Introduction: Ethics across Religious, Political, and Planetary Borders

The "border becomes a text from which to read the future—or a version of it." So writes Christian Parenti (2011: 207) in his book *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence*. With this cryptic phrase, three questions are raised that are essential to the present volume. First, what does it mean to say that the border is a text? To call the border a "text" suggests, accurately, that there is something inescapably, constitutively semiotic about borders. If they did not signify something to someone in some way, they would be meaningless. Second, what does it mean to say that, in the border, one can "read the future—or a version of it"? To frame the matter as one between "the future," per se, and "a version of it," as Parenti does, suggests one possible future whose prospects to become actual depend, perhaps, on how we read the border. This is pivotal, since how borders are understood, how we think about them, how we are disposed toward them—whether through submitting to them or transgressing them—has enormous consequences for which version of the future will come about. Third, what, actually, is meant by "the border"? More than any other, this third question reflects what is distinctive about the present volume.

There is a commonsense interpretation of "the border" that may seem obvious, which is that it is a system of political and territorial division that has become increasingly fraught, a system that manifests itself most concretely in fences, walls, patrols, cameras, documents, and bodies. For many readers, this is what will come to mind when "the border" is mentioned, especially for those familiar with the images of specific border spaces like the US-Mexico border or the southern border of the European Union. However, when one looks at how the word "border" is used in everyday speech and many books or articles, it is clear that "the border" could just as well, and often does, mean something else. A border could mean death as the cessation of life. It could mean that which pits them against us. It could be a turning point in history, or a moment not yet come that is nonetheless charged with anticipation. It could mean a word or action that transpires between two people and alters their relationship. Metaphorical or literal, spatial or temporal, intimate or abstract, "the border" is manifold—as Étienne Balibar (2002: 81) put it, "polysemic." Whatever the intended meaning of "the border" as a general term, no two borders are the same as they are actually experienced, and one can never cross the same border twice.

The anchoring claims of this volume are, first, that the manifest variety of borders in the world can be organized into a short list of forms and, second, that paying critical attention to how different forms of borders interact is of great ethical significance. This is what the title, *Ethics Across Borders*, is meant to express. There is also an additional, more specific claim to be made, which is that three particular types of borders—religious borders, political borders, and ecological borders—interact in a way that is analytically stimulating, morally compelling, and relevant to some of the prevailing challenges, not only of our time, but also of "the future—or a version of it." This is the basis for the sequence of "religious,

political, and planetary divides" within the volume's subtitle.[1] Attending to relationships among these three discrete forms of bordering offers lessons not just on how to reimagine borders, but also on how to engage more justly and with greater sensitivity with both ecological systems and human communities.

The contributions to this volume are largely drawn from an international conference that took place at the Katholische Akademie in Berlin in June of 2023. This was the international meeting of the Institute for American Religious and Philosophical Thought, which unfolded across four days and featured lectures from Sigurd Bergmann, Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary, John Thatamanil, Marcia Pally, and Terrence Deacon, among other presenters. With its theme of "borders and boundaries," the program for the conference stemmed from the premise that religious, political, and planetary borders exhibit links that are both rhetorically notable and yet also not *merely* rhetorical. There are real-world religious, political, and ecological dynamics, in other words, whose interconnections obtain independently of whether one invokes the words "border" or "boundary," even as the rhetorical parallels among religious, political, or ecological uses of the word "border" represent a structure by which the various types of borders can be analyzed and compared in ethically-significant ways.

This is a point whose combination of realism and rhetorical attention calls for caution and care. It helps, therefore, to provide an orienting definition for each of the three border types in question. Along with some respective associated issues or challenges, the definitions are as follows:

- *Political borders*: demarcations between adjacent sovereign territories, in which sovereignty is typically understood according to the (contested) norms of the Westphalian system, that is, as mutually recognized, mutually excluded, and uniformly distributed within each territory in question.

