

THE REBIRTH OF MEANING: A HUMAN PROBLEM

by Frederick Sontag

Abstract. With the rise of the social sciences, it was expected they would replace philosophy in solving practical problems and improving the human condition. Ernest Becker's *The Birth and Death of Meaning* describes this project to cure humankind, but also points out the failures along the way. Nonetheless, a new psychology, based on a final science of humanity, still can accomplish this task. While Becker admits an incurable religious tendency in human nature, he counts on its being satisfied through a "new heroism." However, in light of past failures, it is worthwhile taking another look at religion as a source for "the rebirth of meaning."

With the rise of the social sciences came a tendency to think that philosophy would never again be involved in the healing of human beings or have much concern with the practical problems of people. Before the split into the division of academic fields we have today, philosophy had been thought of as a source of help. Epicurus said: "Vain are the words of the philosopher which heals no suffering of man."¹ We know the followers of Plotinus lived together in a community and thought that following his guidance provided an avenue of escape from life's problems. Philosophy was identified with the life of the church in the Middle Ages, which made its practical application an assured fact. But with the coming of the Modern Age and the rise of science all this changed. The social sciences now are expected to deal with the human situation in a new and improved way assuring us greater success in improving the human condition. Sigmund Freud and modern psychiatry are part of this trend, although pragmatism and existentialism are more recent movements attempting to restore philosophy's practical application.

HAVE THE SOCIAL SCIENCES REPLACED PHILOSOPHY?

If we want to appraise the success of the social sciences in their effort to take the guidance of humankind away from philosophy, Ernest

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Becker, in his book *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, gives us a good account of the project to cure humankind.² However, Becker alters the early hope for a “pure” social science by reintroducing philosophy into the picture. He has admitted that philosophy could not be dispensed with as once was hoped; it is still needed to provide our understanding of humanity. However, in another sense Becker is still an unreconstructed modernist. He is convinced the social sciences have produced the basis on which all reform and renewal must rest: “We are today in possession of an excellent general theory of human nature . . .” as a result of the work of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and psychiatry. The clue to Becker’s optimism is that he thinks we no longer are trapped in the age-old situation of humanity, because we are the only species in the universe that has “pushed self-exposure to such an advanced point that we are no longer a secret to ourselves” (p. viii). Echoing the original revolutionary cry of the social sciences, Becker believes we are now in a position to free ourselves. “We are in possession of a mature scientific psychology that . . . is the most powerful critical weapon that we have for the potential freeing of men” (p. ix).

Although Becker’s statement is filled with modern optimism, the interesting fact is he rejects a “rosy view” of human nature. He stresses our darker side and recognizes both human evil and viciousness. In this sense, his assessment of the human condition is not far from traditional religious views based on a doctrine of original sin. In this respect he differs from the Enlightenment thinkers who viewed the doctrine of sin as a major obstacle to reform, and for this reason theology had to be rejected. In spite of our human bondage, Becker is optimistic about our ability to raise ourselves up with the aid of our new science. God is no longer to be held responsible for our condition but rather society is substituted as a responsible villain. Thus, if we can change society we can change ourselves. Jean Jacques Rousseau was wrong only in that he thought the task of reform was easy.

We can now complete the task of the Enlightenment period, and Becker’s mission is to urge us to do so as quickly as possible. Erich Fromm and Otto Rank are Becker’s heroes in this campaign. True, our subject is humanity, which is full of more frustrating complexity than Enlightenment thinkers dreamed possible. Like God, who grew more puzzling as the medieval philosophical-theologians approached him, humanity has proved to be more baffling than the early moderns thought the further the search was carried out. The difference is that the study of God’s ways of thought is a “learned ignorance”; studying divinity brings us not to a solution but to the depths of an abyss. Modern psychology, on the other hand, has aimed to complete the task once thought impossible. “Man becomes man in a total celebra-

tion of himself," said Becker long before the age of narcissism was exposed (p.4).

Becker plots a "story of man" tracing our development from ape to humanist. Finally, this reaches the highest kind of activity—"symbolic behavior" (p. 6). With language and thought we have learned how to act in a massively unpredictable environment; this is our "coming of age" (p. 12). The phylogenic account of human development which Becker gives seems to him to be true and also the key to the understanding and control that will give us the power to release ourselves. Speech symbolizes for him everything we call human (p. 80). Our major distinction as animals is that we are the only ones who are self-reflective. In opposition to the theory of behaviorism Becker stresses the reality of the inner world, and he thinks we now understand it well enough to control our inner life, whereas the behaviorists have thought we could only modify behavior if every action were made outer and thus observable.

