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Ethics across borders

Incommensurability and affinity

Jonathan MAIR, *University of Manchester*
Nicholas H. A. EVANS, *University of Cambridge*

This article takes what has always been a methodological and ethical question for anthropologists (how should we relate to others?) and turns it into an ethnographic one (how do those we study think ethically across borders?). We show that, paradoxically, anthropologists' commitment to their own forms of ethics across borders have frequently effaced alternative conceptions among the people we study, whilst the burgeoning field of the anthropology of ethics has reintroduced ideas of cultural boundedness and incommensurability into the anthropological canon. Moreover, within anthropology, a focus on either universal motivation or cultural relativism has obscured ethics across borders, which as a practice is premised on *both* the existence of ethical difference *and* the possibility of transcending it. In relation to an example taken from Evans' work on Ahmadi Muslims in India, we develop the idea that ethics across borders depends as much on the creative production and elaboration of incommensurable difference—a process we call "incommensuration"—as on the identification of affinities. As suggested by the collection this essay introduces, ethics across borders in this sense must be widespread, and deserves greater ethnographic attention, particularly with regard to the diverse ways in which difference and affinity are imagined.

Keywords: ethics, borders, incommensurability, difference, affinity

What should happen when cultures meet? Are there models of excellence in inter-cultural exchange to be celebrated and emulated? Should ethical standards be extended across borders regardless of cultural difference, or should some differences be respected? Are there some areas of human activity in which diversity of values and practice can be appreciated and even celebrated and others in which universal standards ought to be observed? Can members of one ethical community evaluate or learn values from members of another?

These are questions about ethics across borders. They will be familiar because they are questions that have occupied anthropologists a great deal, to the extent that we might even say that they are anthropological questions. But they are questions that are not asked by anthropologists alone. Making judgments about the propriety of ways of interacting with ethical traditions other than one's own is one of the defining aspects of the discipline. Yet anthropologists' own preoccupation with these questions has caused us to neglect the fact that all humans are confronted by these same questions and that they have their own, diverse, answers to them. Our aim, then, is to take what has always been an ethical or methodological question for anthropologists and turn it into an ethnographic one, to ask not how one culture ought to relate to another and to one another's values, but how people in diverse times and places have formulated responses to that problem.

In this essay, we do not intend to rehearse the whole history of anthropological ethics across borders, but it will be useful to draw attention to aspects of it in order to distinguish what we, together with the other contributors to this collection, are trying to achieve. Many anthropologists in both the Malinowskian and Boasian traditions have used ethnographic findings to encourage one kind of ethics across borders—a respect for difference between societies and cultures—and discourage another kind—judgment of non-Euro-American cultures as morally inferior and as potential objects of intervention. This approach reached its apogee in the American Anthropological Association's famous "Statement on human rights," a short document submitted to the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1947. The "Statement" enjoins respect for cultural difference on the grounds that "the individual realizes his personality through his culture" (American Anthropological Association 1947: 541), and asserts that

> Standards and values are relative to the culture from which they derive so that any attempt to formulate postulates that grow out of the beliefs or moral codes of one culture must to that extent detract from the applicability of any Declaration of Human Rights to mankind as a whole. (1947: 542)

The authors insist that "man is free only when he lives as his society defines freedom" (ibid.: 543). Intervention is not ruled out altogether, but it should rely on calling attention to a culture's own underlying values to help bring its people to awareness of injustices in their own terms (ibid.).

The anthropological tradition of ethics across borders to which the AAA "Statement" belongs is often taken to be an example of normative moral relativism.[1] That is not surprising—it has been most confidently asserted in opposition to universalist positions, so it seems relativist in contrast. However, it also has universalist elements, and they are no less important to its logic than its relativist ones. Classical anthropological ethics across borders could be summed up as a call to ground intercultural interaction on broadly defined values shared by humanity—"what makes us human"—rather than narrowly understood ones determined by a single

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1.   For example in Geertz's lecture on "anti anti-relativism" (1984), and Richard Rorty's response to it (1990).

culture. Especially suspect for anthropologists are values associated peculiarly with the West or with global trade.[2]

Anthropologists agree about little, and there is no reason to expect that their attitudes to ethics across borders will be any different. Nonetheless, in the very wide variety of discussions regarding anthropological ethics across borders—from Melville Herskovitz (who was the main author of the "Statement") to Joel Robbins (who has argued for universal values, see Robbins 2010)—two problematics or areas of concern are present.[3] We suggest that these two aspects are key to understanding any form of ethics across borders, and although these have been extensively theorized with regard to anthropologists' own practice, they are often ignored as spaces of debate for the people we study. Consequently, understanding other people's answers to the questions raised by these two areas of concern will be central to any attempt to understand the phenomenon ethnographically.

Area of concern 1: *How are the borders understood?* Any form of ethics across borders requires some conception of units and the borders that separate those units. In the AAA's "Statement," those units were cultures, and the borders between them were borders of cultural difference, for in 1947 it was still possible to see anthropology as a science of the objective reality of human cultures. Today most anthropologists are more circumspect; more aware of the shortcomings of the "culture" concept. A question remains, however, as to what kind of ethical units are being objectified. Are people engaging in various ways with the now global discourse of "culture" in order to frame their encounters in terms of borders of cultural difference? If not, what kinds of objectification do they engage with in order to conceptualize units of difference? Are the things being separated by borders even "units" in any traditional sense?

Area of concern 2: *What are the affinities that allow the borders to be bridged?* If ethics across borders is not to dissolve into thoroughgoing relativism, then there must also be a conception of affinities or similarities that transcend the borders. According to the "Statement" in its more universalist mode, the "hard core of similarities between cultures" includes people's "tolerance for behavior of another group different than their own" (1947: 540). Similar claims about the universal, general values that underlie more superficial, specific ethical variation are the basis for ethically engaged work, from Sol Tax's action anthropology (1975) to Nancy Scheper-Hughes' "engaged" anthropology (1995). Other people engaging in ethics across borders will also need to determine a common currency in which differences can be communicated, even if, as we argue below, this currency is sometimes the mutual appreciation, or simply the mutual toleration, of incommensurable difference.

The project of understanding ethics across borders, then, becomes one of understanding the particular ways similarity and difference are understood by those involved. Paradoxically, anthropologists' commitment to their own forms of ethics

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2. See Washburn (1987) for an argument relating the AAA's "Statement on human rights" to the alienation of US anthropologists from their own society and its values.

3. See Mair (2014) for a discussion of both areas of concern in the context of international Buddhism.

across borders, which are frequently couched in particular ideas about difference and affinity, can lead to the effacement of alternative conceptions and practices among the people we study.