- *Ecological borders*: thresholds concerning human interaction with more-than-human biological and climatic systems, which challenge as well as reinforce such terms as "nature" and "culture"

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[1]These adjectives map onto a specific noun: for "religious" there is the sacred, for "political" there is sovereignty, and for "planetary" there is species. Each of these terms bears explaining. The term "sovereignty" captures the changes in geopolitics that have become toxic and are bound up with other transformations in the Anthropocene. This reflects an implicit political theology (Yelle 2019) and, with respect to the Westphalian System, a history of sublimating the religious and excluding the nonhuman. The term "species" represents, in its relationship to the human/nonhuman distinction—which is often represented within the literature as human/more-than-human—the anchoring distinction of environmental ethics, central to debates that have defined the field for decades (Attfield 2023), especially the debate over anthropocentrism (Vogt 2021). The term "sacred" represents a capacious, if vague, set of ideas, attitudes, and practices associated with religion and theology. In spite of its critics, the notion of the sacred is valuable within the scholarly study of religion for representing the religious as something that should be neither essentialized nor reduced to some other mode of thought. In seeking to avoid reductive or essentializing accounts of religion, the use of the sacred here resembles that of R. Scott Appleby's *The Ambivalence of the Sacred* (2000). For further engagement with the notion of the sacred, whose scholarly stock has risen and fallen since the days of Mircea Eliade, see Stuart Kaufman's *Reinventing the Sacred* (2008), Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmerman's volume *Reimagning the Sacred* (2015), and Hans Joas's *The Power of the Sacred* (2021).

and traverse the limits of the human; secondarily, ecological borders can also refer to distinctions within ecological systems such as watersheds or interspecies dynamics.

- *Religious borders*: contrasts between religious traditions that have become explicit and self-conscious to the members of the cultures in question or to third parties, giving rise to narratives that reinforce said contrasts; secondarily, religious borders can also refer to the borders of "the religious," per se, relative to "the secular."

These definitions are important, but they are not particularly interesting. Nor are they meant to be. They are offered for purposes of organizing and clarification. They are an invitation to critical interrogation that leaves open the possibility that any given definition will later be revised. What is helpful about these definitions at present is that they create a basis for examining and layering the respective forms of bordering. This is the analytical dimension of the present project, and it is important.

Equally important is the project's ethical dimension. The most basic way to express the ethical dimension of the project is that the integration of these border types upholds certain commitments, including cultural pluralism (regarding religious borders), political liberalism (regarding political borders), and ecological sustainability (regarding ecological borders). As with the border-type definitions, there is nothing especially interesting about declaring these commitments, which are, frankly, boilerplate. Commitments to pluralism, liberalism, and sustainability are widely held—or at least widely proclaimed. Nevertheless, since each of those commitments is, for a complex variety of reasons, increasingly embattled and decreasingly convincing to large numbers of people, it bears thinking creatively about how they might be strengthened. A conviction at the heart of this project is that, in thinking across borders within a layered structure, new ways can be found of doing just that.

The analytical and ethical dimensions of this volume combine to support three key insights. First, borders represent both an analytical opportunity and a moral challenge, sometimes within the same moment. As Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson write, "Insofar as it serves at once to make divisions and establish connections, the border is an epistemological device, which is at work whenever a distinction between subject and object is established" (2013: 16). This is the analytical opportunity. As for the moral challenge: as Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary observes, "[A]ny kind of place where an object and a subject are to be thought together is a theater of unequal relations and domination processes" (2015: 10). This puts borders in the odd position of being both relevant to ethics as a problem and also helpful to ethics as a resource. Either way, they demand ethical attention.

Second, engaging with borders—and also boundaries, borders' comparatively capacious counterpart—opens onto norms, communities, and practices that reveal a lot about how communities think. As Richard B. Miller writes with respect to Christianity, for example, "Boundaries are important because they define an order of being and value, along with corresponding attitudes that should structure the Christian life" (2001: 16). Just as a full moon appears larger when it is seen near the horizon, social and ecological patterns that might otherwise seem unremarkable become heightened and magnified

when considered at their borders. Borders are therefore an excellent starting point for a range of ethical inquiries.

Third, it is possible to think across multiple types of borders *together*, exploring how one type of borders affects another. The uniqueness of the present volume lies in how it recognizes and applies this third insight. In bringing together multiple border forms under the headings of sovereignty, species, and the sacred, the volume builds on and integrates a wealth of existing literatures—not just in terms of these three headings, but also specifically in reference to the words "border" or "boundary."[2] Given how vast and consequential the literature on each type of border is even in itself, the integration of these multiple borders types thus has the potential to invite inquiries into the dynamics of interreligious interaction, territorial sovereignty, and the human relationship with nonhuman nature within planetary systems.