Yet, Becker is convinced we must pay for our favorable position in nature by constantly being prone to anxiety. Our ability to withstand falling into anxiety Becker labels as "heroic." His form of ideal behavior is to be free from anxiety, but to do this we have to pay a heavy price—restrict our experience (p. 55). Thus we cannot be humanized without developing neuroses. This vulnerability we should not deny but should stress, because the feeling of guilt is natural to the human condition, a view which connects Becker more to the Middle Ages than to the Modern Age.

We exchange a natural or animal sense of basic worth for a contrived or symbolic one. This is unavoidable if we wish to exploit our humanness, but it also makes us vulnerable to self-condemnation. When people do not have self-esteem, they cannot act and they break down (p. 75). Therefore, creating self-esteem is Becker's avenue to achieve human salvation; each-man-a-hero is Becker's solution. However, in contrast to Freud, he does not think society forces neuroses upon us but rather society is the very vehicle for heroism (p. 78). Here lies the root of Becker's optimism: culture does not inhibit but releases us. If fully developed, cultural life is our salvation. True, some systems hold us in bondage, but now that we understand our human goal there is no reason why they should do so. We need a positive self-valuation if we are to act heroically, and society makes or breaks that. As Jean-Paul Sartre said, now we alone create meaning in existence; we must find it for ourselves.

Culture's job is to construct a "meaningful hero system" for its members; that is the key to our newly opened pathway to escape our age-old bondage (p. 118). Yet, achieving Becker's goal does depend on doing away with any sense of an invisible world. We must agree that

all real experience exists on the level of the visible world alone (p. 120). If it does not, Becker believes, we may continue to fear an unknown and become restless heroes. In order to gain control of all human nature for ourselves, we must postulate that what is visible is all that is real and that it can be controlled by us. He thinks modern westerners already have lost all belief in spiritual causality, which if so would enable us to forget transcendence and apply all our effort to manipulate the visible world (p. 120). Is this true: do we have the sufficiently uniform common human agreement on this issue, so that on it we can base our salvation from anxiety? Of course, we do have to eliminate fiction from our hero systems since, as Becker realizes, many beliefs in the past have borne little relation to observable fact. For some reason he thinks those days are now behind us forever.

Human freedom is a fabricated freedom, and it is delicate and fragile for just that reason. We need to become disillusioned: it removes the veil between us and reality and allows us to see our fate full face. Becker thinks our uniqueness, which also is the basis of his optimism for our time, rests on the fact that at last we stand face-to-face with reality. All who have gone before us have seen only a veiled reality; we see it as it is. Human meaning is fictional, and we must accept that despair and the death of meaning are carried by man in the basic condition of his humanity (pp. 140-41). This death of meaning is what Becker finds as the core of the human problem; this is what must be overcome in order to achieve self-salvation. We can face it and overcome it "by being a cosmic hero" (p. 141). Friedrich Nietzsche thinks the heroes in society are few and far between; such a role is only for the superhumanly strong. However, Becker postulates a world built on the possibility of "every-man-a-hero"; we all can achieve this by contributing to world life, even though one day we will die.

A person's character is a defense against impotence and the threat of madness (p. 144). Søren Kierkegaard believed this and turned to God. Becker postulates the same human dilemma, but he calls us to turn to ourselves and to the culture we create. The question is: can we self-create? What is the source for Becker's trust that we can do so? "This is the whole promise of modern science, that it would finally banish illusion" (p. 157). Hence, the two great sciences of sociology and psychology arose in the nineteenth century to fulfill the Enlightenment promise to establish interrelationships in the physical but also and especially in the social and personal world. Why, then, is the burden of illusion so much still upon us? Becker thinks the answer is a twentieth-century discovery: We had to find out scientifically "what caused people not to be able to see the true interrelationship of

things" (p. 157), and Becker believes that is precisely what modern psychology has discovered.

