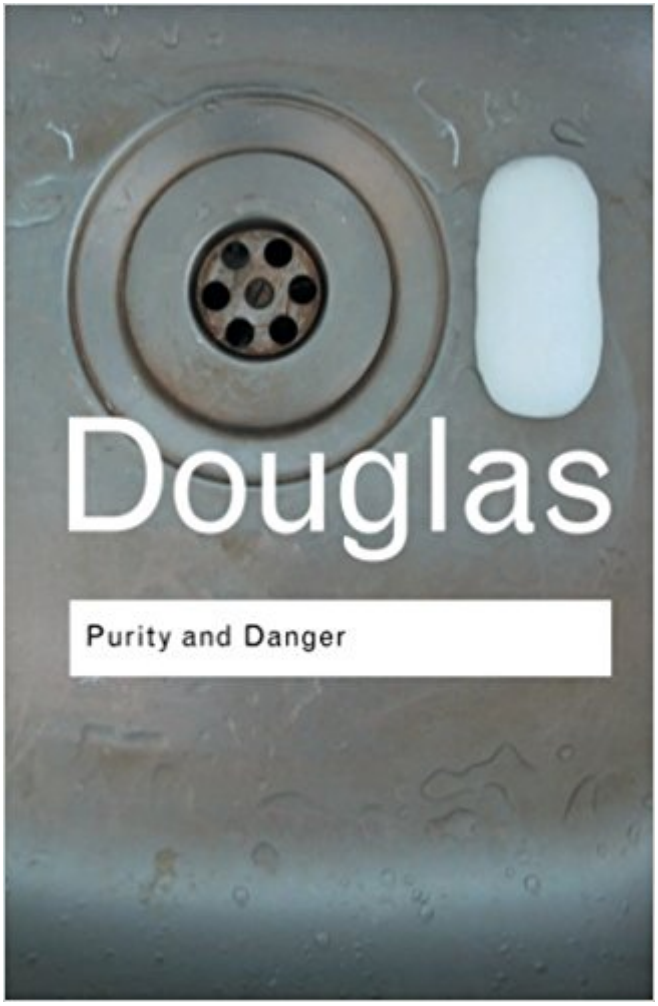
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Purity And Danger: An Analysis Of Concepts Of Pollution And Taboo (Routledge Classics) (Volume 93)



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Synopsis

In Purity and Danger Mary Douglas identifies the concern for purity as a key theme at the heart of every society. In lively and lucid prose she explains its relevance for every reader by revealing its wide-ranging impact on our attitudes to society, values, cosmology and knowledge. The book has been hugely influential in many areas of debate - from religion to social theory. But perhaps its most important role is to offer each reader a new explanation of why people behave in the way they do. With a specially commissioned introduction by the author which assesses the continuing significance of the work thirty-five years on, this Routledge Classics edition will ensure that Purity and Danger continues to challenge and question well into the new millennium.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Purity and Danger ... shattered my assumptions on just about everything." - Silvia Rodgers, The Sunday Times "Professor Douglas writes gracefully, lucidly and polemically. She continually makes points which illuminate matters in the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of science and help to show the rest of us just why and how anthropology has become a fundamentally intellectual discipline." - New Society"Professor Douglas' book sparkles with intellectual life and is characterised by a concern to understand ... A rare and exciting spectacle of a mind at work." - Times Literary Supplement "The reason why one voice speaks to another remains a mystery but my sense of the world was undoubtedly deeply effected by Mary Douglas's Purity and Danger... Long before the

insights of feminist analysis, Douglas noted how symbolic systems were centred upon notions of masculinity and femininity and layered upon the human body. Without doubt, 25 years of feminist work has enlarged understanding of gender issues beyond the insights of even such an original thinker as Mary Douglas. Nevertheless, many of the ideas which have sprouted since can be found in this slim, controversial and still highly relevant volume." - Leonore Davidoff, Times Higher Education Ã Â

Mary Douglas was one of the most distinguished anthropologists of modern times. Natural Symbols, another of her major works, is also available in Routledge Classics.

She has a difficult reading style to get into, but once you've been reading it for a while, it is really good and informative too.

This may be an entertaining book if you want to read stories of foreign cultures and habits, but I don't think it meets the scientific standards of anthropology. The subtitle of the book is "an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo", but this is an overstatement. You will not find any true analysis in it. Every time the author approaches an analytic question or theory, she soon lets go of her thread and diverges into another irrelevant story. While reading this book, I asked myself several times "wait a second, what does this have to do with pollution or taboo?", "what was the subject matter of this chapter again?" and "what conclusions can be drawn from all these examples?". My questions were left unanswered, so this book was a very frustrating read. It deals with an interesting topic but the author just doesn't manage to gain any interesting insights. A few disconnected thoughts scattered among colourful stories is all you get in terms of analysis. Very disappointing.

Even during the busy holiday season, the book arrived as promised and ON TIME! Great job!

Cutting through the epistemological deadlock of both Durkheimian project of defining religion and Maussian focus on manifestly religious activities such as sacrifice, Mary Douglas bring us into that fluid world of the everyday through her meditation on purity and danger. Purity and danger are two concepts one can find in any society and any culture. Purity and danger are two themes that concern everybody in oneÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s daily encounters, from the miraculous to the quotidian. And yet, each culture has its own taboos, its own rituals, and its own formulations of what

constitutes as pure and as dangerous. As such, purity and danger carries us out of rigid metaphysical framework of what is and what is not, instead shed light on the relation of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to deathÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (7). In so doing, Douglas opens up a new path that integrates both explanation and understanding modes of doing anthropology.The core of her methodological ingenuity (instead of merely choosing an interesting topic) lies in her comparative method: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“In the first place we shall not expect to understand religion if we confine ourselves to considering belief in spiritual beings, however the formula may be refinedÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â| Rather than stopping to chop definitions, we should try to compare peoplesÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ views about manÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s destiny and place in the universe. In the second place we shall not expect to understand other peopleÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s ideas of contagion, sacred or secular, until we have confronted our own.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•(35, my italic) By looking into the everyday (her first method of comparison), her meditation walks us from the mundane to the sacred and demonstrates how religion/cosmology and social order emerge from daily life and how such perceived order in turn governs oneÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s lived experience. By reflecting upon oneÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s own views (her second method of comparison), she weights both oneÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s own and the otherÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s views on the same footing. The danger of explanatory mode of scholarship lies NOT in trying to explain the Other per se but in holding oneself ABOVE the explanatory system and hence imposing oneÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s unexamined standards upon the Other. This mutual comparison (meaning comparison with self-reflection and subjecting oneself to the same standard as the subject being explained) reveals that understanding and explaining are co-constitutive and mutually illuminating, which enables us to move fluidly between the insider/outsider divide and bridging cultures through knowledge building.

I have read all of Mary Douglas' books. Her perspective is not like anyone else, and at the same time she is more insightful than 10 other writers on the same subject combined. It is a joy to wander through the streets with her as she weaves a tale about the sociology of a group or community. She is a master story teller, a great writer, and most important her insights are often genius.

I was assigned this book for a college course and really didn't care for it. This book is relatively old now and that is reflected in the writing style. My professor explained that because she was a woman working in the (then) male dominated academic world she felt she had to prove herself by including a lot of quotes in different languages and just through her general style of writing.Some parts were

very interesting but they were too far and few between to make me really want to read this book. I appreciate that this book was groundbreaking when ti was originally published but now there are newer, easier to read and more interesting books you can find to get the same information.

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