REACTION TO MORTALITY: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE FOR THE HUMAN SCIENCES

by Daniel Liechty

Abstract. Ernest Becker's theory about death denial is one example of depth psychological theory. Because very important features of Becker's theory have now successfully and singularly met the rigorous empirical testing of Terror Management Theory (TMT), it must be concluded that the theory of death denial stands apart from and above alternative depth psychological theories in explaining human behavioral and attitudinal motivation. Nevertheless, TMT only touches the surface of Becker's theory in the round. This essay looks at how Becker's wider theories of death denial are applied to (1) personal psychological, (2) social psychological, (3) political, and (4) spiritual aspects of human experience and suggests that what Becker has given us is an organizing principle, a theory of considerable integrative, explanatory, and interpretive power, for a broadly interdisciplinary social science of human behavior.

Keywords: Ernest Becker; curriculum reform; death denial; motivation theory; psychoanalysis; social sciences; Terror Management Theory.

Trained in cultural anthropology, Ernest Becker specialized in the study of human psychological dynamics and behavioral development and their reciprocal effects on social and cultural evolution. Becker was driven by one fundamental question: "What makes people act the way they do?" Because Becker did not remain within the narrow confines of any one particular discipline, his work has not yet taken a center stage position within any one discipline. Yet, in every field of the humanities and social sciences, there are those who have been influenced by Becker's ideas, convinced that, in his suggestion that very basic contours of the individual psyche are created in confrontation with human mortality and that this same dynamic can be observed in social and cultural institutions, Becker had produced a theory of major importance. Furthermore, exactly because Becker pursued his ideas across disciplinary boundaries, he almost

Daniel Liechty is the Psychosocial Coordinator at the Montgomery Hospital Hospice Program, 334 Sagamore Road, Havertown, PA 19083.

inadvertently produced a sweeping and scholarly synthesis of anthropo-logical, sociological, psychiatric, psychoanalytic, and theological material. The acumen of Becker's work and the fruitfulness of his ideas for both interdisciplinary academic theorizing and for clinical practice is only now in the process of being widely recognized.

Human beings seem to live at a different level of self-conscious aware-ness than other animals, but, as Becker suggested, this is both a blessing and a curse. The blessing is that it has made us a very successful species. The curse is that the gift of self-consciousness sets us at odds with that most basic, natural eros, the overriding will to survive, which we share with all living things. Now that I exist, and know that I exist, and know that I know I exist, and I can freeze time and project myself imaginatively into future not-yet-existing environments, I come upon an inevitable and unavoidable realization. I am mortal, death happens to me. Do what I will to survive and continue existing, any success is short term, and sooner or later, death will win out.

According to Becker, this is the deepest root of why we act the way we do.[1] We are a species whose main survival strategy is in direct conflict with evolution's own universal Eros. It seems evolution has created a self-contradictory animal. In terms of mental abilities, humans are truly divine beings, transcendent and ethereal. In our minds we create new worlds and sit on the far side of the planets. Yet this divine and ethereal self-consciousness is entirely dependent on a weak and vulnerable physical body, which hungers, thirsts, defecates, ages, and finally dies. It dies, and knows that it dies, and it knows that it knows it dies.

Awareness of mortality is the dark side of self-consciousness, of not being a dumb animal. As far as we know, we are the only species that knows and understands the reality of death years before it happens. Some animals never seem to understand death, even as the predator pounces or the butcher's blade is poised for the kill. Other of our ani-mal siblings do seem to experience a kind of terror just prior to the mortal blow. We, on the other hand, are a species who must live with that furious terror within us, now simmering, now boiling, from that time in early childhood when we master the use of the linguistic first person until the day the death angel calls. This is the worm gnawing at the core of human existence. The nexus of desire-motivation-action in almost every human endeavor, from the mundane daily "keeping up with the neighbors" to the grand cultural creations of cathedrals and skyscrapers is tinged in various degree by the need to suppress the fact of mortality from immediate conscious awareness—to insist, as it were, either individually or as a species, that we are anything but fleeting, per-ishable, transient, insignificant specks in the universe.

