

AN ERNEST BECKER BIBLIOGRAPHY

by Daniel Liechty

BOOKS BY BECKER

- Becker, Ernest. 1961. *Zen: A Rational Critique*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- _____. 1962. *The Birth and Death of Meaning: A Perspective in Psychiatry and Anthropology*. New York: Free Press.
- _____. 1964. *The Revolution in Psychiatry: The New Understanding of Man*. New York: Free Press.
- _____. 1967. *Beyond Alienation: A Philosophy of Education for the Crisis of Democracy*. New York: George Braziller.
- _____. 1968. *The Structure of Evil: An Essay on the Unification of the Science of Man*. New York: George Braziller.
- _____. 1969. *Angel in Armor: A Post-Freudian Perspective on the Nature of Man*. New York: Free Press.
- _____. [1962] 1971. *The Birth and Death of Meaning: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Problem of Man*. New York: Free Press.
- _____. 1971. *The Lost Science of Man*. New York: George Braziller.
- _____. 1973. *The Denial of Death*. New York: Free Press.
- _____. 1975. *Escape From Evil*. New York: Free Press.

BOOKS ABOUT BECKER

- Aden, L. 1984. "The Challenge of Becker: A New Approach to Pastoral Care." *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 3:74-79.

This is an insightful early statement of Becker's significance for theology.

- Arcaro, T., and T. Cox. 1988. "Human Existence as a Waltz of Eros and Thanatos." *Humanity and Society* 12:75-94.

This article critically and creatively reviews some of Becker's theories in their application to current social issues.

- Evans, Ron. 1992. *The Creative Myth and the Cosmic Hero: Text and Context in Ernest Becker's The Denial of Death*. New York: Peter Lang.

Ron Evans, a literary critic and professor of English, looks at Joseph Cambell's monomyth idea and suggests ways in which this tool of interpretation could be

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criticized, strengthened, and finally expanded by Becker's thesis on mortality awareness.

Farrell, Kirby. 1989. *Play, Death, and Heroism in Shakespeare*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press.

This is the first and most extensive use of Becker's theories as a tool for literary criticism and interpretation. Farrell demonstrates that where Shakespeare is clearly in touch with what we think of as our most basic humanity, the need to mask mortality is always lurking in the spiritual shadows.

Forde, G. 1982. *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Life and Death*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

This is a restatement of the Pauline/Protestant doctrine based on a careful reading of Becker's *The Denial of Death*.

Hartz, G. 1980. "The Denial of Death: Foundations for an Integration of Psychological and Theological Views of Personality." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 8:53-63.

Written by a clinical psychologist, this article is based on a careful reading of Becker's *The Denial of Death*.

Harvey, Van Austin. 1995. *Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press.

The heart of this book is a demonstration that there is a distinguishable difference between the early and later Feuerbach and that for the most part students of philosophy and theology learn only the earlier Feuerbach, which presents God as a projection of idealized human-species characteristics. Although continuing the theme that theology is at root a form of anthropology (and so, in studying God we find out more about human beings), the late formulations of Feuerbach are more profound and more sophisticated. The final chapters of Van Austin's book investigate modern examples of projection theory and suggest that, although there is no evidence that Ernest Becker knew Feuerbach's work except indirectly through Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, Becker, more than any other modern writer, has carried the sophisticated and mature Feuerbachian theory into the post-Darwinian intellectual milieu.

Kenel, Sally A. 1988. *Mortal Gods: Ernest Becker and Fundamental Theology*. Lanham, Md.: Univ. Press of America.

Kenel's thesis is that Ernest Becker's theories about the human need to deny limitations and mortality, and his association of this denial with the moral category of hubris and the theological category of sin, provide a basis for fundamental or philosophical theology (that which Protestant theology generally calls *prolegomena*). This in turn can be compared to and creatively supplemented with the fundamental perspectives of David Tracy and Bernard Lonergan.

Liechty, Daniel. 1990. *Theology in Postliberal Perspective*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International.

