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Book Reviews

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ANGER The Misunderstood Emotion

by

Carol Tavis
Simon and Schuster, Inc.
New York: 1982

Americans have mixed attitudes towards anger. At one time anger was thought to be a very destructive emotion which should be suppressed at any cost, but it has more recently been seen as a healthy emotion whose suppression entails a physical and psychological price. We are advised by the "anger industry", psychotherapy, that within many a tranquil person is a furious one crying to get out and that blocking this anger can produce depression, guilt, anxiety, family problems, psychosomatic illness, and even suicide. Some of us dutifully follow this advice and express our anger at every thwarted wish, cleansing our systems in the process. Yet, we are also aware that anger may be dangerous, that it can have serious social consequences. So, others, fearing the loss of control that anger may bring, suffer injustice in silence. Most of us who don't react in these extreme ways remain ambivalent about how to respond.

Carol Tavis challenges many of the prevailing assumptions about anger, particularly those of psychologists and psychiatrists of the "ventilationist" persuasion. Those who recommend ventilating one's anger do so on the basis of several questionable beliefs, in large part a distortion of the legacies of Darwin and Freud. These beliefs are, first, that anger is an instinctive, biologically based response to threat or the frustration of goals and desires. Since anger is an instinct, attempting to suppress it will ultimately fail. Second, anger is a form of emotional energy which can be "dammed up," "spill over" and possibly "flood" the system. Third, if the outward expression of anger is prevented, anger turns inward, resulting in neurosis, depression, guilt, and psychomatic illness. Fourth, catharsis, treated by many today as nearly synonymous with emotional ventilations, empties the emotional reservoirs and prevents aggression and all the other ills associated with blocked emotions. Catharsis may be achieved in various and sundry ways, ranging from "talking it out," exercising, shouting, playing sports and watching violent movies, to pounding a pillow.

Tavis disputes each of these beliefs. Rather, she views anger as a social event, a form of communication. To be sure, anger is in part a product of our biological heritage. However, unlike animal aggression, which may occur more or less automatically in response to certain stimuli, human anger is influenced by judgment and choice.

For example, whether or not we become angry in a given situation depends upon our interpretation of that situation. Behind every incidence of anger is the belief that someone is not behaving as he or she *ought* to behave. Furthermore, the message of anger is, according to Tavis, "Pay attention to me. I don't like what you are doing. Restore my pride. You're in my way. Danger. Give me justice." Thus, anger is a message to another with a desired social objective. As with any other communication, we *choose* to express it.

Tavis cites extensive research evidence in support of her thesis, evidence which also provides partial answers to some perennial questions about anger. Does suppressing anger cause illness, specifically high blood pressure and heart disease? Conversely, does expressing anger reduce stress? Tavis concludes that *either* expressing or suppressing anger seems to be related to elevated blood pressure. How should these apparently contradictory findings be explained? The critical variable is not suppression versus expression but rather the persistence of stress, which is in turn associated with high physiological arousal. Suppressing our anger is undesirable if, by not revealing our feelings, we allow the stressful situation to continue. However, expressing anger can also be harmful if it subjects us to continued stress (as may happen if we alienate friends and spouses or get fired). The anger strategy which seems to work best is reflecting, waiting until we have calmed down, and then trying to reason with the person who has made us angry. Anger deals with other common questions. Does "talking out" anger get rid of it? Most people think so, but the evidence suggests that "talking it out" rehearses the emotion and might make one worse off by providing a label and justification for one's feelings. Should one always remain quiet? No. Remember that anger is a social communication with consequences. Discussing your anger can sometimes lead to practical solutions to a problem. When is the expression of anger cathartic, or calming? Tavis reports that aggression is cathartic if you retaliate against the person who you feel deserves the blame, if your retaliation inflicts an appropriate degree of harm (no more and no less) to the target, and if your target doesn't retaliate against you. Unfor-

tunately, these three conditions are seldom met.

