CHAPTER 18

Möbius Religion: The Insider/ Outsider Question

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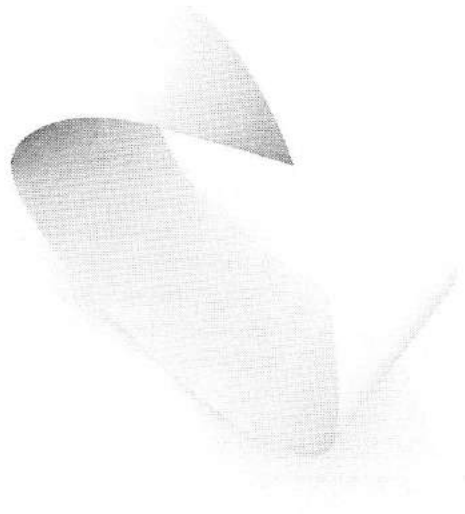
Named after the German mathematician and theoretical astronomer August Ferdinand Möbius (1790–1868), a Möbius strip is a surface with only one side and only one boundary component. It is nonorientable (that is, inconsistent and indeterminate) in terms of mathematical properties. Imagine cutting a paper bracelet, twisting one of the ends around and then reattaching the ends. This is a Möbius strip.

The Möbius strip is a useful image for an analogy in the study of religion. *Möbius religion* suggests that the question of so-called insiders (adherents) and so-called outsiders (scholars) in the study of religion, including the related issues of adherence, identity, and scholar-practitioners, is a complex issue that escapes any easy singular answer (see also Doniger O'Flaherty 1984; Kripal 2014).

The insider/outsider question may be understood as a Möbius strip because there is connection, overlap, and relationship, especially if we broaden our conception of both adherence and the field through a postcolonial and postmodern turn. The postcolonial turn asks us to consider and overcome legacies of colonialism, in this case the representation of others through our own categories; the postmodern turn directs us to recognize a context characterized by diversity, multiple perspectives, relativity, and the destabilization or questioning of any single enduring and coherent personhood or identity. What this means is that there are culture-specific ways of knowing, being, and experiencing that call into question any single perspective or position, including ones that contain alternative and subversive possibilities vis-à-vis dominant Western academic positions or perspectives.



A Möbius strip on a white background. *A surface with only one side and only one boundary component, the Möbius strip serves as a useful analogy in the study of religion. The question of insiders (adherents) and outsiders (scholars) may be understood as a Möbius strip because there is connection, overlap, and relationship.* © FLORIANA BARBU/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM.

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Different scholars might choose, and implicitly have chosen, other analogies than the Möbius strip: circles (unified continuum), squares (opposing sides), abysses (unbridgeable chasms or perilous depths), and so forth. In any case, there are normative claims about what the field of the study of religion is and ought to be, usually with corresponding secular materialist or social scientific demands for objectivity, neutrality, and so forth. One dimension of such concerns (and constructions) is the history and defining characteristics of the field (see, e.g., Sharpe 1986; Capps 1995), including its emergence from and uneasiness with (Christian) theology, which is often assumed to involve biased normative discourse, that is, absolute truth claims.

In the study of religion, scholars often draw a distinction between the two disciplines or fields: Theology is of or from religion, whereas the study of religion is about religion. Thus, this topic raises additional questions about critical subjectivity, academic values, and theoretical commitments. It also represents an open horizon for individuals seeking an alternative way of being, wherein pairs or supposed opposites (such as personal–professional, adherent–academic, and practitioner–scholar dyads) may become integrated. That is, rather than a problem, dichotomy, or rupture, insider/outsider modes may each offer unique contributions, including by scholar-practitioners. It is also possible that one may be simultaneously insider and outsider or transcend such distinctions altogether.

The insider/outer question thus relates to the place of religious adherence in the academic study of religion, assuming that it does have a place. In such a context, adherence may be understood as a public secret. As defined and explored by Michael Taussig (1999), a public secret is a secret that everyone knows, but which cannot be articulated; as a particular type of power, it also involves knowing what not to know, or perhaps in the present case, knowing what not to be or say. In the dominant scholarly mode, adherence is about others (them), not about scholars (us).

Adherence is also an absent referent (Adams [1990] 2010; Gross 2014). That is to say, adherence to a particular religious tradition is often central to this area of inquiry, but rarely addressed in an explicit and sophisticated manner. With respect to actual religious adherence (or lack thereof) among scholars, it is somewhat analogous to sex between ethnographers and natives (see Kulick and Wilson 1995; Orsi 2005, 14). Like sex in the field, many do it, but few publically speak of it. Adherence, especially as a dimension of personal identity, is rarely the subject of explicit examination or discussion. It is a taboo. It is also a paradox: an academic discipline rooted in religious adherence, both as its intellectual genealogy and implicit object of study, excludes scholarly participation. At the very least, adherence is defined as a private matter.

ATTENDING A DAOIST RITUAL

The insider/outsider question brings our attention to the contributions and limitations of adherent and academic approaches to being religious. Specifically, if we are committed to understanding a particular dimension of religious communities and traditions, to what extent is it beneficial to be inside and outside? Adherents often express a more sophisticated understanding of views and practices from a lived perspective, whereas scholars often evidence deeper knowledge about the history, context, and influences involved. These need not be mutually exclusive or the purview of the specific category of experts. Nonetheless, the insider/outsider question highlights the challenges of developing a comprehensive and

integrated understanding of religion, especially if we recognize this modern Western category as shorthand for specific people and specific communities living in specific places at specific times. This is, perhaps, even more the case if we are investigating unfamiliar or esoteric (that is, secret) practices.