"The thing that prevents whole societies from seeing reality is the fictional nature of their hero systems" (p. 138). The aim of the social sciences is to come to grips with the fictions that constrain human freedom. In this Becker has found the source of our release: "The findings of a mature psychology support the ideal of democratic man and reveal to him the causes of his failure" (p. 163). This knowledge shall make us free, open, and an adaptable people. In theological terms, this theory is a modern gnosticism based on a confidence in the social sciences. Of course, the new Garden of Eden offered to us depends for its fulfillment on eliminating any fatal flaws in human nature, and Becker is romantically optimistic on this point: "There is no inherent evil in man that would subvert the ideal of democracy" (p. 174). Of course, his scheme will not work unless we can rid ourselves of those faults which have fatally infected every good plan ever devised. However, Becker feels that the empirical data of psychology tells us it is logical to pursue the ideal of democracy now that humankind has come of age scientifically.

If we follow Becker, we see religion and science both agreeing that what is needed is a change in the basic structure of humans. The only difference is that science now claims to hold the key we need to accomplish this. Culture imposes restraints on humanity, but even the vast numbers who once followed religion were not sufficient to change humankind as a whole. Becker agrees with Karl Marx on this point. Large masses of people will have to turn from narrowness and illusion if whole societies are to be transformed; individual transformation is not sufficient. A second breakthrough in education is needed. Evil, Becker believes, stems not from humanity's wickedness but "from the way he was conditioned to see the world and to seek satisfaction in it" (p. 185). If this is true, we should be able to control ourselves now. We have always known we could change a few people. The meager success of religion shows us that the issue is whether we can change whole societies by design. If we are to do this, each individual must put his self-esteem under his own control: "The person has to learn to derive his self-esteem more from within himself and less from the opinions of others" (p. 192). As Eve said of the snake as she protested her innocence to God, our flaws still come upon us from outside, not from within.

Unfortunately, being self-conscious involves a tendency to despair. This stems partly from our unrelievable fear of death, Becker admits, and must be overcome, as religion also has preached. The difference is that Becker thinks we can now be taught to overcome our despair

on our own. To accomplish this he proposes to create a new human religion, one under our own control that offers the ideal "of what man might become by assuming the burden of his life" (p. 198). In a scientific age, human beings must move ahead under their own strength. We have not been able to do this before on a scale sufficient to alter the human condition itself. How can we hope to do so now? Becker's faith rests on his belief that we have achieved a final self-understanding and have found a way to control or eliminate evil. At this point he sounds amazingly like Marx, who also claims the support of science, except that Becker is the child of the Enlightenment and counts on education and on new cultural attitudes to accomplish the needed mass change. Both Marx and Becker count on the universal acceptance of some one theory, which they are sure science can provide.

The fascinating thing about Becker's confidence in mankind's future is he freely admits that, to date, we have failed to establish "a new science of man." "We have made no substantial advance in solving the basic dilemmas of social science since its founding in the last century" he writes in a later book,³ and he believes that even the idea of forming a science of man is utopian by nature. Any form of Enlightenment utopianism is just not possible: "We cannot bring into being a world in which sanity can unchallengeably reign and in which self-expansive human pleasure can be assured for the masses of men" (p. x)—which was Becker's hope in his earlier books. He does not trust violent revolutions, as Marx does, because force simply leads to a centralized statism that crushes the human spirit. Yet we still must believe in the utopian ideal, even if it does not achieve the hoped-for great community of the human species, it may stop chaos.

"The best we can hope for is to avoid the death and decay of mankind," he concludes in a more subdued tone (p. xi). The modest task of this "utopian holding action" is to sustain humans in the face of overwhelming and unmanageable forces—an altered goal that brings Becker self-admittedly into line with the great Judeo-Christian and Eastern philosophies. Thus in a stroke he has radically altered, if not abandoned, the revolutionary task of the social sciences. Sociology as well as the Protestant Social Gospel was born out of the anguish of asking how to remedy the evils of the new industrial society. Today science is quiet and objective, but sociology began with a sense of human urgency. The tragedy is that, in order to become a legitimate science, sociology had to renounce its revolutionary ambition to alter the state of humanity.