Does alcohol release anger? Alcohol soothes angry individuals as often as it inflames them. Tavis suggests that alcohol merely provides one with a social excuse to behave in ways that might be otherwise threatening or uncomfortable.

Which sex has the anger problems? Tavis produces some interesting statistics. Very few studies have found any sex differences in proneness to or expression of anger. Males are more aggressive than females, but only to strangers. In the home, neither husbands nor wives are more aggressive. And this lack of sex difference includes direct physical aggression. Wives are apparently just as likely as husbands to be physically violent towards their spouses, but less likely to use fists, guns, and knives, and thus less likely to cause serious injury.

Tavis has not answered all the questions one might have and her book is at times rambling and anecdotal. Yet, she is always thought-provoking. No one who reads her book will ever again think of anger as something which "just happens" to us. Anger is a social tool which we choose to use. Although anger may have destructive consequences, both to others and to ourselves, it can also be used morally to rectify wrongs.

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A MAGGOT

by

John Fowles
Little-Brown
Boston: 1985

John Fowles is, not surprisingly, up to his old tricks. I say "not surprisingly" because we have sufficient and increasing evidence from his store of novels, articles, and interviews to suggest quite clearly not only where he has been but also where he might be going. Surely a writer can carve out new territory; but *A Maggot*, his most recent novel, though markedly different in plot and material from *The Magus*, *The Ebony Tower*, and *Daniel Martin*, and even *The French Lieutenant's Woman* which is set

in the same Dorsetshire countryside, bears a striking resemblance to his earlier work in structure and theme.

Simply, thus unfairly, stated, Fowles, like many of his predecessors in the tradition of the English novel, places his central character in a mysterious, sometimes personally threatening situation, moves him through a series of self-revealing crises which force him to assess himself and make crucial self-defining choices, and then demands that he act on his decisions. Usually, he incorporates an open scene in nature for critical events, a literal green world, which becomes a recurrent device in his novels, one that identifies Fowles with the ancient pastoral tradition. (Serious critics beware; Fowles holds little regard for academics; "classics-stuffed Strasbourg geese," he once called them). Thematically, the course of events usually brings the main character to understand that the only true freedom for the individual is the freedom he shapes by his own choices, that his identity is not to be bestowed by society or by tradition but by his own freely chosen acts. For Fowles, the individual must pass from self-delusion through self-analysis to choice. Fowles' obsession with this motif manifests itself in what in *The Magus* he calls "god games" in which one character manipulates situations through disguise, deceit, or, sometimes, truth, to force the main character to choose, in effect, to create himself.

Nicholas Urfe of *The Magus* (whichever ending is read), Charles of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (again, regardless of ending) and *Daniel Martin* of that novel instantly come to mind as examples. Fowles' existential humanism is clear, firmly stated at the end of *Daniel Martin*. Reflecting on the late Rembrandt self-portrait, *Daniel Martin* tellingly muses: "It is not finally a matter of skill, of knowledge, of intellect; of good luck or bad; but of choosing and learning to feel...No true compassion without will; no true will without compassion." Fowles' philosophic position extends to include an aesthetic position which not only postulates the artist as shaper, as manipulator controlling his own god games but also emphasizes the artist as observer of his own process of creation, as observer of his own work. The emphatic position of the self-regarding self-portrait of Rembrandt at the end of *Daniel Martin* acts as a perfect symbol of Fowles' notion of the artist as artist. In the novels, Fowles' use of double time -- historic past and narrative present, of art observed, serves this purpose as does his use of the intrusive author. A *Maggot* follows the same structural and thematic course.

Fowles uses the term "maggot" in its eighteenth-century meaning, which he ex-

plains in his "Prologue" to mean "a whim or quirk...an obsession with a theme." The maggot of his novel, the seed from which the story springs, is a fleeting, imaginary picture of a "small group of travellers, faceless, without apparent motive...in a deserted landscape...." From this modest scene Fowles gives his faceless group a local habitation and a name, and fashions an intriguing novel of adventure, mystery, suicide, suspected murder, deceit, sex and love, and, importantly, faith. Woven into the fabric of his material are consistent patterns of play-acting and stage directing, of known lying and suspected falsehood.

