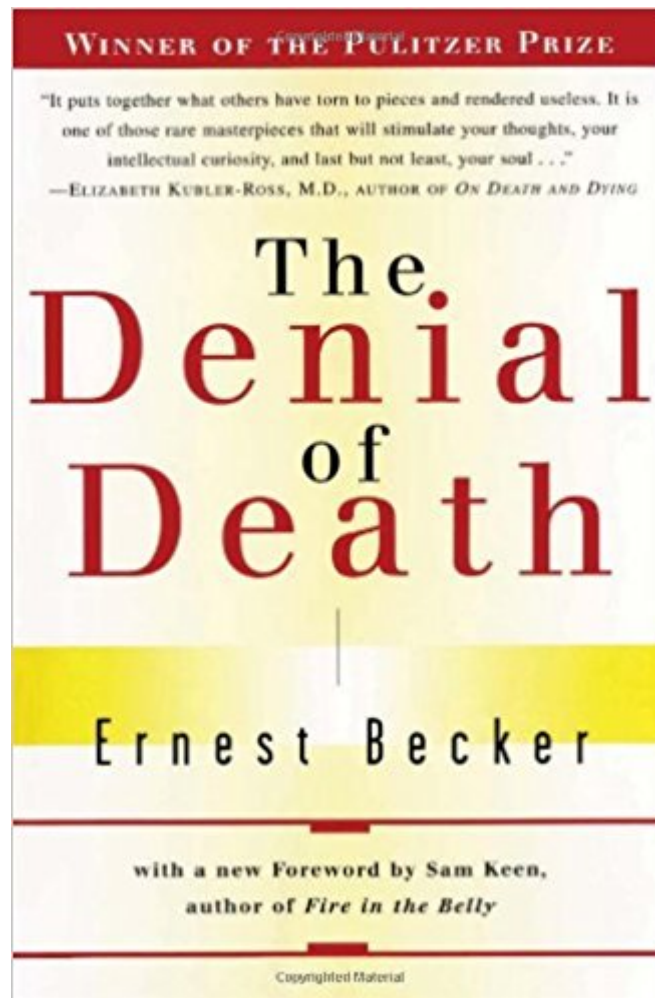




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The Denial Of Death



Synopsis

Winner of the Pulitzer prize in 1974 and the culmination of a life's work, *The Denial of Death* is Ernest Becker's brilliant and impassioned answer to the "why" of human existence. In bold contrast to the predominant Freudian school of thought, Becker tackles the problem of the vital lie -- man's refusal to acknowledge his own mortality. In doing so, he sheds new light on the nature of humanity and issues a call to life and its living that still resonates more than twenty years after its writing.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There are some books that are brilliant because they delve deeply into one subject. There are other books that are brilliant because they synthesize a panorama of other great books. Finally, there are perhaps the rarest of works that in one book combine the insights of many other brilliant tomes and make the synthesis seem like one subject. "The Denial of Death" belongs to this rarest of books. The excellence of the insights on so many pages is breathtaking, and it's only fitting that Becker, certainly a great writer previously, made his last book, published shortly and ironically before his death, his best. Becker states at the outset the problem in our day is not that there isn't enough knowledge, the problem is that there isn't enough integration of this knowledge into a kind of wisdom that would properly summarize the accumulated knowledge. At the outset he acknowledges the difficulty in claiming that there is one direct insight into what causes (almost) all of the neuroses of life, which is the inability of people to see and overcome what I feel is the ultimate paradox of life, that we live and die at the same time. Yet in one book Becker succeeds so well it is astounding! To summarize a summarizing book is difficult indeed! Basically what Becker claims is that man has twin

but conflicting ontological needs/motives - to individuate and yet at the same time to feel a part of something greater. Man is a paradox in many other ways. Unlike other animals inside he (I will omit she to keep it simple) is largely symbolic - in his mind he can imagine the farthest mysteries of the universe, he can philosophize about the deepest meanings of life and its purpose. Yet like other animals man is anal (discussed extensively!) and possesses a body that is only too mortal.

About the Book: All animal species are pre-wired with a survival instinct. Unlike other species, man is cursed with self-awareness which makes known to him his ultimate destiny with death. This realization engenders abject terror. Yet, man has to repress this terror (narrow consciousness) so that he can move through life with equanimity and precision. To do so, culture provides immortality scripts that if lived up to, help attenuate death-related terror through cognitive and emotional means. Emotionally, cultural prescriptions toward immortality elevates self-esteem and buffers against death related fear. This is possible because on a cognitive level, cultural scripts allows one to deny their mortality either through literal (heaven or Nirvana) or symbolic means (e.g., literary immortality). Because these cultural prescriptions to immortality are important to everyday functioning, they are referred to as man's vital lies. The problem with these immortality scripts is that they create continuous holy wars between people of differing worldviews: The very presence of an alternative immortality script insinuates that the favored immortality script may be wrong. This motivates attempts at transmutation or the murder of dissenters (clearing the world of evil).

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