Let us take the example of modern Taiwanese Zhengyi (Orthodox Unity) Daoist ritual. Rooted in the earlier Tianshi (Celestial Masters) movement of the Later Han dynasty (25–220 CE), Zhengyi is a householder tradition composed of ordained, married priests and a larger lay community (Komjathy 2013, 2014b). As expressed in the rural communities of south and southeast mainland China and of Taiwan, Zhengyi priests primarily perform commissioned rituals for a given patron, family, or community. These priests are associated with particular family lineages, often with their own distinct manuscript traditions and unique methods of ritual performance. This includes esoteric dimensions that require initiation, ordination, and in-depth training.

According to Michael Saso (1930–), an important scholar of Daoism (Taoism) who explicitly used the insider/outsider distinction in his work:

> The ritual of religious Taoism [*sic*] is esoteric; that is, it is not meant to be directly understood and witnessed by all the faithful. The esoteric meaning of Taoist ritual and magic is concealed from all but the initiated; only after many years of training and a gradual introduction to religious secrets is the disciple deemed worthy of elevation to the rank of master and full knowledge of the esoteric meanings of religious ritual.... The expertise of a Taoist priest is judged by several criteria, the first one being his external performance of ritual.... The second criterion for judging a Taoist [priest], which determines his rank at ordination, is his knowledge of the esoteric secrets of the religion, including the ability to perform the meditations and breath-control techniques of internal alchemy (*nei-tan*), and to recite the classical orthodox lists of spirits' names [*lu*-registers] and apparel and the mantric summons found in the Taoist Canon. (Saso 1978, 325–326)

That is, there is an adherent or insider way of understanding (and experiencing) the ritual, in which one practices complex internal meditative methods while simultaneously engaging in external ritual performance. This may be interpreted by ethnographers (field researchers) and historians in various ways, including ways that deviate from or obscure that actual practice. Without initiation and formal training, such interpreters will neglect major dimensions of Daoist religiosity. Similarly, the given Daoist priests and communities may not understand the complex historical development of the particular Daoist ritual. This example also highlights degrees of insiderness or adherence, as ordinary (uninitiated) lay Daoists may also be unfamiliar with the informing views and methods.

For present purposes and by way of orientation to our topic, we may not be able to understand a given event without gaining greater access to the associated community, without entering more deeply into the inside. Saso, and another prominent scholar of Daoism Kristofer Schipper (1934–), chose formal Daoist training and ordination in the late 1960s and early 1970s. That is, both Saso and Schipper decided to become insiders (adherents) in order to more fully understand Daoist ritual as outsiders (scholars). Such early ethnographic examples thus reveal an emerging trajectory of participant-observation (see, e.g., DeWalt and DeWalt 2010), rooted in sympathetic understanding, and (convert) scholar-practitioners.

Along these lines, based upon my own participant-observation and involvement in the Daoist tradition, I would suggest that both approaches have important contributions to

make. Without formal academic training, I would not be able to historically contextualize and accurately translate classical Daoist literature. Without formal Daoist training, I would not be able to interpret such texts in a technically accurate way, specifically with respect to actual practice. On a deeper, and perhaps more esoteric, gnostic, and mystical level, I would not have understood other layers of Daoist adherence, affiliation, community, ordination, tradition, and so forth. I may not have been open to experiences that revealed the Daoist tradition as a community of practitioners connected to each other as a historical and energetic continuum (see Komjathy 2013, 2014b).

Such experiences have included mountain seclusion, disappearance in the Dao, and numinous pervasion; they have also included subtle transmissions that apparently originate both within and beyond a particular lineage. For example, the Huashan (Mount Hua) lineage of Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) Daoism with which I am affiliated is technically monastic; it involves a commitment to celibacy (no sex), sobriety (no intoxicants), and vegetarianism (no meat). In Chinese terms, *monasticism* is often referred to as *chujia* (leaving the family), which also may be understood as *chusu* (abandoning the mundane). Following my ordination, and without explicit discussion with my master-father (*shifu*) or extensive reflection, a whole series of insights emerged about the deeper layers of ancestral influences and family obligations. Specifically, I began to see through some of the disorientation and distortion that comes through ordinary family entanglements, including biological and social demands for reproduction. Thus, my scholarship, and any discourse or research for that matter, may be read on multiple levels.

POSITIONALITY AND PARTICIPATION

For those involved in the academic study of religion, critical subjectivity relates to positionality and participation. This correlates to scholars' (and students') locations in their respective fields and disciplines and various traditions, whether religious, interpretive, or otherwise. Positionality and participation relate to various dimensions of critical subjectivity. These involve our own varied backgrounds and commitments, including the ways in which and degrees to which we are embedded in specific contexts. We may also reflect on the meaning and relevance of experience as a critical concept (see, e.g., Proudfoot 1985; Sharf 1998; Bagger 1999; Komjathy 2007, 2015) and the place of actual subjectivity in our discourse communities. These dimensions relate to the insider/outer question (often tellingly referred to as a problem), or our religio-cultural location with respect to a given tradition. To what extent are we able to be neutral and phenomenological (purely descriptive), and are these desirable characteristics? As these are foundational values in much of the study of religion as an academic discipline, to what extent are they our own personal commitments and what are their contributions and limitations?

We also may consider our location and the ways in which we are positioned by others, including our relatedness and situatedness in terms of our objects of study. Here one might profitably reflect on liberation theology and critical race theory (see, e.g., Gutierrez 1988; Delgado and Stefancic 2012), with their attention to the disempowered, excluded, and marginalized. Liberation theology refers to an engaged theology that is rooted in local communities, attentive to power dynamics, and expressed pragmatically as opposition to unjust sociopolitical contexts. Critical race theory involves the critical examination of culture and society with attention to the intersection of race, law, and power, including

one's own involvement, whether recognized or not, in institutional racism and violence. Both approaches inspire one to consider the relationship among race, power, and privilege, and, perhaps, to work toward equality and social justice.

