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The Border as a Philosophical Concept?

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Abstract

This article explicates the border as a metaphor for an English Canadian nation and for Canadian philosophy in English Canada. The concept of the nation is explicated with reference to Winthrop Pickford Bell. The role of metaphor in philosophy is justified while maintaining its distinction from literature or poetry. Key features of the concept of "border" are division, distinction, and relation. The fact that the border is open to two different interpretations testifies to its viability. Use of the border as a metaphor in philosophy and related cultural expressions suggests that it has a limited, though persisting, duration.

Résumé

Cet article explique la frontière comme la métaphore d'une nation canadienne-anglaise et de la philosophie canadienne au Canada anglais. J'explique le concept de nation en référence à Winthrop Pickford Bell. Le rôle de la métaphore en philosophie se justifie tout en conservant sa distinction avec la littérature ou la poésie. Les principales caractéristiques du concept de frontière sont la division, la distinction et la relation. Le fait que la frontière soit ouverte à deux interprétations différentes témoigne de sa viabilité. L'utilisation de la frontière comme métaphore dans la philosophie et les expressions culturelles associées suggère qu'elle a une durée limitée, bien que persistante.

Keywords: border; national identity; metaphor; diversity; Winthrop Pickford Bell

1. Introduction

This article is designed to explicate and justify the use of the border as a metaphor for an English Canadian nation and thereby in and for Canadian philosophy in English Canada. After some preliminary remarks on the possible relationships of philosophy to national identity in Section 2, and on the concept of a nation in Section 3, Section 4 investigates the national identity with primary reference to the work of Winthrop Pickford Bell. Section 5 justifies a necessary use of metaphor in philosophy while maintaining the distinctive character of philosophical discourse and refusing to

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collapse it into literature or poetry. In Section 6, the use of the border as a metaphor for English Canadian philosophy oriented to national identity is addressed directly. Section 7 discusses related cultural uses of the concept of a border and Section 8 provides a summary of the key features of the concept of border advanced. Section 9 provides a final remark that the use of the border as a metaphor for English Canadian nationality has a limited, though persisting, duration.

2. Philosophy and National Identity

Is there a justifiable sense in which philosophy might be pertinent to national identity or indeed any limited social group rather than humanity as a whole? The universality of philosophy and philosophical speech implies that any such concern would be at most preliminary. To understand Socrates, we might need to know something of his Greekness, but once we grasp the philosophy, it is just as much our own as Greek. One sense of Canadian philosophy is that it refers to the practice of philosophy, of whatever kind, in Canada. Thanks to the important pioneering work of Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott, we now have such a history. On this empirical evidence, they summarize the central characteristic that pertains to the main thrust of that work, which is a "philosophical federalism" suggesting "ways of combining apparently contradictory ideas, to discover new ways of passing from one idea to another" (Armour & Trott, 1981, p. 4). In this way, one can identify characteristics of a circumscribed history of philosophy pertinent to its connection to a distinct social group even though those characteristics need not be exclusive to that group.

In addition to considering philosophy *in* Canada, one might also consider philosophy that is *about* Canada, which may well include works written in Canada but might also include pertinent ones from outside. It would take up themes acknowledged to be specifically, though not necessarily exclusively, Canadian: bi-nationalism, a settler nation with active Indigenous peoples, immigration, multiculturalism, etc. It is likely that such works would refer to philosophy as practiced in Canada but not necessarily: a Canadian living abroad might write Canadian philosophy in this sense but it is unlikely, if not outright impossible, that a philosopher with no lived connection to Canada might write philosophy about Canada. Finally, there may be a philosophy that is *for* Canada in the sense that it exemplifies concerns that are characteristic of Canadian culture and attempts to bring them to philosophical clarity. Ideally, it might itself play a cultural role.

These are not meant as exclusive categories, nor is it implied that one is better than the others. They are meant only to explain the sense in which the current investigation into the border as a metaphor in and for Canadian philosophy in English Canada refers to Canadian philosophy: it is philosophy that is *for* Canada in aiming at an expression of national identity, and therefore *about* Canada in the sense of addressing a widespread cultural theme; it may or may not take place *in* Canada but it does presuppose some knowledge not only of Canadian philosophy but of Canadian culture more widely. Canadian philosophy is *of* Canada in that its production and impetus — its spirit in the sense of *Geist* — is in an important sense attached to Canada. It may well have to go beyond being a part of culture to being a critique of

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culture, an analysis of the silences, superficialities, and fixations that make that culture lesser than its spirit.

3. The Concept of a Nation

National identity is a form of social identity through the feeling of belonging to a group. The shared feeling refers to one or more objective markers, though such markers may change over time or shift in meaning. Discussions of national identity usually contain a survey of such markers often looking to one or more of them to define it. Often mentioned are ethnicity, blood, race, religion, common ancestors, common economic or political subordination, history, geography, psychology, and cultural values (Alter, 1985, pp. 4–23; Hobsbawm, 1992, pp. 14–45, 47, 51; Renan, 1970). Even a state institution, such as public health insurance in Canada, may be cited. None of these apply to all cases (Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 5). Since a survey of objective markers is indecisive, though some such markers are always present to members of a given nation, definitions tend to shift to subjective factors, often quoting Ernest Renan's famous definition that "a nation's existence is [. . .] a daily plebiscite" (Renan, 1970, p. 6), which is echoed by Benedict Anderson's claim that it is an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1986).

