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## **"Imagining a Theory: Questioning the Eschatological and Soteriological Motivations in Gananath Obeyesekere's *Imagining Karma*"**

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After reading the latest offering from Gananath Obeyesekere, *Imagining Karma: Ethical Transformation in Amerindian, Buddhist, and Greek Rebirth*, I am once again thoroughly impressed by the author's exhaustive command of his material and the ease with which he engages scholars from such a diversity of fields as anthropology, religious studies, classics, and Indology. Obeyesekere proves that even for a psychoanalytically oriented anthropologist of South Asia, the literatures and cultures of Amerindians and classical Greeks are available to the painstakingly committed scholar. Admittedly overwhelmed on occasion by the sheer volume of evidence cited in support of his analysis of ethicization in such disparate cultural milieus, I commend Obeyesekere for such a well-researched and persuasive presentation.

My training in South Asian studies and religious studies compels me to forego any serious commenting upon the Amerindian and Greek material; that being said, I can also go ahead and state that I am in agreement with much of Obeyesekere's analysis of the Hindu, Buddhist, and ajivaka material. Accordingly, my comments will not focus on the historical-ethnographical material as such. Rather, I want to address a couple of methodological points and attempt a little imagining of my own. To be precise, I first want to address Obeyesekere's most-welcomed foray into comparative studies and the import this has for the methodological debates in the study of religion. Second, I want to ask some psychoanalytically motivated questions. I believe the latter task rides the coattails of the former.

Certainly we have all become familiar with the debates and polemics surrounding the topics of Orientalism and postcolonialism. Ever since the 1978 publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, scholars (particularly Western) have been consistently reminded of the dissymmetry, and concomitant power, associated with the cross-cultural encounter. Within the narrower field of Hindu studies alone, debates continue to rage over such questions as, "Who speaks for Hinduism?"<sup>1</sup> We hear repeatedly the criticism that the Western scholar systematically (even if seemingly innocently) distorts the "worldview" of

Hindu peoples. Especially in such "suspect" fields as psychoanalysis, tempers flare and dismissals abound. Of course we can point here to the troubles and heated exchanges regarding Jeffrey J. Kripal's *Kali's Child*. The Western scholar simply has no unbiased access to these other worlds and thus misrepresents when attempting to represent, or so the argument goes. This of course approaches the much larger question of the insider's versus the outsider's voice, the *ernie* versus the *etic*. Particularly in religious studies, the latter analyses are referred to with that most baleful of designations, reductionism. Indeed, it would appear that the *r-word* arises almost automatically anytime a piece of scholarship (if we can even use this term, a point hotly contested in regard to such works as *Kali's Child*) attempts to move beyond the merely descriptive. Phenomenology and hermeneutics displace the critical. The concern not to offend (itself perhaps a symptom of a postcolonial guilt) effectively erects boundaries between cultures such that only the insider's voice is authoritative. According to Obeyesekere, this leads to an ethnographic privilege, if not prejudice (xx) that potentially ruins the comparative project.<sup>2</sup> In this regard, I applaud Obeyesekere's will-to-imagine, that is, his will to construct nomological models, itself a departure from the thick descriptions that beg the "so what" question. Non-theoretical descriptions are simply uninteresting.

Aware of the sensitivity of this issue, I want to look at Obeyesekere's position a bit more in depth, especially with regard to religious studies, and then I want to press the psychoanalytic position. I pursue the latter because throughout *Imagining Karma* Obeyesekere drops hints at psychoanalytic interpretations, yet I feel that for the most part he leaves these undeveloped. Certainly this latter task was not the author's expressed intention and thus I am not criticizing as much as I am expressing my regrets that he did not in some way pursue these themes a bit further. Perhaps it is in the present exchange that he can share with us his thoughts.