There are, however, two important concerns that one might reasonably raise about this volume. First, in seeking to encompass religious, political, and ecological borders, perhaps too many problems are simply being lumped together. The more challenges one seeks to integrate, it may seem, the thinner and more superficial might be the analyses or the prescriptions. Second, perhaps the word "border" is simply being made to do too much, stretched beyond all meaning or recognition. After all, the notion of borders has become so ubiquitous that some scholars on borders, such as Dina Krichker, fear that the term "border" has lost some of its "pragmatic and methodological relevance" (Van Houtum 2021: 38). Both of these concerns are well taken, and each can be addressed in turn.

Are too many issues being taken on?

The act of observing interactions between religious, political, and ecological borders is not merely an academic or intellectual exercise. One can actually *see* in the world just how present and how entangled

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[2] Regarding religious borders, the term "border" appears in the work of Daniel Boyarin (2004), Francis X. Clooney (2010), and John Thatamanil (2020), among many other commentaries on interreligious encounter. So intuitively relevant is the language of bordering to interreligious issues that the presence of such language is rarely discussed. Regarding political borders, there is a growing body of literature addressing such contemporary issues as the proliferation of walls (Brown 2010), changing patterns of sovereignty (Sassen 2006), postcolonial dynamics (Mignolo 2012), and ecological crisis (McLeman 2019); this literature also includes various theoretical perspectives (Nail 2016, Ochoa Espejo 2020, Mezzadra/Nielson 2013, Bauder 2011, Allen 2016, Krichker 2021). Political borders scholarship increasingly explores challenges to the normative stability within the definition of political borders given above—what is commonly known as the Westphalian System—probing such issues as the "paper border" of biometric passports (Van Houtum/Lacy 2020) and border surveillance technologies (Andersson 2016). Regarding planetary borders, the relevant literature focuses on the "planetary boundaries" framework developed by Johan Rockström (2009), Will Steffen (2015), and their respective colleagues. Characterized by Bruno Latour as "scientists becoming aware that the notion of limit entails law, politics, science—and perhaps also religion and the arts" (2017: 275), planetary boundaries discourse fits into the rapidly growing literature on the Anthropocene. For valuable overviews of religious perspectives on political borders as represented across multiple traditions, see Miller/Hasmi 2001 and Buchanan/Moore 2003; for an integration of interspecies and sovereign borders, see Youatt 2020.

the three border types are, and precisely these three. On this basis alone, it is appropriate to find ways to think of them together.

For example, consider a pair of borders on the Indian subcontinent. The border between India and Pakistan exists because of a wrenching postcolonial separation between Hindu and Muslim communities that has been manifested in cartographic form. This border, then, is a testament to the imbrication of religious and political dynamics. Now shift the perspective to the other side of the region. The border between Myanmar and Bangladesh, like that of Pakistan and India, is also characterized by tensions, although in this case, the tensions are overtly ecological as well as political and religious. This has been the site of the plight of the Rohingya Muslim community, whose expulsion from Myanmar has led to a considerable refugee influx into Bangladesh. This displacement has been ecologically destabilizing (Ahmed et al. 2019), which is disturbing, considering that Bangladesh has been designated by climate scientists as among the world's most vulnerable regions when it comes to sea-level rise resulting from climate change. Although it would be unfair to assign responsibility for this vulnerability to the Rohingya community seeking shelter from persecution in Bangladesh, there is nevertheless a bitter irony in the fact that a region that has been hosting a displaced community for religious and political reasons may someday become the site of large-scale displacement for ecological reasons.

Consider, too, the River Jordan. The Jordan is one of the most polluted rivers in the world. In its relatively short passage between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, the river flows through dead zones and contaminants (Kreider 2018). A factor behind this degradation is the inability to coordinate among the political authorities that border each other in this zone. The factors behind the lack of coordination may be complicated, but given the wider regional context, it is far from inaccurate to say that religious divides play a significant role. Until quite recently, however, there was a prominent exception to the pollution of the Jordan River: a three-kilometer stretch immediately downstream from the Sea of Galilee, where the waters have been kept pristine in order to promote the performance of the sacrament of baptism at this holy site. The fact that a common cultural force, religion, has been the source of both the pristine conditions of this segment of the river and its polluted character everywhere else reveals something powerful—and powerfully ambivalent—in how religious, political, and ecological borders intersect.[3]

From even these limited examples, it should be clear that religious, political, and ecological borders need to be thought of together because they really *are* together in the world. The rest of this section looks at one helpful way of doing so: via their common connection to a transformation currently unfolding relative to normative assumptions within the Westphalian System of sovereignty.