This psychological anthropology is firmly rooted in both evolutionary biological science and in a transcultural constant, the universal fact of death. There is nothing mystical about this theory, nothing that demands a leap of faith in order to understand or to accept it. Rooted as it is in bio-evolutionary reality, this theory, by focusing on human behaviors as a reaction to mortality awareness, incorporates the wide spectrum of social and cultural reality in a truly nonreductive, integrated manner. Social and cultural reality are as much the meat of the theory as is bio-evolutionary reality.

Becker's ideas about human nature and motivation fall into the broad category of depth psychological theory. This type of theorizing has occupied a rather dubious place in the wider community of social scientific thought. From the early period of psychoanalysis to the present, psychotherapists have employed and developed depth psychological theories, producing a significant quantity of case studies and other clinical literature in support of various depth-psychological perspectives. This in itself is a respectable approach, especially in a medical environment where it is commonly accepted that various remedies may have therapeutic effects as well as side effects, and one can only discern truth in the particular case by administering the remedy and noting the results. This case history material, however, has always carried a strong whiff of the ad hoc and fed the suspicion among more hard-nosed scientists that such methods are a self-fulfilling enterprise. As fascinating as these depth psychological theories may or may not be, they seemed compatible with *almost any* patient scenario.

Depth psychological theories gained a reputation of being very elusive in terms of accepted, falsifiable methods of research. Depth theories that blatantly contradicted each other—paradigmatic is the original triad of Freudian, Jungian, and Adlerian theories—each produced therapy successes and failures in approximately equal numbers. Widespread suspicions about depth theories and their inability to discern differences between them were exacerbated by the fact that many of the people advocating one or another of these depth psychological theories were, if not outright uncooperative, certainly aloof and indifferent to attempts to apply more rigorous scientific testing methods to their theories. It is little wonder that social scientists in large numbers have looked elsewhere for paradigmatic theories to guide their research.

The fundamental importance of the work being carried on by Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski and their colleagues can best be seen from this background. Although scientific theories are always fallible, those that successfully withstand experimental attempts to show them false are privileged and those that fail, that are falsified, are history. What Terror Management Theory (TMT) has demonstrated is that

results predicted by hypotheses generated from Becker's theories on the relationship between mortality awareness and cultural anxiety buffers are in fact produced and reproduced in laboratory settings, and that we can discount the credibility of the leading alternative hypotheses for these results. TMT research allows us to conclude that Becker's theories are the most credible ones among the alternatives to account for these particular results in controlled experimental settings. While discerning among the various contradictory depth psychological theories until now has largely been a matter of intuition, mysticism, or personal (dis)taste, the results produced in investigation of TMT give an empirical edge to placing Becker's theories above competing theories. This suggests that, in the present situation, we are further ahead in our stumbling toward truth to interpret the worth of competing theories in terms of their relative ability to assimilate and integrate into Beckerian theory about death denial rather than vice versa.

This being said, it must also be stressed that TMT is but one aspect of Ernest Becker's entire theoretical project. No depth psychological theory is completely accessible to empirical investigation. TMT is, so to speak, the visible aspect of the depth psychological iceberg that is Beckerian theory in the round. It would be a mistake to assume that TMT, as important as it is, exhausts the Beckerian theoretical mine. It is exactly because the visible aspects of Becker's theory (which is TMT) are available for empirical investigation and have so far withstood a very sophisticated battery of empirical testing that we have solid rational grounds for paying special attention to the yet-submerged portions of the theory.

It is the thesis of the remaining sections of this essay that we find in Becker's death denial theory as a whole an organizing and integrating principle for an interdisciplinary social science of human behavior. I will briefly sketch Becker's applications of the death denial theory in four fields of human experience, fields which have been centers of social science theorizing. These are (1) the personal psychological, (2) the social psychological, (3) the political, and (4) the religious or spiritual. It is expected that the reader will consult Becker's own writings and key secondary sources for fuller treatments of these sketches.