For example, in his introduction to the thirtieth-anniversary edition of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Donaldo Macedo comments:

> Whereas students in the Third World and other nations struggling with totalitarian regimes would risk their freedom, if not their lives, to read Paulo Freire, in our so-called open societies this work suffers from a more sophisticated form of censorship: omission. This "academic selective selection" of bodies of knowledge, which borders on censorship of critical educators, is partly to blame for the lack of knowledge of Paulo Freire's significant contributions to the field of education. (2000, 16)

Although infrequently discussed, especially in the context of graduate studies, there is a politics of the field (see Cabezón and Davaney 2004). This often manifests in citation habits, academic book reviews, and bibliographies. Some scholars act as the intellectual equivalents of Guy Montag in *Fahrenheit 451*, the dystopian novel by Ray Bradbury (1920–2012) in which firemen burn books to counteract their potentially subversive influence. There are thus ethical and political dimensions of positionality and participation.

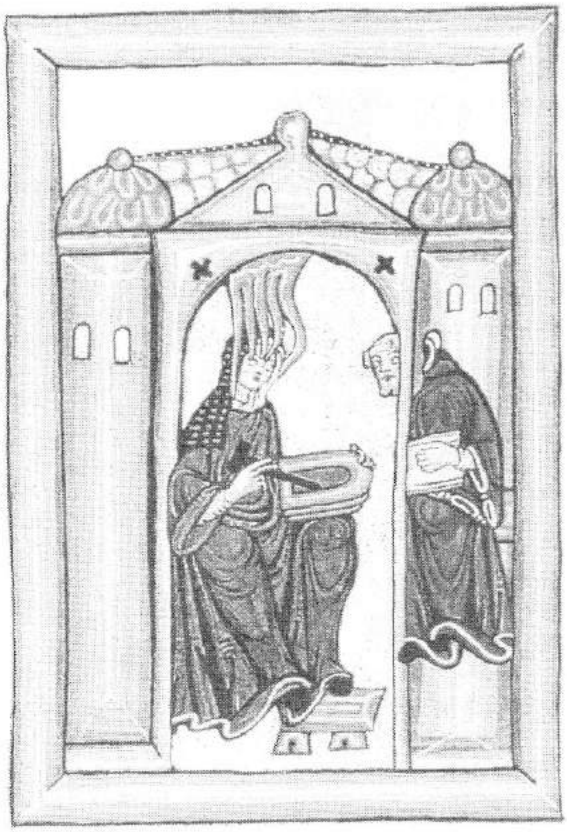
Such reflections reveal the complexity of academic locatedness. Each of us is an experiencing and interpreting agent, with diverse backgrounds, values, commitments, and so forth. In terms of the academic study of and engagement with religion, we may recognize that scholars have distinctive approaches. These are often discipline and field specific, including conformist expectations, research trajectories, and interpretive tendencies. Each scholar is also located in larger institutional and social contexts, which influence the corresponding approach and work, both consciously and unconsciously.

THE POLITICS OF EXPERIENCE AND INTERPRETATION

One of the most pertinent issues here is the place of experience and subjectivity in the study of religion. We need to consider the politics of experience, including issues of power and authority with respect to interpretation. Consider an analogy here with the field of psychiatry. According to the Scottish psychiatrist R. D. Laing (1927–1989):

> "Schizophrenia" is a diagnosis, a label applied by some people to others. This does not prove the labeled person is subject to an essentially pathological process, of unknown nature and origin, going on *in* his or her body. It does not mean that the process is, primarily or secondarily, a *psycho*-pathological one, going on *in* the *psyche* of the person. But it does establish as a social fact that the person labeled is one of them.... There is no such "condition" as "schizophrenia," but the label is a social fact and the social fact a *political event*. This political event, occurring in the civic order of society, imposes definitions and consequences on the labeled person.... The person labeled is inaugurated not only into a role, but into a career of patient, by the concerted action of a coalition. (Laing 1967, 82–84, italics in the original)

For Laing, more important than whether or not there is a psychological condition that may be reasonably labeled schizophrenia is the expressed feelings of the individual as valid descriptions of lived experience. In addition, Laing emphasizes the social effects and political event of the categorization, that is, the label has a particular interpretive and social power, especially for specific individuals, families, and communities. Here one also thinks of Michel



Frontispiece from* Scivias, *by Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179). *Hildegard, a German Benedictine, described and illustrated her mystical experiences, such as her receiving of a vision in this image. Later scholars would explain her visions as hallucinations or the result of illness, suggesting the divide between insiders (religious adherents) and outsiders (secular scholars).* © PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY.

Foucault's discussion in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1964).

I do not have the expertise to challenge the diagnosis of schizophrenia, but I can raise the issue of interpretive authority and the political and ethical dimensions of categorization. In a different socio-historical moment, our schizophrenics might be prophets, mystics, revolutionaries, and so forth. In addition, in a modern context one also notices the disturbing pattern of the pathologization of human existence, including religious affiliation. Simply consider the recent emergence of such diagnoses as so-called restless leg syndrome (RLS) and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). Disobedient children (and subversive intellectuals) are dangerous indeed.

Perhaps more pertinent to our current topic is the way in which accounts of specific types of experience by contemplatives, mystics, and the like are engaged by modern interpreters. Let us take the example of the German Benedictine Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179). In her *Scivias*, or *Know the Ways of the Lord*, she described a mystical experience. It begins with the declaration "These Are True Visions Flowing From God." Hildegard describes her mystical experience as follows:

> It happened that, in the eleven hundred and forty-first year of the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, when I was forty-two years and seven months old, Heaven was opened and a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain, and inflamed my whole heart and my whole breast, not like a burning, but like a warming flame, as the sun warms anything its rays touch. (Hart and Bishop 1990, 59)

For present purposes, it is noteworthy that Hildegard provides a description that is about as close as one can find to an autobiographical, firsthand account, one that is further confirmed in her letters. For Hildegard of Bingen, the "fiery light" that "permeated my whole brain" was divine in origin and nature. Moreover, Hildegard even came to regard her "illness" as "grace" (see, e.g., King-Lenzmeier 2001).