Such a feeling of attachment to, and sharing in, a group identity need not imply that it has an exclusive or even overbearing claim on an individual. One may recognize oneself as a member of a national group, sharing certain common characteristics and values, without regarding it as more important than other individual or social identities or even as significant at all. Indeed, one always participates in other identities as a member of a family, region, profession, linguistic group, religion, sex or gender, etc. that may coexist peacefully with a national identity. For this reason, national identity is distinct from nationalism even though nationalism must depend upon a perceived national identity and must evaluate it very strongly. Indeed, it is more likely that national identity will slide into nationalism when it is perceived as threatened and thus as requiring some support. Likewise, national identity does not in itself imply any hostility to any other group or nation; simple difference does not imply hostility. It may under certain conditions take the form of aggressive nationalism but it must be emphasized that nationalism, and certainly national identity, need not take an aggressive form. Consider inter-*polis* and international competitions at the Olympics, for example, which were designed precisely to sublimate tendencies toward aggressive nationalism into peaceful competition.

Finally, a nation and national identity is not necessarily identified with a state, despite the widespread influence of the Wilsonian doctrine, also accepted by Vladimir Lenin, after the First World War that every nation necessarily aspires to become, and ought to become, a state. The short-sightedness of such a policy is surely evident now insofar as it leads to a virtually infinite multiplication of claims to statehood and often implies conflict with other states. Moreover, the existence, often in stable forms, of multinational states, including Canada, should override the assumption that a national identity can exist only within a state exclusive to itself. National identity is the identity of a *people* and not a state, a feeling of belonging to a group through certain markers but without any specific ones that necessarily attach to any other national

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group. Related matters such as nationalism, international aggression, claims to statehood, etc. are theoretically distinct from the phenomenon of national identity, what constitutes it, and how it changes over time.

4. Winthrop Pickford Bell and the Question of a Canadian Nation

Bell was imprisoned during the First World War as an enemy alien in Ruhleben internment camp just after finishing his Ph.D. with Edmund Husserl. During his internment, he gave a lecture to his fellow internees entitled "Canadian Problems and Possibilities" that asked whether Canada could become a nation. Since Bell used the example of Canada in investigating the characteristics of national identity, he was more attuned to the problem of diversity than those who based their reflections on European examples (e.g., Alter, 1985; Hobsbawm, 1992; Renan, 1970) even though the issue is posed exclusively in terms of surmounting internal diversity toward unity. "What we are forced to recognise as the unity of national being has shown itself historically capable of *surmounting differences* of race and of languages, and national *diversity* is clearly capable of resisting the unifying tendencies of both" (Bell, 2012a, p. 55). That is to say, in the case of new nations such as Canada, the U.S.A. and, in general, American nations, the surmounting of internal diversity is what makes a nation and the failure to thus surmount means that there remain only a plurality of nations or national fragments, perhaps within the confines of a single state. This notion of *surmounting* is, as far as I am aware, unique in the literature on national identity. It means something like a Hegelian *Aufhebung* insofar as internal differences are surpassed but maintained. They are surpassed in the sense that they are made, at least, compatible with a higher, more inclusive identity and, at most, rendered insignificant by that inclusion. Internal differences are maintained in the sense that they usually remain evident and significant — even though their importance may decrease over time due to their surpassing — but displaced from reigning influence and irrelevant to national identity. In this way, it may remain important to a person, or even a defined group with a shared history and institutions, that one (or "we") is Irish or Bengali, for example, but that makes one no less Canadian due to that fact.

The concept of *surmounting* gets beyond the dichotomy between objective markers and subjective feelings of national identity. There must be some markers of the surpassing of internal diversity for members of the new nation to identify with it in a manner comparable to members of other internal groups, but these are precisely markers of the feeling of belonging to a higher, more inclusive identity.[1] The feeling of belonging is not inherent to the objective marker itself but only as an index of the feeling such that it may be shared and communicated. When Renan could not find necessary objective markers of national identity, he resorted to regarding it as a product of individually generated feeling, a "daily plebiscite" which suggests that it is

[1] This overcoming of a subject-object dualism by Bell is a consequence of his phenomenological studies with Husserl who, following Franz Brentano, described the relation of *intentionality* whereby a consciousness (*noesis*) is oriented toward a phenomenon (*noema*). The *constitution* of this relation incorporates these aspects in definite relation, which can only abstractly be distinguished as subject and object but always function concretely in tandem.

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an expression of individual will — implying counter-intuitively that if one wills oneself out of a nation, then one is no longer a member. Bell, however, explicitly denies that it is a matter of will (Angus, 2013, pp. 92–93; Bell, 2012a, pp. 55–56).