That a transformation is occurring is not difficult to see. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, the world had fifteen international border walls. Today it has seventy-four. Wendy Brown writes, "Rather than

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[3] For an example of ambivalence in political borders, see Heimbach-Steins 2016; for ambivalence in religious borders, see Appleby 2000.

resurgent expressions of nation-state sovereignty, the new walls are icons of its erosion" (2010: 24). In the midst of the widespread sense of a loss of control brought on by globalization and its attendant economic, technological, political, and cultural disruptions, sovereignty has become a spectacle that must be performed, and borders have become the prime theater of this performance. On every continent except Antarctica, borders have become increasingly prominent, monitored, reinforced, and transgressed. For Brown, these changes are signs of a "post-Westphalian world" (2010: 22). For the present volume, what is happening can be described by another name: toxic Westphalianism.

This term, "toxic Westphalianism," expresses the pining for a sense of political space that never truly existed, yet is now being vehemently defended and exploited to mobilize the attainment of political power.[4] The term is not so much as an explanation for the issues we face as a way to integrate them under a common heading. One cannot understand the phenomenon of toxic Westphalianism without understanding the Westphalian norms that are its basis and antecedent. Matthew Longo has summed up the legacy of Westphalia as "important first and foremost in establishing sovereignty over territory as an organizing principle of the system of states –i.e., the 'territorialization' of space" (2017: 47). Other Westphalian norms include bounded sovereignty, uniform control of territory on the part of nation-states, and mutual recognition of states across borders. For the sake of historical accuracy, it is important to point out that at no time—not in 1648 when the Peace of Westphalia was signed, not now—have real-world conditions matched the norms bundled together under the Westphalian heading (Osiander 2001). Initially, however, the settlement of 1648 did at least bring about an *increase* in those conditions. This is in contrast to the present situation, in which conditions are moving *away* from said norms.

Until very recently, Westphalian norms have been fundamentally bound up with three key distinctions: religion/politics, human/nonhuman, and border/frontier. Although the first two distinctions are clear enough in commonsense terms, the border/frontier distinction benefits from some terminological clarification. *Frontier* is derived from Latin, having "its roots in the 'front'" and attesting to the "rivalries and battles that took place before linear devices known as boundaries were in use" (Amilhat Szary 2015: 2). The word *border*, which has a Saxon etymology, is very different, suggesting "a place of friction or meeting where alterity is negotiated" (Amilhat Szary 2015: 2). As Anne-Laure Amilhat-Szary (2015: 2) points out, "borders are a kind of space where the relationship with otherness can be developed such a way as to allow for identity-building and place-making." Each of these distinctions—religion/politics, human/nonhuman, border/frontier—has been fundamental for

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[4] To the extent that the claim that the current period is characterized by "toxic Westphalianism" is innovative, the innovation lies in two areas: (a) the integration of different anchoring distinctions essential to the Westphalian System; (b) the claim that these distinctions have become unmoored even as the outward appearance of fidelity to Westphalian norms has remained in effect. This is a claim for which there is considerable scholarly support. For a text that focuses on the colonial dimension, see Dussel 1995. For an approach that opens onto ecological questions and philosophy of science, see Latour 1991. For a richly detailed global systems approach, see Sassen 2006.

organizing modern thought on subjects ranging from politics to religion to science. Each distinction has also, in its way, become unsettled in conditions of toxic Westphalianism.

Regarding religion/politics, there has been a resurgence in recent years of religious populism in politics that transcends religious traditions and regions.[5] From Hinduism under Modi in India to Islam under Erdogan in Turkey to Christianity under Orbán in Hungary, religion is an increasingly powerful marker of political identity. According to Saskia Sassen (2006: 423), "out of the partial unbundling of what had been dominant and centripetal normative orders," that is, the nation-state at the heart of the Westphalian System, "normative orders such as religion reassume great importance where they had been confined to distinct specialized spheres arising into multiple particularized segmentations." For Manlio Graziano (2017: 1), the diagnosis is clear: "some of the voids they [that is, modern political forms such as the nation-state] left are being filled by religion and religious groups." There are promising elements to this latter-day prominence of religion in public life. As Sigurd Bergmann puts it, "Religions offer substantial cultural skills" (2017: 14). With ethically promising implications, Bergmann notes how, at least for some, "theology stands for a pluralist, pragmatist commitment to work with the cultural inheritances that inform how particular communities of discourse interpret the world around them" (2017: 14). Yet even an observer sympathetic to religion would have to admit that its presence is ambivalent at best, including with respect to political borders.[6]

