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Fish! Philosophy: Opiate of the Powerless

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January 4, 2007

Powerful people control *events*. Powerless people control their *attitudes* about those events. It's that simple.

Fish! Philosophy is a lesson from the powerful to the powerless. It involves an enormous sleight of hand. One of the Fish! reviewers at Amazon.Com drew, as the central message of the book: "since you're being raped, you might as well enjoy it." In the bizarro world of Fish!, the rapist and the victim are equally powerless: "Gee, I sure hate doing this to you. If only there were some other way... Ah, well, at least we can both have a good attitude about it!" And to be sure, the rapist usually manages to accommodate himself to his fate.

Fish!, by sleight of hand, conceals the elephant in the living room: we're not all equally powerless in the face of circumstances. Some people *make* circumstances, and some people *adjust* to circumstances.

But take a minute to consider how strenuously Fish! pushes that theme of your powerlessness:

We can either give in to external events and pressures, few of which we can control, or we can take

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Retrieved on 4th September 2021 from mutualist.blogspot.com

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control of our own happiness. Our choices are, after all, the only things that no one can take from us in this world. [And our only “choice,” as far as these people are concerned, is whether to spit or swallow]

Many of us believe our attitudes are caused directly by outside influences like unpleasant experiences or negative people. While these things may act as triggers for our feelings, we can choose to either be subservient to these events, few of which we can control, or we can take charge of our own responses.

We can't control what happens to us, but we do have a choice about how we respond.

You can't always control what happens, but you can control how you respond.

You can't always control circumstances, but you can control your own thoughts.

To grasp just how presumptuous Fish! really is, just try a thought experiment: imagine management's reaction if the circumstances were reversed. Imagine the bosses' reaction if you and your coworkers matter-of-factly announced that, henceforth, you would be working less hard for the same amount of money, or that you would be receiving a higher hourly wage. Imagine telling the boss “you can't do anything about these events, but you can choose to have a good attitude about them!” My guess your boss would demonstrate in short order that he *does* have control over events, and that it's not *his* attitude that has to be adjusted. That's because, while *you* may be powerless, your bosses most certainly are *not*.

This asymmetrical power relationship is implicit in Fish! Philosophy. And you'd better believe that the people who push it are fully aware of their agenda. If you have any doubts of

what the agenda is, and who's pushing it, just Google “Fish! Philosophy”+“your organization.” The people who control organizations are the primary market for Fish!, and the audiences they buy it for are the “human resources” they manage.

They are the ones who *do* things. We are the ones that things are done *to*. Learn to enjoy it, or else. That's the message of Fish! Philosophy.