We are not the first to make this suggestion. Indeed, a key strand of Roy Wagner's *Invention of culture* (1975) is an extended meditation upon the manner in which the culture concept can mask both our own processes of invention and those of others.[4] For Wagner, anthropology has traditionally been a process of "inventing" culture. Yet this is a move that creates a "relation" that is perhaps more real than the thing it invents (ibid.: 4). The anthropologist in the field is never just "going native"—rather she is inventing a relation that presupposes a cultural world of her own invention. This notion of culture, however, is always inadequate for the invention of the other, and when we treat these constructions of culture as real, we risk turning anthropology into a wax museum (ibid.: 27–28). This invention of a relation results in a vivisection of local meaning where we can believe only the local meanings or our own (ibid.: 30). Moreover, it is predicated upon an invention of the natural world, for to create the concept of culture we have had to simultaneously separate it from a nature. Nature is objectified through our notion of culture, and in doing so we erase the traces not only of our own invention, but also that of the other. We thus turn the other's invention into nothing more than knowledge or fact (ibid.: 156). This is the point that is most salient for our current argument. To write anthropologies of "culture" is, for Wagner, to obscure the process of invention and creativity that lies behind both our own creation of relations, and others' processes of doing the same. Moreover, this results in a situation such that when the other attempts to invent us in the same way as we invent them, their efforts are met with pity and derision (ibid.: 20). For Wagner, the only response is to learn how to openly articulate the process of invention, for we have a stark choice: "We can learn to use invention, or else be used by it" (ibid.: 158).

Wagner thus shows that our own processes of relating to others might serve to mask, obscure, and render invisible what we here call ethics across borders. We objectify the other in a fact-bound culture and thus miss the creative acts by which they conceptually invent relations to others. A question therefore arises as to whether we can recapture a way of speaking about the other that also acknowledges their capacity to create the same kind of relations of difference that anthropologists create. This collection should be considered a belated attempt to extend Wagner's call to recognize in those we study the same inventive creativity that anthropologists exercise (ibid.: 16). When we speak of borders, we are thus not trying to fix a concrete definition, but calling for ethnographic attention to the various ways in which difference is and has been conceived.

So much for borders. Why, then, are we particularly interested in *ethics* across borders? Thanks to Wagner's arguments, and to a slew of other critical work on the culture concept published in the 1980s (e.g., Boon 1983; Clifford and Marcus 1986), anthropologists are, in general, much less likely than they once were to write

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4. We are grateful to Giovanni da Col for reminding us that this is only one part of Wagner's discussion of the dialectics of invention, in which "it is impossible to objectify, to invent something, without 'counterinventing' its opposite" (Wagner 1975: 39).

about bounded wholes. In contrast, however, in anthropological work on ethics,[5] the idea of discrete cultures as the source of ethical values persists in one form or another; indeed it has been suggested that terms such as "ethics" or "morality" are merely functioning as replacements for earlier notions of culture (Zigon 2007).

In fact, the emergence of the anthropology of ethics as an identifiable subdiscipline over the past decade and a half has seen a resurgence of the idea of boundedness, whether the bounded entities are described explicitly as cultures (see Robbins 2004 and 2010 for an explicit call to return to a Dumontian concept of culture as a systematic and coherent whole) or more commonly as ethical traditions (Asad 1986; Mahmood 2005; Hirschkind 2006; Agrama 2010; Laidlaw 2014). In either case, the categories of analysis define the nature of the units, the borders between them, and specify the object of study as lying within those borders. While we applaud the work produced by scholars working with these concepts, we also feel that attempts to formulate quite concrete accounts of the organization of ethical difference, usually based on thinkers in the Western academic tradition of philosophy, are likely to obscure alternative and diverse accounts of metaethics that are part of what we ought to be describing.

The emphasis on bounded, incommensurable ethical traditions in the anthropology of ethics can largely be attributed to the influence of Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre 1984, 1988, 1990), particularly via the work of Talal Asad (1986), which has led anthropologists to claim, for instance, that ethical traditions create horizons "within which reasoning might occur" (Hirschkind 1995: 474). MacIntyre's position is not that some pairs of ethical traditions happen, contingently, to be incommensurable. Rather, he makes incommensurability the defining essence of the ethical. Ethical practices and traditions are defined by goods "internal to a practice," that is, values that cannot be explained in terms of external criteria (MacIntyre 1984: 218).

The anthropology of ethics has been very successful in conceptualizing how people come to live ethical lives within the parameters of such traditions. Yet precisely because of the focus on self-aware conversations through time, such studies have tended to neglect the question of how movement between these traditions, and conversation across the borders that separate them, might themselves be important aspects of ethical life.

Two prominent anthropologists of ethics have specifically discussed contact and exchange between different ethical traditions. Joel Robbins (2004) has written about the tensions between Christianity and traditional, local morality in Papua New Guinea, while James Laidlaw (2011) has written about the synthesis of traditional Jain ethics of compassion and vegetarianism with environmentalism and animal rights. Neither of these case studies, as reported by these authors, seems to us to be an instance of ethics across borders as we have defined the phenomenon here.

Laidlaw argues that young Jains have emphasized the compatibility of Jain ethics with that of Western animal rights movements, but in the process they have

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5. Another area that has seen a resurgence in ideas of boundedness is anthropology of the "ontological turn," which, for reasons of space, we do not deal with here, but see Bessire and Bond (2014) for a discussion of the problem of boundedness for this literature.

quietly forgotten an important difference: whereas environmentalists cultivate a love for the world, traditional Jain ethics demands cultivation of disgust for it. In the case studies presented by Laidlaw, the ethical innovators seem to be unreflective about the fundamental difference in orientation to the world in traditional Jain ethics and environmentalism, so their account is, in our terms, all about affinity and not at all about difference. Robbins argues that Christianity carries with it an account of culture that envisages a radical rupture with the past on conversion, that is, in our terms, an account that is all about difference and not at all about affinities.

Ironically, MacIntyre's most important work is based on analyses of successful instances of ethics across borders—especially Aquinas' historic effort to reconcile Augustinian and Aristotelian ethics (MacIntyre 1990)—he sees these events as historically unique moments; paradigm-shifting exceptions to the ordinary science, as it were, of ethical traditions. On this model, ethics across borders is not an ongoing encounter, but a short-lived event, since each instance results in the borders being dissolved.

John Marenbon (this collection) draws particular attention to this aspect of MacIntyre's thought. If only a tiny number of geniuses whose names stand out in the history of thought—such as Dante and Aquinas—are able to see the deep incommensurability clearly enough to propose ways of overcoming it, then does this mean that, for everyone else, the problem of ethical difference appears merely as a superficial issue of translation? Does this mean that, for the rest of us, encounters between diverse ethical traditions are destined to remain mired in confusion? There is an urgency to this question for anthropology, if only because practitioners of our discipline have, in recent years, been tempted to see themselves as precisely those geniuses who might comprehend gulfs of incommensurability that elude everybody else. We refer, of course, to the ontological turn, and its presumption of "a cosmos of boundaries that only its ordained authorities can magically cross" (Bessire and Bond 2014: 449).