While Obeyesekere's analysis of ethicization is certainly compelling, as a scholar of religion, and one who appreciates the analytical-critical as much as the phenomenological-hermeneutical, the question I found myself returning to concerns the "why." That is to say, I'm interested in why human communities posit that which is immanently counter-experiential. Let me be as clear as possible. I recognize that I inhabit a demythologized world. The Enlightenment prejudice, with both its pros and cons, is not lost on me. However, I am willing to suggest that life after death, either in an ancestral (or otherwise) realm without rebirth, or an ethicized (or not) rebirth is not immediately evident in the way that fire burns a body is. Taking into account Obeyesekere's suggestion that "whether we are talking of the Greeks, the Buddhists, or the Amerindians, the central validating principle of religious experience is a form of 'empiricism'"(286), I am willing to propose that regardless of cultural frame the human condition is empirically, experientially, and (most significantly) irreversibly mortal. Obeyesekere's documentation of rebirth narratives from such disparate cultures as the Amerindian, Buddhist, and Greek reflects as much: the human animal has anxieties concerning its ultimate fate precisely because a narcissistic injury of the first magnitude *is* its fate. In other words, *that* there are eschatologies across cultures that share a

common logic - a result of scholarly thick description and nomological analysis - pressing invites a theory as to why. I want to piece together a few fragments from Obeyesekere's text that suggest an answer.

This, however, is where the issue of Orientalism, and by a certain extension reductionism, often comes into play. How dare I suggest a "non-religious" point to which such various eschatologies may be reduced! But here I believe I follow Obeyesekere's suggestions: "Areal barriers can be broken only by comparative analyses and *theoretical thinking*, and comparison is possible only if one moves away from the purely substantive domain to delineating structures, ideal types, or topographical models and their transformations"(xx, emphasis added). While Obeyesekere persuasively gives us the models and the logic of their transformations, I want to imagine that which motivates the models in the first place, a pursuit that not only follows Obeyesekere's lead but also comments upon the recent methodological debates in religious studies.

The past couple of decades in the study of religion have witnessed what could be considered a crisis. To this day, scholars continue to debate the *raison d'être* of the field. What is it that we scholars of religion study and how do we study it? The terms of this debate typically resolve to one hotly contested topic - to reduce or not to reduce. Those following the phenomenological-hermeneutical approach contend that the reductive fails to open up to *sui generis* phenomena that do not by definition resonate with the merely historical. By extension, the other's voice and religious experience is there not to be explained away, but rather understood and interpreted. While I believe I can appreciate the concern -theoretical imperialism is no more appealing than no theory at all - to a certain extent this approach presupposes a fundamental philosophical position. As I see it, the stance that criticizes those who reduce ultimately rests on an understanding of authorship: only the other authors and thus authorizes her or his position. Precisely in this regard, notice that a leading text in phenomenology is titled, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (Husserl 1960). In other words, the position that endorses only the nuanced description of the insider's position privileges a certain Cartesian legacy: it presupposes that the other is transparent to her or his motivations and intentions - *cogito ergo sum*. The putative self-evidence of such a position seems to me to be Eurocentric in its own right.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, the critical tradition in religious studies contests precisely the issue of authorship. Why privilege the insider's voice when the point of departure for the critical study of religion often presupposes a hermeneutics of suspicion? Indeed, the phenomenological-hermeneutical (and some would suggest crypto-theological) decides in advance that religion and religious experience is *not*:

the result of alienation from socioeconomic relations (Marx and Engels), that religion is an illusory practice of wish fulfillment (Freud), that religious practices and stories symbolically deny the contingency and transience of life and human institutions (Bloch 1994), that religion is but one species of anthropomorphism (Guthrie 1993, 1996), or that religion is but an

evolutionarily developed mechanism (Burkert 1996). (McCutcheon2001: 126-127)

But is this in fact the case? And more importantly, how would we know it without presupposing precisely what the critical tradition finds question worthy?

I want to say immediately that I do find the phenomenological-hermeneutical an essential aspect of the study of other cultures and religions. To be sure, the critical next step can only be taken when a thorough appreciation for and understanding of the other's traditions have been reached. As difficult as this may be, and at times the other may appear insurmountable in her or his alterity, I believe as scholars we must take the next step, as unpopular as this may make us. After all, "our scholarship," Russell T. McCutcheon argues, "is not constrained by whether or not devotees recognize its value; it is not intended to celebrate or enhance normative, dehistoricized discourses, but, rather, to contextualize and redescribe them as human constructs"(2001: 139). In fact, and as McCutcheon points out, there is often a political element at stake:

Through their use of the tools of nuanced description, their effort to recover authentic meaning, and their disdain for transgressive questions, scholars of religion risk uncritically reproducing their subjects' claims of autonomy and authority - whether that authority sanctions politically liberal or conservative actions. (2001: 133)

As for Obeyesekere's material, it would indeed seem that certain forms of ancestor worship and their concomitant eschatologies serve precisely the purpose of socio-political conservatism: "Those buried thus may be invoked by their descendents to occasionally appear in their physical forms as the 'incarnate dead' to judge the community and *demand that social norms be upheld* (22, emphasis added). While I don't want to pursue the *politics* of rebirth here, I do want to historicize, humanize the discourse concerning eschatology and soteriology. As mentioned above, I want to do this through a psychoanalytic consideration.

Throughout *Imagining Karma*, Obeyesekere drops hints regarding the psychoanalytic interpretation of his data. For instance, he suggests that the Buddha's pre-awakening asceticism was motivated by guilt as much as it was by a search for "truth." The orthodox interpretation notwithstanding, Obeyesekere suggests that we view this behavior in terms of self-punishment: "By punishing himself he is trying to expiate the guilt he feels for violating powerful family values and ideals of filial and domestic piety"(157). This sounds faintly familiar. Though Obeyesekere finds J. M. Masson's work methodologically impossible to substantiate, the latter has similarly suggested that the historical Buddha suffered depression: the Buddha defensively displaced his own depression onto the outside world (Masson 1980: 6-7). In addition to the Buddha's ostensible guilt, Obeyesekere alludes to the work of Jacques Lacan and Melanie Klein on the pre-oedipal fragmented body in his discussion of Empedocles, a fragmented body that he claims is "found in virtually all mythological traditions in their representations of monsters"(221). With respect to Plotinian philosophy, he suggests that the *daimon* acts much like "the Freudian conscience"(294). There are many other such brief references to psychoanalytic theory (e.g., 108, 127, 172, 220).

I find these suggestions as interesting and tantalizing as they are seemingly undeveloped (again, I recognize that a psychoanalytic reading of eschatologies is not Obeyesekere's immediate task). All the same, by incorporating these allusions Obeyesekere invites us to pursue questions of deep motivation. In this regard, Obeyesekere notes in passing, "Buddhists extolled the renunciatory ideal that leads to salvation, but, in the spirit of Vedic thought, they also believed that the household life was necessary and desirable for those not *driven* by soteriological aspirations"(l 12, emphasis added). Elsewhere he writes, "kinship structures do not exclusively determine rebirth affiliations; personal *wishes* and *motivations* often complicate the picture"(356, emphases added). Let us pause here and note Obeyesekere's language.

I find "those not *driven* by soteriological aspirations" and "personal *wishes* and *motivations*" suggestive. Indeed, the very idea of "driven" recalls Freud's notion of compulsion (if not the drive theory itself), as does "wishes" Freud's theory of illusion. That the householder life is fine for those not driven by soteriological aspirations begs the question of just why certain people have these drives and not others. Of course, we are precluded from the case histories of the Buddha and his contemporaries, not to mention Vedic-age persons in general. I would all the same suggest that we imagine along these lines; after all, "although all experiments are imaginary (that is, constructed in the imagination), experimentation in the human sciences is exclusively imaginary rather than partially constructed and tested in a laboratory"(18). Pursuing our imaginative path then, we need to focus not only on those who have the soteriological aspiration and wish, but also those who do not: What are the aspirations for those without such aspiration? For instance, "Laypersons may be incapable of achieving salvation in this life, but they can achieve it in some future one. Thus the wish to eventually escape... is part of the long-term soteriological motivations of most people"(144). With specific reference to Hindu religious traditions, Wendy Doniger similarly notes that there is a "general dichotomy between the moksha-oriented, Vedantic level of Hindu society and the rebirth-oriented 'transactional' level.... Some Indians have a positive attitude to... the world of *maya*, while others have a negative attitude"(O'Flaherty 1980: 47). Yet does this not seem a bit odd if this is "truly" a life of suffering and illusion (*maya*)? Soteriology aside, what do we make of the motivations driving the eschatologies? In the case of the Balinese data, Obeyesekere points out that the neonate is often identified as the father of the father, or, the grandfather returned (46); certainly, this is no accident. That there are these different systems that share a common logic is demonstrated in Obeyesekere's text; we now ask, why?