The Personal Psychological

Freudian theory, to characterize slightly, pictures a dynamic unconscious composed of thwarted instinctual sexual and aggressive drives in conflict with the norms and values of civilization. Socialization, the process by which a personal conscience is achieved, is presented as a psychologically veiled and covert primal struggle for possession of the sexual object. The young boy (for Freud focuses on the male child) finally capitulates only in recognition of an overwhelmingly inferior position in terms of raw

physical power in relation to his enemy, the father. Defensively, the boy internalizes as his own the "socially acceptable" values and modes of behavior represented by his foe and will later insist that these are his own freely chosen values. Yet a "real self," the seething, defeated, defensive, selfish, reactive, "reptilian" antisocial character remains, somewhere under the surface of civility. It reappears in various measure depending on the circumstances and provocations.

In contrast to this view, Becker understood personal psychological development in broadly post-Freudian terms. He accepted the concept of a dynamic unconscious but downplayed the role of instinctual drives. Becker suggested that the content of the dynamic unconscious was that of symbolic distortions of childhood perceptions of the actions of parents and other caregivers. Following Alfred Adler, Otto Rank, and others, Becker focused attentiveness to original ego-weakness and ego-inferiority in the context of the infant's relationship with caregivers and the vicissitudes of the separation/individuation process. Becker pictured the individual child as naturally social, with continuing needs for security, closeness, and affection. Spurred originally by the anxiety of physical separation from caregivers, the child is increasingly motivated by the need to maintain self-esteem. Because infant needs are focused on bodily needs, the infant maintains its sense of security, closeness, and affection on a more or less physical level. As the infant matures, its needs expand to the emotional and symbolic level of facial expressions and tone of voice. As the infant becomes a small child, maintaining a sense of security, closeness, and affection becomes increasingly based less on the body and more on symbolic action. The very body-based actions that once produced smiles and laughter in caregivers no longer do so, and the child must begin to "master" its own body in order to again produce the smiles and the reassuring tone of affection in the voices of caregivers.

Thus, Becker wrote not of a psychosexual Oedipus complex but rather of a relational/existential Oedipal transition in children of both genders. The Oedipal transition is a time in which the child must learn to seek and be satisfied with continued parental involvement on a psychological and symbolic level rather than on a direct physiological level. It is a culturally specific process, the beginning of the process of socialization. The Oedipal transition describes the process by which the child is being changed from a primarily biological actor to a primarily social actor. It is transactional and does not assume an "instinctual drive" theory of development.

The Oedipal transition moves the individual right into the larger Oedipal project. The individual learns to maintain a sense of personal self-esteem in the psychological, symbolic arena, which comes only as the self takes ever more effective control of the physical body. An experienced

dualism of body and self begins to emerge. The body becomes an object in the sphere of the ego or symbolic self. The growing ability to delay reaction to bodily stimuli is the mechanism by which the symbolic self is constructed and stretches toward individuation.

The need to create separate spheres for the physical and the psychological is further necessitated by a realization that occurs relatively early in childhood in confrontation with the fact of mortality. Quite early the child learns that continued existence on the physical level is doomed to fail. Universal Eros will inevitably push the human individual toward attempts at a psychological, symbolic (not physical) conquest of death.

The chronologically first anxiety is the anxiety of physical separation from the caregiver. As the child's ability to abstract and symbolize develops, this first anxiety is displaced by the existential anxiety of mortality awareness. From that point at which the child is able to understand that caregiver separation (object loss) = inability to thrive = death, it can be assumed that death anxiety has established itself as basic to the anxieties of abandonment. This is in place by about the age of seven years in most children and may be even earlier for those who experience an existentially traumatic confrontation with death, for example, the death of a parent.

The experienced dualism of the physical arena and the arena of the symbolic self and the concomitant urge to conquer death symbolically, which emerges during the Oedipal transition, tends to define the problem of living itself. The child encounters this first as it moves to gain entrance into the adult world of symbolic meaning, but it is a life project. The Oedipal transition leads into the lifelong Oedipal project. It is characterized by ego expansion on the one hand and safe anxiety avoidance on the other.