Needless to say, in a modern context, such traditional accounts have been challenged, reinterpreted, and dismissed on multiple grounds. One of the more influential is that of the British-American neurologist Oliver Sacks (1933–2015) in his work titled *Migraine*:

> The religious literature of all ages is replete with descriptions of "visions," in which sublime and ineffable feelings have been accompanied by the experience of radiant luminosity.... It is impossible to ascertain, in the vast majority of cases, whether the experience represents a hysterical or psychotic ecstasy, the effects of intoxication, or

> an epileptic or migrainous manifestation. A unique exception is provided in the case of Hildegard of Bingen ... who experienced countless "visions." ... A careful consideration of these accounts and figures leaves no room for doubt concerning their nature: they were indisputably migrainous, and they illustrate, indeed, many of the varieties of visual aura earlier discussed. (Sacks 1992, 299)

For Sacks, Hildegard clearly suffered from chronic migraines, and her "visions" are best understood as examples of "migraine auras" that were interpreted religiously by Hildegard. Sacks's statement is noteworthy for its intellectual arrogance in diagnosing someone living in the twelfth century. Sacks does not say that there are parallels between the two conditions or types of experience, but rather that Hildegard's account "leaves no room for doubt concerning their nature: they were indisputably migrainous." Others have conjectured that Hildegard's mystical experience was probably a result of frontal lobe epilepsy or consumption of ergot fungus (King-Lenzmeier 2001, 48), a poisonous fungus that grows on rye and similar plants and that may cause hallucinations.

I use this example to show the prominence of secular materialist assumptions, the ways in which religious experience becomes pathologized (that is, made to look like the activity of a crazy or ill person), and the issue of interpretive authority. The insider (Hildegard) is almost completely denied here for the perspective and position of the outsider (the neurologist). This example may help us to imagine and develop a deeper form of critical subjectivity in the study of religion, including consideration of the ethical and political dimensions of experience, identity, and interpretation.

THE INSIDER/OUTSIDER QUESTION

Historically speaking, the study of religion largely emerged as a response to, corrective for, and critique of theology, with its assumed Christian normative discourse and construction of *religion* in terms of belief in the Abrahamic (traditions associated with the Hebrew Prophet Abraham [Judaism, Christianity, Islam]) or biblical god (God). Drawing upon the social sciences, members of the discipline have endeavored to study religion in a more neutral way. Considering foundational values and defining characteristics, the study of religion generally aspires to be neutral, objective, descriptive, comparative, interdisciplinary, as well as nonnormative and nontheological (not about defining a higher truth). It has involved outsiders (scholars) studying insiders (adherents). It has assumed that scholars are, and perhaps has required scholars to be (or at least to make themselves take the position of) outsiders with respect to religious traditions. As expressed by historically prominent departments such as those at Harvard University, the University of California-Santa Barbara, and the University of Chicago, students are inculcated into an approach in which personal identity and particularly religious adherence and affiliation are bracketed (see later discussion herein). That is, to be a scholar of religion is to be an outsider with respect to religion and thus an insider with respect to the field. This involves what we might refer to as self-othering or auto-alterity: to be a scholar of religion, one must not only study others as others, but also make oneself other in terms of religious adherence, identity, and affiliation. In order to gain greater access, recognition, position, and thus economic resources, one must conform to this model (cf. McCutcheon 1997). Thus, as explored more fully in the following, there is an alternative type of (normative) adherence at work in the study of religion, one that may be as dogmatic and fundamentalist as its religious counterparts.

The distinction between insider or emic (adherent) perspectives and outsider or etic (scholar) perspectives largely derives from Kenneth Pike's *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior* (1967) (see, e.g., Headland, Pike, and Harris 1990; McCutcheon 1999). One may explain language, behavior, culture, and so forth from an insider or outsider perspective. The language connection is helpful here, as it draws our attention to the complex process of language acquisition and utilization, including native speakers, multilingualism, and even translation. Is it possible to live in two or more linguistic systems simultaneously?

In the case of anthropology, a discipline that has strongly influenced the study of religion, the dominant, early model involved ethnographers (outsiders) travelling to foreign cultures and attempting to understand that culture, especially as expressed and practiced by its members (insiders). The ethnographers remained outside the culture under investigation; they endeavored to be neutral observers. There was the ever-present danger of what was called going native. However, even in such earlier undertakings, things were not so clear-cut. For example, in his highly influential "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight," Clifford Geertz recounts how he and his wife gained access to Balinese social life. After running with the Balinese during a police raid on an illegal cockfight, and thus spontaneously identifying with the Balinese participants, "The next morning the village was a completely different world for us. Not only were we no longer invisible, we were suddenly the center of all attention, the object of a great outpouring of warmth, interest, and, most especially, amusement" (1973, 416; see also Geertz 1974). That is, there are degrees of inside and outside in every account, and there are moments when one finds oneself more inside and more outside, as we saw in my opening discussion concerning Daoist ritual.

THE EXCLUSIVIST-INCLUSIVIST SCALE

Paralleling patterns of engagement with religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue in certain respects (see, e.g., Sherwin and Kasimow 1999), academic views about and approaches to the insider/outer question may be measured on an exclusivist-inclusivist scale. That is, one may consider the degree to which scholars (and students) tend to exclude or include members of religious communities in the study of religion, particularly with respect to individuals associated with the given tradition being considered. The dominant position in the academy, especially among many of the field's key theorists, is neutrality. One's own religious identity must be bracketed, and one must endeavor to study religion in as neutral and objective a way as possible. Whether one is considered an insider or an outsider with respect to a particular tradition should not influence one's interpretations. In place of advocacy or devotionalism, this approach seeks to understand, accurately represent, and convincingly theorize about religion (see, e.g., Smith 1982, 2004).