Regarding human/nonhuman, the normativity of Westphalian borders was paired from the beginning with an attitude of dominance over nature. Rafi Youatt (2020: 139) has claimed that anthropocentrism "has long been a guiding force of Westphalian international politics—and a deeply underacknowledged one." Political philosopher Paulina Ochoa Espejo (2020: 32) has called the anthropocentrism of modern Westphalian bordering this the Desert Island Model, which takes Robinson Crusoe—that is, a lone man subjugating and separate from nature—as its inspiration. Given that some Earth System scientists have considered dating the origins of the Anthropocene as far back as 1610 (Lewis/Maslin 2015), it would be difficult to argue that the human/nonhuman distinction central to Westphalian sovereignty has been healthy for the long-term stability of the Earth System. As the human/nonhuman distinction has become increasingly problematized among many commentators, an opportunity has emerged to reimagine political forms via coalitions that, as William Connolly has put it, "face the planetary" (2017). However, considered in the context of toxic Westphalianism, the necessary rethinking of human/nonhuman

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[5] In this volume, Robert Yelle traces the contemporary difficulty in clearly delineating church and state back to its seventeenth-century roots.

[6] This ambivalence is evidenced by the border-enforcing "Rosary at the Borders," which was an event in Poland in October 2017 in which thousands marched along the Polish national borders in defense of a "Catholic Poland" against an "Islamic invasion" (Napolitano 2019: 74), and by the border-defying Posada Sin Fronteras (Inn Without Borders), which has been an annual reenactment of the journey to Bethlehem of Mary and Joseph that has been held on both sides of the border at the edge of the Pacific Ocean in Tijuana and San Diego (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2008).

relations precipitated by the Anthropocene is ambivalent.[7] A better world is perhaps possible, but its realization will require extraordinary creativity and cooperation. As this volume seeks to demonstrate, realizing such a better world includes reimagining borders in multiple ways.

Regarding the border/frontier distinction, it is impossible to unpack this distinction without at least touching on the legacy of European colonialism. The distinction of frontier/border was profoundly intertwined with that of non-Europe/Europe: whereas Europe had borders, non-Europe had frontiers. These conditions were present from the beginnings of Westphalian sovereignty—much earlier, in some ways, given that the age of European colonial conquest began in the fifteenth century. At the risk of historical oversimplification, as the European political order was settling into an equilibrium of mutually-recognized states via the Westphalian System, these same states had already been competing for territory overseas: first in the Americas, then in Asia, and then in Africa (Mignolo 2012). This is what Carl Schmitt (1950) called the "nomos of the Earth," a system of territorial partitioning in which the Europe/non-Europe was a core principle. Since the twentieth century, and especially in the advent of toxic Westphalianism, this distinction has become less clear. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has recognized (2018: 232), "[W]e stand today on the threshold of an age when borders are becoming frontiers again." Chakrabarty is writing about forces projected outward from Europe, or beyond the Global North more broadly, onto former colonies. But when one sees the profoundly military character of contemporary North-South borders such as those of the US-Mexico border or the southern border of the European Union, the character of border-as-frontier within toxic Westphalianism is clear.

From this brief survey of some of the key distinctions within Westphalian sovereignty that have become unsettled, it is clear that the means by which borders are maintained and enforced are rapidly changing in religious, political, and ecological contexts, even as many of the assumptions bound up with the Westphalian System continue to dominate commonsense understandings about borders and territory. As that often-quoted phrase from Antonio Gramsci has it, the old is dying and the new cannot be born. Is ours a time of monsters? It can certainly feel that way. Nor should one deny that the ethical challenges of our time compound across political and ecological systems, as such metaphors as "moral

