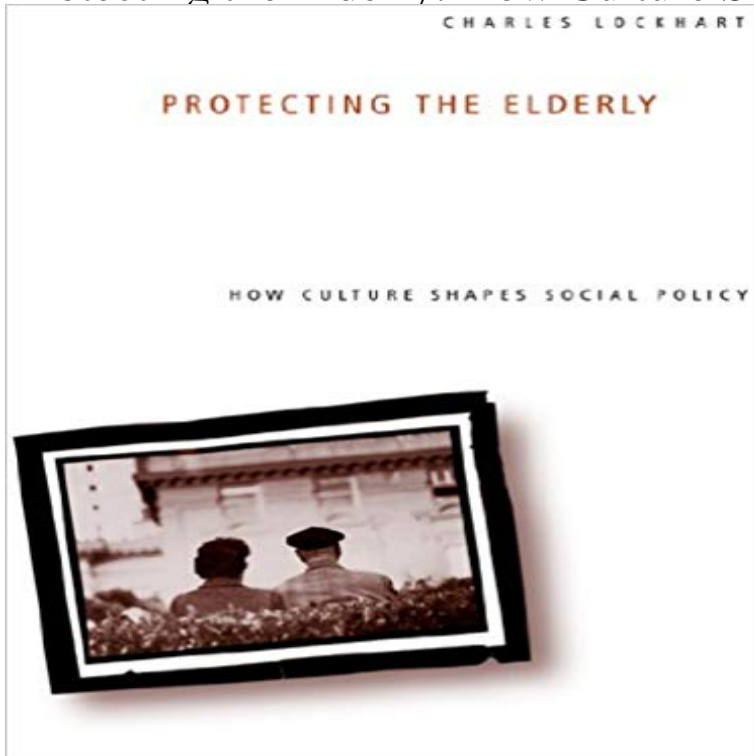


Protecting the Elderly: How Culture Shapes Social Policy



Building on the pioneering work of anthropologist Mary Douglas and political scientist Aaron Wildavsky, this book develops and applies grid-group theory to show how political culture can be used to explain decisions about social policy and how, as an interpretive approach, this theory complements the now more dominant rational choice and institutionalist models. In Part One, Lockhart elaborates on the basic ideas involved in grid-group theory, using examples to help illuminate how the theory can address areas of explanation left out of rational-choice and institutionalist models, such as preference formation and institutional design. According to grid-group theory, different societies have varying proportions of their members who adhere to one or another of three ubiquitous, socially interactive cultures: hierarchy, individualism, and egalitarianism. The adherents of these disparate cultures adopt culturally constrained rationalities (based on rival sets of values) and strive to construct distinctive institutional designs. In Part Two, this theory is used to help make better sense of social policy decision making. A society whose political elite is predominantly hierarchical, for instance, will develop social programs sharply distinct from those of societies whose leaders are adherents of individualism or egalitarianism. The empirical focus of this part of the book is on the decisions about policy affecting the elderly in the United States, the former Soviet Union, Germany, and Japan during the economically difficult 1980s. Important aspects of these decisions, Lockhart shows, reflect the relative influence of rival cultural purposes among relevant societal elites.

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