Bell described a nation as an *organic* unity, meaning by "organic" that it is a whole distinguished by the difference of its parts constituting a unity through the coordination of its different functions. The classic example is the distinction between the unity of a face (with eyes, ears, nose, etc.) versus the unity of a pile of sand in which each part is more or less the same. Even if the parts are slightly different, the unity of the pile is not forged from such differences (Bell, 2012a, p. 56, 2012b, p. 298). Bell utilized the metaphor further to suggest that a nation "grows" through the interlacing of its originally independent parts to become a part-whole unity that is not the product of, nor reducible to, individuals but a community with its own characteristics.[2] Three further aspects of the nation understood as an organic whole may be distinguished. First, it is whole laden with meaning and value, both in the national styles and habits that give a nation its structure of feeling and in the more abstract notions of honour, fidelity, fame, and duty which call upon its members. Second, this distinctive structure of feeling is expressed as a *tradition*, which gives it continuity over time such that it becomes *historically capable* of surmounting differences (Bell, 2012a, pp. 54–56). Third, the nation carries such characteristics itself; it is not simply the sum of its parts. "Such factors as tendencies and tradition *affect* the individuals but are *borne only* by the super-individual being" (Bell, 2012a, p. 56).

There are several assumptions underlying Bell's analysis. First, he never doubts, or even inquires into, whether the state can legitimately steer or control matters pertaining to national identity. To be sure, since it is not a product of will, the nation could not be a product of state action alone — even though a state-organized action is not merely an individual will nor a sum of them. Nonetheless, Bell's whole discussion assumes that it is the right and duty of the state to oversee the mixture that is in the process of becoming a new nation. This is an especially acute issue in Canada where the union of British colonies took place at the level of state action and the attempt to create a Canadian nation was largely a project of that state. There is, at the very least, an unaddressed tension here between the controlling or steering role of the state over the mixture of peoples and the defence of diversity — which could not in that case be without restriction and which restriction Bell does address (Angus, 2012a, pp. 41–42; Bell & Dinan, 2021, p. 410). He does not wish to exclude any immigrant people in principle, though he does favour some, and one of his main goals is to limit British influence. Nevertheless, this assumption does position him in the traditional role of the philosopher as "advisor to the prince" or, indeed, the settler state.

Second, there is no discussion of Indigenous nations nor of their role inside or outside a developing Canadian nation — an omission that is made difficult to remedy by his assumption of the perspective of state policy, which is, after all, a settler state.

[2] Though he does not mention the term, Bell's intention here is clearly to present what Husserl called the "higher-level personality" characteristic of human groups of various kinds (Husserl, 1969, pp. 128–131). Jason Bell has shown that this Husserlian concept derives from Josiah Royce, from Bell's studies at Harvard with Royce to his dissertation on Royce with Husserl — a topic that Husserl insisted upon (Bell, 2011).

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Third, consider the issue of diversity, which is more an ambiguity than an assumption. Insofar as the concept of *surmounting* signifies that some phenomena come to supervene the initial diversity as objectified in markers, it also indicates that other aspects of the diversity are left aside and do not enter into the national identity.[3] The second part of Bell's concept (as quoted above) claims that "national *diversity* is clearly capable of resisting the unifying tendencies of both [race and language]" (Bell, 2012a, p. 55). That is to say, the diversity that remains in the society prevents unification in the nation being of a racial or linguistic form. Such discarded identity (from the perspective of national identity) does not necessarily disappear entirely but remains as characteristic of an individual or a group without national significance. For example, I may wish to eat haggis and drink whiskey on Robbie Burns Night but this is a private matter that does not have anything to do with my being or not being Canadian. Bell's concept of the Canadian nation combines national unification with social diversity, especially of race and language. The French and English bi-national character of Canada militates against such a form of unification — thereby disallowing two of the key factors that are often cited as a basis for national identity in international discussions. As he says, "[c]onsider the bi-racial problem in Canada, where race, language and religious divisions coincide. There is a *diversity* here of just that tradition which could really act as a binding force" (Bell, 2012a, p. 54). In other words, the ex-English (or British) and ex-French communities have just those characteristics that would bind each into a distinct nation. Taken together, however, another form of unity is required. Insofar as these two communities are preserved within Canada, certain aspects that allow their traditions to prosper must be taken up into the national unity even while the binding forces that render them distinct and unique must be muted. This is why French Canadians do not regard themselves as an *ethnic group* and their belonging in Canada depends, in large part, on the marker of language. What distinguishes French Canada from an ethnic group is precisely that certain of its national characteristics are taken up into Canadian national identity. Indeed, to the extent that this is not felt to be the case, the case for an independent nation becomes stronger (Langlois, 1999). Social diversity, aside from bi-nationality, is relegated to the private domain.