"The story of the discipline of sociology in America is the story of the triumph of science over a vision" (p. 29). This vision was to bring about the union of science and ethics, and it has haunted us the last

two hundred and fifty years, producing Marxism as one result. The advocates of the new science revolted against the jurisdiction of the church over humanity, but what authority were they able to substitute? Rationalism as a philosophy proposed to overcome the pain and unhappiness of life right here on earth; its followers needed a secular morality that all people of good will could agree upon. But is there such a thing? Evil has to be taken away from theology and placed in the hands of science; yet, if we are to do this, a new unified vision for humanity must be found. Marx's economic view of humanity is too narrow; instead Becker believes he can take in all of art, culture, and even religion and still find the needed unified vision. The question is: "How could the sciences themselves supply a unitary vision to replace the lost medieval one?" (p. 35).

Becker does not scorn the unity of the Middle Ages; he views such unity as a necessity to form any ideal society. However, the new society must be guided by a unified scientific view of humanity. Is it the social system itself, not human nature, that causes evil? If so, that can be altered and controlled. The life-meanings that move us are symbolically contrived. If we all come to recognize this, we can learn the formula and thus create the meaning needed for life, since according to Becker's account it never was given from heaven. Yet he admits the rise of anthropology has stressed the diversity of the human species, not its unity. No one theory simply arises from the data before us, so the problem becomes one of explaining our differences, which anthropology set out to catalogue in all their variety. Once we have realized this, a moral crisis is at hand. Becker laments: "The medieval worldview had loosened its hold on society, and now there was nothing to replace it" (p. 116).

Our goal is to provide a new system of morality, but Becker admits this cannot be done unless "you have a unification of the various sciences into a single scheme" (p. 116). Otherwise, in science as in life, all is disjointed. True, but except for wishing, what is the evidence that such unity will emerge? Except for our hope that there is one, does the variety in most societies give us ground to expect that one set of laws can be found? Becker admits that a great deal depends on how much we want to use social science to instigate deep-going social change. If you want to do this, you first have to believe in the ideal of a unified and agreed scientific law (p. 136). Ironically, this does not sound much different than the medieval church's demand for belief as a prior condition for salvation.

History will not support our social ideals, Becker concedes, and general empirical law is subject to many exceptions as well. We first must "accept a certain moral and critical stance toward present conditions" (p. 137), but what guarantees that this "moral and critical

stance" will be for all of us? Can this outlook become uniform and instigate massive change any more than the religions of the world have been able to unite us? Becker opts for Rousseau's moral-organizing principle (p. 139), but what leads him to believe any significant number of people will make the same leap of faith? We need, Becker repeats, a secular moral code that answers the problem of the origin of evil in society. Yet what has he told us about the history of the social sciences (they have failed to accomplish this to date) that would lead us to expect the emerging of such a universally acceptable account? It would seem the result will be various forms of individualism and, unlike Marx, Becker is suspicious of all forms of state control and so cannot opt for that avenue to create uniformity in society.

Becker's most crucial assumption is that "man is born pliable and natural and is shaped by his society" (p. 151). If this is true, it offers us one basis for hope. However, what leads him to think humans are that pliable, except that many have been taught to accept this as a basic premise? If we need a new myth for the meaning of life, what makes us think it lies in our power to create it? Becker admits his vision is a dream, but all he says is he cannot do without it; more precisely, he does not seem to know any other way to achieve a restored mankind except to hang on to the Enlightenment vision, even after he has documented its continual failure. It is as if he had reached the end of his analysis and found that no evolution has really taken place, but, because he has become so used to the idea that progress is possible, he cannot abandon what seems like his last best hope. He is correct to say the human problem is the rebirth of meaning, but where are we to go after Becker's devastating critique of the Enlightenment hopes and our realization of what has or has not come from them?

CAN THEOLOGY PROVIDE A RENEWED SOURCE OF MEANING?

If the vision of what the social sciences might do has failed to materialize, and if we cannot join Marx in his optimism about the power of revolution and a new state to produce fundamental change, then what options are open to us? Psychiatry as a science hoped to produce massive social change by working individually, but Freud thought it could accomplish this goal only on the basis of an agreed theory; similar to his view discussed above, Becker does not think this optimism has proved justified either. One option always open for us is to return to religion, and there is some evidence this is occurring. Another is the quiet cynicism of despair into which many have slipped. Also, we can return to individualism and find meaning in groups of two or more, but promoting individual change actually thwarts the

goal of massive social alteration. Then, there are those descendants of G. W. F. Hegel who see art and aesthetics as a road to salvation, but if we put too great a burden on aesthetic experience to create meaning for our lives, we may strain art beyond the limits of credibility.

