

Tools for Teaching

Chapter One

1. Do you consider yourself to be a selfish person? In what ways do you exhibit selfishness?
2. Based on your reading of the chapter, try to provide a workable definition of heroism.
3. Based on your reading of the chapter, try to provide a workable definition of narcissism.
4. How do we use symbols to provide ourselves with cosmic significance?
5. What is Becker's definition of society?
6. Identify and explain what Becker says is the most important question man can put to himself.
7. Identify and explain what Becker says is the "potentially most liberating question of all, the problem of human life."
8. Explain what Becker calls "the dilemma of religion in our time."

Chapter Two

1. Explain the quote, "Man has elevated animal courage into a cult."
2. Explain the "Healthy-Minded" argument.
3. Explain the "Morbidly-Minded argument.
4. Which argument does Becker find more compelling? Which argument do you find more compelling? Why?
5. Though some think the fear of death is always present beneath all of our normal functioning, why can't it consistently be present on a conscious level?
6. Why does the child live with "an inner sense of chaos that other animals are immune to"?
7. How can we explain the "disappearance" of the fear of death? What is the term for the process by which this is accomplished? Explain how this works. Consider "character defenses" (p.23).
8. What is "Inner Sustainment"

Chapter Three

1. Explain in depth man's essence. What is his paradoxical nature?
2. What is the psychoanalytic view of the early child? p. 28
3. Explain the quote on p. 29 "To grow up at all is to conceal the mass of internal scar tissue that throbs in our dreams."
4. Reread p.30-34. Give a detailed summary of anality and what it means to

be an anal person.

5. Give more than just a lazy paraphrase of the Oedipus complex. Explain it in psychoanalytic terms.
6. Explain the Castration Complex and Penis Envy.
7. What is the psychoanalytic version of love? Do you think this is an accurate analysis? Why or why not?
8. Explain the events and the fallout from the Primal Scene.

Chapter Four

1. Why is man so naturally cowardly? p. 48
2. What accounts for the hostility to psychoanalysis? p. 51
3. Explain the two great fears that characterize the human animal as different from other animals. p. 53
4. What is the "vital lie" of character? Why is it vital, and what makes it a lie? p. 55-56 Explain the quote, "It is fateful and ironic how the lie we need in order to live dooms us to a life that is never really ours." p. 56
5. What is "full humanness" according to Becker and Maslow? p. 58-59
6. What is schizophrenia? p. 62-64
7. Paraphrase Marcia Lee Anderson's poem on p. 65-66.

Chapter Five

1. What does Becker assert about psychology and religion?
2. What is man's paradox, as described on p. 68-69?
3. What is the result of "the fall into self-consciousness?"
4. What does Kierkegaard mean by the term "shut-upness?" Describe the two different types of shut-upness.
5. What prescriptive advice would Kierkegaard give to parents?
6. The "inauthentic man," the "immediate man," the "automatic cultural man," and the "philistine" are all words or phrases that Becker and Kierkegaard use to describe one type of person. Explain what these terms mean. Do you know anyone like this?
7. What is Becker's answer to the question, "Why does man accept to live a trivial life?"
8. Explain what Becker means by the term "psychosis."
9. How do Becker, Kierkegaard, and modern psychologists understand schizophrenia?
10. What is an "ambulatory schizophrenic?"
11. Explain the term "depressive psychosis."

12. How does the depressed person behave? Why?
13. What is "normal neurosis?"
14. Who or what is Kierkegaard's "introvert?"
15. What becomes of the most extreme introverts? p. 84-85
16. How does one "transcend" himself? Explain the process. p. 86- 92
17. All of Kierkegaard's ideas about possibility and the human condition lead up to one fundamental thing? What is it? Explain why and how this is the keystone that crowns Kierkegaard's thoughts.

Chapter Six

1. Read closely pp. 93-95. Explain Freud's great contributions. Then, do your best to explain in detail where/how Freud went wrong.
2. If Freud was mistaken in his claim that sexuality is the primary repression, what do Becker and the rest of the psychoanalytic community suggest is the true primary repression?
3. In no more than one sentence, explain Freud's concept of the "death instinct" (pp.97-98).
4. What is killing? (p.99)
5. Read the last full paragraph on p. 102. Becker says of Freud, "in one great way he was extraordinary..." Explain.
6. Read p. 103-104. In what ways is Freud's work a reflection of his personal life and vice versa?
7. Summarize the relationship between Freud and Carl Jung (pp.106-115).
8. What is the psychoanalytic definition of homosexuality? (pp.118-119) Do you think this is an accurate definition?

