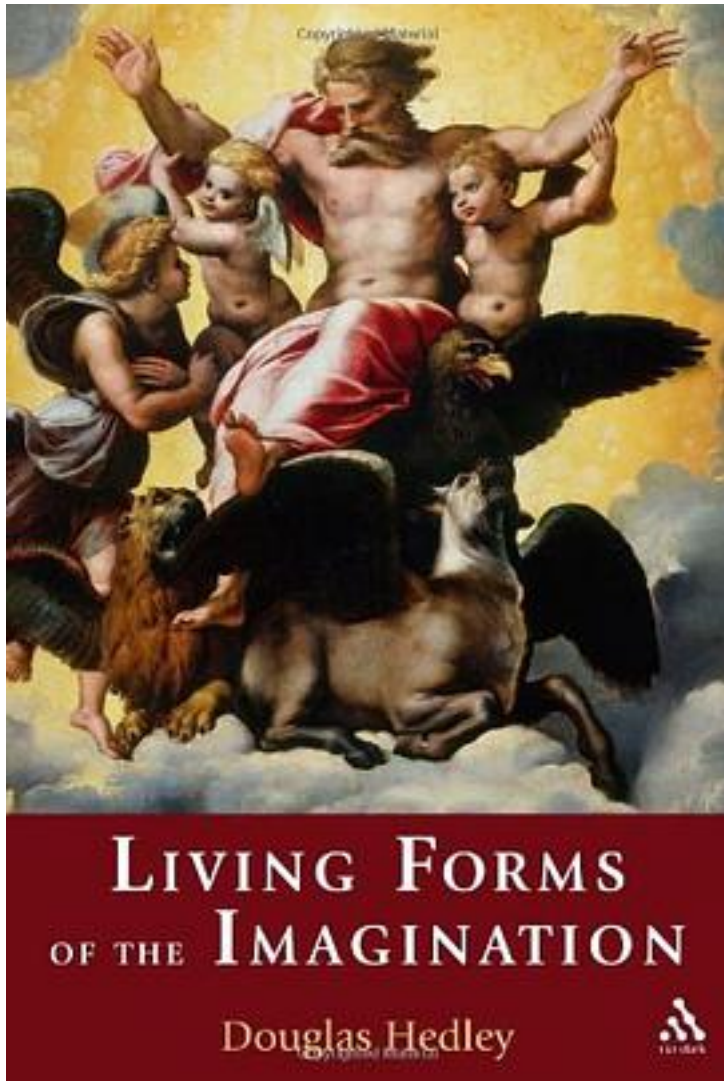


Living Forms of the Imagination



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著者:Douglas Hedley

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Religious belief characteristically requires imaginative engagement. If this is not to be confused with fantasy or wish fulfilment, we need some account of how the imagination can be used through images of salvation: symbols and sacred narratives. Metaphysical reductionism inspired by success of the physical science, especially by employment of recent molecular biology, creates an unprecedented challenge for reflective religious belief: ontology is confined to scientific description. Christian theology in particular has a long tradition of 'faith seeking understanding'. This project is rendered implausible, if not totally incoherent, if the reductionist project prevails. There have been many forms of anti-reductionism in philosophical theology and in Anglophone discussion of religion. This book argues that the concept of imagination must play a core role in any successful anti-reductionist account. The role of imagination in psychology, ethics and aesthetics provides a good analogy for thinking about the imagination in religious belief. In dealing with the inner lives of other human beings, moral values or aesthetic qualities we need to employ the imagination: to suppose; form hypotheses; empathise or imaginatively engage with alien people or worlds in order to understand. The imaginative skills required remain very different from any quantifiable account of items and events in time and space, and yet remain necessary for the acquisition of genuine knowledge. Just as we use the imagination to relate to other minds, appreciate beauty and understand goodness, we need imagination to engage with God's action in the world.

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目录:

[Living Forms of the Imagination_ 下载链接1](#)

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