However, this is exactly where there emerges a possibility that has been realized in Canadian political history but was not considered by Bell: perhaps the right to retain and exercise public ethnic identity may become a political right that becomes important for national identity. This was institutionalized in the *Canadian*

[3] Jason Bell and Matthew Dinan have written compellingly of Bell's significance as a philosopher of diversity or, more cautiously, its "forbearer," which allows them to suggest that the concept of diversity could be expanded from his initial formulation to address current issues — for instance, expanded from the history of treaties into a recognition of Indigenous nations in a spirit of friendship (Bell & Dinan, 2021, pp. 418–422). Despite the worthy ideal expressed in this extension, it overlooks, in my view, the fact that Bell's defence of diversity is limited by the right of the state to oversee the mixing process. The role of the state in marginalizing Indigenous nations needs no documentation in this context. Insofar as Bell's defence of diversity is qualified — as perhaps any such defence within a nation must be — then it is not clear whether the bounds of that diversity would not exclude Indigenous nations pre-existing Canada. Similarly, Jason Bell and Dinan present Bell as anticipating multiculturalism but fail to note the significant difference between the fact of social diversity and the political incorporation of a right to such diversity (Bell & Dinan, 2021, pp. 414, 418). Diversity itself is a term that requires explication and qualification.

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Multiculturalism Act (1988), which aimed "to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians" (Government of Canada, 1988, Preamble). However, such political recognition must have its limits: if all of the characteristics of a plurality of groups were to be recognized *in their original form*, then there could be no unity that could constitute a new nation. I have termed this elsewhere an "enlightenment presumption," i.e., it is possible to adopt a reflective and critical stance with regard to the beliefs attendant upon one's original national belonging — a stance that is encouraged but not guaranteed by the social diversity of the Canadian population (Angus, 1997, pp. 141–146, 160–162, 2014, p. 333). What is worthy of recognition and what requires abandonment thereby becomes a continuous source of political action and controversy. In Canada, diversity has, to a significant extent, become not only social diversity in the private domain but a political right to diversity in that domain along with the recognition of a similar right of others. However, even the recognition of a political right to the public recognition of ethnic belonging does not in itself mitigate the role of the settler state in overseeing or managing social diversity nor achieve the displacement of British domination (and, to a different extent, French) in the mixture. To the extent that multicultural recognition is understood and practiced in the form of a "host" recognizing a "guest," the new plurality remains merely tolerated by the historically dominating communities and not participant in a genuinely multicultural polity (Angus, 1997, pp. 153–154, 160–162). One should not forget the practice of the British Empire in managing intermediate groups, often transplanted, between colonial authorities and Indigenous nations. A racial or ethnic hierarchy arranged around a central, still-dominant community or communities does not yet constitute a new Canadian multicultural nation. "[A]uthentic, genuine multiculturalism," as Kogila Moodley put it at the beginning of debates about multiculturalism, "would have to preclude a cultural hierarchy as well as mere parallelism of cultural traditions in isolated compartments and represent a mutual learning process" (Moodley, 1983, p. 327).[4]

Bell regarded it as impossible that Canadians be incorporated into British nationality and thought that if Canada could not become a nation, then it would be absorbed into the U.S.A., and this is no doubt the eventuality that has most plagued Canada since (Bell, 2012a, pp. 59–60). The question of whether Canada can become a nation was left open by Bell and may even be regarded as open today. His original theorizing of *surmounting* as the formation of a national identity allows one to define what is at issue in so becoming and to explain the evolving national/sub-national dynamic within Canada even if not to resolve it. To the extent to which Canadian national identity remains unresolved, it is undetermined what markers might become attached to surmounting and by what method such markers might be identified or invented.

[4] What would constitute genuine multicultural recognition has been a very large issue in Canadian social science and philosophy for about 40 years. I will not attempt to document it here. Nevertheless, throughout this literature Moodley's early prescient article has remained a constant touchstone for those sensitized to recognition taking the inadequate form of a cultural hierarchy.

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5. Metaphor and Philosophy

A marker that is selected from widespread experience in Canada to stand for national identity can be described as a metaphor for that identity. A metaphor carries over a meaning from one level, or discursive context, to another, usually more abstract, sphere of reference. "My love is like a red, red rose" takes the sense of brightness and joy associated with redness and applies it to love in order to determine its abstract and difficult-to-determine meaning with reference to a more easily perceptible reference. In the same way, an aspect of experiential life in a society takes on metaphorical meaning when it *surmounts* that ordinary use to become a marker of national identity. We have already noted how language in Francophone Canada is both used in ordinary life and stands metaphorically for the Franco-Canadian, or Quebec, nation and its (problematic) place in Canada. In what we may call *English Canada*, language cannot play the same function both because, for many of the ethnic and immigrant groups, English is not a first, native language and because the bilingual nature of Canada rules it out as a marker of unity. Members of immigrant and ethnic groups often demur from such usage, stating that "I'm not English," but that is not, of course, the point.[5] The language of public interaction outside French-speaking communities in Canada is English and immigrant and ethnic groups must accommodate to this. An ineradicable asymmetry between French and English communities derives from the fact that the French-speaking community can imagine its nation as centred in Quebec and, or not, in Ottawa. English-speaking Canada must seek national identity through Canada in an unrestricted sense since it has no definite location nor sub-national institution with which it can identify. Thus, language cannot stand as a marker of national identity and the question of what markers may so function is difficult to determine. In sum, what would be an adequate metaphor for national identity for English Canada?