In the course of our own research, on Ahmadis in northern India (Evans) and on a Taiwanese Buddhist movement (Mair, see also Mair 2014), we have both encountered everyday Aquinases, working with their own alternative accounts of ethical difference and affinity, which serve in each case as a charter for a very different ethics across borders. The contributors to this collection further demonstrate that self-conscious ethical traditions can be defined by reflective conversations with real and imagined interlocutors outside of the tradition.[6] The main purpose of this introduction, then, is to clear the ground conceptually to make way for more ethnographically informed accounts of ethics across borders of the kind included in this collection.

In the first part of this essay, we examine why anthropology, despite its historical interest in otherness, has often failed to attend to those moments when people engage in questions of value across difference. We argue that the premises of anthropological accounts of practical reason—and in fact the premises of accounts of practical reason throughout the social sciences—impose specific models of the

6. See also Michael Lempert's work on the important role of "shadow interlocutors"—imagined representatives of Western and Chinese publics—in ethical practice in the contemporary Tibetan diaspora (Lempert 2012: 85).

relationship of values and borders that make it difficult to see alternative, local models in action. Later, in the second part, we examine how practices and plays upon and across borders result in processes of differentiation, commensuration, and what we call "incommensuration." In some cases, commensuration—finding affinities that can serve as a bridge to overcome borders of alterity—is seen as the basis of ethics across borders. In others, via a practice of "incommensuration," incommensurability is carefully highlighted and elaborated and made the object around which ethical relations can be built, as illustrated here through an example taken from Evans' work on Ahmadi Muslims in India. Finally, in the conclusion, we argue that anthropological ideas about the proper way to relate to otherness have distracted us from the task of turning a dispassionate ethnographic eye on other people's answers to analogous questions.

Anthropology, social science, and ethics across borders

Methodological relativism and political economy

Beyond anthropology, key aspects of the social sciences in general have tended to hide vernacular ethics across borders from view. Throughout the social sciences, accounts of practical reason are usually based on one of two approaches, whose proponents often see them as mutually exclusive.

One of these approaches starts with what are, often implicitly, taken to be universal and self-evident human motivations or values: pleasure and the avoidance of pain, utility, the pursuit of power, or the desire to survive and leave descendants. This is what might be called the political economy approach, whose genealogy in social theory can be traced at least as far back as Hobbes and Machiavelli, and whose champions are found today in the disciplines of economics and international relations. Applying this approach to cases of ethical diversity means assuming that differences are superficial and mask more fundamental, shared values. Since it is a methodological assumption of this political economy approach that all human beings are motivated by the same rational goals, no genuine ethical disagreement is possible; conflict just as much as cooperation can be explained in terms of the universal value of self-interest. When actors have different immediate goals, it is because they are differently positioned with respect to the resources through which they are related.

The other approach is methodological relativism. Relativism in this sense assumes that the fundamental goals that motivate human behavior are not universal, but derive in one way or another from historically constituted cultures, communities, and languages. This approach seeks to interpret human action by elucidating those culturally and historically specific values as a context within which action has meaning. In its modern form, methodological relativism originates with Durkheim, and it has, of course, been enormously influential among anthropologists. Human universals may enter into relativist accounts in relation to the form, but not the content, of ethics. For instance, relativist anthropologists may emphasize the importance of ritual or *communitas* or universal structures of thought, but the transhistorical significance of these processes lies in the inculcation of historically specific values. A methodological relativist attempts to explain action with respect to the actor's specific values, not the universal processes by which she acquired them.

We have already outlined two areas of concern that we see as essential to ethics across borders: a conception of the differences that constitute the borders, and an understanding of the affinities that make crossing the borders possible. It will be apparent that each of the two dominant social scientific approaches to explaining differences in human values ignores as a matter of method one of the two elements.

The relativist approach can accommodate the first part of the equation, the difference: on each side of the putative border are complexes of values that are associated with some particular society or culture and which make sense in their own terms to people who have been properly socialized into them. But it has no resources for accounting for the second part of the equation, the affinities, so meetings of distinct sociocultural traditions are either ignored or presented as misunderstandings: conversations at cross-purposes whose participants are hopelessly trapped in their own symbolic systems and webs of belief.

Meanwhile, a political economy approach can deal with the second of the two areas of concern for ethics across borders that we outlined above—universal affinities—but not the first. Ethical difference may be present in political economy accounts, but only in the form of "ideology"—a mystification of power relations whose origins must be explained in terms of the universal goals of rational actors. Alternatively, culture is invoked to explain superficial differences, the logic often being that the more culture one has, the more one's view of actual power relations is obscured.[7]

Structure, agency, and practice theory

From the late 1970s, some sociologists and anthropologists began to be dissatisfied with the unresolved tension between the two dominant explanatory strategies, the impetus for this being a growth in interest in Marxist analyses of class and domination. Anthropologists, whose interest in the power of culture to make worlds had always made them natural methodological relativists, increasingly came to incorporate Marxist-inspired political economy explanations into their work (e.g., the work of Claude Meillassoux).

The traditional anthropological emphasis on structure explained human motivation in terms of values and meanings inculcated in the individual by a coherent social framework made up of some combination (depending on the author's theoretical commitments) of meanings, institutions, habits, emotions, and values. This had proven a powerful approach, but it seemed to rule out of consideration the things that the new political anthropology was interested in: change in relation to the external stimuli of colonialism and the capitalist system, and struggle and competition between individuals and groups whose interests clashed. As Eric Wolf

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7.   João de Pina-Cabral has argued that the failure of social scientists to see beyond the dichotomy of cognitive relativism and cognitive universalism is due to the "hegemonic strength of the all-or-nothing fallacy" (2014: 68). That is to say, we tend to believe *either* that our reasoning is based on empirical reality *or* that it is constructed by language and culture; the third position, that cognition is a mixture of these two processes, is rarely considered. The positions we are describing here in relation to practical reason are analogous to those Pina-Cabral describes for cognition in general, and the same fallacy surely applies here too.

famously observed, it led to a view of homogeneous cultures as billiard balls that spun off against one another (Wolf 2010: 6–7).

This billiard ball approach, however, also raised more fundamental problems about free will and agency, which Sherry Ortner diagnosed: "There is actually a profound philosophic issue here: how, if actors are fully cultural beings, they could ever do anything that does not in some way carry forward core cultural assumptions" (1984: 155). Methodological relativism is based on the premise that *structures*—culture, language, and institutions—are prior and determine the thought and action of individual actors. Political economy is premised on the claim that the *agency* of individuals and groups—acting in pursuit of universal goals—is prior, and that structure is nothing more than the cumulative effect of the exercise of agency. Because of this disagreement about explanatory priority, the conundrum came to be known as the "structure/agency problem."