The Social Psychological

As Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski have already well outlined the social psychological side of Becker's theories, I will not belabor it here. I note, however, that there is a logical and compelling movement from Becker's personal psychology into his social psychology. There we see the need for continued individual self-esteem maintenance carried into the social arena.

One major advance of Becker's theories over many others is that his personal and social psychologies are convincing in their own right yet also complement each other well. One is not subsumed by the other. There are several linking concepts between the sphere of the personal and the sphere of the social, but the most important is the concept of the *immortality project*. Immortality projects are personal, socio-cultural, or both. Human beings spend most of their psychic energy in the creation of symbols of immortality that promote an immediate suppression from consciousness

of the terror that arises from awareness of mortality. The mechanism for taming the terror of finitude is the creation of cultural symbols of immortality with which people can identify and through which people vicariously participate in immortality. All people want to endure and prosper and in some sense gain immortality. But knowledge of mortality condemns them to mask this fact and suppress awareness of it from consciousness. A viable culture provides what Becker called an "immortality ideology" in which people find security and protection. By giving allegiance to some external source of symbolic power, whether in the form of a particular person, a political group or movement, the standarized cultural immortality project, or abject idol worship, the anxieties of personal finitude are calmed and subdued.

In Becker's view, the symbolic self is largely linguistically (i.e., socially) constructed. The grammar by which the symbolic self maintains its sense of worth and value moves logically and compellingly into the social arena by way of the developed theory of role and status. Becker here followed particularly the formulations of G. H. Mead and E. Goffman. There is a "public logic" (socially constructed dominant ethos) that may well differ from the "private logic" of individuals making up that particular public. Social pathologies (including most of the psychoanalytic "character types") reflect individual and group strategies for encompassing the gap between public and private logic while balancing both the social need to maintain the "sanctity" of public logic and the individual need to maintain maximum self-esteem.

It is here that the social importance of Becker's concept of transference can be seen. As individuals, we are finite, mortal, weak animals. Given the choice between accepting this reality or giving themselves over to illusions of greatness and importance, which a leader imparts to followers, the mass of human beings will choose illusion over reality, lies over truth, fiction over fact. Transference describes the nature of the bond between leader and follower, between individual and group behavior. It is a bond rooted in the regressive, individual submission to "power," in the individual need to feel awe and protection by symbolic icons of power and thus deny and avoid recognition of finitude. People do not simply find themselves passively "engulfed" by such feelings toward symbolic icons of power. People actively and all-but-consciously seek such symbolic icons of powers toward which they might submit themselves, even when, perhaps in our time especially, this is done under the ideological cover of seeking independence, individuation, self-actualization, self-fulfillment, and autonomy.

The individual Oedipal project is the lifelong quest to establish independent sources for grounding ego expansion. It is finally a striving for a self-grounded ego. Yet, very few are able to establish their own meanings

(private logic as opposed to public logic) in an absolute sense, and no one is able to sustain such personal meaning over time without socially available structures of plausibility. Therefore, most people all of the time, and all people some of the time, must draw upon the established categories of culture (public logic) for a personal sense of worth and forward movement. Life is a constant movement between establishing personal meaning and seeking confirmation of that meaning from the group. The most prominent features of social life can best be understood as public striving for symbolic immortality. They are attempts to symbolically establish human worth, dignity, meaning, and significance, thus to allay the anxious, gnawing, unconscious suspicion that, in the face of the reality of mortality, human life is but fleeting, perishable, transient, insignificant, and meaningless.