By way of an alternative, let us re-explore the theological dimension. The Enlightenment, and those who objected to religion's dominance as a provider of human meaning, did so primarily on two grounds: (1) the view of God involved was stultifying to human freedom and so thwarted the development of man's potential; and (2) science had placed in our hands tools which allow a more rapid and complete change in the human condition on a mass scale than any religion had accomplished. We are essentially face-to-face with a modern Prometheus. Science gave us new and powerful tools which allows us to break the locks and wrest power from the gods permanently. We wanted to control our own destiny, not just for a time and for a few, but into the indefinite future and for us all. We know that this was not possible in the past, so only the belief that we had entered an entirely new age could inspire such confidence for the future.

As to the first objection, it is true the Christian God has been thought of primarily as omnipotent and omniscient, thus requiring the eclipse of human freedom. In our struggle to be free in the modern world, it appeared God must be eliminated if we were to gain our liberty, or so Sartre seemed to think. Not all have felt that, but many have, particularly those who were enamored of the possibilities latent in the new sciences. The conflict between science and religion often has centered around the question of setting us free to govern our own future. The revolutionaries who based their hope on the social sciences recognized that in past ages a stable God provided the meaning needed for human significance, but they have been confident their new powers could provide synthetic substitutes. Meaning as well as freedom had to pass over into our control. Once free of God's domination, the human spirit could create its own meaning, we have thought.

If God is banished as a source of meaning in life because he is too deterministic, could the Gods return if they were pluralistic rather than monolithic and if they embodied human indeterminacy rather than opposed to it? Looking over the history of theology, the notion that there is a single view of God's nature appeared late on the scene. It is an oversimplification and seems more the work of human desire than divine dictate. Thus, if we redraw the model of the divine to reflect the variety actually found in religious history, and if we introduce contingencies into the divine life itself, then there is no reason to deny God's existence in order to be free. In fact, it is quite possible such a view of divinity will stimulate self-reliance rather than hinder

it, since our freedom would now be modeled on God's own. We cannot accept some single, inherited notion of God without criticism. The flexibility we locate within God's nature encourages us to establish our own form of stability.

In regard to the second objection to religion, the power science has unleashed, we need to look at where the sciences stand today and how the community of scientists conceives of its task. There is little evidence that contemporary scientists think of themselves as about to reach a final theory and gain complete acceptance for it. Thus, whatever science has accomplished, it has not united behind one theory and seems less likely to do so as the advance of science continues. Science has produced technology and new discoveries but not a unified theory of humanity. Further, human values now seem to be held less in common but instead seem to be spread to a much greater diversity. The more sophisticated the science, the more it is content to throw off the grandiose plans to reconstruct social consciousness demanded by reformers such as Marx and Freud.

Two factors should concern us if theology is to return as a source of human meaning. First, our picture of the divine must not restrict human potential or arbitrarily limit human freedom. The divinity we encounter must be a God at home with contingency and willing to restrict his own powers, at least temporarily, to allow human beings to work out their own indeterminacy. Neither omnipotence and omniscience need be abandoned, as some have proposed, but they must be reinterpreted. God may still be perfect, but the notion of perfection cannot be identified with the idea of completion and actuality as it was by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Divinity can be redrawn in new images rather than abandoned. Of course, some notions of human freedom which call for the denial of God, such as Sartre's, probably are too extreme and themselves need revision. We have not vindicated the confidence we thought we could place in ourselves if only we could gain unrestricted freedom.

The other factor which must be considered if theology is to be a renewed source of human meaning is our view of science. Looking back, it is clear there never was one view of science, for which some had hoped so that philosophy and theology could become obsolete. The issue at stake is whether science, however conceived, is sufficient as a producer and guardian of human meaning. Many have argued that science is the primary source of human meaning in the modern world, but a glance at the development of science shows it has retreated from that role rather than asserted it. Yet, even if the social sciences, instead of the natural or physical sciences, still hold to that claim, we nevertheless face a lack of unity among them. This cannot be if science is to be our provider of meaning. Still, in one theory or in

one specific science, individuals may find meaning for their lives, but to approach science in this way leads to the very individualism and lack of unity which the new science found so unacceptable and limiting in religion.