Ortner coined the term "practice theory" (1984) to refer to a loosely aligned set of approaches already developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977), Anthony Giddens (1979), and others that sought to overcome the structure/agency problem by producing a working synthesis of methodological relativism and political economy. Strategic decision making, in which individuals and groups acted in ways that were not prescribed by structure, was introduced into the mix. For example, Bourdieu argued that individuals employed culture in practice to dominate and inflict symbolic violence on others. However, as Ortner showed, far from producing a balanced synthesis between methodological relativism and political economy, this approach made structure subordinate to agency, so that practice theory was ultimately just a more elaborate form of political economy:

> The model is that of an essentially individualistic, and somewhat aggressive, actor, self-interested, rational, pragmatic, and perhaps with a maximizing orientation as well. What actors do, it is assumed, is rationally go after what they want, and what they want is what is materially and politically useful for them within the context of their cultural and historical situations. (1984: 151)

Sahlins on conversations at cross-purposes

Marshall Sahlins' contributions to practice theory and its attempts to overcome the structure/agency problem provide what we consider to be the most sophisticated and sustained anthropological engagement with the topic of ethics across borders. Though he was at pains to point out that the processes he identified— what he calls the "structure of the conjuncture" and "mythopraxis"—are not only observable in situations of culture contact, it is in these situations that they are cast in the clearest light. Specifically, it is the interaction of European colonialists and residents of the Pacific area that furnish him with a series of examples in the many articles and books through which he makes his argument (e.g., Sahlins 1985, 2000). We will discuss one of these in detail, the British 1793 trade mission to China led by Lord Macartney, as it illustrates the benefits and limitations of Sahlins' approach.

The mission was sent because the British were facing ruin on account of their desire for Chinese products such as silk and porcelain and above all their addiction

to tea. The Chinese government permitted foreigners to trade only from a single small location in Canton (Guangdong) and imposed hefty taxes on the import of foreign goods. Worse still, the Chinese merchants were disdainful of the foreigners' wares, often insisting on payment in silver (Sahlins 2000: 425).

The Macartney mission carried boatloads of the latest and most ingenious products of British science and industry, which "were supposed to communicate a whole political, intellectual, and moral culture" (Hevia 1995: 135, quoted in Sahlins 2000: 430). Macartney was "to impress the Chinese court with the powers of his own civilization, represented as the extension of the virtues of his own king" (Sahlins 2000: 425) in order to induce the emperor to enter into diplomatic relations with Britain and ultimately to allow for more liberal conditions of trade to be negotiated.

The mission was a miserable failure, dismissed with a high-handed letter from the Qianlong emperor thanking George III for his submission and assuring him that the Chinese had not "the slightest need for your country's manufactures" (quoted in Cranmer-Byng 1962: 337, 340; Sahlins 2000: 422).

Sahlins puts the fracas down to a tragic mismatch between British and Chinese concepts of civilization. Though these concepts may have been superficially similar, he argues that they were enmeshed in complex and radically different moral cosmologies. For the British, the gifts they bore were "self-evident signs of an industrial logic of the concrete" in which were encoded information about the virtues of the British people and the majesty of their king (Sahlins 2000: 429). The sheer variety of clocks and astronomical instruments and other contrivances, as well as their ingenuity, could act as indices of national virtue for the British because of what Sahlins describes as "the native Western theory of the systematic relation between technology and civilization" (ibid.: 431).

In Sahlins' account, these associations were lost on the Chinese. The Chinese "cosmography of civilization" (ibid.: 435) was, he claims, based on the distinction between inner and outer, with the emperor, the source of civilization, at the center, and concentric domains of ever less civilized, ever more barbaric regions radiating away from him. If the emperor was virtuous, then foreigners would be drawn toward the imperial center to pay tribute and submit to his virtue, in order to be transformed. The variety of the foreign and exotic would thus come to be encapsulated by the empire. This was represented in Chinese parks and gardens, in which variety and strangeness were cultivated, in contrast to the ordered, uniform, and symmetrical Chinese house. So in this model, the variety and novelty of the British offering, precisely the characteristics that the British hoped would convince the Chinese of their preeminence, in fact achieved the opposite, and confirmed their barbarian status.

In this and his other work on intercultural contact, Sahlins had two targets. On the one hand, he wanted to argue against the methodological relativism of the historians of the Annales School, who advocated a history of culture-bound structures that downplayed the importance of events and the autonomy of individuals. Sahlins insisted that events and the acts of individuals were crucial to understanding history, and even to understanding changes in structure. On the other hand, he wanted to vindicate the practice of anthropology in a context in which World System scholars were suggesting its utility was coming to an end because all societies

were being incorporated into a single system that only had room for narrow economic rationality (Sahlins 1993). Against this position, Sahlins' aim was to show that even self-interested economic rationality must derive the values by which self-interest is understood from "cosmologies" whose full extent and power can only be understood ethnographically.

Although Sahlins' goal was to overcome the structure/agency dichotomy, it is clear that in his account of the Macartney mission, structure, in the form of moral cosmologies of value, has the upper hand.[8] The British and Chinese sides were each working toward goals rationally, but in Sahlins' account the values in terms of which their goals are understood as desirable are inseparably linked to a symbolic structure. These cosmologies, as he calls them, are supposed to derive their inescapable force from their complex imbrication in every aspect of cognition and action.

As every novel encounter and every struggle to revalue the goods through which power is expressed is—can only be—understood in terms of cosmologies of value, Sahlins' model is ultimately a methodological relativist account, and there is thus no room in it for ethics across borders. In the Macartney affair, the British used their symbols and the Chinese read them, each in their own terms, and each apparently unaware that the other side was working on the basis of different values.

Reading Sahlins' case studies, it is hard not to come away with a pessimistic feeling, because it appears from his accounts that the history of intercultural communication is an unbroken chain of misunderstandings and conversations at cross-purposes. When, in another case studied by Sahlins, Hawaiian women acted on traditional understandings and demanded that the British sailors who arrived with Cook had sex with them in order that their children, and so their lineages, might share in the Britons chiefly/godly *mana*, the sailors thought they were prostitutes and paid them in iron goods (Sahlins 2000: 289). These payments, Sahlins argues, were in turn (mis)interpreted by the Hawaiians in ways unimagined by the sailors. He traces similar confused mutual misinterpretations in relation to the cosmological meaning of weapons for Europeans and locals in Fiji (ibid.: 377–78).