Fowles brilliantly invokes the spirit and flavor of eighteenth-century England (much as he did for the nineteenth century in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*) by interlacing copies of pages from the *Gentleman's Quarterly* at strategic points in the narrative, by incorporating political and sociological commentaries by the intrusive authorial voice (when were undergarments adopted by eighteenth-century gentlewomen; what was the attitude of the clergy toward change and property), by re-creating the pompous reports of the officious lawyer, and by recapturing the eighteenth-century idiom in the dogged interrogations of the witnesses.

The opening narrative, striking in its control of detail and rhythm, carries the riders, five men and one woman, from London, through Salisbury, by Stonehenge, to Dorset on a mission whose true purpose is known only to one member of the group; the others, however, believe they do know. The party is comprised of his Lordship, the main figure of the party, second, his deaf/dumb servant who thinks he knows but is unable to indicate in words his understanding, then an actor, chosen for both his ability and his diplomacy, a serving man who lives by day to day labor, and, finally, a London whore, drafted for purposes known only to the Lord. After a stay at an inn the party travels to a deserted but symbolically described remote place in the wilds of Dorsetshire where an incident of significant magnitude occurs. The incident is followed by the disappearance of the Lord and the apparent suicide of his deaf/dumb valet. The rest of the novel is comprised mainly of the legal interrogation by Henry Ayscough, a lawyer, of members of the party (and others), to determine the whereabouts of the missing Lord, the cause of the apparent suicide, the purpose of the journey to the wild place, and, in general, what actually happened.

The center of the interrogations pits the ex-whore, repentant and renewed-in-Christ Rebecca Lee (the mother of Anne Lee, founder of Shakerism) against Henry

KANSAS

Kansas lies down
because the rest of the country
won't. It rolls on one side
then the other,
verdant or brown. Here
the earth speaks only
to the earth. When people came
they were told to rest
or else continue on.

Because Kansas knows the value
of sleep, night hangs
just above the waist,
and in daytime the sky
rests on any hand
held up to it.

Fran Quinn

Ayscough, lawyer, rationalist, sceptic, protector of vested property interests and guardian of the *status quo*. In such a confrontation, of course, no middle ground can be reached. Rebecca has accepted Christ and faith; Ayscough believes in empirical evidence and the rule of property.

On the surface, the interrogations form the center of the novel. They seem designed to be the vehicle for the discovery of truth and in a way they are. We want to know the true identity of the members of the little band of travellers; we want to know their mission; and, especially, we want to know what happened to the Lord, Rebecca, and the deaf/mute in the cavern which is the core of the novel. Fowles presents varying versions of the incident in the interrogations, ranging from satanic copulation to divine revelation. One version comes from Jones, the servingman, who reports the incident as seen from his hidden vantage point outside the cavern and embellished by what he tells us Rebecca told him. Two additional versions come from Rebecca herself, one of which she insists is deliberately distorted, the other she quietly protests as the truth. Finally, objective investigators inspect the scene, within and without the cavern, and report their find-

ings. Surely both Henry James and Robert Browning would relish the material, but the question of *A Maggot* is not one of moral judgement or motivation or of psychological understanding. Although the interrogations provide the reader with a variety of views, they serve more than a structural function, for the question of the novel centers on the motive of faith, a motive not disclosed by empirical or psychological methods. The interrogations, which shift in tone, often becoming acerbic, also frame a deeper question: not only what is the motive to faith in a strict, divinely ordered universe, a faith that demands total submission of the will, but also, how can observers, those outside the faith, understand it and, if understood, how accept it.

