The Deities Are Many
A Polytheistic Theology
Jordan Paper

Provides a theology of polytheism—the belief in many deities—using examples from a wide range of world religions.

The Deities Are Many is a lively and learned introduction to polytheism. Drawing from both his scholarly research and his personal experience, author Jordan Paper is the ideal guide into this milieu. Paper was drawn to polytheism through his love of nature, seeing it as a source of the divine. In this book he focuses on Chinese and Native American religious traditions, as well as West African, African-Brazilian, Hindu, Polynesian, and circumpolar traditions, to describe the theology of polytheism. The book provides a topology of polytheistic deities, focusing on the cosmic couple, Father Sky and Mother Earth; animal, plant, and mineral deities; ancestral spirits; divine ghosts; and culture heroes and tricksters. Paper also shows how monotheists misunderstand polytheism and provides a polytheist perspective on what it means to be human when the "deities are many." This is a fascinating, illuminating book, especially for those raised in monotheistic societies.

"The Deities Are Many is a wonderful intellectual/theological work by a remarkable religious studies scholar. It will appeal to anyone who has questioned the sufficiency of monotheistic traditions."
—Kelly Bulkeley, author of Visions of the Night: Dreams, Religion, and Psychology

Jordan Paper is Professor Emeritus of Humanities (Religious Studies, East Asian Studies) at York University. He is also an Associate Fellow at the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society and Adjunct Professor in the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria. He is the author of several books, including The Mystic Experience: A Descriptive and Comparative Analysis and The Spirits Are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion, both published by SUNY Press, as well as Through the Earth Darkly: Female Spirituality in Comparative Perspective and Offering Smoke: The Sacred Pipe and Native American Religion.

A volume in the SUNY series in Religious Studies
H arold Coward, editor

March / 160 pages
Trim size: 5 ½ x 8 ½
$49.50 hc ISBN 0-7914-6387-7

Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam
An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas
Samer Akkach

A fascinating exploration of how the transcendent is expressed in the spatial sensibility of premodern Islam.

This fascinating interdisciplinary study reveals connections between architecture, cosmology, and mysticism. Samer Akkach demonstrates how space ordering in premodern Islamic architecture reflects the transcendental and the sublime. The book features many new translations, a number from unpublished sources, and several illustrations.

Referencing a wide range of mystical texts, and with a special focus on the works of the great Sufi master Ibn 'Arabi, Akkach introduces a notion of spatial sensibility that is shaped by religious conceptions of time and space. Religious beliefs about the cosmos, geography, the human body, and constructed forms are all underpinned by a consistent spatial sensibility anchored in medieval geocentrism. Within this geometrically defined and ordered universe, nothing stands in isolation or ambiguity; everything is interrelated and carefully positioned in an intricate hierarchy. Through detailed mapping of this intricate order, the book shows the significance of this mode of seeing the world for those who lived in the premodern Islamic era and how cosmological ideas became manifest in the buildings and spaces of their everyday lives. This is a highly original work that provides important insights on Islamic aesthetics and culture, on the history of architecture, and on the relationship of art and religion, creativity and spirituality.

Samer Akkach is Senior Lecturer in History and Theory of Architecture at the University of Adelaide, Australia, and the Founding Director of the Center for Asian and Middle Eastern Architecture.

A volume in the SUNY series in Islam
Seyyed Hossein Nasr, editor

April / 320 pages
Illustrated: 8 b/w photographs, 49 figures
$80.00 hc only ISBN 0-7914-6411-3
Alternative Krishnas
Regional and Vernacular Variations on a Hindu Deity
Guy L. Beck, editor

Going beyond the standard depictions of Krishna in the epics, this book uses regional and vernacular sources to present a wide range of Krishna traditions.

Krishna—widely venerated and adored in the Hindu tradition—is a deity of many aspects. An ancient manifestation of the Supreme God Vishnu, or the Godhead itself, Krishna is the bringer of Yoga philosophy and the creator of the universe, the destroyer of evil tyrants, and the hero of the epic Mahabharata. He is also described in classical Sanskrit texts as having human characteristics and enjoying very human pursuits: Krishna is the butter thief, cowherd, philanderer, and flute player. Yet even these playful depictions are based upon descriptions found in the Sanskrit canon, and mostly reflect familiar, classical Pan-Indian images.

In this book, contributors examine the alternative, or unconventional, Krishnas, offering examples from more localized Krishna traditions found in different regions among various ethnic groups, vernacular language traditions, and remote branches of Indian religions.

Guy L. Beck, a religious historian, teaches Hinduism and Asian Religions in the Religious Studies Program at Tulane University. He is the author of Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound.

April / 240 pages
$65.00 hc only ISBN 0-7914-6415-6

Religious Studies and Comparative Methodology
The Case for Reciprocal Illumination
Arvind Sharma

A contribution to the methodology of religious studies, this work discusses using comparison to provide mutual illumination among religious traditions while avoiding the problem of assimilating one tradition to another.

Comparison is at the heart of religious studies as a discipline and foundational to the field’s methodology. In this book, Arvind Sharma introduces the term “reciprocal illumination” to describe the mutual enlightenment that can occur when a comparison is made between one tradition and another, one method and another, or between a tradition and a method. Developing the concept of reciprocal illumination through historical, phenomenological, and psychological methods, Sharma demonstrates how to use comparison, while avoiding the pitfall of treating it as merely raw material for higher order generalizations.

“Chapter by chapter, Sharma works through his material with such enlightened precision that the reader is persuaded by his formal conceptualization toward the traditions he is approaching, and the method by which he deepens the overall focus. His original scholarship and innovative framework call for a model of mutual understanding rather than competitive oppositional approaches to cultural and religious ‘others.’”—Robert M. Garvin, University at Albany, State University of New York

Arvind Sharma is the Birks Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill University. He is the author or editor of numerous books, including Sleep as a State of Consciousness in Advaita Vedānta and Methodology in Religious Studies: The Interface with Women’s Studies.

May / 272 pages
$65.00 hc only ISBN 0-7914-6455-5