



A Grammar of Motives

Kenneth Burke

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About this book Mr. Burke contributes an introductory and summarizing remark, "What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it? An answer to that question is the subject of this book. The book is concerned with the basic forms of through which, in accordance with the nature of the world as all men necessarily experience it, are exemplified in the attributing of motives. These forms of though can be embodied profoundly or trivially, truthfully or falsely. They are equally present in systematically elaborated or metaphysical structures, in legal judgments, in poetry and fiction, in political and scientific works, in news and in bits of gossip offered at random."

A Grammar of Motives Details

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Mary says

Admittedly not my favorite work by "Kenny B." Bit too long and obtuse--even for Burke. The core of it, the pentad, is just as genius as you could expect, but there are plenty of long digressions. The appendices at the end, though, are not to be missed, especially "The Master Tropes" and his poetic criticism.

Jeremiah Henry says

Burke's Dramatism—specifically his pentad—has changed the way I think about human interaction (as reflected both by literature, drama, and "real" human motives).

Daniel Liddle says

Having read most of the main burke, this was the roughest. He was at a stage between the fun-muddle of p and c, and not quite in command as he was in r of m.

Randy Hulshizer says

Burke is very hard to read, but some of his ideas are powerful.

Brian Kubarycz says

He taught me how to read.

Michael says

Enjoyed his older stuff more — when he was more explicitly Marxist. This one dragged on too long, imho.

Wasi says

i want to read this book

B. says

Metonymy, metaphor, synecdoche and irony

Mike says

Alright, I will just say it: I never saw the big deal about dramatism. Sure, sometimes it's useful to have a heuristic to guide analysis, but I have never felt the need for it. Here's what does interest me in The Grammar:

"We began with a theory of comedy, applied to a treatise on human relations. Feeling that competitive ambition is a drastically over-developed motive in the modern world, we thought this motive might be transcended if men devoted themselves not so much to "excoriating" it as to 'appreciating' it. Accordingly, we began taking notes on the foibles and antics of what we tended to think of as 'the Human Barnyard.'"

I appreciate it as an extension of the *ad bellum purificandum* project and an extension of some of the great framing discussions in Attitudes Toward History.

Andrew says

Weighty, dense, rife with ideas, and at times utterly baffling to a non-expert. The basic premise of the book-- a "dramatistic pentad" that explains human activity in terms of rhetoric-- seems sound and useful, but when he goes into the specifics of it, I'm lost. I'm afraid the subtleties of early 20th Century constitutional law, for example, are simply not my area. I'm told some of his other writing is a bit more lucid, so maybe I should check that out.

Pete says

The cover of this book scares me. I am scared to read this book.

Liaken says

Good ideas but, like Burke in general ... pretty unreadable. A pity.