At the same time, some scholars, especially individuals with secular materialist and social constructivist commitments, would completely exclude adherents from the academy. If we are to engage adherents, we must do so in a critical way. Adherents must remain others. Many academic exclusivists would also seek to establish the study of religion as a humanistic and social scientific discipline wherein religion is not considered as sui generis, special or set apart (see, e.g., McCutcheon 1997, 2001). This position largely rejects religious adherence in the field; it is irrelevant and potentially corrupting or dangerous.

However, there are also more recent attempts, what we might label inclusivist approaches, that not only recognize and engage adherent perspectives, but also critically reflect on religious adherence, including personal background and position. Often rooted in contemplative practice, mystical experience, theological reflection, or similar concerns, academic inclusivists recognize or explicitly address the ways in which they are implicated in or involved with their objects of study (see, e.g., Orsi 2002, 2005). At times, this involves explicit subjective engagement (see, e.g., Clooney 2006, 2010) and actual use of autobiography (see, e.g., Forman 1999; Kripal 2001, 2007). Thus, at the far end of an inclusivist approach, one may actually include the voices of adherents and scholar-practitioners. As discussed in the following, one might even be (God forbid) a critical adherent.

While scholars located across from each other on the insider/outer divide tend to work in isolation or among fellow adherents, they occasionally cross paths, especially on panels at academic conferences, and explicitly engage the other's work. For example, in a critical response to Russell McCutcheon's book, *The Discipline of Religion* (2003), Robert Orsi commented, "the assumption appears to be that the scholar of religion by virtue of his or her normative epistemology, theoretical acuity, and political knowingness, has the authority and the right to make the lives of others the objects of his or her scrutiny. He or she theorizes them" (2004, 88–89). That is, McCutcheon's theoretical approach stands in contrast to Orsi's sympathetic study of Roman Catholics engaging in devotional practices in specific communities.

In response, McCutcheon wrote "'It's a Lie. There's No Truth to It! It's a Sin!': On the Limits of the Humanistic Study of Religion and the Costs of Saving Others from Themselves." As the title suggests, and briefly discussed in the following, McCutcheon has argued and continues to suggest that scholars and students of religion must be critics; they must investigate their own assumptions, including the types of discourse and approaches being privileged. The study of religion involves and must support academic freedom, with religious adherents, communities, and traditions not being given any kind of immunity. Outsiders must be privileged, even to the point that insiders are completely excluded. Also noteworthy here, both McCutcheon and Orsi have published their own introductions to the field. It appears that the theoretical positions and academic lines are drawn; we must make a choice. However, various scholars are also beginning to investigate identity, ethics, and politics in the field (see, e.g., Doniger O'Flaherty 1986; Doniger 1998; Cabezón and Davaney 2004). That is, in terms of position and participation in the study of religion, we must consider not simply *what* we are studying but *how* and *why* we are studying.

Although the conventional construction of insider/outsider may be helpful in certain respects, it is also overly simplistic and obscures as much as it reveals. For example, Robert Orsi and others have emphasized the importance of studying lived religion. Orsi has documented the religiosity of his own family members and reflected on his own Roman Catholic background (see Orsi 2002, 2005). As a professional academic, Orsi has also shown the ways in which he has found himself inside and outside of the associated Catholic communities.

Moreover, even scholars whom one might assume are wholly outside cannot anticipate or restrict the radical potential of actual cross-cultural and inter-subjective engagement. For example, in *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience*, Young and Goulet discuss culture-specific dreams and visions that ethnographers have while in the field. One may be thrown into the inside, while trying to remain outside.

Young and Goulet also consider both the rationalist bias at work in the academy and the possibility of nonrational modes of thought:

> In other words, paradoxical as it may seem, subjecting emic claims to etic investigation is an expression of an anthropologist's willingness to take traditional cultures seriously.... What we are arguing is that after anthropologists have come to some understanding of the world view of their informants, they should proceed to use these world views to address larger questions, such as those dealing with the nature of reality, or with pressing ethical and social issues. (1994, 11; see also King 1999; Goulet and Miller 2007; Ferrer and Sherman 2008; Komjathy 2015)

One may also work to see or think through alternative perspectives (see Hall and Ames 1987; Clooney 1996); this involves developing the capacity to understand a given worldview or cultural system in such a way that it has "such an aura of factuality ... [to] seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz 1973, 90). Such perhaps is the requirement for being an ethically responsible and socially engaged person in a multicultural, multiethnic, and religiously pluralistic global context. Such perhaps is the requirement for accepting the ambiguity of modernity and postmodernity.

However, although Young and Goulet open themselves to the radical transformations of consciousness and perception that may occur while in the field, they cannot admit the possibility of alternate realities (1994, 8–9). They cannot or will not fully abandon their own enculturation. Anthropologists must remain in anthropology. Still, the anthropology of extraordinary experience perhaps provides a window into our own involvement in the study of religion, yet another field of encounter. Regardless of actual religious adherence and affiliation, each person remains insider and outsider and perhaps becomes self and other. There are also times when we cannot predict or prevent a radical shift in perspective, especially if we are open to different ways of being and experiencing.

FIRST-, SECOND-, AND THIRD-PERSON DISCOURSE

As the previous discussion should have made clear, the so-called insider/outer question relates to degrees of critical subjectivity as well as issues such as identity, position, authority, access, privilege, and so forth. In order to analyze a given scholar's or individual's approach, position, and relationship to a specific object of investigation (religion in the present case), we may make a distinction between first- (subjective; *I*), second- (interpersonal; *you*), and third-person (objective; *they*) discourse.

First-person approaches make space for subjective perspectives, including discussion of personal experience. A fuller account of this approach will be provided shortly. For the moment, we may think of first-person discourse as consisting of a number of trajectories, including adherent views or personal responses on the part of nonadherents of particular religions. Second-person approaches utilize a dialogic model, in which each individual participates in and contributes to a particular inquiry (see, e.g., Tracy 1998; Thompson 2001). In terms of the academic study of religion, third-person approaches tend to frame the inquiry as about others (them) and observable objects (there), often with the aspiration of objectivity and neutrality.