A philosophy oriented toward expressing national identity for English Canada must confront this question. Indeed, insofar as Bell's view that it is undetermined whether Canada will become a nation still prevails, the question of what might stand as a metaphor for English Canada overlaps with that possibility itself. A completed philosophy might claim to be purely conceptual, that is to say, to rely on its internal unity of definition and conceptual relations such that it retains no significant reference to the experiential contents of a distinct people or group. But a philosophy that is incomplete in this sense must rely upon metaphors from ordinary life both to assess the possibility of nationhood and for its own conceptual justification. In relying on metaphors for its elaboration, a philosophy utilizes literary or poetic figures that threaten to erase the distinction between literature or poetry and philosophy.[6] In this

[5] It is rather surprising that members of immigrant and ethnic groups often make this remark since one would expect that their experience of having to speak English in the public realm while often speaking another in the private would make one aware of the significance of public language. No more are Canadians whose native language is English any more or at all English in the national sense. This overlaps with the common Anglophone tendency to see language as merely a "medium of communication" in the instrumental sense without any cultural significance. One cannot imagine a Francophone Canadian thinking any such thing nor any Latin American for that matter.

[6] The distinction between metaphor and simile as well as other literary figures is not pertinent here. I follow Ricoeur in regarding metaphor as the generic form of expressing similarity (Ricoeur, 1977, pp. 26–30). Likewise, there is no denial of a genre distinction between poetry and literature but that is not the

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respect, I want to side with Paul Ricoeur and his argument that philosophy must rely on metaphor but simultaneously maintain the genre distinction between poetry and philosophy. This is because, to the extent that a philosophy is completed, it severs its conceptual contents from their metaphorical origin such that they derive their meaning solely from its intra-philosophical conceptual framework.

In contrast, Jacques Derrida argued influentially that there is always a plurality of operative metaphors in a philosophy, entailing that a philosophy cannot fully understand its material and thereby is a sub-genre of literature or poetry. He claimed that a systematic philosophy of metaphor is impossible because "metaphor remains, in all its essential characteristics, a classical philosomeme, a metaphysical concept. It is therefore enveloped in the field that a general metaphorology of philosophy would seek to dominate" (Derrida, 1982, p. 219). Since, in his view, conceptual meaning could master neither its metaphorical origin nor its poetic implication — "[m]etaphor is less in the philosophical text (and in the rhetorical text coordinated with it) than the philosophical text is within metaphor" — the distinction between metaphorical and conceptual use is thereby dissolved (Derrida, 1982, p. 258). Consequently, a critical practice that unpacks the dead metaphors that hide within metaphorical concepts shows that the very task of philosophy, insofar as it means separating and distinguishing the conceptual use of a term from ordinary language, is impossible. This is, of course, a version of Derrida's thesis of an end of metaphysics, where metaphysics equals philosophy, which he took from Martin Heidegger.

Ricoeur responded in three steps. First, he argued that, when a metaphor is used to create a philosophical concept, the new meaning that it achieves becomes a literal meaning in a new plane of reference, that is to say, that its metaphorical origin dominates neither its subsequent reference nor use (Ricoeur, 1977, pp. 343–345). Second, the conceptual meaning thus achieved takes its meaning from adjacent concepts in the relevant field such that its metaphorical origin is devalued with respect to its use in conceptual relationships (Ricoeur, 1977, p. 347). Third, this difference originates a break between metaphorical and speculative philosophical discourses. The specific genre difference is that the speculative is the discourse of "the same" whereas metaphor is that of "the similar," which is to say that the relation between identity and difference shifts toward a greater stringency of identity in philosophical discourse (Ricoeur, 1977, p. 356). For this reason, a completed philosophy aims to become an enclosed conceptual field shorn of any residual relation to the practical, cultural experience that provides its metaphorical origin.[7]

subject of this investigation. Pertinent here is rather that they both rely on metaphorical language for the very essence of their expression. The form of expression in philosophy, while it relies on metaphors in the forging of concepts, is distinct from both literature and poetry in that it breaks with such metaphorical origins and is stabilized on a conceptual plane. I am using the term *metaphor* here, as is common in theoretical discussions, as the generic term for figurative language. It thus covers analogy, simile, etc. as well as metaphor in the narrow sense.

[7] I am not claiming that this aim of philosophy toward completion in this sense is attainable as such. Indeed, I might well argue in another context that it is not. But all that is needed at this point is that a philosophy underway cannot be entirely closed off from its metaphorical origins even while it strains to become an authentically philosophical discourse.

