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Arweck & Stringer's "Theorizing Faith: The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Ritual" - Book Review

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There follow chapters on various issues such as the genetic manipulation of non-human organisms and issues raised over 'celebrating diversity: genetic variation and disability'.

One of the themes of the book is that of the role of genes in our understanding of our lives. As Scully remarks we often talk of there being a 'gene for' something, and this invites the idea that who we are and what we do is *determined* by our genes. This needs to be resisted, as she notes. Even in the case of 'Scully's disease' which is so set up as to be *inevitable* if one has the gene (barring earlier death or gene therapy which stops an otherwise necessary process), what we do and how we respond are not. But generally so called genetic traits do not determine behaviour anyway – it's our own choice whether we accept or resist the tendencies that may exist. In any case, as she notes, in family relations it is the emotional relationships that count not the biological ones. Whether we think that there is a separate 'soul' to each of us or not, who we are has really little to do with what genes we have. Answering that of God in others, whether acknowledging our common-ness or the unique special-ness of each of us, is definitely not to be reduced to recognising that another being has the genes he or she has.

There is a wealth of ideas, facts and moral perspectives in this book. Anyone wanting a rich survey of the ethics of genetics will be well rewarded. If however the reader wants to get a clear line of moral argument, or an assessment of which moral ideas are preferable, she or he will be disappointed. In the final chapter on 'making moral evaluations' a picture of ethics as contextual, relational and rooted in emotions which endorse our intuitions is presented. In the context of a scepticism about the Enlightenment attempt to find a rationally based ethic, Scully reports about the Quaker responses: 'an observer might therefore have identified them as making indiscriminate use of justice ethics, principlism, Kantian deontology, rights theory, utilitarianism, feminists care ethics, casuistry or virtue ethics, all within the same moral evaluation' (p 211). She came to see that it was not her role to provide better philosophical arguments. Earlier on p. 24 she remarks, 'I emphasised there were no correct answers to any of these questions' – a good Quaker approach at one level for listening to and accepting each perspective as serious moral thought, but at another level it is I sense problematic for the whole idea of moral *truth*. But without a truth about these matters, all these views on genetics, sincere as they are, are merely the data for mutual accommodation. I sense that Scully does have a view about what it really is reasonable to think about genetic ethics, but for the most part she bites her lip. For me as a philosopher as well as a Quaker, this absence is a pity. For some other Friends, it may be thought a blessing. Anyway, do read the book.

Nigel Dower
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Arweck, E. and Stringer, M. D. eds., *Theorizing Faith: The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Ritual*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2002. pp. vi + 186, ISBN 1-902459-33-4, Paper, £19.95.

In the past decade or so, the pluralism that so dominated religious studies, that so sought an inclusive tolerance, has been replaced by a wish to find authentic understandings of what it means to be in *that* belief system. This has given rise to some dilemmas of approach peculiar to the characterisation of religion. On the one hand, the pursuit of objective understandings of a belief system facilitates a critical distance and a sense of comparison. Yet, this stress on being on the outside of a belief system carries a price of downplaying understandings of religious life from within the nexus of social relationships that realise forms of belief for the actor. This stress on understanding from the inside has an impeccable sociological pedigree in Weber's notion of *verstehen*, understanding at the level of the meaning of the actor.

Identity politics and qualitative methods have accentuated this turn towards the insider in sociology as stress is laid on giving voice to the unvoiced. This demand has given rise to concerns with reflexivity. This points to the disciplinary self-awareness of being a sociologist, but also of his own position in the field of study. This sense of occupation of the field for analytical discernments has its own ethical implications over the rights of those represented in sociological discourse. The study of religion provides a distinctive variation on the worries of the sociologist going native. In going inside the belief system, the sociologist risks becoming a true believer, or might feel that he needs to be one to understand fully and authentically.

This well edited and presented collection fills a gap in the sociology of religion by providing a welcome and path breaking clarification of some of these dilemmas. The essays are all well written and are reflective and stimulating in their exploration of many facets of the insider/outsider problem. Very much voices from the coalface, the essays come with weighty bibliographies that bring together a lot of literature into a critical focus not easily found elsewhere. A particularly pleasing aspect of the collection is that it is the product of a younger generation of British scholars in religious studies and the sociology of religion. Another interesting dimension of the collection is the way it draws attention to the distinctive contribution Quakerism makes to the study of religion in the United Kingdom. The numbers involved are small but are significant.

Two of the contributors are Quakers. The other essays deal with Islam (Sambur), alternative forms of worship in Anglicanism (Guest), the ritual of Soka Gakkai International-UK (Waterhouse), British Wicca (Pearson), and the insider/outsider problem in the study of New Religious Movements (Arweck). Stringer provides a useful introduction to the problems raised of theorising faith and, as an outsider, an American, Livezey supplies a model epilogue to the collection, generously reflecting back on the issues raised by its contributors and placing these in a wider picture.

In his epilogue, Livezey correctly indicates that the title of the collection is slightly misplaced, the issue of ritual being only mentioned in passing in the introduction (p.165). The reflexivity abroad in the volume veers towards the soft side, to reflection rather than to issues of hard choice that can emerge in the field, particularly when faced with inscrutable and complex rituals that gener-

ate issues of choice of affiliation and transformation. In some cases, in the collection, ethical dilemmas are not properly encountered. Although a valuable piece of ethnography, the damage effected by 'alternative' forms of worship in Sheffield is not faced in Guest's otherwise insightful account of their use and significance. As an outsider, he seems to go too much with the flow of rite, and pays too little attention to its ebbing. Elisabeth Arweck supplies the only really hard nosed critical approach to the insider/outsider debate by setting it well in the context of the politics of representation where distinctions do need to be made. She deals with the critical representation of texts and documentation associated with new religious movements in ways that point to difficulties of contexts of reading, where critical stances are required that do beg questions about the status of the sociologists so involved in their scrutiny. In her account, a critical awareness *does* generate questions of choice over the status of the accounts, over whether one is to settle for the inside version, or whether the critical distance of the outsider is required.

Issues of ethics and rights representation are sensitively explored in the contributions of Waterhouse and Pearson. Both are concerned with clarifying forms of attachment to the belief systems in question. Pearson clarifies well the ethics of coming as outsider and pretending to be a believer for the purposes of research as against the accounts supplied from the inside by those who *do* believe. 'Coming out' as an insider relates to issues of commitment, conversation and transformation and these are well covered in her contribution. There is a bit of bite to her account of reflexivity that gives it a critical edge.

The two Quaker essays come from Collins and Nesbitt. Collins supplies a beautifully written account of the insider/outsider in relation to his status as a Quaker. It is written in a way that takes the sting out of the dichotomy. This is the encounter of an ethnographer gone native with few qualms. His account uses ritual in a metaphorical sense and underlines well why Quaker meetings pose particular difficulties of sociological characterisation. His essay complements the efforts of Nesbitt to find a Quaker ethnography. This involves linking the personal religion of the ethnographer to the account supplied. She seeks to clarify what a Quaker belief brings to fieldwork. For her, the practice of silence and listening provides an openness and sensitivity in the field, and this leads her to point to an issue seldom explored: the ethnographer's spiritual journey (pp.146-49).

Highly readable and stimulating, this is an important collection that opens out avenues for further debate. Although the reflexivity is often in soft focus, and the typicality of the religions so selected might seem diffuse, there is a sense of a ground shifting in this collection. Voices in the collection are not strident but reflective, and this lends a property of persuasion to their efforts to clarify their own role in relation to religious thought. Undergraduates on courses on religion and the sociology of religion will find this collection of particular use for the way issues that seem speculative are given a practical turn.

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