Can a new vision of the divine as the source of human freedom, plus a reinterpretation of the view of science that eliminated God as the provider of meaning in the name of human progress, allow the Gods to return from exile? Of course, the Gods have only been missing in certain philosophical and scientific circles, from whence they were banished in the name of creating a new society. Divinities have been living underground or with the people, and they re-emerge about as often as they are banished by decree. However, the absence of divinity in intellectual circles is not unimportant, for whenever the Gods are in disrepute with the intelligentsia we have a split life. We may feel their power, and yet we are half afraid to admit it for fear of being laughed out of respectability.

For this reason it is important that the return of the Gods be intellectually respectable and accompanied by new theologies which do not simply repeat old tales. When the nature of divinity was thought to be fixed and static, a "perennial theology" was appropriate; but if the modern world has set the Gods free at the same time that it freed us humans from religion, even if it did not intend to do so, a rapid change in theological conceptions is not strange but is to be expected. This makes the life of religion less comfortable than it might be if theology remained fixed. To stress freedom in the life of religion offers just as much challenge as the modern world claimed would appear if we banned religion. If for a time we sought to enhance human meaning by freeing humanity from religion and its Gods, it is an interesting twist of fate that, when science fails to produce the rebirth of meaning, the rebirth of meaning should prove quite compatible with the return of theology. New conceptions of divinity breed new challenges to human minds. Evidently meaning can be reborn in human life in more ways than the new sciences thought possible in the excitement of their early years.

METAPHYSICS AS THE PROVIDER OF MEANING IN HUMAN LIFE

Becker's astute analysis of the rise of the social sciences (and their goal to replace philosophy and cure mankind) indicates the project was not assumptionless. The project was based on its own finalized metaphysics, which has not proved exclusively true. Becker thinks the human revolution can still be accomplished by adopting a uniform science of man, which he sees emerging at last. However, if this is not taking place, we must suspect that all human meaning is "metaphysi-

cally dependent." That is, significance is only given to human life if one vision of the world or another is accepted for a time and draws energy from those who adopt it. The only problem is that the reformers in the social sciences, and Becker also in a more sophisticated way, think this source of meaning can be given in one final form and thus can provide a stability metaphysics cannot offer.

However, if such unity is not achievable and plurality remains, the discipline of metaphysics returns as "our basic science." Here we outline and compare our first principles with no assumption that one view of reality will come to embrace all others. Of course, on this score Hegel believes (along with social reformers) that a particular metaphysics, "the metaphysics of process," reveals reality progressively and cumulatively, that is, not all metaphysics are plurally based. However, if we want a metaphysics to sustain meaning in social reality, we must decide the nature of metaphysics first. In doing so we cannot yield the decision to Hegel's view or to any other theory without a prior comparative study, which means we must spread out all the classical and contemporary options before us. As long as alternatives remain, we know human meaning and our vision of social reality can never be one. We also know that the rebirth of human meaning depends not on the physical sciences or even the social sciences, but on our willingness to keep metaphysics alive as a fundamental human enterprise.

Concerning our suggestion in the preceding section of this essay about the restored role of theology, we also know our conception of divinity (if we seek to provide meaning from that source) is metaphysically dependent. There is not and really never was only one view of the divine nature, which means no contemporary suggestion can prove entirely adequate. In sacred scripture God has been reported to say many things, some strange, some profound, but never has the divine given an endorsement of one metaphysics as adequate and final for the description of the divine life. Plurality may be necessary where divinity is concerned, which means no rest in our quest for meaning. If this is so, I suggest that "rest" may not be as prime a divine attribute as Aristotle hoped to make it.

If theology is subject also to such theoretical instability and lack of finality, how can it support human meaning and establish social reality, much less give final authority to religion? Evidently, human meaning does not require finality in theory, and social reality also can support human endeavors without demanding uniformity in theory. True, since we are humans with inescapable fears, we are involved in a proneness to sin which Becker finds to be indigenous in us. Wars and the vicious attacks which one political or religious group makes upon another will go on. Perhaps this destructive conflict is induced by our frantic effort to use force to overcome human instability. The social

reformers hoped to end this mutually destructive human conflict once and for all. But perhaps the history of metaphysics tells us that reconstruction is constantly necessary, given the fragile nature of all human meaning and of every social reality.

NOTES

1. Epicurus *Fragments* 59.
2. Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, 2nd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1971). Page references are cited in the text.
3. Ernest Becker, *The Lost Science of Man* (New York: George Braziller, 1971), p. ix. Page references are cited in the text.