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[7] The US-Mexico border, for example, has been called an "interspecies practice" (Youatt 2020: 2). In this border region, migrants camouflage their water bottles in dark colors to avoid detection on their journeys (De León 2015: 160-161), even as surveillance cameras, camouflaged as rocks or plants, seek to detect them (Miller 2017: 128-129). In these opposing-yet-inextricable cases—migrants seeking to avoid detection, cameras seeking to detect migrants—the boundaries that distinguish human from nonhuman are blurred, even as the boundary that separates the citizen from the noncitizen is heightened. The former type of boundary is blurred, in fact, *because* the latter boundary is heightened. In this simultaneous heightening and blurring of distinctions—the border exhibits characteristics that have also been attributed to the Anthropocene. As Clive Hamilton (2017: 99) has put it, "[T]he Anthropocene both undermines [human/nonhuman] dualism *and* reaffirms it." In spite of Hamilton's claim (2017: 34) that, "From an Earth System viewpoint, there are on Earth no divisions between North and South or between nations, cultures, genders, and races," these parallel paradoxes speak to the promise of exploring links between planetary and political boundaries. After all, if, in the Anthropocene, humanity has become the primary force shaping the Earth system, then boundaries within human life have taken on ecological significance—including the boundaries of sovereign territories.

storms" (Gardiner 2011) or "wicked problems" (Hogue 2018) attest. That these challenges are bound up with borders is also fairly clear, with environmental devastation and vulnerabilities for displaced persons and refugees being only two of the most urgent challenges we face.

Nevertheless, as urgent as its challenges are, there is also a profoundly fluid character to the present moment that raises the possibility of what Darrel Moellendorf (2022) has called "mobilizing hope." Inspiration here can be drawn from Catherine Keller (2018: 15), for whom uncertainty "does diminish responsibility; it multiples possibilities for response." In other words, with such fluidity comes possibility. To return to the focus of the present volume, not only do religious, political, and ecological borders overlap amidst contemporary transformations in sovereignty, but also any effort to think through the ethical implications of the present situation benefits from thinking across these border types in an integrated way. This section's emphasis on distinctions that have become unmoored in toxic Westphalianism raises questions not only about how the past informs the present, but also how borders understood concretely relate to the logic of distinctions per se. On this last point, it helps to turn attention to the second concern about the project.

Is the word "border" being stretched to the point of meaninglessness?
Although it would be difficult, the challenges associated with intersecting forms of borders amidst transformations in sovereignty could be described without one ever having to use the word "border." This is worth considering when responding to the second potential objection to this volume, which is that the word "border" is being stretched to the point of meaninglessness.

Is *everything* a border? Recall the point from Dina Kritchker that, because of its overuse, the term "border" has lost some of its "pragmatic and methodological relevance" (Van Houtum 2021: 38). If the purpose of the present volume were simply to collect an assortment of scholarly projects on the basis of their having "border" or "boundary" in the title, then Kritchker's concern would be warranted here. Yet thankfully this is not the case. As with "boundary," the word "border" can be shown to encompass many religious, political, and ecological dynamics without being overextended or used arbitrarily or superficially.[8] Instead, "border" can be shown to encompass both concrete and abstract realities, integrate complex real-world relationships, and be differentiated at different levels of abstraction even as it retains its coherence with respect to each of the three types of borders.

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[8] This volume follows Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2013:14) in understanding "borders" and "boundaries" as in continuity with one another—"border" being a more specific version of "boundary," which is the titular focus of several of the chapters. As for "frontier" and "limit," their respective roles are limited but specific: the former functions as a helpful contrast to "border," as the previous etymological histories from Amilhat Szary indicated, and the latter functions as a comparatively vague counterpart to "border" and "boundary" applicable to the logical of relations, e.g., "the liminal." Moreover, to state the obvious, different languages have different shades of meaning for their rough equivalent of the term "border." The German *Grenzen*, for example, can be taken to refer commonly to borders, boundaries, and limits, each of which has its own English-language connotation. Recognizing this does not obviate the combination of realism and rhetoric that characterizes the present approach.

It is possible to navigate cross-border dynamics across three ordered relationships: *within* each border type, *across* border types, and *beyond* the whole set of border types. These can be taken in turn, as each entails a set of normative commitments. To reflect on relations within a given border type is to avoid the error of thinking that there is only one way a given border has to be or, perhaps more accurately, that there is only one way that one must think about it. To reflect on relations across borders is to explore how shifts that affect a border in one category manifest themselves in a border within a different category, which may or may not reveal something important about the border between the categories themselves. To reflect on relations beyond a given set of border types is, at heart, a humble reminder that the very act of thinking across borders is a purposive project of taxonomic structuring that is enhanced by the tension of difference, which is a task both necessary and ongoing.

