

NEXT Issue Five

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Issue Five

NEXT is an interdisciplinary journal of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder featuring the work of emerging scholars whose scholarship explores religion in its many expressions and facets.

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Moriah Arnold
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Cristen Dalessandro is a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her research broadly focuses on identities (race, class, gender, religion), emotions, sexualities, and inequalities. Her dissertation explores the intimacy stories of a diverse group of young adults living in the Western United States. Her research has previously been featured in the journals *Gender & Society* and *Sociological Spectrum*.

Paul A. Rodriguez teaches classes in both philosophy and religious studies at Chaffey College in Rancho Cucamonga, CA. He is currently working on completing a doctoral degree in the Philosophy of Religion at Claremont Graduate University. His dissertation is on modern philosophical uses of the Apostle Paul. His academic interests also include Latino/a religion, as well as philosophy of film.

Lucas Lognion was born in Lake Charles, LA, and studies comparative mysticism at the University of Colorado Boulder. He plans to continue his research in the emerging field of secular mysticism. He likes to hike, read, and discuss film.

Greg Mileski is currently completing a Master of Arts at the University of Colorado Boulder, where he focuses on religious conceptions of selfhood and their ethical implications, particularly in Buddhism and Hinduism. He holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Pittsburgh and a Master of Divinity from Trinity Lutheran Seminary, and hopes next to complete a doctoral degree in comparative theology. He lives with his wife Jenny and their two young children.

Eben Yonnetti studies the contemporary transmission and translation of Tibetan Buddhism. Studying both in Euro-North American and East Asian contexts, Eben's primary research interests include the contemporary trans-national and trans-linguistic dissemination of texts and practices, as well as translation and ritual studies more broadly. He has a Bachelor of Arts in History from Siena College, New York and is currently completing his Master of Arts in Religious Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Tino Garcia grew up in Santa Fe, New Mexico and earned a Bachelor of Arts in English and Spanish from Concordia College in Moorhead, MN. He graduated with a Master of Arts in Religion (Philosophy of Religion) from the Claremont School of Theology/Claremont Graduate University and completed doctoral coursework in the same field in Religious Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara. His interests include Deconstruction, Decolonialism, Multicultural Literature, and Latino/a and Latin American Thought. He currently teaches English at Antelope Valley College in Lancaster, CA.

Moriah Renee Arnold is a civil rights activist, yoga teacher, and 2012 graduate of Naropa's Traditional Eastern Arts program. She is currently completing a Master of Arts in Religious Studies alongside her Juris Doctorate at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her studies focus on the overt

and covert roles of religions, religious language, and religious institutions in the democratic process and the development of international law.

Introduction

Scholars of religion(s) are necessarily, in some ways, students of history. If you're like me, you've occasionally found yourself reading about an historical period and feeling your skin warm with envy, touched by the excited drama—and even danger!—of those significant moments that compiled into significant eras. Those who witnessed these landmarks events—how lucky! Did they realize what they were a part of? Was it exciting? Or, did it pass by unnoticed, with the implication becoming clear so much later on that it was all too close, too familiar, to see with any perspective? What would it be like to live immersed in those historical periods whose reverberations continue to echo through our texts, our universities, our media?

I have often found myself entertaining those thoughts—and then I consider our own age. Many of us remember a world in which the internet (remember: it was the capital I-Internet back then) was fringe technology, a far-off possibility full of promise and questions. Increasingly, more people find themselves traveling the globe, experiencing first-hand what could only be read about in the not-so-distant past. Individual and group identities are forming, refracting, dismantling, and reinforcing each other, revealing themselves to be more malleable than we had previously conceived. Perhaps it is the conceit of any student of history, but the changes that have shaped our contemporary world order do indeed seem significant, and generations to come will hear the echoes of our days in ways we can imagine and in ways we couldn't possibly predict.

But, of course, that's only a portion of the story. So many exciting developments and advances in technology have brought with them significant costs, too often borne by those with the least power to affect global responses. Our globalized experiment is powered by a fuel that has done over centuries what ecosystems have only previously experienced over millennia. Many moving from country to country are doing so as bombs fall behind them, as global superpowers

wage proxy battles to keep power concentrated among the few. In countries in which they have been marginalized, Indigenous and Native Peoples remain too often an afterthought in public policy debates. And, as benign and beneficial technologies increase, so too do those used to wage war, exercise the interests of the powerful, and subdue domestic and foreign populations clamoring for fundamental human rights.

