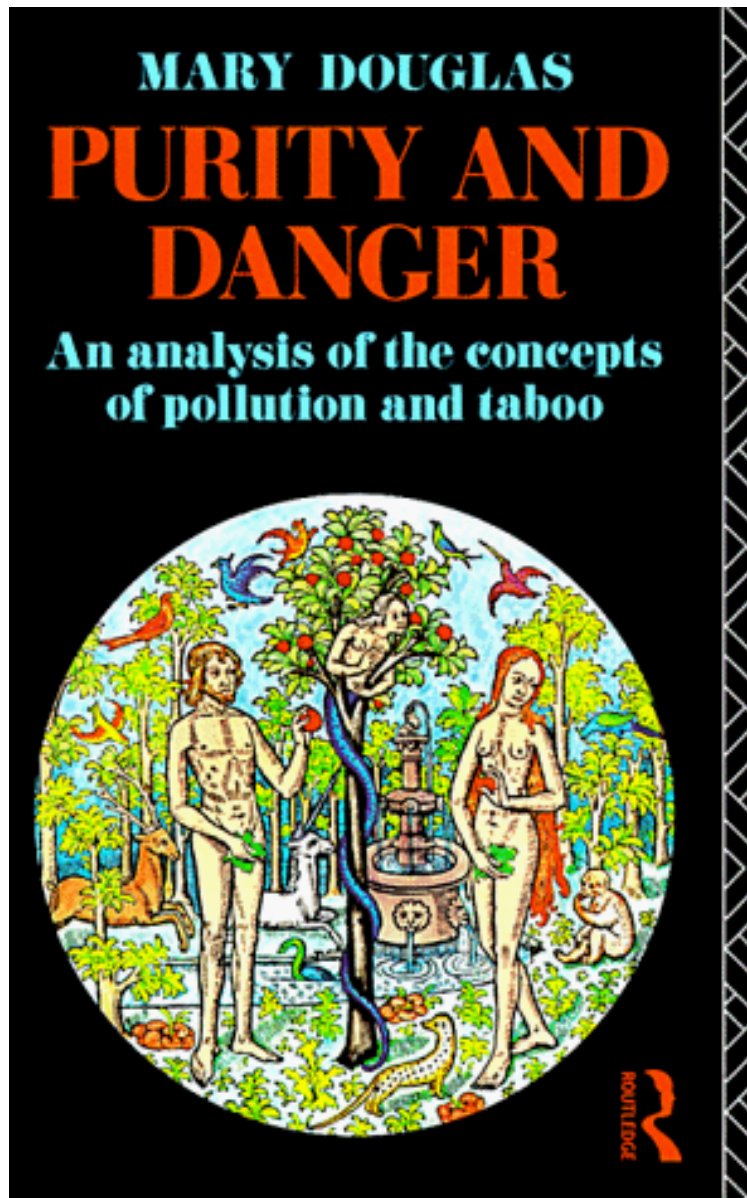


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Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo

Mary Douglas

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Mary Douglas : Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. it is really good and informative tooBy AvolasterShe 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. 6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. obsessed with order By X. Zu 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 ones 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 order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death (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: 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 refined. Rather than stopping to chop definitions, we should try to compare peoples views about mans destiny and place in the universe. In the second place we shall not expect to understand other peoples ideas of contagion, sacred or secular, until we have confronted our own. (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 ones lived experience. By reflecting upon ones own views (her second method of comparison), she weights both ones own and the others 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 ones 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. 7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Mary Douglas is a great writer By John M. Beasley 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.

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. Right or wrong, sound or idiosyncratic, it presents a rare and exciting spectacle of a mind at work.' - Times Literary Supplement

"Sparkles with intellectual life." -- Times Literary Supplement "This is an absorbing book, full of fascinating insights into some important and universal aspects of human behavior, and Professor Douglas's erudition is made accessible through the enviable lucidity of her writing." -- Lore and Language About the Author Mary Douglas is an internationally recognized anthropologist whose work is influencing scholars of religion in both her native England and in the U.S.A. She is affiliated with Northwestern University.