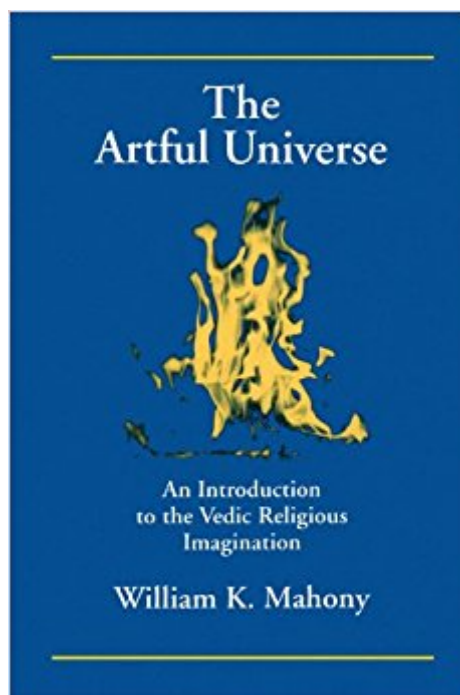




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The Artful Universe: An Introduction To The Vedic Religious Imagination (S U N Y Series In Hindu Studies) (Sunny Series, Hindu Studies)



Synopsis

Provides an accessible introduction to the Vedic religious world by focusing on the role of divine and human imagination in sacred texts."The Artful Universe provides a gentle tour through formative passages from the Rgveda and Upanisads that explicate the creative ritual/philosophical process. I particularly enjoyed the passages selected by the author, and his competent translation of them. He has captured and summarized the philosophical intent of the Vedic hymns, and thematized key concepts." -- Christopher Key Chapple, Loyola Marymount University

"This is a very important contribution to our understanding of early Indian religious imagination and to the field of religious studies broadly construed. Basically, the book develops an angle of interpretation that tracks on what the Vedic poets were constructing in the way of a universe in which imagination, language, and nature intersected one another. Using philological and literary-critical approaches to Vedic texts, Mahony sorts through a great many of the one thousand and eight hymns of the Rgveda in an effort to reconstruct and present the unfolding of a world view which sees the cosmos as an elaborate, interconnected, and paradoxical artistic reality." -- Paul B. Courtright, Emory University

The Artful Universe introduces the Vedic religion, a rich and densely textured tradition that has influenced the religious sensibilities of India for 3500 years or more. Engagingly written and based on traditional as well as modern Vedic scholarship, the book introduces Vedic ideas regarding the nature of divinity, the structure of the sacred universe, the process of revelation, the function of ritual as hallowed activity, and the realizations lying behind the practice of meditation. As a way to link these diverse aspects of Vedic religion, Mahony identifies and highlights the important role of the divine and human imagination in the formation, revelation, and reformation of a meaningful world."

"I found Mahony's translations of the Vedas to be stunning. He has treated the text carefully, even reverentially. After reading these texts anew, some of which I had read many times before in mechanical translations, I was able to viscerally understand how and why the Vedas are revelatory, shining, holy." -- Joanne Punzo Waghorne, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

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Customer Reviews

Mahony, a professor of religion at Davidson College in North Carolina, offers a lively introduction to the 3500-year-old Vedic tradition, which has played a formative role in Indian civilization in general and Hinduism in particular. Central to the Vedic religion, Mahony contends, are the ideas of "transcendent universal order and harmony" expressed through ritual performances and mythic narratives. Using selections from the Vedic writings, especially the Rig Veda and the Upanishads, Mahony demonstrates how the Vedic imagination represents the principle of harmony in the construction of a meaningful world. In three particularly enlightening chapters, Mahony focuses on the poet as the "visionary artist of the verbal imagination," the priest as the "artist of universal drama and the liturgical imagination" and the "inward seer as enacting the liberating power of the contemplative imagination." Although Mahony uses sometimes complex literary and philological approaches to the Vedic texts, his thoughtful prose is engaging and draws readers into the practices and history of an ancient religion. Copyright 1997 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

