

Hello, Abdallah -

Yes, my description of 'the problem' basically only identifies its parameters, which you yourself have also clearly identified. In my book, I presented it as a kind of 'challenge' to readers, as something which 'we' need to intelligently focus on resolving as it is a thorn (to say the least!!!!) in all of our sides. I thank you for bringing the topic up and thereby pulling/pushing me to think about the matter further.

First, in relation to what you say above, let me say that I don't think you appreciate the 'depth' (the 'deep'-rootedness) of the problem. For one thing, it is not simply a matter of 'switching' (updating) the 'software' memes programmed into our (people-in-general's) computers. The ego-based 'needs' and fears which result in people desperately (emotionally, despite all rational argument) clinging to the 'programs' they were programmed with as they grew up are instinctual, I think. IOW, they are to a significant degree hard wired into people's 'nervous' 'systems'.

I will address said needs and fears later on. Here, I just want to say that I think peeps like you and I are an 'abnormal' minority in this regard, my guess being that this is probably as a result of our having risen above and grown past SUCH needs and fears in the course of previous lifetimes, though I suppose one could also imagine this as simply being the result of our having 'unusual' (compared to most people), less emotion-'driven' body-chemistries by 'lucky chance' so to speak. Whatever the case, you and I have a greater degree of self-confidence/self-reliance and so are free (or freer) from the the kinds of 'hang ups' that hamstring the vast majority of our fellow humans because we are not 'insecure' about having 'independent' (from any 'group' or 'super-supreme' God) personal 'identities'.

Second, I want to opine that, despite its clear superiority IN TERMS OF RATIONALITY, the 'world-view' of SCIENCE does not even begin to address the emotional needs and fears, i.e. the heartfelt CONCERN, of people who gravitate to a (any!) 'spiritual' world-view which reassures people that they (their spirits) are or are potentially at least 'immortal' as well as 'promises' them a way of getting 'there'. For you to appreciate the 'pull' this has on people, I would strongly suggest you educate yourself further about the things like the 'fear of death' ('defeat' and 'loss' being mini precursors thereof) which, by virtue of their having greater powers of imagination than animals, humans are especially susceptible to being 'gripped' by, by reading Ernst Becker's groundbreaking books, "The Denial of Death" being the most classic of these.

I look forward to engaging with you in further conversation about this great-buggaboos issue. In the meantime, here is a quote about the book, to hopefully picque your interest:

"Becker's philosophy as it emerges in Denial of Death and Escape from Evil is a braid woven from four strands.

The first strand. The world is terrifying. To say the least, Becker's account of nature has little in common with Walt Disney. Mother Nature is a brutal bitch, red in tooth and claw, who destroys what she creates. We live, he says, in a creation in which the routine activity for organisms is "tearing others apart with teeth of all types — biting, grinding flesh, plant stalks, bones between molars, pushing the pulp greedily down the gullet with delight, incorporating its essence into one's own organization, and then excreting with foul stench and gasses the residue."

The second strand. The basic motivation for human behavior is our biological need to control our basic anxiety, to deny the terror of death. Human beings are naturally anxious because we are ultimately helpless and abandoned in a world where we are fated to die. "This is the terror: to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression — and with all this yet to die."

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and Ernest Becker were strange allies in fomenting the cultural revolution that brought death and dying out of the closet. At the same time that Kubler-Ross gave us permission to practice the art of dying gracefully, Becker taught us that awe, fear, and ontological anxiety were natural accompaniments to our contemplation of the fact of death.

The third strand. Since the terror of death is so overwhelming we conspire to keep it unconscious. "The vital lie of character" is the first line of defense that protects us from the painful awareness of our helplessness. Every child borrows power from adults and creates a personality by introjecting the qualities of the godlike being. If I am like my all-powerful father I will not die. So long as we stay obediently within the defense mechanisms of our personality, what Wilhelm Reich called "character armor" we feel safe and are able to pretend that the world is manageable. But the price we pay is high. We repress our bodies to purchase a soul that time cannot destroy; we sacrifice pleasure to buy immortality; we encapsulate ourselves to avoid death. And life escapes us while we huddle within the defended fortress of character.

Society provides the second line of defense against our natural impotence by creating a hero system that allows us to believe that we transcend death by participating in something of lasting worth. We achieve ersatz immortality by sacrificing ourselves to conquer an empire, to build a temple, to write a book, to establish a family, to accumulate a fortune, to further progress and prosperity, to create an information-society and global free market. Since the main task of human life is to become heroic and transcend death, every culture must provide its members with an intricate symbolic system that is covertly religious. This means that ideological conflicts between cultures are essentially battles between immortality projects, holy wars.

One of Becker's lasting contributions to social psychology has been to help us

understand that corporations and nations may be driven by unconscious motives that have little to do with their stated goals. Making a killing in business or on the battlefield frequently has less to do with economic need or political reality than with the need for assuring ourselves that we have achieved something of lasting worth. Consider, for instance, the recent war in Vietnam in which the United States was driven not by any realistic economic or political interest but by the overwhelming need to defeat "atheistic communism."

The fourth strand. Our heroic projects that are aimed at destroying evil have the paradoxical effect of bringing more evil into the world. Human conflicts are life and death struggles — my gods against your gods, my immortality project against your immortality project. The root of humanly caused evil is not man's animal nature, not territorial aggression, or innate selfishness, but our need to gain self-esteem, deny our mortality, and achieve a heroic self-image. Our desire for the best is the cause of the worst. We want to clean up the world, make it perfect, keep it safe for democracy or communism, purify it of the enemies of god, eliminate evil, establish an alabaster city undimmed by human tears, or a thousand year Reich.

Perhaps Becker's greatest achievement has been to create a science of evil. He has given us a new way to understand how we create surplus evil — warfare, ethnic cleansing, genocide. From the beginning of time, humans have dealt with what Carl Jung called their shadow side — feelings of inferiority, self-hate, guilt, hostility — by projecting it onto an enemy. It has remained for Becker to make crystal clear the way in which warfare is a social ritual for purification of the world in which the enemy is assigned the role of being dirty, dangerous, and atheistic. Dachau, Capetown and Mi Lai, Bosnia, Rwanda, give grim testimony to the universal need for a scapegoat — a Jew, a nigger, a dirty communist, a Muslim, a Tutsi. Warfare is a death potlatch in which we sacrifice our brave boys to destroy the cowardly enemies of righteousness. And, the more blood the better, because the bigger the body-count the greater the sacrifice for the sacred cause, the side of destiny, the divine plan.

Becker's radical conclusion that it is our altruistic motives that turn the world into a charnel house — our desire to merge with a larger whole, to dedicate our lives to a higher cause, to serve cosmic powers — poses a disturbing and revolutionary question to every individual and nation. At what cost do we purchase the assurance that we are heroic? No doubt, one of the reasons Becker has never found a mass audience is because he shames us with the knowledge of how easily we will shed blood to purchase the assurance of our own righteousness. He reveals how our need to deny our nakedness and be arrayed in glory keeps us from acknowledging that the emperor has no clothes."