In his discussion of the Macartney mission, Sahlins was at pains to point out that no member of Macartney's crew could speak Mandarin (ibid.: 248), and there is certainly no indication that anyone involved realized that the two sides were working with different premises. In fact, not only was the mission unable to communicate, Sahlins gives the impression that all trade between China and the West had been carried on for decades without real communication taking place, approvingly quoting the historian Louis Dermigny, who described the foreign trading post at Canton as a place "through which passed silver and merchandise only, but by no means language or ideas, they [the Europeans] remained nearly completely marginal to a civilization which they gave up all hope of understanding" (Dermigny 1964: 512, quoted in Sahlins 2000: 423). Similarly, he notes that Cook and his crew

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8.   In other writings he has said explicitly that this was his goal. For instance, in a 2010 piece written in memory of Claude Lévi-Strauss, he recalls a seminar in which the French anthropologist challenged his view of structuralism: "I was finally freed to resolve the long-standing opposition between praxis and culture by encompassing the former in the latter" (Sahlins 2010: 373).

were not able to communicate freely with the Hawaiians, as they did not learn the language, merely collecting isolated items of vocabulary, as they collected samples of local flora.

In Sahlins' accounts, the British, Chinese, Hawaiians, and Fijians operate without any understanding that there might be values other than their own. Macartney addressed the Chinese court in the same symbolic language as he would have used back home, just as the Chinese interpreted the symbolic gifts of the foreigners in their own terms alone. This may be an accurate account of these particular cases,[9] but the studies we have gathered in this collection show that this is not the only way that groups of people and their disparate ideas can encounter each other. We do not have to take a side in the structure/agency debate in order to understand that Sahlins' methodological relativism led him to formulate an idea of culture, or "moral cosmology," that underestimates the capacity of the people involved to generate their own comparisons based on their own invented borders of difference.

Thus, although Sahlins attempted to provide a solution to the structure/agency problem, his failure to escape this dichotomous way of thinking ultimately led him only to add nuance to the account of the multiple linkages between forms of structure and forms of individual goal-driven rationality. The result is an analysis that focuses upon the incommensurable rather than taking as its problematic the notion of ethical work across borders.

There are interesting parallels between MacIntyre's approach to medieval thought and Sahlins' accounts of culture contact in the Pacific region. Sahlins' interpretation of particular instances of confusing and confused intercultural contact are persuasive. And yet as a set of examples from which to understand the encounter of diverse values in general, his selection is partial and unrepresentative. The cases chosen by Sahlins are all taken from situations in which communication was minimal, at least on his account. In the same way, as Marenbon argues (this collection), MacIntyre portrays ordinary medieval Christians as misunderstanding classical models by applying their own standards to them, waiting for an Aquinas or a Dante (or an anthropologist) to apply unique insight in order to produce a new hybrid ethical tradition.

Anthropological approaches to mixed and multiple traditions

In Sahlins' work, cosmologies were brought together in moments of seismic friction. His focus was upon units of civilization as they grated, rubbed, and ground against one another. Yet in recent decades, across anthropology, there has been a shift toward a consideration of the individual subject as the object of analysis, and ethnographers have increasingly sought to locate the fractures of the global world within the private spaces of the individual. Influenced in particular by Homi Bhabha's work on the postcolonial (1994), anthropologists have positioned themselves against earlier models that privileged essentialized cultural identities in order to understand how mixing, abrasion, and friction have produced new forms of hybrid identity.

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9.   Other treatments of the Macartney mission, however, add that the initial standoff over the prostrations that foreign guests were expected to make to the emperor was in the end settled in a way that was satisfactory to both parties (Esherick 1998).

Why do we need a specific notion of ethics across borders when theory is now concerned with probing the way in which individual ethical selves are produced out of multiple strands, traditions, and discourses that are never stable or pure? The articles in this collection ask how ethical conversations are articulated across difference. As we will see, this is not because we see difference as something that is fixed in the world: often, processes of differentiation are a prerequisite for ethics across borders. Certainly, many of the examples given in this collection are of people speaking from a hybrid position (e.g., Lorenz), and yet our interest lies in how they then position themselves as they speak out across felt and constructed boundaries. Hybrid identities are never absolute; people always also make strategic claims to essentialist belonging (Moore 1997: 141). The contributions to this collection ask what the consequences for ethical discourse across boundaries and borders might be as people shift between hybrid and essentialized registers of belonging.

In particular, work on the mimetic, hybrid postcolonial subject has been politically and morally important for demonstrating both the psychological toll such fractured sense of self can have on the individual (e.g., Fanon 1967), and the possibilities of resistance and mockery that inhere in the mimesis of power (e.g., Taussig 1993). Yet as James Ferguson (2002: 565) notes, the focus of such studies upon the dyadic relationship of colonized and colonizer, North and South, rich and poor, can sometimes blind us to the way in which fractured identities and mimetic personas might be put to use as "moral claims" for belonging to a wider global order. The point, of course, is that what is often seen as a pathologically fractured self can from another angle be understood as the performative enactment of an ethical dialogue across borders. Our goal is thus to extend the ways in which anthropologists have thought about those moments when people are caught at the interstices of traditions; a topic that has been of much interest in recent years.

Commensuration, incommensurability, and incommensuration

We have already noted the influence of MacIntyre's view that ethical traditions are incommensurable. Other philosophers, who come from disparate traditions and often have little in common with MacIntyre, have also come to this conclusion, and they have been equally important for recent anthropological formulations of the ethical. We think particularly of Hans-Georg Gadamer (see Lambek, this collection), and Bernard Williams (2006: 157). This idea of incommensurability has largely been embraced by anthropologists, and it is central to what we identify as the anthropological elision of ethnographic cases of ethics across borders.

What if we instead turn our attention to the way people negotiate questions of similarity and difference, in situations in which commensurability and incommensurability are not givens but rather practices that require careful management? Anthropologists have for some time considered commensuration to be a process that enables disparate elements to be brought together under a common standard of value, rule, or governance (Espeland and Stevens 1998; Povinelli 2001). Should incommensuration also be thought of as a process and practice?

An illustration can be drawn from Evans' ethnography of India's Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. The Ahmadis, in spite of their claims to be Muslim, are

widely viewed by other Muslims in the subcontinent as heretics. The group claims that the promised Messiah of Islam and all world religions was born in Punjab in the 1830s, and they ground this belief in a large body of elaborate proofs and prophecies. Their strongly proselytizing ethic means that they are no strangers to publicly airing these proofs in debates with members of other religions, and yet alongside a polemical attitude to proving the superiority of their claims, they also often engage in forms of interfaith activity that are explicitly not designed to convert others, but are rather aimed at creating dialogue. Such events frequently take the form of "Peace Symposia," which adopt a standardized structure, and which occur around the world wherever there are Ahmadi communities. This universal model is the result of the Peace Symposia being devised and spearheaded by the leader of the community, who is based in London. These events invariably involve non-Muslim religious leaders, along with various dignitaries, including politicians, being invited to give short speeches on the topic of achieving peace. The Symposia are taken extremely seriously by the Ahmadis as an exercise in what we have here called ethics across borders.