"The Artful Universe provides a gentle tour through formative passages from the Rgveda and Upanisads that explicate the creative ritual/philosophical process. I particularly enjoyed the passages selected by the author, and his competent translation of them. He has captured and summarized the philosophical intent of the Vedic hymns, and thematized key concepts." -- Christopher Key Chapple, Loyola Marymount University "This is a very important contribution to our understanding of early Indian religious imagination and to the field of religious studies broadly construed. Basically, the book develops an angle of interpretation that tracks on what the Vedic poets were constructing in the way of a universe in which imagination, language, and nature intersected one another. Using philological and literary-critical approaches to Vedic texts, Mahony sorts through a great many of the one thousand and eight hymns of the R}gveda in an effort to reconstruct and present the unfolding of a world view which sees the cosmos as an elaborate, interconnected, and paradoxical artistic reality." -- Paul B. Courtright, Emory University "I found Mahony's translations of the Vedas to be stunning. He has treated the text carefully, even

reverentially. After reading these texts anew, some of which I had read many times before in mechanical translations, I was able to viscerally understand how and why the Vedas are revelatory, shining, holy." -- Joanne Punzo Waghorne, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

This is one of the best books on the topic of the Veda that I have ever read. The author's translations are careful and insightful - far better than most others I have read. The crux of the theme is that the creativity of humans is really born of Brahman - the source of the material world. The author speaks of the human urge to merge with the Universal Being. The author investigates the structure of the sacred universe, the creative process - or more aptly put - the process of revelation and the function of rituals as part of the scheme of divine revelation. There is a verse from the Rig veda that can be roughly translated "He who is awake, the gods seek him out." This refers to the divine revelation or Sruti that arises as an individual awakens to that still yet dynamic Inner Being that is also the unbounded outer Being. The key to understanding the Veda is inner awakening - the key to inner awakening is understanding the Veda. Interestingly enough, I have found numerous links between the writings of this author and the writings of the great sage Mayan the scientist, poet, philosopher, and architect who wrote the Aintiram, Surya Siddanta, and the first veda - The Pranava VEda (not to be confused with a book called pranava vAda) which I myself have written about. I highly recommend this book to anyone who has even the slightest interest in Vedic knowledge. In it you will find that the "gods" are really creative impulses within the body of God much like waves on the ocean. And that the Veda is not really about worshiping numerous "gods" it is about The One in the form of many qualities. One will observe that Vedic "religion" is not a heathen belief or practice that focuses on worshiping any number of lesser "gods" - in fact it is an understanding that transcends religion, in which the Rishis or Seers were awakened sufficiently enough to become aware of the innumerable qualities that exist within the body of Brahman - including qualities known as trees, rocks, dogs, cows, human beings and the entirety of the material and non material world. One of the most important aspects of this book is that the author has given thoughtful and careful attention to the translation of the vedic verses he illustrated. His translation far exceeds the translations by Max Muller and the many others who have slashed and burned this amazing body of literature. He, among others, (the University of TX Austin ancient sanskrit program, for example) are beginning to make headway in the proper translation of the Veda. I have the highest praise for this book and its author. In addition to its scholarly content, I was deeply touched and inspired by this book. I feel indebted to the author for producing such a remarkable work. For those interested in this genre I would also suggest The Strides of Vishnu as another well

thought out and amazing book on this general topic. The Strides of Vishnu: Hindu Culture in Historical Perspective

In this book which explores both the origins and some later traditions of the Hindu religion (focussing on the Vedas and the Upanisads), William Mahony's mastery of the subject is clear and captivating through his poetic prose and his ability to draw on language which is memorable and at times stunning. A wonderful read for anyone interested in the subject. This book can serve as an introduction for a beginner or an insightful piece for any scholar.

This is a wonderful guide to an ancient philosophy which holds that the creation of art by humans is part of the greater process of the creation of the universe by the gods and goddesses. It's written in an accessible style and includes lovely translations of hymns and verses from the Vedas. I found it affirming, inspiring, deeply thought-provoking. I underlined phrases on almost every page!

This is a truly fantastic book, one with amazingly beautiful poetry, marvelous description, and insightful discussion. A masterpiece.

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