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The preceding account has attempted to sustain that the use of metaphor in philosophy, especially as it refers to the discovery, or invention, of a promising, or adequate, conceptual term, does not undermine the genre distinction between philosophy and other genres in which metaphors operate. Metaphors are tamed, we might say, within philosophy, by the conceptual meaning that they open and elaborate. An incomplete philosophy retains a relevance of the metaphorical origin of its concepts even while straining toward a purely conceptual meaning. Insofar as the *surmounting* that might attain an English Canadian nation is incomplete, a philosophy that might interpret, justify, and criticize that conception of a nation also remains incomplete. Thus, the question of which metaphor might stand forth in surmounting remains an open question. For this reason, it is a justified philosophical task to inquire into which metaphor might so stand and to investigate its provenance, the conceptual clarity it affords, and its limits. Here we come to the key topic of this article: to what extent may the idea of a border function as a metaphor for an English Canadian nation and what may it afford as a philosophical concept?

6. The Border as Metaphor for English Canadian Nationality

There have been various proposals regarding a metaphor for Canadian existence, most notably those having to do with the North, a northern climate, and ice (Angus, 1997, pp. 114–115; Gould, 1967; Wesselius, 2021). I discovered the metaphor of the border in 1989 as a result of my intermittent returns to Canada while an economic exile in the U.S.A. Subsequently, a short essay proposed it as a theme and method for understanding English Canadian nationality and thinking it philosophically. The theme of the border was introduced through a relation of being elsewhere, then suspended, held up, at the border and finally coming home. Surely a sense of home or belonging is essential to national identity as is perhaps the sense of being elsewhere, being out of place. The transitional space of the border inscribes a difference between two sides that allows a passage between them, a passage overseen by surveillance and uncertainty, a preference for one side that makes them unequal, and the possibility of return (though it is not the same crossing when travelling in reverse). Philosophically, this allowed a preliminary formulation of the issue of identity and difference in which "the border is not difference; it allows difference to appear" (Angus, 1990, p. 45). Four relationships were briefly referred to in this respect: between the two countries, between the self and an other, between humanity and nature (or wilderness), and between language and silence. It was suggested that philosophical interrogation should begin in a critical spirit from the denigrated side of the duality. By "beginning from the second side of the relation of dominance [. . .] by excavating that which is repressed by relations of dominance, can we glimpse the new possibility" (Angus, 1990, p. 37).

In 1997, I followed up this tentative beginning in a book that discussed the same four relationships by entering into the social discourses of each on their own terms and questioning them through the metaphor of the border in order to explore English Canadian existence and national aspiration and thereby to address some of its key themes philosophically. The relation between countries was explored through the discourse of Canadian nationalism. The relation between self and other was explored through the discourse on multiculturalism. The relation between humanity and nature

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was explored though the discourse of environmentalism and ecological thought. The relation between language and silence was not explored thoroughly but only used to distinguish the conventional murmur that comes from a too-social manner of speech in contrast to the babble of madness when speech loses any social location — the point of which was to identify the suspension, or border, between murmur and babble as a silence which indicates its proximity to philosophical thought. I intended, while writing, to include the further relation between secularity and the sacred — a persistent theme in Canadian thought — but found that it stretched my capabilities too far. It was, however, suggested that ecology implies "an immanent concept of the sacred through participation of human life in Being" (Angus, 1997, p. 104; also see pp. 103–105, 195).

Without recounting the details of these distinct discourses, suffice it to say that the border as metaphor would succeed to the extent that its key feature or features could be found to illuminate these diverse discourses, create surrounding concepts, and thereby raise the border metaphor from philosophical discovery to a conceptual justification that would justify its claim to be a national philosophy for English Canada. This key feature consists in understanding the aspects of the border — unequal duality, crossing, surveillance, etc. — through abjection, that is to say, the opening up of a closed internality through a deference to, a ceding space to, an other. At the political level, it was argued, this signified a historical shift from the attempt to defend "one's own" (George Grant) characteristic of Left nationalism toward the emerging new era of globalization and social movements and, further, directed the search for belonging, for home, from the nation-state toward other social groupings — which allowed greater appreciation of the identities of Quebec and First Nations and explained the book's specific focus on English Canada (Angus, 1997, pp. 111–114). While the central feature of the metaphor of the border cannot replace detailed inquiry into each of the distinct discourses, should not result in a mere subsumption of their heterogeneity, if it serves to orient critical inquiries and to stimulate related concepts, then this suffices, I would say, as a justification for its creative role in an incomplete philosophy.

