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## Keyword: Boundary

The term 'boundary' can be used both literally and metaphorically. Literal usage generally refers to the boundary between two neighbouring zones, which can be very general in terms of space, or more concrete in terms of territories considered in geography and politics. The semantic field of 'boundary' encompasses demarcation lines, borderlines, frontiers, edges and margins, among others. Boundaries also give rise to border regions, fringes, peripheral areas and transitional zones. A special type of boundary is the horizon, which can be open and shifting.

If the terrain beyond a boundary is unknown, the edge of a territory can still be determined from within. But can this also be done if the interior territory consists of the entire universe? According to modern cosmology, the universe is finite. However, it seems impossible to imagine the end of the universe without also imagining something beyond it. But a terrain beyond the boundary of the entire universe would not only be unknown; it would be incomprehensible. Conversely, it is also impossible to imagine an infinite universe without a boundary. Although we understand these notions abstractly, we cannot imagine a bounded or unbounded universe. Therefore, it seems impossible to apply the notion of 'boundary' to the entire universe in any literal sense.

The semantic field of 'boundary' can also be used metaphorically. For example, when philosophers speak of 'limits' in different contexts, they seem to be referring metaphorically to the edge of a territory beyond which there is nothing. In this sense, they discuss, for instance, the limits of knowledge, thought and language. One could argue that a particular limit of understanding stems from the attempt to transfer the literal concept of 'boundary' from neighbouring spatial areas to the entire universe. We are part of the universe, yet we can neither imagine its boundedness nor its unboundedness.

If the concept of 'limit' is taken to mean not just that there is unknown territory beyond the border, but that there is nothing at all beyond it, then this metaphor leads to a problem similar to that encountered when the concept of 'boundary' is transferred to the entire universe. Although we can understand the concept of such a limit abstractly, we cannot imagine it, just as we cannot imagine a boundary of the universe. For example, Wittgenstein argues in the preface to the *Tractatus* about the limits of thought: "[...] for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought)" (Wittgenstein 1922: 23). Although the metaphor of the limit is widely used in philosophy and elsewhere, it is in such cases, strictly speaking, incoherent and thus incomprehensible.

However, one could argue with Hans Blumenberg that the notion of a 'limit' as the edge of a territory beyond which there is nothing is an absolute metaphor. According to Blumenberg, absolute metaphors cannot be dissolved into conceptuality ("[können] nicht in Begrifflichkeit aufgelöst werden", Blumenberg 1960: 11). They do not refer to objects of experience or imagination, yet they still function as instruments for our orientation in the world. For example, the notion of 'limit', taken as an absolute metaphor, enables us to acknowledge our limitations in relation to knowledge, thought and language, even though we cannot imagine a border with no other side. The fact that our understanding is limited is paradoxically demonstrated by our inability to fully comprehend the notion of a limited understanding. Following Blumenberg, this important yet paradoxical limitation can be acknowledged through the absolute metaphor of the 'limit of understanding'.

Another example of an absolute metaphor is the spatial metaphor of transcendence. For instance, if we say that the notion of a border with nothing beyond it transcends our imagination, this metaphorical step has nowhere to move to. Therefore, 'transcendence' cannot be understood as referring to objects of experience or imagination. Nevertheless, we can use it alongside the absolute metaphor of the 'limit' to acknowledge our limited understanding and thereby orient ourselves as limited beings in the world.

The problem that we cannot imagine a border with nothing behind it is also relevant to Karl Jaspers' concept of the boundary situation. The German term *Grenze* can mean boundary as well as, among other things, limit, border, demarcation line and frontier. In his preface to the translation of Jaspers' major three-volume work *Philosophy*, the translator discusses this problem and points out that he translates the notion of *Grenze* differently depending on the context (PhEI: xviii–xix). In the context of the notion of *Grenzsituation*, however, the translator opts for 'boundary situation', a choice he justifies in the preface (PhEI: xix) by referring to the following description by Jaspers: "*Grenze* drückt aus: es gibt ein anderes, aber zugleich: dies andere ist nicht für das Bewußtsein im Dasein" (PhII: 203). Accordingly, he translates this passage as follows: "The word *boundary* implies that there is something else, but it indicates at the same time that this other thing is not for an existing consciousness" (PhEII: 178–179).

Thus, the translation of *Grenzsituation* as 'boundary situation' takes into account the fact that Jaspers explicitly speaks of two sides of the border: 'there is something else'. However, in the cited passage, Jaspers also states that the other side of the boundary is inaccessible to the mind: 'this other thing is not for an existing consciousness'. This peculiar claim can be interpreted as describing an absolute metaphor. According to this interpretation, the concept of the boundary situation hints at a side of the border that we cannot imagine, but which nonetheless helps us to orientate ourselves as finite beings.

Jaspers' unusual description of the other side of the boundary can also be interpreted in terms of negative theology, beyond absolute metaphors. Jaspers was strongly influenced by negative theology and, regarding transcendence, speaks of a content of not-knowing (*Gehalt des Nichtwissens*, PGO: 356), which echoes the traditional concept of learned ignorance (*docta ignorantia*). While absolute metaphors express something that cannot be understood as referring to objects of experience or imagination, learned ignorance can be interpreted as a form of understanding that cannot be immediately expressed in language, but which manifests itself in a new orientation within the world (cf. Gutschmidt 2022).

For example, we are part of a universe that we cannot imagine as either bounded or unbounded. An appropriate way to orient ourselves towards this universe could be based on learned ignorance. Philosophically, this notion can be construed in such a way that the experience of failing to imagine a bounded or unbounded universe is epistemically transformative (Paul 2014: 17), leading to a new perspective on the world that cannot be immediately expressed in language (Paul 2014: 8–15). Experiencing boundary situations, as defined by Jaspers, can also be epistemically transformative, evoking a new perspective on the world and a new orientation within it. According to this interpretation, Jaspers' concept of *existential elucidation* refers to the process of achieving such an orientation.

## References

- Blumenberg H (1960) Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie. *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 6:7–142.  
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