Chapter Seven

"Men worship and fear power and so give their loyalty to those who dispense it."

1. Who/what is the mana-personality?
2. Explain how hypnosis works or is supposed to work.
3. Freud, Fenichel, and others would claim that our longing to be hypnotized can be traced back to what? (p.132)
4. What is Fromm's concept of "incestuous symbiosis?" (p.134)
5. Explain the power of Redl's group dynamics. What implications does participation in groups have?
6. What is transference?
7. Explain the term "fetish." Be sure to consider its various forms.

8. Ponder and explain Jung's quote, *"...unless we prefer to be made fools of by our illusions, we shall, by carefully analysing every fascination, extract from it a portion of our own personality, like a quintessence, and slowly come to recognize that we meet ourselves time and time again in a thousand disguises on the path of life."*
9. Explain man's twin ontological motives.
10. What is the purpose of morality, according to Becker? (p. 154)

Chapter Eight

1. In what way does Becker use the term, "Romantic?" How is this meaning different from the literary definition of the term?
2. What is "transference beatification?"
3. How are sex and death related?
4. Sometimes, in relationships, people claim that their boyfriends, girlfriends, husbands, wives, etc... are "everything" to them. Some even say things like, "You complete me." What are the pros and cons of investing too much divine stock in your lover? In other words, why is it both good and bad to look at your lover as "everything" or "all?" Why is it unhealthy for your lover to complete you?
5. Explain the fundamental motivation of the "artist type" or what Becker calls the "creative solution."
6. What is the definition and significance of "the work of art?"
7. Aside from the fact that he or she is frequently poor, what is it about art that will always make the artist suffer?
8. Explain: "...only by surrendering to the bigness of nature on the highest, least-fetishized level, can man conquer death. In other words, the true heroic validation of one's life lies beyond sex, beyond the other, beyond the private religion-- all these are makeshifts that pull man down or that hem him in, leaving him torn with ambiguity." How can *you* apply this to *your* life? (Think about, don't write the answer to this last question.)

Chapter Nine

1. What are the three interdependent aspects of neurosis? (p. 177)
2. What is the difference between the normal, well-adjusted man and the clinically neurotic? What do both have in common? (p. 178)
3. What is the essence of normality? Explain. (p. 178)
4. Who is more neurotic: the normal man or the artist? Why? (p. 181-183)
5. How does the neurotic try to cheat nature? (p. 183)

6. What is the difference between the neurotic and the artist? (p. 185)
7. Why is the causa-sui a pretense that one is invulnerable? (p.187)
8. On p. 190, Becker asks, "If history is a succession of immortality ideologies, then the problems of men can be read directly against those ideologies-- how embracing they are, how convincing, how easy they make it for men to be confident and secure in their personal heroism. " Consider modern American society and at least two other societies (either current or past), and analyze how they account for the answers to man's dilemma.
9. What happened to the soul in the 19th century? What can and must we mean by the word "soul" today? (p.191)
10. What was the great promise of psychology? Has it fulfilled this promise? Why or why not? (p.192)
11. Paraphrase what Becker says about psychology and religion at the top of p. 194.
12. What is Romantic about what Becker says on p. 197? Look in the first FULL paragraph.
13. On p. 199, Becker explains Goethe's concept that "we must plunge into experience and then reflect on the meaning of it. All reflection and no plunging drives us mad; all plunging and no reflection, and we are brutes." In all honesty, place yourself on the line below with an X. In other words, how have you actually lived so far? On the second line, place yourself where you would like to be in the future.
 experience _____ reflection
 experience _____ reflection
14. What is the religious problem for modern man as explained on p. 200?
15. Who are the most logical, greatest reasoners we know? Why? (p.201)
16. On p. 202, Becker contends that "the question of human life is: on what level of illusion does one live?" Use the lines below to locate yourself. On the first line, place an X where you think you have actually been this far in life. On the second line, place an X where you would like to be in the future.
 truth _____ illusion
 truth _____ illusion
17. Is the illusion to which you subscribe and in which you participate the product of your own creativity, or is it the product of social construction? Place an X on the line below.
 your own _____ social construction
18. List and explain the pros and cons of religion that Becker discusses on p. 202-204.
19. Why does Rank assert that Christianity is a truly great ideal foolishness? What does he mean by Christianity?