Given our universal psychobiology (Obeyesekere 1990: 101), and cultural psychological theory notwithstanding (S. Kurtz 1992, A. Roland 1988, 1996, R. Shweder, 1991), I want to propose two, perhaps related, theories that can guardedly account for the material at hand. Anticipating what is to follow, I suggest that Obeyesekere's psychobiology entails not only the universal vicissitudes of familial life along with the negotiations regarding the expressions of sex and aggression, but also the universally existential concern - death. I of course do not pretend that this thesis is new, nor should it seem all that shocking. I do, all the same, sense that this most fundamental of existential concerns motivates (perhaps obviously) much of the

discussion concerning eschatology and soteriology. I believe Obeyesekere himself encourages such a consideration: "the goal of the human sciences is not only to simplify the world but also to understand its complexities and *existential predicaments*" (120, emphasis added). Accordingly, I suggest here that the existential psychoanalysis of Ernest Becker along with the general object-relations psychoanalysis of Sudhir Kakar<sup>4</sup> lends suggestive insight into the material at hand.

It seems to me that the overwhelming motivation/aspiration of eschatologies and soteriologies is the denial of death (Buddhism is of course a curious departure from such a denial, or is it?). Indeed, "a rebirth eschatology has an inescapable logical form: the individual at death has to be reborn in the human world"(15). Unmistakably then, eschatology in its most elementary logic denies precisely irreversible mortality. Obeyesekere notes in this regard that even Socrates in his practice of death prepared himself for anything but death: "Socrates is fearless and confident because, as a philosopher, his very lifestyle is given to 'practicing death.' This training for death is in reality the cultivation of the soul, rendering it pure and recognizing its *immortality*"(250, emphasis added). I believe such a denial of death also accounts for the denial of paternity, a historically heated topic especially in regard to the Trobrianders. Can we not imagine that instead of an ignorance regarding paternity, there is a wish, deep or otherwise, to see conception as driven by something other than the biological, itself an all-too-pressing reminder of mortality?<sup>5</sup>

Here then is where I find Becker's existential psychoanalysis helpful: the human animal's motivations rest not only in the drives of sex and aggression but also in the adamant denial of mortality. For instance, Becker suggests that the horror of the primal scene has nothing to do with jealousy and rivalry. Rather, in his Rankian approach, he argues that parental intercourse threatens a displaced oedipal project, a project that has everything to do with self-constitution: "The Oedipal project is the flight from passivity, from obliteration, from contingency: the child wants to conquer death by becoming *the father of himself*, the creator and sustainer of his own life"(1973: 36). However, once the individual recognizes her or his own incapacity for such self-constitution the desire is then displaced onto the omnipotent parent. Yet, if the parent is seen in the animal act of copulation, the model is degraded and thus ruined: "When *they themselves* [parents] do not transcend the body in their most intimate relations, the child must experience some anxious confusion"(1973: 44). When such a theory is applied to Obeyesekere's data, the Balinese neonatal identity (not to mention other forms of ancestor rebirth predicated on the child being the grandfather reincarnated) becomes an *expected* move in the *causa sui* project: the existential Oedipus desires to be the father of the father. That is to say, if one's own *causa sui* project is dashed by reliance upon a fallible other, this dilemma is ultimately solved when the offspring turns out to be the source of the source. Whatever the socio-political ramifications of ancestor reincarnation, the psychological payoff undeniably rests in the denial of death.

Along with this denial of death, which is simultaneously a fear of death, we also have, as Becker points out, a denial of the contingent. If religions provide worlds of meaning (among other things) as Geertz contends, I suggest that such worlds exclude the contingent: meaning and contingency are antithetical. Imagining karma, in this sense, means imagining worlds without contingency, that is, chance. Karma is an airtight theodicy. Obeyesekere quotes Plotinus to this effect: "It is not an accident that makes a man a slave; no one is prisoner by chance; every bodily outrage has its due cause"(295-296). There is a reason for everything; the aleatory has not the final say - meaning triumphs. In other words, a world with death entails a world of chance and chance entails the death of both meaning and the *causa sui* project. I thus propose that Becker's existential psychoanalysis provides a compelling theoretical explanation of these disparate rebirth theories: human narcissism disallows the contingent and chancy life of irreversible mortality.

