



Course Syllabus

Course Title: The Visionary Psychology of Ernest Becker

Term and Year: Fall / Annual

Instructor:

Ed Mendelowitz, Ph.D.

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Hours by arrangement

Catalog Course Description:

The cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker was an astonishingly brilliant thinker, interdisciplinary in the truest sense. With a surpassing fund of knowledge and a uniquely passionate and penetrating mind, Becker roamed freely through seeming libraries of works in sociology, anthropology, political science, ethology, psychoanalysis, psychology, religion and the broader humanities so as to articulate stunning cultural, existential-humanistic and spiritual truths. Compelling filmic and literary references regularly appear. Becker understood, like William James and Otto Rank before him, that the fundamental problems in life are existential rather than instinctive. Human beings are conflicted not so much because of sexual or aggressive drives but because we know too much. We have evolved into creatures that think, a simultaneously mortifying and exhilarating occurrence when we consider the implications of what it means to be briefly alive on a planet that spins on the periphery of a single galaxy within the Infinite. We are, in a sense, effete animals who strive interminably to limit overexposure. Although the risks are self-evident, the unrealized possibilities are paramount in Becker's searching and visionary mind. In reading Becker's seminal works, we will consider the universal mind and pervasive humanism of one of the most original and ethically-attuned native psychologists of our time.

Readings:

Required Texts:

Becker, E. (1969). *Angel in armor: A post-Freudian perspective on human nature*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Becker, E. (1971). *The birth and death of meaning: An interdisciplinary perspective on the problem of man, 2nd Edition*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Becker, E. (1973). *The denial of death*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Becker, E. (1975). *Escape from evil*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Liechty, D. (1995). *Transference and transcendence: Ernest Becker's contribution to psychotherapy*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

Liechty, D. (2005). *The Ernest Becker reader*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Required Articles:

Kramer, R. (2007). The journals of Ernest Becker, 1964-1969. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 47, 430-473.

Martin, J. (2014). Ernest Becker at Simon Fraser University (1969-1974). *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 54, 66-112.

Mendelowitz, E. (2005). Intimations of genius: Review of The Ernest Becker Reader. *AHP Perspective*, 27-28. (Article to be made available through the course shell)

Mendelowitz, E. (2006). Meditations on Oedipus: Becker's Kafka, Nietzsche's Metamorphoses. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 46, 385-431.