



Risk and Blame Essays in Cultural Theory

Mary Douglas

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The idea of risk has recently risen to prominence in political debate and in matters of public policy. Cognitive psychology treats decision-making as a private personal act but in real life, dangers are presented in standardized forms which pre-code the individual's choices. This collection follows on from the programme for studying risk and blame that was implied in the book "Purity and Danger". The first six essays in this book argue that any analysis of risk perception that ignores cultural and political bias is worthless. For the sake of a mistaken idea of objectivity, research on risk perception tries to avoid politics, the idea of nature is inherently politicized. The next five essays range over questions in cultural theory. A culture is viewed as a way of life which standardizes concepts and values. It is held steady by the institutions in which it is articulated. Questions of autonomy, credibility and gullibility, the social origins of wants, and the recognition of distinctive thought styles are at present only beginning to be treated systematically in a framework. This book should be of interest to undergraduates, postgraduates and academics of social anthropology, philosophy, political and cultural theory.

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