THE POLITICAL

Though hardly an activist, Becker held generally progressive views for his time—he was an early voice against the Vietnam War and thought very highly of the Civil Rights movement. Yet Becker was, like Reinhold Niebuhr, no unambiguous friend to the conventional dichotomous politics of either left or right, liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican. He saw that all political movements of whatever stripe gain power by fostering transference reactions of their constituencies, the utopian desire to participate in that which is essentially an immortality project and thus to allay individual anxieties of insignificance. In that sense, all political movements engage to one extent or another in mesmerization and sleight of hand, since none can actually produce the implied utopia of its immortality ideology. On the other hand, some political movements are less prone to deception than others, and some political movements exact a greater pound of flesh from adherents and the movements' opposition than others.

Becker drew directly from his philosophical anthropology in support of what we might call an ideal/real theory of democracy, which he defined briefly as a state in which each person strives to achieve maximum individuality within maximum community. In critical service of this ideal is the quest to provide a synthesis of knowledge leading to better solutions to the recurring problems of community, social morality, and an ordered but free society. Becker was cognizant of the fact that, as a buffer against anxiety, human beings will always be prone to falling in line behind leaders who project an image that makes them adequate transference objects.

A fully "socialized" adult human being in most societies is one who accepts authority in place of trial-and-error learning and distrusts his or her own independent judgments if they conflict with those of authorities.

In Becker's view, modern liberal democracy at its best has been an experiment to see if the cycle creating this type of socialization can be broken or seriously modified. It is a radical social experiment, especially when viewed against the backdrop of European monarchies and aristocracies, systems in which it was anything but self-evident that all people are created equal. It is an experiment to test whether a conceptual construct, self-governing human freedom, can itself function as a transference object adequate to hold a free and diverse people together in unity. Contrary to what many history books teach, however, this is not an event accomplished in 1776 or 1792 but rather an ongoing experiment, the results of which are not yet in.

This experiment is of itself a heroic endeavor in which it is expected and even encouraged by the state (in the form of protection of minority rights) that individuals will participate in multiple interlinking spheres of heroic meaning that may be quite contrary to aggrandizement of the state (the state as "highest good"). At the same time, all people would share in at least one heroism together, the heroism of participation in the democratic experiment itself. This sense of personal and social heroism is the force that imparts to this diverse and multicultural population the sense of mutual respect for each other as free and equal citizens and effectively curbs the urge to pursue naked self-interest at the expense of the commonweal. Much of the social malaise that many people feel in America today stems from the fact that as a nation we have largely lost the sense of personal and social heroism we enjoy as participants in this experiment. We therefore run in all directions willy-nilly seeking that sense of heroism that is already ours by heritage, even while the democracy itself falters.

In the ideal/real democracy, leaders emerge from the people and change often enough that there is minimal opportunity for continued demagoguery. People learn to trust their own independent judgments, and this self-trust is fostered and encouraged by the state itself. The state, both by strategic active intervention and by strategically keeping out of the way, becomes a mechanism for encouraging progressive social change.

This use of state power for what is actually the abolition of a powerful state is indeed a fragile experiment and is easily driven off course. In America this experiment has been significantly derailed by an assumption that took hold in the late nineteenth century, an assumption by which for all practical purpose the political system of liberal democracy and the economic system of free market capitalism were totally fused. This significantly narrowed the scope of heroic pursuits supported by the "public logic" of the society and focused social power and effort on one main social project, that of material accumulation and consumption. The

relative merit of all social institutions, as is confirmed by even a cursory look at the debates surrounding (as one example) current educational policy, is then judged by how well they contribute to this one social project.

Becker suggested that a unified educational curriculum might be the way to get our democratic experiment back on track. Recognizing that it is impossible to define what is good to the satisfaction of all, Becker counseled that at least we might find agreement in defining what is bad for human beings. This would be anything that stands in the way of full human development, of achieving maximum individuality within maximum community. Becker subsumed the bad under the umbrella category of "alienation." He proposed that we examine the possibility of using the concept of an "alienation curriculum" as a unifying force for education and learning. A general theory of alienation is an explanation for the evil in the world that is caused by human-made arrangements. It therefore points out those evils that could be ameliorated by human effort. Becker sometimes called this larger social scientific project "anthropodicy" and sometimes referred to it as a "unified science of man[kind]," a dynamic, inductive description of human values that evolves and is revised in response to the concerns of each generation as new aspects of human alienation are recognized.