Although complex, considered more comprehensively the study of religion has tended to practice and advocate third-person approaches (e.g., historical, sociological), with the

corresponding inclination to bracket religious adherence. Often referred to as *epoché* (Greek: suspension), this stands in contrast, intentional contrast, to the work of many academic theologians, who often engage in confessionalism—that is, to confess a particular set of beliefs or doctrines as ultimately true (see, e.g., Clooney 2006, 2010). The attempt to describe, interpret, and analyze a given dimension of religion in a more neutral and nuanced way is a laudable aspiration, one that has great interpretive power, especially if we aim to understand. It has been formative and remains normative for the field, especially in the context of American public education wherein separation of church and state is a legal requirement (see, e.g., Webb 2002). However, there are also limitations to this approach.

CONTEMPLATIVE STUDIES

To assist us in addressing the complex, problematic, and potentially subversive dimensions of first-person discourse, we may shift our attention slightly toward contemplative studies, which is an emerging interdisciplinary field dedicated to research and education on contemplative practice and contemplative experience (see Roth 2006; Komjathy 2015). Scholars in this area of inquiry are explicitly attempting to develop critical subjectivity and to address the so-called insider/outer question in a more nuanced and sophisticated way. With some parallel approaches and concerns with spirituality as an academic discipline (see, e.g., Frohlich 2001), one of the more radical dimensions represented by contemplative studies, especially with respect to the larger academy, involves the recognition and utilization of critical first-person discourse as legitimate. This approach was first discussed in depth by the Dutch psychologist Han de Wit in his seminal *Contemplative Psychology*: "Contemplative psychology, however, focuses rather strongly on personal experience as it occurs to me or us. While also accepting the approach of a third-person psychology, contemplative psychology comprises a *first-person psychology* and methodology that includes subjectivity or 'private experience'" (1991, 31–32, italics in original).

This perspective has been further developed by the American Sinologist Harold Roth, director of the Contemplative Studies Initiative at Brown University, and others in the emerging field. According to Roth:

> In the field of contemplative studies we attempt to: *1. Identify the varieties of contemplative experiences of which human beings are capable; 2. Find meaningful scientific explanations for them; 3. Cultivate first-person knowledge of them; 4. Critically access their nature and significance.* That is, we study the underlying philosophy, psychology, and phenomenology of human contemplative experience through a combination of traditional third-person approaches and more innovative, critical first-person approaches (2008, 19–20, italics in original; see also Komjathy 2015).

Critical first-person discourse involves critical investigation of contemplative practice and contemplative experience from a subjective and lived perspective. It parallels other recent work, such as on critical interiority by Mary Frohlich (2007) and on a participatory approach by Jorge Ferrer (2008) and his colleagues. It also challenges the denial of embodied experience within much of academic discourse, what B. Alan Wallace has referred to as the taboo of subjectivity (2000), and brings the issue of religious adherence in the academy into high relief.

CRITICAL ADHERENTS AND SCHOLAR-PRACTITIONERS

Along these lines, we may suggest yet another approach to contemplative studies and to the study of religion by extension—namely, critical adherent discourse—and highlight the potential contributions of scholar-practitioners. As an extension of critical first-person perspectives, critical adherent discourse would be rooted in a religiously committed perspective. Here we may reflect on the degree to which these may or should be autobiographical, confessional, and interreligious. At the very least, critical adherent approaches may be implicit or explicit. They should be ecumenical, inclusive, or pluralistic, as well as perspectival. That is, as a viable academic approach, critical adherent discourse would endeavor to respect difference and honor alternative perspectives, even, perhaps especially, ones that challenge various assumptions and commitments of non-adherents. Such an approach also relates to one's location in a specific tradition, one's degree of religious adherence, as well as types of adherence, affiliation, and participation.

Scholar-practitioners are scholars with deep subjective connection to what they study. While here we are focusing on tradition-based and religiously committed forms, this need not be the case. Rather, such approaches bring the intersection between scholarship and adherence, practice, and experience into high relief. For example, we might compare our predicament to other disciplines, such as chemistry or dance. Do we really want theoretical chemists or theoretical dancers teaching us how to conduct chemical experiments or how to dance? Of course, perhaps the academic study of religion is or should be different in this respect. Perhaps religious adherence, practice, and experience are too dangerous for one to accept such an approach.

Although complex, it could be argued that disciplined or critical first-person approaches have a role to play and may offer a unique contribution, especially a unique opportunity for students. They also relate to the insider/outer question, including degrees of inside and outside. Finally, there could be diverse expressions of a scholar-practitioner approach, including one that more closely resembles participant-observation ethnography. The latter involves going into the field and gaining personal experience through actual involvement in a given cultural activity. In all cases, the critical dimension of critical adherent perspectives would exclude or challenge certain religious tendencies, such as advocacy (advancing a particular agenda or set of beliefs), apologetics (explaining and defending one's religious system to those who stand outside it), dogmatics (the systematization of religious teaching or doctrine for the sake of the believing community), evangelism (actively spreading a particular view), fanaticism (excessive zeal or obsessive enthusiasm for one's own religious positions), missionization (active attempts to encourage conversion, sometimes through coercion), sectarianism (the splitting of a religious tradition into distinct groups or communities, often of a highly exclusive or intolerant nature), and so forth. That is, in the context of the academy, critical adherent discourse would be informed by and possibly be an expression of the study of religion. Any form of normative discourse would be open to engagement, critique, and debate.

Although many in the academy would have concerns about such an approach, one wonders how a holistic, comprehensive, and integrated understanding of religious traditions could exclude adherent perspectives and lived religiosity. We may thus acknowledge that adherents and religious leaders can be as reflective and analytical about their traditions as scholars. We can and should make space for them in the study of religion.