The world in which we live, the one where indelible changes seem to occur with increasing frequency, is one full of opportunities and challenges. The societies we are shaping promise benefits to some while ignoring—or worse—others. While some have sought to blur certain boundaries, others have fought to solidify them. As some aspects of our identities have become intermingled, others can seem to reveal intractable differences. Even a flawed attempt to step back and see this age with any kind of historical perspective reveals a world built of equal parts hope and fear, even as they seem to take turns at the front of our imaginations.

The offerings that follow attempt to make sense of how these phenomena are shaping and being shaped by the religions that feed our curiosity. Cristen Dalessandro begins this issue by investigating the role of religious affiliation in constructing minority identities. By interviewing Latinx undergraduates at a predominately white university, Dalessandro asks how Roman Catholicism becomes intertwined with ethnicity to shape an identity that is neither one nor the other. She also prods us to stay aware of the ways the religions we study are more than ritual, tradition, texts, or philosophy, but are also deeply intertwined with the identities of individuals and communities.

Paul Rodriguez continues our theme of blurred boundaries by considering the ways philosophers Baruch Spinoza and Alain Badiou, separated by three centuries, make use of Paul of Tarsus, a prominent figure in the first century of Christianity and one who has loomed large in Christian imaginations since. By constructing versions of this enigmatic figure to fit the philosophical case each is making, Spinoza and Badiou cast Paul as a forerunner to their own philosophical thought. Both see in Paul a kind of universalized definition of selfhood which they

utilize to bolster their own claims of how one ought to understand a person. In this way, Rodriguez asks us to consider how historical narratives are shaped by those looking back, and so calls us to be mindful of our own constructions of historical figures and how we gaze upon them from our own locations.

Moving from constructions of identities to constructions of worldviews, Luke Lognion prods the thought of twentieth century Roman Catholic monk Thomas Merton. Merton drew on a number of surprising sources in formulating his spiritual outlook, including literary criticism, Marxism, and existentialism. By articulating theological worldviews deeply influenced by secular thinkers, Lognion argues, Merton complicates our easy division of secular and religious matters and leads us to wonder about the ways religious thought is interwoven with broader cultural influences.

My own contribution to this volume examines the relationship between violence and nonviolence—two categories often thought to be diametrically opposed but which may be more closely related than we tend to think. In examining the movements of Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., I characterize nonviolence as primarily a response to violence, with the violence of the oppressive power raising the stakes of the conflict and the responsive violence of some within the oppressed population amplifying the strategy of the nonviolent actors. In this way, the line between violence and nonviolence becomes blurred, as violence helps to contextualize, define, and elevate nonviolent strategies.

Increasingly, identities also include a digital component and Eben Yonetti tackles the blurring of spatial boundaries as religious seekers from around the globe gather in digital spaces, as understandings of “place” broaden. In investigating an online Buddhist community, Yonetti gives us a look into the ways that technology can provide opportunities for new forms of religious practice, while simultaneously introducing new complexities into what it means to be an adherent of that tradition. Yonetti’s work raises questions about the changing nature of religious belonging. If the online world allows for a greater variety of religious options, what does it mean to be a member of a religious community? Who holds authority in religious

traditions in the face of the internet's democratizing (and destabilizing) power? Yonetti's paper provides a fascinating look at the ways different players within this dynamic navigate this new and exciting space.

This edition is proud to continue NEXT's tradition of including poetry alongside academic articles. For those of us accustomed to entering into the lines of a poet's imagination, I hope this space feels familiar and interesting. If it has been a while since you've sat with a poem, let this be an invitation to a practice that can be at once insightful and disorienting, uplifting and sobering. In the words of Tino Garcia, we are reminded of some of the real costs of our globalizing world, keeping us mindful of the ways that power is exercised destructively. As boundaries continue to blur in the ages to come, let us stay vigilant about those being swallowed, attacked, or pushed to the margins. And, in a wholly different vein, NEXT's own Moriah Renee Arnold provides a lilting and dancing homage to the academic process itself. With contrasting and contradicting imagery, Arnold points us to the ways scholar and subject shout and whisper at one another, how an idea can seem so clear and trenchant at one moment only in the next to evaporate like a thin fog in the rays of a summer sun.

Finally, allow me to share that this edition of NEXT represents a reawakening of sorts, a return to publication after a number of years dormant. Moving this journal from hibernation to activity added to the challenges any editor faces but it has also infused these pages with a note of triumph known intimately by only a few. It is my hope that future editors of NEXT will be able to build from this small but significant step forward and that this offering will provide much momentum for a continuation of this tradition, even as they find ways to expand and reimagine this small corner of the academic world.

With humility and gratitude,
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