In each field of human life students would learn the ways in which various institutions and forces work against full human development. Alienation studies would focus on psychology, psychiatry, sociology, comparative politics, and economics; students would learn for themselves the ways in which symbolic meanings are created and manipulated. Biological, ecological, and other natural science studies would focus on alienation from nature and our place in natural systems. Humanities would focus on the portraits of alienation in history and literature. Philosophical and theological studies would focus on the metaphysical aspects of alienation. All subject areas, even pure physics and mathematics, would have something to contribute to our expanding knowledge of the nature and sources of human alienation.

In service of a revival of what he took to be the true spirit of liberal democracy, Becker suggested that a unified theory of alienation could become the single unifying principle for our whole curriculum and the foundation for a genuine synthesis of knowledge. Education would seek to show students the history of alienation in their personal life development, how alienation arises as a result of the law of individual development. It would seek to show the history of alienation in society, how alienation arises as a result of the workings of society and the evolution of society in history. And finally, it would seek to show the total problem of alienation under the conditions of existence, how evil arises as a result of the very conditions of life, which are finitude and mortality.

Becker characterized the educational system in the ideal/real democracy as a "great conversation" carried on by a community of scientist-scholar-investigators. This also was his basic description of an ideal social existence in the ideal/real democratic state, in which the expansion of maximum individuality within maximum community would itself serve as the socio-cultural immortality project—the only kind of immortality project that by its nature would not displace freedom with servitude in the process of achieving its actualization.

THE RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL

Using the human reaction to mortality as an interdisciplinary organizing principle fosters a perspective in which the religious or spiritual aspect of human experience is given a place of full integrity beside other fields of experience. From this perspective there is no need to deny the reality of the religious and spiritual experience, to bracket it out as something less important than other fields of experience, nor to treat this field of experience reductively. There is also no need to privilege this type of experience. What it does encourage is our appreciation of this field of human experience for what it contributes to our expanding knowledge of the human situation.

One of the main points Becker makes in this regard is that, because all personal and cultural immortality projects, strategies, and ideologies function to allay the terror of mortality, finitude, insignificance, and nothingness, in a very real sense all of these are "religious" to the core. Because these are directly employed to help us confront the mysteries of life and death, of mortality and immortality, any such strategy is, in the broadest sense of the term, deeply religious in character. We may speak of a distinction between secular and religious strategies on the social level, but on the psychological level, all strategies are deeply religious. Religious faith is the strong and inevitable human response to mortality awareness and is manifested as containing individual, communal, and cultural aspects.

Becker follows Søren Kierkegaard and Paul Tillich especially for a positive understanding of the nature of the spiritual and the sacred. The concept of a Creator God is obviously our ultimate transference object. It is only in this Creator God that we have real hope of transcendence over the terror of mortality. It is only by living for this Creator God that our lives gain significance, meaning, and value in a world of suffering and pain, a world in which death finally rules. In this world, any sense of significance— meaning and value—of transcendence over the terror of mortality must be received only as gifts of the Creator God. Our salvation can come only by the free graciousness of the Creator God and can only be accepted on our part as an act of total faith.

Here we see that wittingly or unwittingly, speaking the voice of the Hebrew prophet, Becker stepped directly into the thicket of postmodern theological debate. For the very Creator God who is able to act as the ultimate transference object as Becker outlined it—who bestows human freedom but does not aggress against human freedom in reciprocal expectation—is an ideal/real aesthetic construction. This construction of the Creator God always stands "ahead" of human history, calling humanity toward new achievements of maximum individuality within maximum community. This is a God who cannot be pinned down in terms of divine nature and attributes or ever be known exhaustively. This is a God of whom no "graven image" can be made. For as soon as individuals or communities assume that they have this God pinned down, that they know this God exhaustively, what they have is an idol, a human-made god, the service of which will sooner or later demand the displacement of human freedom with servitude.