This set of ordered relationships within/across/beyond is elegant, and it has informed the set of sections and chapters that comprise this volume. Yet it must be admitted that as one actually starts to think about specific borders relative to more general border forms, the seeming tidiness of within/across/beyond can become murky and entangled. This may not seem obvious at first. Within a given border form, for example, a border is simply a signified distinction between two things that share a common category or frame of reference: the Chilean/Argentinian border is such because Chile and Argentina are both countries, a Judaism/Christianity border is such because Judaism and Christianity are both religious traditions, and a bonobo/chimpanzee border is such because chimpanzees and bonobos comprise distinct species.[9] What is murky and entangled about that?

Recall the claim from the very top of this essay that borders are constitutively semiotic. They exist purely in their function of demarcating two sides. If they did not signify themselves as such, they would not be borders. They would be nothing. Considered only in itself, a border is simply negative, a void. As something semiotic, borders are logically triadic rather than binary.[10] This may seem surprising,

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[9] A chimpanzee/bonobo distinction is of course far less ethically fraught than that of human/nonhuman, which obviously does not refer to two discrete species. However, insofar as "human" and "nonhuman" have a common ecological frame of reference, the human/nonhuman border still constitutes an ecological border, one that, in fact, is profoundly anchoring for the field of environmental ethics (Slater 2024: 40-49).

[10] These emphases on triadic logic and semiotics are core elements within the writings of C.S. Peirce, whose thought is an essential referent for the volume for three reasons. First, Peirce developed an original, highly influential semiotic system that is triadic (in that signification requires an intersection of sign, object, and an apprehending imagination that mediates the sign-object relationship), dynamic, and staunchly realist. Second, Peirce's semiotics exists within an intricate logic of relations, one of whose fundamental attributes is that interrogating likeness and alterity—an inescapable task when analyzing borders—is less about determining *classes* than discerning *systems* (Raposa 1989: 18). Applying such logic thus suggests that determining the respects in which things are similar or distinct is undertaken less in terms of static essences than dynamic habits or tendencies that are discernable diachronically and empirically. This is a helpful feature for embedding classic moral questions within specific normative communities and cultures (Hänselmann/Slater 2022). Third, Peircean pragmatism is sympathetic to religion and theology, not merely in terms of the theological claims it supports but also in its amenability to appropriation as an instrument for thinking about religious practices and values in multiple social and historical contexts (Slater 2015). Regarding the three border types at issue in this

given that borders are paradigmatically two-sided. However, as just noted, a border cannot be anything without being interpreted by someone as a sign and always for a purpose. It is the presence of an interpreter alongside bordered sides that renders a border triadic instead of binary, and it is the interpreter for whom the border of, say, Argentina and Chile, is only intelligible relative to the category of countries.

Self-conscious attention to a given border as "within" a given type leads one fairly quickly to inquire about the border *of* that type. That is, one can prescind from a given political border to ask about the border *of the political*. The same point applies to ecological borders/borders *of the ecological* and religious borders/borders *of the religious*. In light of the list of contributions to this volume, it is noteworthy how, within a given section, some of the chapters look at borders *within* that category, whereas others look at the borders *of* that category. This is a line of inquiry that leads, easily enough, to questions about what might be *beyond* that category. From there, it is only a short leap toward exploring how applying this line of thought to multiple borders within respective border forms might raise valuable questions about the relationships between the respective border forms themselves.

If this sounds straightforward, it bears cautioning that navigating distinctions within and across border categories requires nuance in understanding how border types interact with each other, as well as how the rhetoric of borders interacts more broadly with what it represents. One must avoid both a false univocity that sees border types as fixed, separate, and incommensurable and a false equivocity that dissolves border-type distinctions and untethers the language of borders from the reality it represents.[11] Both errors would impair, perhaps fatally, the ethics that the volume seeks to demonstrate. A univocal stance toward the definitions for the three types of borders would *collapse* the distinction between rhetoric and reality even as it *overstates* the distinctions between border types. In a word, its reading of the respective borders definitions would be too literal.[12] This recalls what the philosopher

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volume, it bears mentioning that Peirce's work has been applied in interreligious issues (Ochs 2019) and at the limits of the religious per se (Raposa 2020), in interspecies issues (Deacon 1997, Kohn 2013), and also with respect to both maps (Wagner 2011) and political borders (Slater 2024).