The Peace Symposia are structured so as to encourage the proliferation and flourishing of very specific forms of difference. Speeches by Ahmadi delegates tend to be affirmations of a particular kind of pluralism. Difference is celebrated, as long as it is difference that exists within the bounds of an accepted form; it is a celebration of diversity that actually creates uniformity and homogeneity at a structural level (Wilk 1995). Thus, for example, religious difference and otherness are celebrated only insofar as religions are seen to conform to a specific definition in which all examples are directly comparable, symbolic-cultural forms (cf. Masuzawa 2005). While this is a process of differentiation, it is thus simultaneously a practice of commensuration, for it involves bringing these values into a relation vis-à-vis one another in such a way that they can be both compared and contrasted. The specific relations of discipline and value that structure each religion are differentiated in a process whereby they are made comparable. Here, differentiation is commensuration.

Yet this practice of commensuration also involves a parallel practice of incommensuration. Take, for example, Ahmadi discourse about the relationship between believers and the founders of religions. Often present at the Peace Symposia witnessed by Evans were Sikh and Christian delegates. In Ahmadi literature, and in settings outside of the Peace Symposia, Ahmadis claim that they have definitive, empirical proof—in the form of prophecy, scripture, and archaeological and linguistic evidence—that Jesus was a prophet who died a natural death (Ahmad 2003). In a similar fashion, they claim to have both physical and prophetic proof that Guru Baba Nanak (the founder of Sikhism) was a Muslim saint. The Ahmadis thus accord a holy station to both Jesus and Baba Nanak, and yet the relationship that they have toward these figures is structured by a particular set of values: values that would not be recognized in any Sikh or Christian traditions.

In line with these claims, many Ahmadis at the Peace Symposia would publicly declare that they respect, or honor, Jesus and Guru Nanak. This was a distinctive way of phrasing their relationship to these figures, but one that enabled them to create a common ground of understanding, in which they could claim that everybody present, including the Sikhs and Christians, was in agreement in *respecting/*

honoring the founders of these religions. That the Christians and Sikhs present had fundamentally different ways of structuring their relationship to these figures remained unspoken. Importantly, these different kinds of relationships and the alternate regimes of value that they implied were not capable of being compared. The particular institutionalized nature of the peace conferences enabled them to become incommensurable.

A similar practice can be observed in the manner in which Evans' interlocutors articulated a notion of "equality" between religions. When an Ahmadi spoke at a Peace Symposium in Delhi in April 2012, addressing an audience of representatives of multiple religious traditions, the speaker made a major point of expressing the equality of all religions. His goal was evidently to foster an ethical discourse between religious groups; a goal hailed as admirable by a number of those in attendance. Yet, in order to make this argument, some things had to be commensurated and some incommensurated. Ahmadi literature states that all religions, including non-Abrahamic Indian religions, are a product of divine prophecy. Hence the possibility of commensuration, in which the speaker drew these religions together into a single realm of value, and thus a common notion sacredness. For him, these religions are all equally a product of divine inspiration.

This commensuration, however, was made possible only by a simultaneous process of the inverse. Ahmadi discourse, like that of many Muslim sects, sees religions as being hierarchically ranked; they may all be divine in origin, but they are chronologically arranged in terms of truth, with the older religions being more corrupt and less complete in their message. It is only Islam that stands at the top of this hierarchy as being both comprehensive and pure. This is obviously a point that would not be accepted by most of the audience. In order to commensurate, the speaker thus also had to incommensurate this system of values. It was not just about hiding or concealing these ideas; rather it was about working toward a particular construction in which the forms of value structuring his own notion of sacred, and the forms of value structuring his audiences' notions of the sacred, were not differentiated but arranged vis-à-vis one another in such a way as to not admit comparison. Incommensurability is, in other words, quite different from difference.

The Ahmadis and their partners in dialogue have distinct ethical traditions with distinct forms of value and relationships of sacredness. Rather than describe these distinct forms of valuation as being a priori incommensurable, we should instead look at these interfaith events as particular institutional forms that enable the development of specific commonalities, differences, and incommensurabilities.

Negotiating difference and incommensuration in the articles in this collection

This collection does not dream of a world without borders, but rather focuses upon the many forms of ethics that can be a practice upon borders. Anthropologists have historically viewed constructed borders as interrupting ethically positive relationships, as resulting in hostility, injustice, and oppression, and as being ripe for deconstruction (e.g., Evens 2009), yet recent work on the ethics of detachment has shown that some forms of ethically positive relationship actually depend on efforts

to distance, separate, and detach (Candea 2010; Candea et al. 2015). Similarly, in this collection, our contributors explore forms of action that are attempts not to dissolve borders, but to establish ethical practices upon them, through them, and across them. Our goal is to look at the commensurable and the incommensurable as they emerge from practice.

Jan Lorenz, for instance, takes quite seriously the notion that incommensurabilities between traditions might be a given—that is, along with Michael Lambek, he sees incommensurability as an inevitable, natural aspect of society, rather than a necessarily created feature. He also uses incommensurability in a subtly different fashion from us—he is, for example, less concerned to distinguish between incommensurability and difference. Yet his article provides a superb example of what we see as incommensuration. He describes a dispute within a Jewish congregation for whom a quorum of ten adult male Jews—a *minyan*—is required for the commencement of a service. At the heart of this dispute was a conflict between completely different registers of reckoning Jewish identity; the question was thus whether several newer members of the congregation could be counted toward this quorum. Lorenz demonstrates (contra Zigon 2007) that the moral breakdown this precipitated did not cause any kind of alteration to habitual ethical behavior. Rather, his interlocutors were able to come to a compromise—an ethical way of relating to one another—by the maintenance of the prior incommensurability. They did so by deciding to count the new congregants within a *minyan* composed in any case of more than ten adult male Jews whose status was not in doubt. Here our interpretation differs from Lorenz; we see this as a decision to defer difference in favor of maintaining incommensurability. This skillful social play (compromise seems too blunt a word) enabled the two incommensurable ways of reckoning Jewish identity to be kept in such a way that they could not be judged by a single moral standard, and it thus deferred their transference into difference, a state in which their incompatibility would be obvious and inescapable. In other words, we see here a practice of incommensuration that rests upon skillful action and judgment, and enables a particular kind of ethics across borders.

Another example is to be found in John Marenbon's article, in which he demonstrates how the medieval theologian Boethius of Dacia maintained, often with great difficulty, an incommensurability between the Christian tradition to which he belonged and a pagan other. Incommensuration between the traditions, we argue, is what enabled him to participate in a conversation across that border. This might seem paradoxical, yet if Boethius had allowed the tradition of the other to be judged by a common Christian standard, his opportunities for dialogue with it would have been destroyed. In other words, it was only in resisting that particular form of leveling, or translating, and in thus preserving the incommensurable border between self and other, that he was able to maintain dialogue.

