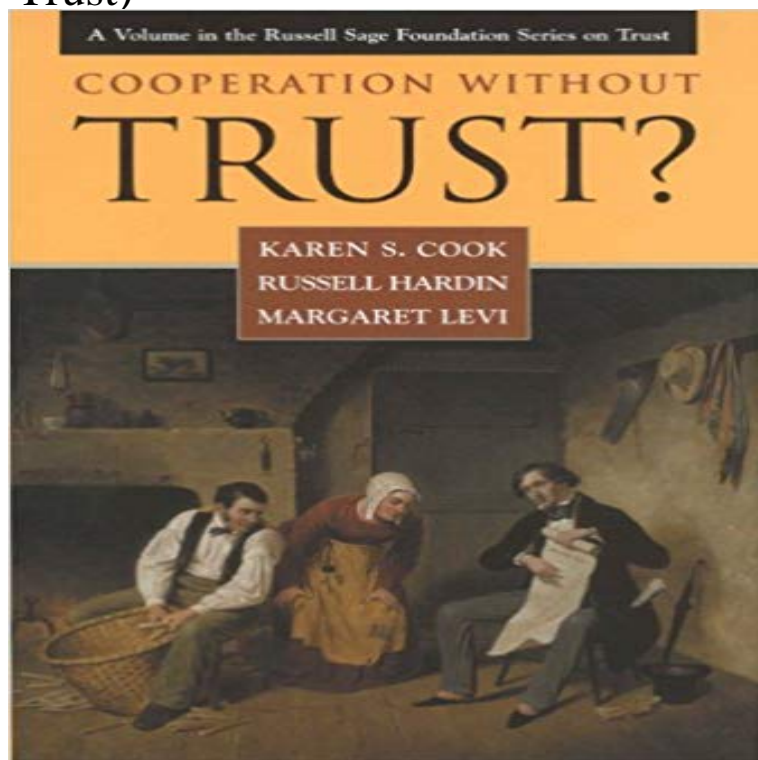


Cooperation Without Trust? (The Russell Sage Foundation Series on Trust)



Some social theorists claim that trust is necessary for the smooth functioning of a democratic society. Yet many recent surveys suggest that trust is on the wane in the United States. Does this foreshadow trouble for the nation? In *Cooperation Without Trust?* Karen Cook, Russell Hardin, and Margaret Levi argue that a society can function well in the absence of trust. Though trust is a useful element in many kinds of relationships, they contend that mutually beneficial cooperative relationships can take place without it. *Cooperation Without Trust?* employs a wide range of examples illustrating how parties use mechanisms other than trust to secure cooperation. Concerns about one's reputation, for example, could keep a person in a small community from breaching agreements. State enforcement of contracts ensures that business partners need not trust one another in order to trade. Similarly, monitoring worker behavior permits an employer to vest great responsibility in an employee without necessarily trusting that person. Cook, Hardin, and Levi discuss other mechanisms for facilitating cooperation absent trust, such as the self-regulation of professional societies, management compensation schemes, and social capital networks. In fact, the authors argue that a lack of trust or even outright distrust may in many circumstances be more beneficial in creating cooperation. Lack of trust motivates people to reduce risks and establish institutions that promote cooperation. A stout distrust of government prompted America's founding fathers to establish a system in which leaders are highly accountable to their constituents, and in which checks and balances keep the behavior of government officials in line with the public will. Such institutional mechanisms are generally more dependable in securing cooperation than simple faith in the trustworthiness of others. *Cooperation*

Without Trust? suggests that trust may be a complement to governing institutions, not a substitute for them. Whether or not the decline in trust documented by social surveys actually indicates an erosion of trust in everyday situations, this book argues that society is not in peril. Even if we were a less trusting society, that would not mean we are a less functional one. A Volume in the Russell Sage Foundation Series on Trust

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