This is a theological appropriation of Becker's basic theses from a radical Protestant point of view. Liechty suggests that if Becker is correct in viewing evil as always a projection of our mortality anxiety, thus leaving us unable to set rational limits on the levels of violence we are willing to employ in seeking to eradicate evil, then an a priori commitment to nonviolence has to be at the heart of the Christian message of Gospel, Good News. Other issues of Christian theology are then interpreted through this prior commitment.

_____. 1995. *Transference and Transcendence: Ernest Becker's Contribution to Psychotherapy*. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson.

Drawing from the entire body of Becker's works, this book uses a developmental perspective to outline Becker's theories. Although the emphasis is on those aspects of Becker's views that will be most helpful to clinical psychotherapists, this book is also the best available introduction to Becker's general theories.

_____. 1996. "Abstracts of the Complete Writings of Ernest Becker." Seattle, Wash.: Ernest Becker Foundation.

This includes detailed abstracts of each article and book chapter of Becker's complete writings in chronological order.

Martin, Stephen W. 1997. *Decomposing Modernity: Ernest Becker's Images of Humanity at the End of an Age*. Lanham Md.: Univ. Press of America.

South African theologian Stephen Martin suggests that, more than any other modern theorist, Becker profoundly understood and presented the modern-postmodern dilemma—that human beings have a deeply embedded need for some sense of cosmic significance and that violence in various forms is the result when this need is unmet. Martin believes that the need is met by reaffirmed cultural belief in Calvin's God. Although this conclusion goes considerably beyond Becker's own writings, Martin's thesis and presentation is provocative and worthy of consideration by theologians and social theorists.

SELECTED ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

Bates, Harvey. 1977. "Letters from Ernest." *Christian Century* (March 9): 217–27.

This fascinating exchange of letters covers the radical sixties and gives Becker's perspective on what was happening in the major movements of that time. The letters also provide insight into Becker's personal struggles and the ways in which his beliefs were shaped by his environment.

Becker, Ernest. 1974. "The Spectrum of Loneliness." *Humanitas* 10: 237–46.

One of Becker's last writings, this essay looks at various forms of loneliness—not necessarily as a condition from which to flee but rather as a given for the human situation. The final form of loneliness is that of cosmic or transcendental loneliness, in which a person calls upon the cosmos for answers, receives at best an

ambiguous reply if any at all, and yet, satisfied, is able to turn over hopes and desires to the life force for a final confirmation that the individual may never personally experience. This essay is truly a yet-unrecognized spiritual classic.

———. 1974. "Toward the Merger of Animal and Human Studies." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 4:235–54.

Originally a section in Becker's posthumously published manuscript *Escape from Evil*, this journal article is the last publication that Becker himself explicitly sanctioned. Becker's basic point here is that it is time to stop the arguments about whether animal studies, which focus on instinct and habitual behavior, can be applied to human motivation and behavior. All social scientific studies have been demonstrating that human beings are not totally free in their actions but are also driven by external forces of one sort or another. Coming to grips with the fact of our basic animal nature is essential to a true assessment of our situation. On the other hand, the human future is open and not predetermined.

Keen, Sam. 1974. "A Conversation with Ernest Becker." *Psychology Today* (April): 71–80.

Edited interview with Ernest Becker from a hospital bed, only days before Becker died. Here Becker makes explicit that he was converted from atheism to a belief in God, a move prompted by the birth of his first child.

OTHER SOURCES AND OTHER MEDIA ON BECKER

Also available are audiotape of edited deathbed interview of Becker by Sam Keen (1993) as well as texts, audiotapes, and videotapes of lectures and conferences held on Becker-related topics (1994–1997). Newsletters of the Ernest Becker Foundation are published quarterly and are mailed free of charge. Most current material is on the web page.

Tapes and other materials are available at nominal cost from the Ernest Becker Foundation, 3621 72nd Avenue SE, Mercer Island, WA 98040; phone (206) 232-2994; e-mail <nelgee@u.washington.edu>

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