again, we might ask, is gift-giving beneficial to me? Again, our answer is "yes". I gain and grow by giving to others and the planet upon which I live. It is by means of this very giving and gifting that a new world opens up to me, a world that transcends the "business as usual" of "normal" society, the commerce of daily (political) life. Being hospitable, it seems, very much works to my own benefit and to the ones whom I shower ethical care.

In summary: game theory potentially provides us with the language or grammar by which we may more deepy understand the hospitable life by moving away from the absoluteness of moral dividing, separating and distancing and recognizing the pervasive influence of the worth of all—including the worth of ourselves. Against this general background, let me suggest several concrete, specific ways that game theory may function to help us make a more hospitable real life environment, and thereby provide us with a deeper understanding of the *intrafaith energetics* implied in the practice of hospitality:

1. Game theory takes as axiomatic the idea that religious systems are basically ***communication systems***. As such, they are subject to the same dynamics as all communication systems, including political ones. As communication systems, religions are addressed as rational strategies by which the formation of authentic community can be attempted through both non-political, as well as political, means. Hospitality is itself one such non-political strategy that is not based in a power differential modality, but rather an ethos of gifting.   Functioning as communication systems, religions both withhold information from other, and as well as strategically reveal it to them. This "other" in this sense can be either religious systems, as well as social and political ones. When information is withheld, it is called "concealment"; when it is shared, it is called "signaling".   Since the hospitable exchange is a mixed expression of both concealment and signaling, strategically determining what to conceal, as well as what to signal, it stands

as a basic component of the dynamic of hospitality.   Hospitality, as such, does not demand either total ethical concern or moral judgment: it affirms the potential of each in the communicative dynamic. By *allowing* concealment, hospitality moves beyond the political order that tends to *require* revelation of all "private knowledge".

2. By focusing on ***equilibrium*** as a goal, rather than moral goodness or purity, game theory fleshes out the pervasive openness of authentic hospitality. Hospitable acts are universal in that they transcend cultures in ways that individual religions do not: the guest/host relationship is inherently "come as you are," without pre-condition or requirement.   As such, both hospitality and game theory are inherently non=moral, or non-judgmental, in character. In both instances, things simply *are.* The grammar of this open, non-judgmental quality of hospitality helps us understand a major pay-off that it provides us in our spiritual lives in this way: the implementation of universal hospitality reveals the benefits peculiar to *both the host and guest* in the dynamic exchange made manifest in hospitality. Rather than altruism, game theory is built on the foundation of ***mutual self-realization that lays a foundation for interactive equilibrium***, ***rather than moral purity or goodness.*** Mutual self-realization must be present in any harmonious relationship crafted on the grounds of balance and equilibrium. Tilting toward the other inherently brings about an inherently inherent imbalance. Such an imbalance may be kept in place for a considerable period of time, but an *eventual* tilting backward swing of the pendulum can be assuredly assumed. How many exceptions to this rule exist in human history? Put in other words, the goal of hospitality is *co-operation* with the other, not the *superiority* over the other—even the implied superiority of benevolence itself which functions to provoke a relational imbalance.

3. Game theory requires us to ask a wholly new set of questions with regard to religious systems and the strategies they employ in establishing a more ethical, altruistic society by focusing on the ***relational significance of all religious teachings and practices*** within society and community. Game theory takes all contingences into account; so, too, must hospitality. Both are "any and all" environments. To illustrate: we might enquire more deeply into the meaning of religious liturgy and requirement in the game theory categories of *costly signals* to others.   Some religious practices come at high cost to the adherents: examples including dietary/fasting, prayer, and financial requirements.   To what purpose are they implemented in the life of religious communities? By inquiring more deeply into how such requirements *function* in society and in religious communities themselves, we encounter the roles of communicating and signaling in our actions and behavior. Hospitality itself is foundationally relational; and game theory provides us with the language of relationality.

4. Like hospitality, game theory is anchored in real life social relations, and it seeks to bring a new means of understanding *reciprocity*. Neither based in "tit for tat," nor "the inequality rooted in benevolence," this *new reciprocity* is etablished on the basis of ***mutual benefit*** for all parties involved. Both the host and guest grow as a result of the hospitable act: neither remains the same person. This growth is empowered by the "call" or "pull" of the ethical. This points to the concrete connection between mutual parties that evolves from "interfaith dialogue" to "intrafaith energetic" in the dynamic hospitable interchange. Whereas ethics evolves from the moral base of being good to experiencing the other as good, understanding hospitality as facilitating that transition, game theory demands ethical growth on the part of the host, as well as the guest. This is why hospitality is not benevolence, although it can certainly include benevolence. Benevolent acts alone can be part of a more sinister plot that seeks to maintain an unjust system or broader ethos. They can encourage us to "take our eyes off the ball," and encourage us to turn away from our own self-interests and involvements. Game theory will not allow this blindness, and it very much serves the purposes of hospitality as a result.

5. Although it may be categorized as "theory", it is only so in the sense of seeking a better grasp of the rational/theoretical structure of real life decision-making. Game theory is oriented toward the twin goals of efficiency and agency that must characterize human behavior that makes a difference. Individual acts of hospitality are magnificent and are to be appreciated by all. But how to make an "hospitable society," what we might mean an "authentic community?" That is the question left unsaid by simple acts of hospitality, venerable though they are. In this context, hospitality represents a fundamental rational strategy for the formation of enduring community, one that lies beyond both simple, individual acts, and the broader moral community that relies on measured force and appropriated legitimacy. Game theory lays bare the reciprocal relationship that exists between host and guest, a reciprocity not based on expectation and return, but on mutual growth and enlightenment. Like hospitality, **game theory does not rely upon the compensatory power of moral actors for enforcement**. In short: change happens in the engagement of pure hospitality: game theory helps us better understand how this engagement may function to make that efficacious in all the rest of our lives.

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