[11] Invoking equivocity and univocity calls to mind their classical counterpart: the logic of analogy as a preferred middle course. There is indeed a deeply analogical dimension to the cross-and-multi-border thinking that structures the volume, which is another form of connection to the project's religious dimension—given that the "analogical imagination" (Tracy 1981) is at the heart of theological reflection. However, while an analogy such as, say, "human is to nonhuman as Argentina is to Chile" is acceptable, if a bit basic (in that the respective terms face each other across a border of some kind), the analogy "human is to Argentina as nonhuman is to Chile" is both logically untenable and morally abhorrent, valuable only in how it calls attention to a fundamental errant pattern of thought that has led to exclusion and, too often, violence. Such multi-category exclusions of the religious, political, and nonhuman Other have been commented upon by thinkers such as Delores Williams (1993) and Jacques Derrida (2008).

[12] For example, one might deduce that political borders are exclusively spatial or religious borders exclusively patterned as relationships in history. And yet, these parameters are constantly confounded. For religious borders, the dynamics are undoubtedly spatial as well as relational; one need only think here of the religious geographies of Belfast or Jerusalem (Gorringe 2002). Or for political borders, temporal markers are almost as important as spatial ones, in that political borders are not only the static

William James called "vicious intellectualism," which is the "treating of a name as excluding from the fact named what the name's definition fails positively to include" (2011: 16). By contrast, an equivocal stance toward borders types would *overstate* the distinction between rhetoric and reality even as it *collapses* the distinctions between borders types. Such a stance is contrary to the idea of a border, which entails intelligible distinctions with discernible sides—this is the case whether the discernible sides go by the names of here/there, before/after, or us/them.

These unhappy extremes can be avoided by recognizing that the word "border" encompasses literal and nonliteral uses, which complement rather than compete with each other. Moreover, nonliteral uses of "border" themselves encompass both metaphor and metonymy, which also complement rather than compete with each other. As captured by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2003: 36), the distinction between metaphor and metonymy is one of "different *kinds* of processes." As they put it, "Metaphor is principally a way of conceiving one thing in terms of another, and its primary function is understanding" (2003: 36). Metonymy, on the other hand, "has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to *stand for* another" (2003: 36).[13] These points apply to political, ecological, and religious borders, which are metaphorical relative to each other—albeit with an obvious nonmetaphorical dimension for political borders that is not present in religious or ecological borders—and metonymic relative to dynamics that exist in history, culture, and politics.

Highlighting nonliteral forms of reference for the word "border" raises an insight that complements the previous observation that an actual border is, in itself, an absence. This is that the normative significance of borders far exceeds their descriptive significance—a point made by John Thatamanil in his chapter on religious borders. Even the abstract question about how to think about intersecting border forms is informed by normative criteria, as the previous observation about the pitfalls of univocity and equivocity showed. As to how interactions across border types actually play out in public life, the normative stakes are far higher, for both better and worse. As anthropologist Eduardo Kohn has written, we are "colonized by certain ways of thinking about relationality" (2013: 21). To change this requires the constant negotiating of alterity and identity across multiple forms.[14] After all, borders of any of the

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results of past practices of bordering, but also dynamic filtering agents that intervene in flows of goods, capital investments, and bodies (Nail 2016).

[13] For an exploration of borders' metonymic dimension with specific considerations for religion, see Sander 2020. For a rich theoretical engagement with the links between the rhetorical and phenomenological dimensions of borders, see Nail 2016.

[14] For an example of overlapping biological/biological borders in a post-colonial context, consider the ca. 1990s campaign in South Africa against "invasive species" of plants that turned into xenophobic violence against migrants from Zimbabwe and Namibia. According to Jean and John Comaroff, a "panic about non-indigenous vegetation" in Capetown "crystallised inchoate fears about alien-nature, named them, and called them into the heart of public consciousness" (2001: 650). According to the Comaroffs, the metastasizing anxiety in this incident stemmed from the "fact that the anxiety concerning foreign flora, while real enough in and of itself, was, at the same time, also a metonymic projection of more deep-seated questions facing the postcolonial state about the nature of its sovereign borders, about the right to citizenship within it, about the meaning and the passion inherent in national belonging" (2001:

three forms examined by this volume—political, religious, or ecological—are sites of perennial contestation. The chapters in this volume examine, in their various treatments of borders and boundaries, many such sites of contestation.

Contents of the volume

The volume's chapters can be summarized as follows.

[Section to be comprised of collected contributor abstracts.]

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650). Thus, an excessive hardening within one border type—biology—both heightened and reflected an excessive discontinuity of another border type—politics.

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