

English Abstract

Imagination and Religion – Contexts, Interpretations, and Applications
Eds. Aila Viholainen, Jaana Kouri and Tiina Mahlamäki

Imagination is familiar to everybody. But what if we were to employ the concepts of imagination and imagining as analytical categories in the study of religion and culture?

The authors of this book take the concept of imagination seriously. They question the notion of imagination understood only as a mental action, fantasy, and not real. Instead, they call for a broader examination of the analytical potential and uses of the concept and processes in relation to the fields of religion and spirituality.

Starting with the history of the concept of imagination, this book explores the relationships between imagination and image, imagination and language, imagination and utopia, and imagination and ideology. The contributors provide new ideas that can be used to revisit previous research and research data. Drawing on sources in literature, folkloristics, history, philosophy, film studies, ethnography, theology, and the history of science, the authors offer various case studies to examine how imaginaries as products of imagination are historically, culturally, and socially constructed, experienced, narrated and materialized. They explore the technologies of imagination (i.e. how it takes place), what actors are involved in co-imagining, and, above all, what kinds of knowledge are produced by imagining.

Also taking a critical look at themselves as engaging in the study of religion, culture, and spirituality, the authors ponder what role the imagination plays in the work of researchers themselves. Moreover, they ask, could imagination have harmful consequences? The authors offer a significant contribution to contemporary debates in the study of religion and cultural studies in Finland.