



The Origin of Anxieties

Charles Merrett

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The Origin of Anxieties offers a fresh and revealing look at anxiety. It emphasises that anxiety is an ordinary, natural and valuable part of all of our lives; we are all interested in how things will turn out for us and so we need to anticipate any risks we face.

The book explores our everyday ways of thinking about anxiety and how these tend to be unhelpful. It argues that we have come to see ourselves primarily as biological machines that are pushed and pulled by the circumstances of our lives. This is a problem because it doesn't allow us to see the role of our thinking in making us feel anxious; we can only feel anxious when we predict something might happen that we don't want to happen (even though we may admittedly find it hard to be aware of this thinking). The book offers a number of memorable examples to illustrate how we are intimately involved in our own anxieties. These examples remind us that thinking is complex, powerful and that much of it is largely automatic or unconscious.

Most of our anxieties are not a problem. We often don't notice them because they are just part of doing difficult things. However, sometimes, we develop anxiety problems. The Origin of Anxieties shows this can happen when we are taken by surprise by our feelings or judge that we shouldn't be feeling like it. If we then also think of anxiety as something that happens to us or that is caused by events or situations we can become more and more concerned with ourselves and how bad we might feel in the future. If we take this route we can turn an episode of anxiety into an anxiety problem.

In this way the book shows how ordinary, sensible people get drawn into having anxiety problems because they have relied on society's everyday ways of thinking about anxiety. Seen from this point of view anxiety problems are not so much personal problems or failures but they are problems and failures with our society's ideas about who and what we are and its failure to recognise that we are constantly trying to make sense of our world.

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