20. What does Becker say is the ideal for mental health? (p.204)

21. How neurotic are you? Place an X on the line.

extremely neurotic(psychotic) _____ not at all

Chapter Ten

By pushing the problem of man to its limits, schizophrenia also reveals the nature of creativity. If you are physically unprogrammed in the cultural causa-sui project, then you have to invent your own: you don't vibrate to anyone else's tune. You see that the fabrications of those around you are a lie, a denial of truth-- a truth that usually takes the form of showing the terror of the human condition more fully than most men experience it. The creative person becomes, then, in art, literature, and religion the mediator of natural terror and the indicator of a new way to triumph over it. He reveals the darkness and the dread of the human condition and fabricates a new symbolic transcendence over it. This has been the function of the creative deviant from the shamans through Shakespeare.

1. Why/how is depression a problem of courage? What causes it?
2. What are the symptoms of depression?
3. Why is menopause so difficult to deal with?
4. What is schizophrenia? How is it different from normal neurosis?
5. There are two types of schizophrenics, those who possess artistic skills and those who do not. What happens to those without artistic talents?
6. What is Freud's definition of the fetish? What was wrong with Freud's theory?
7. Some people write off Freud's theory of the castration complex because it seems to only apply to boys. How does Becker reconcile this?
8. What is sexuality? What is homosexuality, according to the ideas expressed in this chapter? Is this an adequate definition?
9. Becker suggests that everyone needs fetishes and that everyone has fetishes. Do you agree?
10. Throughout this chapter, Becker mentions the problems of many actual patients who have a variety of phobias, hypochondrias, and disorders. Pick one that you think is the strangest and explain it. Why are perversions worth studying? (See p. 222)
11. What is sado-masochism?

Chapter Eleven: The Final Chapter

1. What/who is the "knight of faith?" (p.257-258)
2. Though Kierkegaard was a Christian theologian, he differs from many other

- Christians in his personal position on the issue of faith. Explain. (p.258)
3. Explain Norman Brown's prescription for the solution to man's fear of death. (p 260-261)
 4. Brown suggests that the evolution of man is some kind of mishap. Explain Becker's response to this. (p.262-263) What is your take on this idea?
 5. Some famous thinkers have argued that even though we cannot eliminate death, we can figure out ways to preserve life so long that the fear of death will disappear. What is the major problem with this vision? (p.266-267)
 6. On p. 268, Becker claims that "fear of death is not the only motive of life." What other motives does he cite?
 7. On p. 270-271, Becker explains all of the things that psychotherapy can and cannot do for its patients. List its abilities and inabilities.
 8. Some people choose to adopt psychology itself as their belief system. Becker explains three ways in which this can work. Explain each. (p.272-274)
 9. How does Zen archery work? (p.274)
 10. What does Becker say is a problem with Eastern mysticism? Why is it not for Western man? (p.280)
 11. Becker suggests that science and religion both, in different ways, promote the "lived truth of creation." What does he mean by this? (p.282)
 12. "Creation is a nightmare spectacular taking place on a planet that has been soaked for hundreds of millions of years in the blood of all its creatures. The soberest conclusion that we could make about what has actually been taking place on the planet for about three billion years is that is being turned into a vast pit of fertilizer." What is the consolation? (p.283)
 13. What does it mean to take life seriously, according to Becker? (p.283-284) Have you been taking life seriously?
 14. What does Becker conclude about "a project as grand as the scientific-mythical construction of victory over human limitation"? (p.285)
 15. The final sentence of Becker's book includes a prescription for living, a prescription that echoes into eternity as part of Becker's personal legacy. What does he say is "the most that any one of us can seem to do"?

*Express your overall reaction to/ assessment of this book. How relevant is Becker's work to the world today? Is it realistic to think that we can actually reduce human evil in the world by understanding Becker's work? Should I continue to use it as part of the 11th grade Honors English course?