

Infinite Paths to Infinite Reality:
Sri Ramakrishna and Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion
(forthcoming with Oxford University Press)

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Book Description:

Sri Ramakrishna, a nineteenth-century Indian mystic, is best known for having affirmed the harmony of all religions on the basis of his richly varied spiritual experiences and eclectic religious practices, both Hindu and non-Hindu. In *Infinite Paths to Infinite Reality*, Ayon Maharaj argues that Sri Ramakrishna was also a sophisticated philosopher of great contemporary relevance.

Through a careful study of Sri Ramakrishna's recorded oral teachings in the original Bengali, Maharaj reconstructs his philosophical positions and analyzes them from a cross-cultural perspective. Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual journey culminated in the exalted state of "*vijñāna*," his term for the "intimate knowledge" of God as the Infinite Reality that is both personal and impersonal, with and without form, immanent in the universe and beyond it. This expansive spiritual standpoint of *vijñāna*, Maharaj contends, opens up a new paradigm for addressing central issues in cross-cultural philosophy of religion, including divine infinitude, religious pluralism, mystical experience, and the problem of evil.

Sri Ramakrishna's *vijñāna*-based religious pluralism—when grasped in all its subtlety—proves to have major philosophical advantages over dominant Western models. Moreover, his mystical testimony and teachings not only cut across long-standing debates about the nature of mystical experience but also bolster recent defenses of its epistemic value. Maharaj further demonstrates that Sri Ramakrishna's unique response to the problem of evil resonates strongly with Western "soul-making" theodicies and contemporary theories of skeptical theism. A pioneering interdisciplinary study of one of India's most important philosopher-mystics, Maharaj's book is essential reading for scholars and students in philosophy of religion, theology, religious studies, and Hindu studies.

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