In fact, they (adherents and scholar-practitioners) are already among us (academics), holding many of the most prominent endowed chairs and positions in the field. Some influential scholar-practitioners include José Cabezón (Tibetan Buddhism; University of California-Santa Barbara), Francis X. Clooney (Roman Catholicism; Harvard University), Robert K. C. Forman (Advaita Vedanta; Forge Institute; formerly of Hunter College), Gurinder Singh Mann (Sikhism; University of California-Santa Barbara), Russell McCutcheon (Secular Materialism; University of Alabama), Vasudha Narayanan (Hinduism; University of Florida), Robert Neville (Confucianism/Methodist Christianity; Boston University), Robert Orsi (Roman Catholicism; Northwestern University), Kristofer Schipper (Daoism; Fudan University), Robert Thurman (Tibetan Buddhism; Columbia University), Tu Wei-ming (Confucianism; Harvard University), and Kallistos Ware (Eastern Orthodox Christianity; Oxford University). This partial list does not, of course, include the large numbers of Jews, Christians, and Muslims who hold endowed chairs in their respective fields. It also does not address the complex issue of tradition-specific discrepancies or institutional opportunities. However, such a list is an important starting point, as many of the individuals have explicitly engaged in adherent discourse or addressed the insider/outer question, even if only obliquely.

I have also included Russell McCutcheon, one of the strongest critics of positions like the one expressed in this chapter, in order to suggest that everyone in the study of religion is an adherent in some respect. That is, an assumed secular materialist or social scientific approach may be as likely as a religiously committed approach to inhibit a comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of religion, especially if it lacks the requisite critical subjectivity. In fact, many social constructivist and scientific interpreters of religion appear as dogmatic as their fundamentalist religious counterparts. Critical subjectivity is just that: critically aware. This includes the investigation of unquestioned assumptions and unrecognized biases.

There are, in turn, various issues related to being a scholar-practitioner in the academy, especially a contemplative, mystical, or religiously committed one. These include one's academic degree, access and privilege, birth-tradition, disciplines and fields, ethnicity, evaluative criteria, gender, institutional affiliation and location, paradigms, socioeconomics (including resources), and traditions. Here one thinks of the interesting, but problematic *Our Religions: The Seven World Religions Introduced by Preeminent Scholars from Each Tradition* (Sharma 1993). At times bordering on reverse Orientalism, there is a tendency to privilege, and perhaps to make exceptions for, ethnic birthright adherents associated with the source-culture of the given religious tradition. However, interestingly, the contributor of the Daoism chapter, Liu Xiaogan (Chinese University of Hong Kong), has no formal standing in the Daoist tradition. In fact, his presentation of Daoism largely represents an internalized nineteenth-century Protestant Christian missionary and European colonialist construction (see Komjathy 2013, 2014b).

This is somewhat analogous to using D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966) as a representative of Zen Buddhism (see Sharf 1993). A complex historical figure in many respects, Suzuki was a popularizer who expressed a vision of Zen Buddhism that was simultaneously nationalistic and universalistic; he endeavored to represent (construct) the tradition as the essence of Japanese culture and a way of life relevant for any human being. It is thus not surprising that Suzuki's works, like those of Alan Watts (1915–1973), continue to have wide circulation in popular American culture. In any case, one could imagine a supplement to Sharma's volume written by converts and different others titled *Our Religions, Too*.

We may, in turn, endeavor to develop a more critical subjectivity. Fortunately, a great deal has already been written, although the research and topics are often disparate. Some related issues include approach, background, commitments, community, embodiment, learning style, movement (yes, I mean actual physical movement), social location, values, and ways of being.

Critical subjectivity also opens up the possibility of autobiography and auto-ethnography. While the problem of hyper-awareness remains, such as one finds in many recent ethnographies that appear more as ethnographies of the ethnographer than ethnographies as such, it is noteworthy that we already have examples of radical personal narrative in the study of religion, specifically in what we may refer to as scholarly mysticism. Consider, for example, the following scholars and their associated autobiographical descriptions of mystical experience:

1. William James (1842–1910): Walpurgis Nacht (Occult Event?): 1898. *The Letters of William James* (1920) 2: 76–77.
2. Robert K. C. Forman (b. c. 1940; Forge Institute): Pure Consciousness Event (PCE): n. d. *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness* (1999), 20–21.
3. Jeffrey Kripal (b. 1962; Rice University): Erotic Presence and Energetic Transmission: 1989. *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom* (2001), 200–206.
4. Jordan Paper (b. c. 1940; York University): Primordial Nothingness: 1972. *The Mystic Experience* (2004), 1–3.

As the work of Steven Wasserstrom (1999) and Jeffrey Kripal (2001) has shown, many of the most prominent and influential scholars of mysticism had mystical experiences, and these experiences determined many of their research trajectories. (The same is true with respect to contemplative practice for teacher-scholars in contemplative studies.) In his own *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism* (2001), Kripal even goes so far as to index the various dimensions of his own subjectivity, including his religious and erotic experiences (399–400; see also Kripal 2007). Here one also thinks of other dimensions of scholarly biography, such as, no doubt, various negative experiences with religion, especially Roman Catholicism and evangelical Protestant Christianity, which influence the research trajectories of some (many?) academics. That is, one's religious background, whether acknowledged or repressed, whether revealed or hidden, influences one's scholarship and approach to religion more broadly.

Summary

The insider/outer question or problem is often presented as an either/or choice. That is, one is either an insider (adherent) or an outsider (scholar or student of religion); by extension, one is either, apparently, an uncritical follower or a critical investigator. In terms of the study of religion, apparently to be fully inside academia requires being fully outside religiosity, at least in a visible and vocal way. To be fully inside religiosity requires being made fully outside academia, or at least to be excluded from its more elitist expressions and to risk expulsion (or omission) altogether. Adherence must remain a public secret, just as one must not speak of sex in the field. One must adhere to the taboo of subjectivity.