But this isn't the end of the story. We must now revisit an issue raised earlier: who chooses to pursue *moksha* and who chooses to put it off for another day? This question arises especially when we start considering soteriologies as opposed to eschatologies. In other words, a purely eschatological consideration poses not descriptions of final things; rather, it simply suggests that the course of events continuously moves on in its orderly way (212-213). The soteriologies Obeyesekere analyzes, on the other hand, address the conditions of the last things. As he points out, the Upanishadic and Plotinian share a sense of merging with the One, a true historical connection or no. I believe it is with regard to these imagined soteriologies that we see individual aspirations playing themselves out. Perhaps guilty of a certain reduction, I want to imagine that the object-relations psychoanalysis of Sudhir Kakar accounts for one's soteriological pursuit, or lack thereof. I will suggest here in abbreviated form a hypothesis that I detail at length elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

Kakar proposes that the "essential psychological theme of Hindu culture is the polarity of fusion and separation"(1981: 34). That is to say, the Hindu must negotiate her or his fear of separation from the (m)other as well as fear of identity-annihilation in her overwhelming presence. This predicament he suggests is not only Hindu in nature, but is rather universal (1981: 34). Reflecting such universality, Kakar argues, "the psychological importance of the theme of fusion and separation lies in its intimate relation to the human fear of death"(1981: 35). Significantly, this is Becker's fundamental argument with regard to the *causa sui* project's emotional and conceptual ambivalence (1973: 115-123). For Becker, the entire project comes down to the individual's predicament between either standing out (and thus alone) or being elided in participation with the grandiose other. Kakar, for his part, suggests, as does Doniger, that the Vedanta (and the concomitant Upanishads) encourages an identity-eliding fusion, a fusion reflected in the popular Atman-Brahman monism most represented by the Vedanta mantra, *Tat Tvam Asi* (That You Are). Considering this identification outside the traditional philosophical discussion, we curiously come across repeated instances of an ambivalence, that is, a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. This of course is most famously represented by Arjuna's response to Krishna's epiphany in the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. There Arjuna is thrilled and terrified by the

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overwhelming presence of the Other. We find this same ambivalence repeated in the *Devimahatmya* and the *Chaitanya-charitamrita*. Such ambivalence directly reflects Kakar's essential psychological theme. Significantly, I believe, the later Hindu devotional tradition displaces precisely the early identity thesis of the Upanishads. In other words, if the Upanishadic soteriology falls on the fusion side of things, leading to many fascinatingly terrifying experiences of the other's totality, then we seem to have a psychoanalytic account for the emergence of the devotional tradition whose quintessence I suggest is found in the *Bhagavata Purana*'s *viraha bhakti*, or 'love-in-separation' - methinks the *gopis* do suffer too much. The *gopis* don't want Krishna (in his totality) to appear because this would ultimately elide their individual identities, an expected response to the identity shattering epiphanies found in the other texts. Thus reflecting the vicissitudes of identity and alterity, I suggest that soteriologically motivated Hindus (and others?) search for an elision of identity while the eschatologically motivated *bhaktas* are content to enjoy their identity in devotion to a delimited other, satisfied to put off such Vedantic apotheosis. Who chooses which depends on the individual's psychosocial development; the decision is not merely philosophical in nature.

