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When Emotion Takes Control - Of Mice and Men

When someone is acting out of emotion, they are also often irrational. This can cause problems because irrationality causes illogical decisions. Emotions can drive people to act in the wrong way. In *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck suggests that too often, one's actions are defined by emotion rather than logic or ethics. Scattered throughout the book, there are instances where characters faced ethical dilemmas but chose to act out of anger.

Curley's wife felt bad for herself. She didn't like that nobody cared about her. So, she decided to react. She walked into Candy's room, and after being asked to leave, she "turned on him in scorn. 'Listen, [Candy],' she said. 'You know what I could do to you if you open your trap?'" (80). Curley's wife decided to attack Candy because she thought that Candy would be vulnerable. She threatened to lynch him because she was emotional and couldn't think of anything better to do. But then, she realized that she and Candy had more in common than they initially realized. She cried to Lennie, "Nobody'd listen to you, an' you know it!" Candy subsided, "No... Nobody'd listen to us" (80). She realized that she was acting out of emotion, and decided to respond in a different way. She realized that they were both lonely. When angry, one can wait a period of time, and the emotions won't be as severe. They will be able to make rational decisions again.

When Lennie was imagining his dream farm, he laughed with joy. Immediately, he was criminalized and forced to face the consequences for a crime of which he did not commit. Curley shouted in anger, "What the [heck] are you laughin' at?" ... Then, Curley's rage exploded.

‘Come on, ya big [female dog]. Get up on your feet. No big son-of-a-[female dog] gonna laugh at me...” (62). Curley thought Lennie was laughing at him, but that was simply not the case. He was laughing with joy about his dream farm. But Curley didn’t understand, so he jumped to a conclusion. Thus, Lennie was beaten over a misunderstanding. “Blood welled from his nose. ‘George,’ he cried. ‘Make ‘um let me alone, George.’” (63). Lennie didn’t fight back until he had permission from George to do so. Lennie didn’t want to fight, and he didn’t mean for Curley to interpret his laughing this way. But when anger gets in the way of logic, people tend to make irrational decisions.

After Lennie killed Curley’s wife, Curley, of course, was filled with hatred for Lennie and wanted to end the killer’s life too. When Curley discovered his wife’s corpse, he shouts, “That big son-of-a-[female dog] done it! I’ll kill that son-of-a-[female dog]! I’ll shoot ‘im in the guts myself!” (96), it was clear that he was very, very angry. He threatened to kill Lennie even though he didn’t know for sure it was him. He was just so emotional that he didn’t stop to consider anyone else. And so, he decided to take action. “When you see [Lennie], don’t give ‘im no change. Shoot for his guts.” (97). Essentially, he was telling his men not to question. Lennie was “guilty until proven innocent”, though he was never going to have the opportunity to be proven innocent. Lennie was criminalized and sentenced to death without a proper investigation or a fair trial. Emotions caused Curley to act out of hatred. Curley didn’t make an ethical decision. He made an illogical one.

Scattered throughout the book, there are hints of symbolism. There are hints that gambling occurred in the bunkhouse, because “in the middle of the room stood a big square table littered with playing cards, and around it were grouped boxes for players to sit on” (18). Furthermore, bunkhouse represents the location where conflict occurs the most-- violence, cruelty, jealousy, and suspicion all arise in it. It even represents racism, because it is the place

Candy could not enter because he was different. The only other place where this much happens is in the barn. Usually, animals should feel safe in the barn. They use it for shelter. But the barn is where Lennie killed a dog and a human (Curley's wife).

When Curley's wife was irate at Candy, she was able to recover over time. Curley's indignation at being laughed at caused him a broken hand and Lennie a bloody face. And finally, Curley's resentment towards Lennie caused him to assume that Lennie was the killer, and without a fair trial, he was sentenced to capital punishment. While some would argue that Lennie was the killer, that is not the point. Lennie shouldn't have been given the death sentence on the spot, due to natural justice. But, when acting out of emotion rather than logic, one tends to make irrational decisions. So many people's lives are negatively affected because someone else couldn't control their emotions. Suicide and Murder. Imagine a world where everyone can control their emotions and make logical decisions when angry. Imagine how much better of a place it would be for all of us.