In place of this problematic and outdated viewpoint, we might adopt a both/and approach (see also Kripal 2014, 104–105). We may consider the contributions and

limitations of each form of positionality and participation, of each approach. To use Russell McCutcheon's (2001) artificially bifurcated and politicized construction, we may follow the critics of religion and resist advocacy, apologetics, dogmatism, fundamentalism, sectarianism, and the like. We may think critically about religion with attentiveness to the work of scholars utilizing historical contextualist, text-critical, social constructivist, and similar approaches. We may consider the other as radically unfamiliar. Following the caretakers, we may resist biased analysis (including implicit antireligious tendencies), reductionistic approaches, intellectual colonialism, as well as other interpretive legacies. We may think critically about religion with attentiveness to the work of scholars utilizing critical adherent, interreligious, theological, and similar approaches. We may consider the other as radically familiar. Of course, one must reflect on the ethical and political dimensions involved in representing others, especially if such individuals and communities are marginalized or excluded (see, e.g., Said 1979; King 1999).

Stated more positively, we may work to develop both sympathetic understanding and critical engagement. While academic discourse has its own values and commitments (e.g., critical thinking), it is also important to recognize that individuals and communities are implicated in and affected by research. We might, in turn, imagine academic inquiry as a dialogue, one in which we remain committed to respectful engagement, but also one in which there are bound to be disagreements. These may become absolute, as in the case of biblical literalism.

We may also engage in critical subjectivity, wherein we reflect on our own locatedness. Are we really studying others? If so, what are the sociopolitical functions of these others for us? Or are we actually them, the others being studied? Am I an insider, outsider, insider-outsider, or something completely different? Such questions relate to the appropriate place of religious adherence in the study of religion. Adherents deserve a voice in the academic study of religion. Scholars and students may invite them into the classroom or visit associated communities. This involves letting in and going out. However, as suggested, critical adherents and scholar-practitioners should also be included as viable faculty members and academic educators. They have important contributions to make. This includes the possibility of classrooms as (occasional) contexts for interreligious dialogue, which is yet another way of letting in and going out.

However, individual teacher-scholars, departments, and subfields must address the insider/outer question from their own perspectives, including the appropriate place of religious adherence. For example, in my own field of Daoist studies, adherents have been largely excluded, with most studies being primarily historical and textual reconstructions. However, two of the major second-generation scholars, Michael Saso and Kristofer Schipper, were not only scholar-practitioners, but also ordained Zhengyi (Orthodox Unity) Daoist priests. That is, greater inclusion of adherent perspectives seems necessary.

In contrast, a field like biblical studies has had to work hard to decouple itself from Bible study, or its devotional and often ahistorical interpretation (see, e.g., Oden 2000). Here one also thinks of the Hindu sectarian and nationalist engagement (and censorship) of the work of American scholars such as Paul Courtright, Wendy Doniger, and Jeffrey Kripal. Although there are complex issues that require more thorough discussion and reflection (such as the Western contexts of their academic training and institutional perspectives and the political rise of Hindu nationalism in India in the 1990s), the critical scholarship of Courtright, Doniger, and Kripal has deviated from ultraconservative Hindu perspectives and agendas in significant and provocative ways, and thus has been dismissed on various traditional grounds. The point is that adherent and academic perspectives may inform, but not limit each other.

At the same time, we may recognize that adherence and commitment are always involved in any area of study; we are always insiders and outsiders with respect to something. There are also forms of participation, types of adherence, and degrees of inside and outside. Each person is implicated in what is studied, and this requires acknowledgement of one's own cultural conditioning, intellectual genealogy, and interpretive commitments. That is, utilizing a postmodern and postcolonial perspective, we may analyze each and every approach as a form of adherence, with commitments to particular values and concerns. Moreover, as suggested, there is an alternative type of (normative) adherence at work in much of the study of religion, one that may be as dogmatic and fundamentalist as its religious counterparts. The dominant mode and model involve secular materialism and social constructivism. Concisely stated, in this materialist and constructivist worldview or commitment, we are supposedly studying other people's fictions.

Perhaps most problematic for the insider/outer construct is the presence of scholar-practitioners in the academy, that is, individuals who are simultaneously inside and outside of both dominant scholarly and adherent models. As a radical and subversive (and often disturbing and disruptive) dimension of the study of religion, scholar-practitioners might be referred to as insider-outsiders or outsider-insiders. This perhaps involves turning the inside out and the outside in (Kripal 1999). Such individuals are both inside and outside of academia, and both outside and inside of particular religious communities and traditions. They (we?) perhaps reveal the deeper contours of the phenomena and the debate as Möbius in nature, as a continuous surface with apparently different sides that may be non-orientable (again, inconsistent and indeterminate).

While often a public secret and a taboo, religious adherence is central to this area of inquiry, assumed and implied in everything that we study, but rarely addressed in an explicit and sophisticated manner. It is part of the field's intellectual genealogy and its implicit object of study. Moreover, like adherence and commitment, each and every scholar is inside and outside of something. The so-called insider/outsider question raises the critical issues of identity, position, authority, access, privilege, and so forth. It also brings the question of the ethics and politics of the field into high relief. With respect to religious adherence, scholar-practitioners reveal a hyphenated and hybrid identity that may represent integration rather than fragmentation. This may provide an alternative approach to understanding religion.

We may in turn consider the contributions and limitations of first-, second- and third-person approaches. We may also consider degrees of inside/outside as well as alternative, unrecognized forms of adherence (e.g., secular materialism and social constructivism). We may work to develop critical subjectivity and auto-ethnography. In the process, we may begin to cultivate multiperspectivalism. Then, perhaps, the study of religion will benefit from a model based in scholarly inclusivism and interpretive pluralism.

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