This proposal was not without its critics, many of which I have elsewhere addressed (Angus, 2014). Corey Lamont observed that some people do not simply pass the border and its moment of suspension but "carry the border [. . .] beyond the point of entry [. . . because] she is not recognized by Immigration and Customs officials as fully belonging to the nation-state in which she resides" (Lamont, 2013, p. 330). One might point out that the conflation of nation and state in this remark confuses state regulation and surveillance, which is an exclusionary practice of all states, with the belonging characteristic of a nation. But this would amount to a quibble since there are certainly non-state (economic, social, traditional, etc.) forms of exclusion that still prevail. Even so, the philosophical issue cannot be addressed through social scientific or literary studies. It is rather an issue of what lived experiences can stand for a sufficiently inclusive belonging: whether national identity, which is therefore distinguished from other identities that it does not include, and incorporates a specific form of surmounting, can avoid such illegitimate forms of excluding altogether. It is indeed a different case when one excludes, as one must, a citizen of another state from when one allows a person to pass but not to become a full member

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of the national identity, as Lamont suggests. The adequacy of inclusion depends on the selection of the metaphor of surmounting that prevails. To this extent, the metaphor of the border holds greater promise than that of an Anglo elite attached to the Empire and Commonwealth from which the exclusion Lamont discusses originates. Even if a more inclusive metaphor begins to prevail, it may take some time to take hold.

If a metaphor were to incorporate all of the lived experiences of everyone to the same extent, it could not perform its function of surmounting such experiences toward a unity. If, alternatively, we were to abandon the project of surmounting in a national identity, what would be left is an indefinite social plurality living under a merely state-administrative body. That may be where we are and where we might remain — which is to say, without an English-Canadian nation. The only other alternative, which was mentioned above, is that a right to social plurality, or, better said, to one's own socio-ethnic belonging, might itself become a universal right recognized politically as a key aspect of the nation. In Canada, multiculturalism has, to a significant extent, become not only social diversity in the private domain but a political right to diversity in that domain along with the national recognition of a similar right of others. Of course, such a right could not be without qualification, but if the qualification were the acceptance of enlightenment liberal-democratic civic virtues, it could be acceptable. To that extent, diversity might well be a successful competing metaphor to the border. Indeed, that appears to be a majority opinion in the part of Canada where the English language prevails and would, if fully implemented, address the issue of including all those with the right to reside.[8]

7. The Cultural and Historical Impact of the Metaphor of the Border

Usage of the border metaphor stimulates inquiry into the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. The wider cultural significance of the border metaphor outside of philosophy has been considerable. The grandfather of such inquiries is no doubt Marshall McLuhan, who noted that Canada has multiple borderlines and defined borderlands as "a form of political 'ecumenism' [. . . constituting] an area of spiralling repetition and replay, both of inputs and feedback, both of interlace and interface, an area of 'double ends joined,' of rebirth and metamorphosis" (McLuhan & Powers, 1989, pp. 164–165). By this, he appears to refer to any sort of a permeable boundary using, as he does, the notion of the *frontier* as equally applicable to the U.S.A and Canada with neither qualification nor restriction, thereby implying that the two sides are more or less the same in the sense that crossing in one direction is like crossing in the other.

[8] We might remark parenthetically at this point that it is the predominance of the metaphor of diversity in English Canada that allows the smugly self-satisfied response to politics in Quebec where national identity through language is at issue. Any restriction of diversity in Quebec is counted, both in popular culture and the media in English Canada, as a violation of a "national" consensus amounting to tyranny. While in Quebec the issue is an ongoing politics of how to reconcile social diversity and the national role of language, in English Canada it is the necessary limitation of diversity without any generally accepted markers suggesting the legitimacy of such limitation. Limitation by an enlightenment doctrine of civic liberalism may be sufficient, and no doubt has significant ethical and historical claim, nonetheless the metaphor of diversity cannot legitimate such a limitation, which would have to be found elsewhere.

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Within literary and historical studies, W. H. New used the metaphor of the border in a similar way to refer to "a place that *includes*, a place that *excludes,* as a place *divided*, as a place that *distributes* resources and power, and as a place that embraces some ongoing principle of *boundary negotiation*" (New, 1998, p. 5). He also noted that the border is not simply a binary division (as he claims it is usually seen in the U.S.A.), but motivates a search for multiple possibilities or at least a third one. Drawing on popular culture, television, and various forms of writing, Jody Berland agreed that the border, though it draws upon a binary division, is also a rejection of binary codes and thereby a connection as well as a separation. She concluded that such connection does not imply shared meaning. "On this side of the border, reference to the 49th parallel evokes a rejection of market ideology, an acceptance of cultural complexity, and an antipathy to bigness and imperial expansionism" (Berland, 2001, p. 164). It seems clear that the metaphor of the border has considerable purchase on the cultural experience of English Canadians. However, it is also evident that the metaphor is used in a number of ways to express not only binary distinction but avoiding or overcoming that distinction with other possibilities, separation but also multiplicity and diversity, crossing but also a preference for one side, critique of individualist expansionary capitalism compressed in an image of the U.S.A. but also a smugly self-satisfied sense that one's country is exempt in this regard.

