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## Risk and Blame Essays in Cultural Theory

*Mary Douglas*

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**Mary Douglas : Risk and Blame Essays in Cultural Theory** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Risk and Blame Essays in Cultural Theory:

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.

"[an] always rewarding collection covering topics as diverse as witchcraft, the usefulness of stigma, the misguided

search for the historical Jesus, and the contrasting cultures and consequent effectiveness of Swedish and English trade unions . . . For my money, Douglas's sure grasp of how symbolism is tied to social relations is indispensable in making sense of contemporary religious conflict." - "Commonweal" Characteristic of Douglas' other works, these essays define cultural theory as "a way of thinking about culture that draws the social environment systematically into the picture of individual choices," a "method of analyzing public debates as positions taken in a conflict between cultures" (xi). This definition is of value for how it frames a theory of culture that guides research while compelling us to recognize the real subject of our interest. . . . "Douglas's arguments about the ideological bases of knowledge and consequently its necessary political implications are not only eloquent but convincing. One can only admire the frankness with which she makes an (avowedly unpopular) case for "hierarchy," and agree that those who appeal instead to abstract "reason" or "justice" are merely less forthright or less lucid." - "Zygon" About the Author Mary Douglas retired as Professor of Anthropology at University College, London in 1977 and taught in the US until 1988. She is the author of many books, among them *Implicit Meanings* (1978) and *Purity and Danger* (1984) both from Routledge.