Paolo Heywood is concerned to show how constructions of difference can be as important as construction of similarity in situations of ethics across borders. Just as we here seek to show how incommensurabilities are best thought of as practices rather than natural facts, Heywood is concerned to investigate the ways in which the borders across which ethics is carried on "are as much a product of construction as the parties involved" (this collection). Heywood thus shows how some kinds of ethical conversation require the difference between participants to be emphasized

and recognized if they are to be performatively successful. The Italian LGBTQ activists with whom he works see no point in engaging in explicitly ethical dialogue with a nonofficial Catholic group (We Are Church) because the latter too closely approximate the activists' own idea of what the good is, and thus do not represent a realistic partner for dialogue that can successfully create ethical bridges between Catholics and activists. Heywood's article thus draws our attention to a pressing question within the study of difference: What are the consequences of two parties failing to agree upon the nature of difference? We wish to extend this interest in the construction of difference to ask whether the construction of incommensurables might also be a factor in determining the performative success of ethical dialogue. Is an agreement upon the nature of incommensurability necessary for an effective dialogue through (rather than across) difference? Or does incommensurability ultimately only enable ethical discussion when the partner in a debate is silent (as in Marenbon's example, where Aristotle cannot respond to Boethius of Dacia)?

Even if incommensuration does not always enable ethical communication, it might still be argued that a skillful balancing of incommensurabilities remains crucial for ethical attempts to speak to the other in those kinds of tradition that Lambek (this collection) describes as "earnest." In some situations, such as the medieval Christian tradition described by Marenbon, any attempt to acknowledge the ethical nature of another tradition can imperil one's commitment to the truth claims of one's own tradition. As the philosophical gymnastics of Boethius demonstrate, however, one way of overcoming this is by incommensurating aspects of that other tradition to one's own.

A question that this raises is whether we can ever think about the success of any ethical dialogue in anything other than the narrowly defined terms of those who are speaking. The skillful and judicious (to borrow Lambek's phrasing) maintenance of incommensurabilities is shown within these examples to constitute one way of performatively succeeding within such interactions. But such success is reliant upon the paucity—or thinness—of the conditions that define such success. Skillful acts of keeping incommensurability in the picture even when common standards for judgment appear to present themselves are thus evidently crucial to much ethical action. Yet incommensurability is unstable; it requires continuous construction and rebuilding if it is to provide a firm basis for dialogue. And it is by no means a sure producer of "successful" dialogue.

Focusing upon the way incommensuration is carefully balanced with commensuration in diverse ethnographic cases promises to help us to overcome the methodological problems that had limited previous anthropological engagements with ethics across borders. It enables us to understand, through an ethnographic appreciation of processes, the production of forms of alterity that can both enable and foreclose dialogue.

It is worth, at this point, returning to the assumption that Marenbon attributes to MacIntyre: the idea that for most people in most places, difference can be seen only as a problem of translation, and that incommensurable difference is not recognized as such. We argue, rather, that incommensuration might be thought of as a frequent aspect of ethics across borders, in which people strive to resist both assimilation and differentiation. It is the process by which things are kept within different registers of judgment, and it rests upon ethical judgment in the Aristotelian

sense (Lambek 2000; Aristotle 2004). It is not that incommensurables are not trans-lated—for even a failed translation would imply a transformation of incommensu-rability into difference—it is that they are left untranslatable.

Our view of incommensurability can thus be seen as existing in a productive ethical tension of difference to the views of other contributors to this collection, in particular, Lambek. This raises a question about the various ways in which diffe-rentiation, commensuration, and incommensuration need to be thought of as dis-tinct practices that undergird ethics across borders. Differentiation and commen-suration are both (paradoxically) processes that bind separate traditions and ideas together: commensuration because it strives for similitude, and differentiation because it draws separate ideas into a web of possible comparisons and contrasts. As Tom Boellstorff points out, some kinds of translation work not just because they include failure, but because they "revel" in it (2005: 5). If differentiation is the skillful proliferation of failures in translation that provides the productive basis for future ethical communication, incommensuration is the ethical work of refusing even failed translation. Wendy Espeland and Mitchell Stevens describe commen-suration as "a system for discarding information and organizing what remains into new forms" (1998: 317). Incommensuration might, by contrast, be thought of as the practice in which a proliferation of information is insisted upon so that com-parison is always made to fail.

Where we do agree with Lambek (this collection) is in his assertion that, con-trary to much anthropological theory, incommensurables are not contradictory. Why should this be so? Difference, of course, implies the possibility of contradic-tions, as do similarities. Yet incommensurability is by definition a relationship that precludes any kind of comparison. Incommensuration might thus be seen a stra-tegy to avoid conflict, a scarce resource that has to be judiciously maintained in interaction for some forms of ethics across borders to be possible.

Conclusion

This collection focuses comparative attention on some issues and away from oth-ers, as any thematically organized project must. The cases and arguments presented raise a number of questions that neither we nor the other contributors have had space to address at length. One of these is the issue of power. A goal of our project is to see ethics across borders "from the native's point of view," and this makes com-bining our approach with various forms of political critique difficult, though not, we suspect, impossible. We hope that others will take up this challenge.

Another question raised but not yet answered is the relationship of ethics across borders to the category of religion. It is notable that all but one of the articles pre-sented here, including this introductory essay, draw their key case studies from religious contexts. In a small collection, we cover Judaism, Catholicism, Pentecos-talism, and a number of forms of Islam. Is it that the category of "world religion" is intrinsically plural in conception, so that traditions that have come to see them-selves through the prism of some version of the religion category are particularly disposed to engage in or think about ethics across borders? Perhaps the reason for the bias is simply that anthropologists and historians interested in ethics are also

often interested in religion. How would our conclusions have been different had our examples been drawn from, say, international politics and law? Or from development? Again, we hope that others will be able to answer these questions in future work on ethics across borders. [10]

In the previous section, we explored forms of ethical practice that rely on the creation of incomparable regimes of value as much as they rely upon affinities and resemblances. The importance of this is that it demonstrates why the ethnography of ethics across borders might actually lead to an anthropological reevaluation of those borders themselves.

Countless words have been written about anthropology as a practice of ethics across borders. In this introduction, we have attempted to shift the conversation from one that asks how anthropology should relate ethically across borders, to one that asks how anthropology can understand how others relate ethically across borders and respond ethically to borders. The end result, we hope, has been a historicization of anthropology's own ethics across borders. How, then, might we approach ethnography as ethics in light of this historicization of our own core methodologies?

