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The Denial of Death

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE

'A brave work of electrifying intelligence and passion, optimistic and revolutionary, destined to endure'
The New York Times Book Review

THE DENIAL OF DEATH

'One of those rare masterpieces that will stimulate your thoughts, your intellectual curiosity and, last but not least, your soul'
Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, author of *On Death and Dying*

ERNEST BECKER

Ernest Becker. 1973. Souvenir Press. 336p

“Man is a worm and food for worms”, yet “up in the stars”; “out of nature and hopelessly in it”: “gods with anuses” and (after 2001) “a versatile ape”. Becker’s psychoanalytical enquiry of our view of, and paradoxes around, death is a foundational text.

He explores how humans construct meaning to seek security and relief from anxiety around death, noting the irony of how this search is driven itself by being alive: “we must shrink from being fully alive”; a “nexus of unfreedom”. His analyses are revealing, for example on parallels between sin and neurosis, and of how some leaders exploit fears of death – and conversely how we may scapegoat them in turn “almost as an excuse” post facto for acts they may commit: “the more you fear death and the emptier you are, the more you people your world with omnipotent father-figures, extra-magical helpers”.

And in terms of seeking meaning, Becker suggests “the most that any one of us can seem to do is to fashion something—an object or ourselves—and drop it into the confusion, make an offering of it, so to speak, to the life force.”

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