This then is where I come to my conclusion. I thank Professor Obeyesekere for his painstaking documentation and comparison of these various rebirth traditions. I certainly would not have had the academic temerity to travel so far afield. That being said, and knowing Obeyesekere's penchant for psychoanalytic theorizing, I hope that he may comment on possible explanations for why humans consistently and cross-culturally devise such complex theories regarding the immortality of *the, faute de mieux*, "soul." That these Amerindian, Buddhist, and Greek traditions elaborate upon the soul's journey through many incarnations, with or without ethicization or soteriological motivations, is no longer in doubt. What interests me, as a scholar of religion on occasion willing to transgress the taboo against reduction, is the question of why. If our pursuits are humanistic in the sense that McCutcheon sees it (as opposed to Mircea Eliade), then I believe Obeyesekere has given us plenty of material to imagine a theory regarding the desire for either multiple births or escape from such births.<sup>9</sup> Here I suggest that the existential psychoanalysis of Ernest Becker along with the object-relations psychoanalysis of Sudhir Kakar provide us with compelling explanations of these motivations. I recognize that these are not the only possible lenses through which to view this material. All the same, they are lenses available to public consensus as well as dissent. I certainly don't pretend to pose these questions to Obeyesekere as if he himself were unaware of these issues. Rather, I hope my reflections will invite his response in what I find to be a most fascinating discussion pertaining to a seemingly universal human phenomenon.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In this regard, see the series of articles under the general heading of "Who Speaks for Hinduism?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68, no. 4 (2000): 705-835.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the text I will place in parentheses only the page references when referring to Gananath Obeyesekere, *Imagining Karma: Ethical Transformation in Amerindian, Buddhist, and Greek Rebirth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Note in this regard that a primary epistemological position within many South Asian traditions presupposes that the subject is deluded by both *maya* and karmic impressions from prior lives, a non-Cartesian point of departure.

<sup>4</sup> I recognize of course that Obeyesekere problematizes the language of the self: "The French analyst Pontalis asks whether the concept of 'self' can be exported elsewhere even though the French language has an equivalent in *soi*. I agree; 'self' theories, whether Kohut's or Mead's, must result in too radical an appropriation of other minds into Anglo-American language games and life-forms," *The Work of Culture: Symbolic Transformation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), xx. This being said, I believe we can cautiously use "self" in a culturally nuanced way as do Kakar (1981), Roland (1988, 1996) and Kurtz (1992).

<sup>5</sup> Here we could perhaps point to Maurice Bloch's thesis of "rebounding violence" in the sense that ritual often entails the violent subordination of the merely biological in lieu of an emerging symbolic realm that denies precisely the transience of life. See Maurice Bloch, *Prey Into Hunter: The politics of religious experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas B. Ellis, "I Love You, I Hate You: Hindu Devotion and the Vicissitudes of Object Representation" (unpublished).

<sup>7</sup> According to Barbara Stoller Miller's translation, Arjuna, in the presence of Krishna's epiphany, states: "I am thrilled, and yet my mind trembles with fear at seeing what has not been seen before" (11:45); see *The Bhâgavad-Gîta*, trans. Barbara Stoller Miller (New York: Bantam, 1986), 107.

<sup>8</sup> In the *Devīmāhātmya*, we find the epiphany of the goddess described as both *saumya* (gentle) and *ghora* (terrible). According to Swami Jagadiswarananda's translation: "Armed with sword, spear, club, discus, conch, bow, arrows, sling and iron mace, *you are terrible* (and at the same time) *you are peaceful*" (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1953), 18-19. Thomas B. Coburn likewise translates: "Terrible with your sword and spear, likewise with cudgel and discus, with conch and bow, having arrows, sling, and iron mace as your weapons, Gentle, more gentle than other gentle ones," *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devi-Māhātmya and a Study of*

*Its Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 37. According to David Haberman's translation of the *Madhya-līla* in the *Chaitanya-charitāmrita*, Ramanda repeats Arjuna's condition in the epiphany: "Seeing this, Ramanda became faint with ecstasy, was unable to control his body, and fell to the ground. The Lord touched him with his hand and thereby caused him to regain consciousness. Seeing the Lord once again in the guise of a renouncer, he was amazed," *Textual Sources for the Study of Hinduism*, ed. W. D. O'Flaherty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 158.

<sup>9</sup> McCutcheon notes in this regard: "It is with deep irony then, that I now find myself seemingly in agreement with Mircea Eliade when he suggested... that the scholar of religion 'is destined to play an important role in contemporary cultural life'.... Eliade, however, saw this role as the therapeutic recovery of archaic meanings housed in supposedly timeless myths and rituals. This is nothing other than the regressive - and not trasgressive - politics of nostalgia. Instead, I side with Mack and Lincoln in recommending for scholars of religion the role of critic, rather than Eliade's role of savior, for our work is carried out within the material contestations of history rather than in the mists of primordial time," *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 142.

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