



The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish, and Early Christian Patterns

John B. Henderson

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This book presents the first systematic and cross-cultural exploration of ideas of heresy, as well as orthodoxy, in a group of major religious traditions, including Neo-Confucianism, Sunni Islam, rabbinic Judaism, and early Christianity. It shows how authorities in all four of these traditions used common strategies to distinguish orthodox truth from heretical error. These same strategies often appear in modern ideological polemics and studies of deviance as well as in traditional religious controversies. The party that most effectively uses these strategies often gains a decisive advantage in the struggle among competing claimants to orthodoxy.

The author also shows how orthodoxy depends on heresy. Without heresy, or at least ideas of heresy, orthodoxy could not establish or perpetuate itself. In fact, in all four traditions orthodoxy constructed itself by creating an inversion of the heretical other.

By highlighting the common patterns in constructions of orthodoxy and heresy in four major religious traditions, this book also sets in relief subtler variations that give each tradition a special character. In this way this study strikes a balance between the universal and the particular: it illuminates a general pattern in world intellectual history, but also shows how the traditions that illustrate this pattern are distinctive.

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