Anthropologists who have seen their discipline as a kind of ethics across borders can be separated into two broad categories of those who see ethics across borders as a means to an end and those who see it as the end in itself. For example, it has long been noted that Mead's classic "relativist'" account of Samoan adolescence was actually a means within a larger debate, the end of which was the altering of American self-understanding (Mead 1928). It was a typical example of anthropological one-way relativism; the other was not expected to teach us, but we could learn from our image of it. Examples of ethics across borders as means to an end are similarly found in the ethnographic examples in this collection, for example in Simon Coleman's description of charismatic "overflow," in which an ethics across borders is only ever a means to a particular kind of self-formation. By contrast, the kind of anthropology envisioned in this collection by Lambek, which is inspired by Gadamer, sees an ethical relation to an other as an end in itself. In Heywood's article, we find an example of a liberal Catholic who views ethical dialogue as an end in itself. One reason for this Catholic's failure to engage LGBTQ activists could be the latter's understanding of that dialogue as a means to social progression that he was ill equipped to facilitate.

In recent years the notion of anthropology as an end-in-itself ethics across borders has gained in prominence thanks to what Joel Robbins (2013) has described as the development of an anthropology of suffering. Robbins describes how in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a generation of anthropologists who no longer felt morally able to define their discipline as the study of a savage other shifted their relation to those they studied from "one of analytic distance and critical comparison focused on difference to one of empathic connection and moral witnessing based on human unity" (ibid.: 453). Such an anthropology—often going hand in hand with a desire to uncover the global abuses of "neoliberalism"—takes as its moral objective the documentation of others' precultural suffering so as to show that they are just like us in their humanity (e.g., Biehl 2005). This moment in anthropology is, if we

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10. Our thanks to HAU's anonymous reviewers for drawing our attention to these issues.

are to follow Didier Fassin (2012), the result of a more general shift over the last two decades to a politics of humanitarianism that is fundamentally unstable. That is, it presents itself as being a politics of equality, for it recognizes the essential similarity between ourselves and the other, whilst necessarily being a politics of inequality, for the compassion at its heart is a result of a focus on the poor (ibid.: 3).

This form of anthropology as ethics across borders is not always ethnographically productive, for it tends to cast our informants as the mere object of our own ethical practice, and thus fails to accurately grasp the ways in which they themselves are engaging in an ethics of sentiment. It objectifies passive suffering as the pan-human aspect that binds us to them and as a result ends up committing the fault of denying the other's creativity and inventiveness (Wagner 1975: 15). There are other ways of framing this relationship: Harri Englund (this collection) provides us with an ethnographically informed way of talking about moral sentiments and suffering as the objects of ethical discourse. He describes Zambia's "radio grandfathers," who engage in an explicitly hierarchical multivocality that avoids the pitfall of "constructing voiceless subjects to whom they might give a voice as an act of charity or justice." Instead, they attempt to be the subjects who mediate and thus frame these voices. Theirs is an ethics of sympathy rather than compassion; it is mindful of the hierarchies in which it is embedded, and it is a product of skillful storytelling.

This is not to say that we are pessimistic about anthropology as ethics; it is just that we want to avoid a situation in which anthropological ethics become a methodological stumbling block to understanding ethnographic cases of ethics across borders. Anthropologists have long attempted to engage in ethical practice through forms of methodological relativism, yet they have also recognized the ethical dilemmas that this can produce. Can one really claim to be taking the other's ethical view seriously if one is choosing to bracket its "truth and seriousness" through a relativistic method (Rabinow 1983)? This collection has sought to show that anthropologists aren't the only ones asking such questions, and that it is often our methodology that masks the fact that we share such preoccupations with our interlocutors (cf. Wagner 1975).

Anthropologists have recently asked how the study of ethics might help us move beyond the problems of methodological relativism. According to Laidlaw, for example, anthropology as an ethics across borders must be understood as a "form of self-fashioning" (2014: 217), in which we can learn both about the other and from them.

What, we might ask, distinguishes this approach from those charismatic Christians (Coleman, this collection) who also see ethics across borders as a practice of self-formation? One answer is that the kinds of openended engagements envisioned by both Laidlaw (2014) and Lambek (this collection) do not (in Wagner's terms) obviate the creativeness of the other, but instead seek to build upon it. By contrast, Coleman's charismatics ultimately engage with the other only so as to efface any specificity that that other might possess. Just like earlier generations of anthropologists who either assumed a priori a relativist or political economy view of ethics across borders, the charismatics' response to the challenges of a cross-border ethics ultimately tells us more about them than about the ethical other with whom they engage.

We tend to assume that speaking across borders is the animating force behind our discipline; that it is what makes anthropology an inherently moral pursuit. The contributions to this collection show that we should be attentive to the ways in which a similar impulse may guide the ethical lives of those about whom we write. Cases of ethics across borders are uniquely problematic for anthropologists; we would do well to remember that they are problematic for our interlocutors too.

Acknowledgments

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L'éthique à l'épreuve des frontières: incommensurabilité et affinité

Résumé : Cet article se saisit d'une question méthodologique et éthique canonique pour l'anthropologue (comment établir notre rapport aux autres ?) et la transforme en une question ethnographique (comment est-ce que ceux que nous étudions pensent éthiquement face aux frontières ?) Nous montrons que, paradoxalement, l'adhésion de l'anthropologue à ses propres formes d'éthique dans une situation étrangère a fréquemment effacé les conceptions alternatives des personnes étudiées, tandis que l'anthropologie de l'éthique a réintroduit les notions de délimitation culturelle et d'incommensurabilité dans le canon anthropologique. De plus, au sein de la discipline anthropologique, l'attention particulière portée à la motivation universelle et au relativisme culturel a fait perdre de vue le moment

où l'éthique se confronte aux frontières, moment dont l'existence stipule l'existence de différences éthiques et la possibilité de les transcender. En nous inspirant d'un exemple emprunté au travail d'Evans sur les musulmans ahmadis en Inde, nous développons l'idée que l'éthique, lorsque mise à l'épreuve des frontières, dépend autant de la production et de l'élaboration de la différence incommensurable—un procès que nous appelons « incommensuration »—que de l'identification d'affinités. Comme le montre l'ensemble des articles que cet article présente, l'éthique au-delà des frontières doit être un phénomène plus répandu qu'on ne l'imagine, qui mérite plus de travaux ethnographiques, particulièrement en ce qui concerne les diverses manières dont la différence et l'affinité sont imaginées.

Jonathan MAIR is Lecturer in the Department of Religions and Theology at the University of Manchester. He has previously lectured in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester and held research fellowships at CRASSH, the University of Cambridge and St. John's College, Cambridge. He has conducted research on Mongolian-Tibetan Buddhism in northern China and on Buddhist ethics in Taiwan.

Jonathan Mair
Department of Religions & Theology
University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester M13 9PL
United Kingdom
jonathan.mair@manchester.ac.uk

Nicholas H. A. EVANS is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at CRASSH, the University of Cambridge. His Ph.D. drew upon fieldwork with the Ahmadiyya Community in India, while his current project explores the visual history of South Asia.

Nicholas H. A. Evans
CRASSH
Alison Richard Building
7 West Road
Cambridge CB3 9DT
United Kingdom
ne228@cam.ac.uk