In addition, the interrogations reveal a contrapuntal journey experienced by Rebecca and Ayscough. On the one hand, Rebecca's literal journey from London to Dorset parallels, a bit too obviously perhaps, her spiritual journey. Growing out of a curiously commercial sexual liaison which ends in a nearly miraculous transformation, Rebecca moves from a highly sought-after London prostitute to a woman of faith with the light of Christ in her, in a phrase, from eros to agape. On the other hand, Ayscough's journeys, from his posture as spokesman for eighteenth-century religious, economic, and political beliefs to a grudging acceptance of the possibility of Rebecca's avowal of faith, from a questioning certitude of his values to a puzzled admission of the possibility of another view. Ayscough, like many of Fowles' characters who are philosophically and morally moved by a significant encounter, comes, ever so hesitantly, not to a true understanding of Rebecca's position but to understanding how one's identity, one's values, and implicitly one's actions, are shaped by choice, usually choice under pressure. Fowles underlines this point through Rebecca's impassioned diatribe against Ayscough during her final interrogation. Her uncharacteristic outrage at his lack of moral sensibility and his dispassionate intellect, uttered when she is legally at his mercy, marks her true being. Importantly for the novel and for Fowles' position, her attack emphasizes the essential need for personal self-denial as the fundamental virtue. Clearly, here, Fowles is implying that choice, even one that limits further choice, is essential in discovering and determining self. In this much at least, Fowles' existential humanism has advanced beyond that of *Daniel Martin*.

A Maggot, then, can be seen as consistent with most of Fowles' major works. Though the setting is new, the characters fascinating, the mystery attractive, the re-creation

of the times impressive, the theme and structure remain close to that of *The Magus* and, especially, *Daniel Martin*. One of the thematic allusions in *Daniel Martin* comes from Rabelais: Do what you would; "Fais ce que voudrais." From what he has written and what can be discerned in *A Maggot*, I think Fowles wishes he had coined the phrase.

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Crime and Human Nature

by

James Q. Wilson
and
Richard J. Herrnstein
Simon and Schuster, Inc.
New York: 1985

The crime problem has received a great deal of attention in recent years from academicians, politicians-policy makers, law enforcement personnel, the general public and the mass media. The increasing magnitude and tenacity of crime have created a coalition among these groups in efforts to analyze and control this problem, but the coalition has not always been harmonious. For example, politicians use the crime issue in seeking election, but not to effect meaningful crime control policies; law enforcement agencies use it to obtain additional firepower, but not to improve community relations; the mass media use the crime problem to titillate and reinforce fears, stereotypes, and as bait in the competition for readers and viewers. The public fear of crime is used to justify protection ...at any cost.

The crime problem has also brought to fruition an interesting, if not dangerous, relationship between academicians and policymakers. Increasingly, theories of criminal behavior are advanced which are more directed toward controlling the offender than to clarifying conditions which tend to produce high levels of crime.

The empirical base of the crime problem is rather clear. Young, urban males commit

a disproportionate number of crimes. No matter the attempt to redirect or rehabilitate these individuals, innovative programs have not been successful. The fact that a substantial proportion of criminals are repeaters brings into question the ability of the criminal justice system to deter crime, let alone to rehabilitate offenders.

As a result, policymakers and some crime researchers have shifted their attention to identifying repeat offenders (recidivists) in order to facilitate successful prosecution and imprisonment. Consequently, there has been a gradual but steady shift in the search for the causes of crime from social and environmental explanations to individual and personal ones. The Wilson and Herrnstein essay on criminal behavior reflects these interrelated trends.

Crime and Human Nature is a megabook (twenty chapters and over 500 pages) on the crime problem, written both to document the problem and to set forth a general theory of criminal behavior based upon individual differences in susceptibility to crime. It is a rational view based on the psychological theory of behaviorism, which assumes that "...people, when faced with choice, choose the preferred course of action... a person will do that thing the consequences of which are perceived by him or her to be preferable to the consequences of doing something else."

According to Wilson and Herrnstein, involvement in crime is simply a matter of choice, a decision based upon the rational calculation of consequent rewards and punishments. Theoretically, the larger the ratio of the net rewards of crime to the net rewards of non-crime, the greater the tendency to commit the crime.