The wide use of the metaphor in cultural life suggests that it might be useful not only to explain the sense in which English Canada might be or become a nation but also as a concept in philosophy through which an adequate understanding of that polity and its philosophical expression might be achieved. Trott has explored this possibility in one particular register that follows up philosophically the third possibility mentioned by New and Berland. She begins from the immediate implication of division but remarks that a border also means margins, limits, boundaries, edges, and barriers, in order to argue that the border can also be re-interpreted to focus on what we share rather than on differences (Trott, 2022, pp. 19, 21). Referring directly to my use of the metaphor in *A Border Within* (Angus, 1997), she comments that "[w]hat I want to emphasize is that the dominant metaphor of border, which frames that which is included and draws attention to that which is excluded, is instrumental for understanding how a possible synthesis of oppositions can be achieved" (Trott, 2001, p. 646). This interpretation allows her to connect the metaphor of the border to the theme of the reconciliation of opposites that has permeated throughout the history of the predominant Hegelianism of Canadian philosophy (Trott, 2018, 2022, p. 21).[9] The border in this interpretation is understood as a *place* where opposites encounter each other and can be mediated or drawn into compromise (Trott, 2022, pp. 24–25). This interpretive strategy allows her to overcome the deficiency, for which she earlier rebuked me, with some reason to be sure, of ignoring earlier Canadian philosophy in my own proposal of the border

[9] Trott speaks specifically of *opposites* which may be drawn into *synthesis* or *compromise* but Canadian Hegelianism more widely tends to regard duality of any kind — be it compromise, difference, tension, consensus, moderation, communication, promise, etc. — as an invitation to the Hegelian middle. It is common in Canadian Hegelianism to regard the Absolute suspiciously and to displace synthesis into the future as an expectation, thereby demoting it from Hegel's *actuality* to a Kantian regulative ideal and, finally, in my critical view, to a *polemos* (Angus, 2019).

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metaphor (Trott, 1998, p. 237). For this interpretive strategy, it is possible to inscribe the metaphor of the border, interpreted as philosophical synthesis of social and intellectual oppositions, within the long history of English Canadian philosophy oriented to proposing "ways of passing from one idea to another" that she and Armour uncovered in their path-breaking history (Armour & Trott, 1981, p. 4).

8. Short Statement of the Border Understood as Abjection

It is no doubt inevitable that philosophical use of a metaphor will allow more than one interpretation since the metaphor itself is not a concept and, as we have seen, can only become a concept by severing itself — at least provisionally but ideally finally — from its origin and taking its meaning from the surrounding conceptual realm which it organizes. I would like to note briefly several features of the conceptual formation that surrounds the use of the metaphor of the border in *A Border Within* (Angus, 1997). In the first place, let me note that the border is qualified as "*within*" in the title. It is not merely a matter of internal versus external spaces but also the reflection of the external within the internal and thereby not simply a binary division. Specifically, the image of the U.S.A., caricature though it may be, is utilized to criticize those very same features of Canadian society and thereby to imagine a different future. Thus, though there is indeed a *distinction* between two spaces, it encompasses much more than a simple logic of inclusion and exclusion. Closely connected to this is the description of the relation between the two distinctions as being, not merely an opposition, but an unequal relation of power, whose critique implies an *abjection* (Levinas) of the powerful in favour of the heretofore denigrated (Angus, 1997, pp. 8, 10, 47, 111, 130, 132, 163, 242 n. 81, 250 n. 16). This applies as a diagnostic tool to the relations investigated separately: the self *vis-à-vis* the other, wilderness/ecology *vis-à-vis* industrial capitalist society, the Protestant ruling elite *vis-à-vis* multicultural society, silence *vis-à-vis* the constant chatter of consumer society, and Canada *vis-à-vis* the U.S.A. Thus understood, the border is not a place but a moment of transition between spaces, not an encounter between two different spaces but a passing from one to the other. It is a *suspension* between places that opens both toward a *localization* that defines the non-dominant space through its newly discovered possibility and a *universalization* that might free one from any division of space.[10] This suspension is the origin of philosophy from within a divided world. In the context of English Canadian and Canadian philosophy, the turn to philosophy as conceptual articulation and meaning remains incomplete such that the metaphor remains partly metaphorical and not totally conceptual. This incompletion cannot be (yet) completed. It is not a failure but a continuing question about an English Canadian nation and Canadian philosophy.

[10] I have always understood this moment of suspension in light of phenomenological philosophy where Husserl spoke of a regressive move (*Rückgang*) that allows an unbuilding (*Abbau*) of a given phenomenon to reveal what has constituted it as such and which Heidegger characterized as a step back (*Schritt zurück*) (Angus, 1997, p. 132, 2012b, p. 199).

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9. Concluding Remark

It is likely that the border will be productive as a viable metaphor for national identity and Canadian philosophy as long as its difference from the U.S.A. remains significant in English Canadian cultural life. The fact that the concept of the border is open to two different interpretations, and two different sets of surrounding concepts, testifies to its viability as well as the ability of its related conceptual fields to frame fundamental debate about national identity and Canadian philosophy. Should the metaphor's usefulness begin to fail, that would be an indication that the often critical, even caricatural, image of the U.S.A. that has been effective in English Canada to motivate a search for a distinct culture and society has been abandoned because that search has itself been abandoned.

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