Because in all cultural immortality ideologies people seek protection from their own mortality, from that which they perceive in themselves as ultimate powerlessness, humanity has always been drawn to figures and ideologies that seem to possess and offer power, for power suggests the possibility of victory over ultimate powerlessness. Thus we see that Becker's theory also helps to account for the "dark" side of human spiritual, mystical experience—the fascination with violence, the attraction to blood rituals of sacrifice, the worship of symbols of wealth, the need of religions for reverence and servitude, and the attraction to the awfulness of raw, amoral power. As we are becoming only too aware, this dark side of human religious and spiritual experiences persists and even flourishes in conditions of modernity, long after their "irrational" nature has been exposed. It turns out that this very irrationality is central to the attraction.

Human spirituality is presented in Becker's theory in a very real sense as the age-old struggle with idolatry. The God that acts as ultimate transference object cannot be materialized, cannot be possessed, cannot even be "with us" in history, but rather stands before us as an aesthetic ideal/real construction. Faith in this God must entail the endurance of some level of anxiety. On the other hand, there are those gods that can be materialized, possessed, known exhaustively, located in time and space, and that seem to offer power for anxiety-free living. Only too late we learn that servitude to such gods eventually brings about a sacrifice and displacement of human freedom and creative expansion. Human spirituality consists exactly in the possibility that we may choose on a daily basis which god we will serve.

CONCLUSION

Although this presentation of the broader scope of Becker's ideas has been necessarily sketchy, I hope to have shown the positive value of his central thesis. By using the human reaction to mortality as an interdisciplinary organizing principle for a unified social science, we are able to account for much of human motivation and behavior in at least four large fields of experience. It allows us to do so such that each field is treated autonomously and with integrity, without ignoring any field and without collapsing all fields into one. The results of investigation in TMT strongly suggest that Becker's theories now stand apart from other examples of depth psychological theorizing in terms of their scientific value and significance. Important aspects of his theories have been tested using established, sophisticated, empirical methods, and the results have been demonstrated to be reliable, predictive, and repeatable across a spectrum of research teams, age groups, and nationalities. While such research cannot prove his theories infallibly, it has shown that among a field of alternative theories, Becker's best account for the demonstrated research results.

Becker's own theories would warn us against ideological "grand narrative" approaches to human knowledge. This is not what Becker advocated and certainly not what is being advocated here. However, even as a pendulum reaches its apex in one direction, its forces are being gathered for a return swing in the opposite direction. If we be near the apex of a trend emphasizing the deconstruction and tribalization of knowledge, we can expect that forces are gathering for a swing back in the other direction, toward the integration of knowledge. Historically, such integration has taken place on the basis of the very sort of ideological grand narratives toward which we currently direct blanket suspicion. My suggestion is that in Becker's theories we may find a significant way forward toward a respectful, unified, interdisciplinary integration that does not simply steamroll distinction and difference. This should be of special regard to those who have an expressed interest in the points of intersection between the studies of science and religion.

NOTE

1.   Most of my generalizations about Becker's thought refer to his entire body of work, which develops these same ideas in various ways. The reader is referred especially to Becker 1971, 1973, and 1975. The student of Becker may also pursue these ideas in more detail through abstracts of Becker's complete writings, presented in Liechty 1996. This resource is available from the Becker Foundation, 3621 Seventy-second Avenue SE, Mercer Island, WA 98040; phone 206/232-2994; e-mail: <nelgee@u.washington.edu>; web page: http: //weber.u.washington.edu/~nelgee/

See also the annotated bibliography of works by and about Becker on pages 87–90 of this issue of *Zygon*.

REFERENCES

Becker, Ernest.   1971.   *The Birth and Death of Meaning*. 2d ed. New York: Free Press.
_____.   1973   *The Denial of Death*. New York: Free Press.
_____.   1975.   *Escape from Evil*. New York: Free Press.
Liechty, Daniel.   1996.   "Abstracts of the Complete Writings of Ernest Becker (1924–1974)." Mercer Island, Wash.: The Ernest Becker Foundation.