Wilson and Herrnstein suggest that this theory is particularly applicable to individuals who commit repetitive predatory street crimes (aggravated assault, murder, larceny, robbery). Moreover, the fact that predatory crime is a matter of concern in all societies and in all historic periods indicates something more than a mere universal concern with crime and social order. People in different societies rank the seriousness of specific offenses (murder, robbery, theft, incest) in similar ways regardless of the individual characteristics (age, sex, education and social class) of respondents to crime surveys.

To Wilson and Herrnstein, crimes are committed by a certain "type" of person and are the result of a rational decision-making process. It is not that non-criminal individuals are entirely crime free, it is just that they do not commit repetitive predatory crimes.

Who are the criminal individuals? According to the authors, there is mounting

evidence that offenders are differentiated by physique (they are mesomorphic males); by intelligence (they are from the low/normal or borderline percentile distributions on standard tests of intelligence); and by personality type (they are generally psychopathic). The personality psychopathy is then the salient force which constitutes the essential base of criminality. This type is characterized by hyperactivity, impulsivity, distractibility, poor judgement, lack of internal motivation, deficient sense of guilt, anxiety, and deficiency in learning, as manifested in the failure to learn or profit from past experience or punishment. To Wilson and Herrnstein, these personality attributes of psychopathy are critical because they affect the offender's ability to realistically calculate the rewards for non-criminal over criminal behavior. We are told that "...the relevance of (psychopathy) to criminal behavior can hardly be over-estimated, for crime often pits a quick gain against avoiding a remote punishment. Because of (psychopathy) the offender is driven toward the wrong end of the choice."

The authors adduce an impressive array of family, educational, media, constitutional and other data to support both their rational choice theory and their program for the effective control of crime.

The answer to the crime problem seems to be the development of a calculus of punishment that would increase the risks of crime. It is interesting that Beccaria, writing in 1764, with the admonition that the punishment should fit the crime, also thought a calculus of punishment could be developed to deter repetitive criminal behavior.

Wilson and Herrnstein's argument that personal conditions affect the rational choice to commit crime synthesizes a growing compendium of literature used to support an emerging nationwide correction policy of punishment by incapacitation. In the Commonwealth, this policy is reflected in the Governor's presumptive sentencing bill, prison construction program and advocacy of state control of county lockups legislation, which are currently under consideration in the Legislature. Thus, academic research and political policy concerns are joined.

Crime and Human Nature should be a controversial book; for those interested in the mysteries of deviant behavior, it is well worth reading.

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A Poem For My Father Upon Finding A Brittle Piece of Moss With A Twig In It

I

The light green hair of earth, matted and snarled,
twisted around a twig. The winding thatch will not open.
The twig remains stuck -- a nest with a sword beside it,
a crossroad where branch and fur meet, old friends crossing a stream
and if they part they are still entangled.

There is a tea smell down in the earth
like horse hay left in a long abandoned barn;
it still gives off odor.

The stems of the moss are hand-shaped, fingers of a poor one grasping nothing.

II

Old nest, my father! The green of his life did not leave
when the brittleness came. His sword, a hat pin
caught in his mother's hair.

Old nest! Old hounds baying over hills.
My father standing in snow, off any path, somewhere
where the fox would run, somewhere where the rabbits scatter.
He knew where the treasure was, the silent places, the names of things
I do not notice now. Stepping along a path
or walking paved streets I cannot hear his voice;
and at those parties where wine flows easy and conversation
is like the hum of spent machinery, I cannot remember
his face, or how tall he was,
and only when I brush apart the bushes do I remember
the way he could rumble through the bushes or go softly.

I left him, it seems to me, standing in snow
the hounds running farther and farther away.

Fran Quinn

Fran Quinn was born in Easthampton, MA in 1942. He taught on every level from pre-school to graduate school. He has worked for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities in the Poets-in-the-School program. A founding member of the Worcester County Poetry Association, Inc., Mr. Quinn conducted a radio program on poetry for seven years. He has read throughout the United States and also in Canada. He lives in Worcester, MA, and this is his first collection of poems.