

Sheldon Solomon 2 on Escape from Evil

Solomon: One of the things Becker points out in a very powerful book called *Escape from Evil* is that if these ideas are correct, if we really do subscribe to our views about the nature of reality that culture gives us in order to minimize concerns about death, then we're naturally going to have problems when we run in to people who are different than ourselves, because if we accept the validity of an alternative conception of reality, that undermines the confidence with which we subscribe to our own, and that in turn opens us up to the overwhelming terror that our beliefs were designed to reduce.

So according to Becker and other theorists, what we do when we run in to people that are different than ourselves is we tend to belittle them as an inferior form of not quite human life, we try to convince them to drop their beliefs and adopt ours instead, and if that doesn't work we just literally kill them, as harsh as it sounds. According to Becker and terror management theory, a good deal of the ongoing strife that we see in the world, not only today but throughout history, is the result of a psychological inability to tolerate those who do not subscribe to our own death-denying ideology. I think underlying all of the problems that we see in the world today, I think central to understanding those is just recognizing that it's very tough when we run into folks who happen to be different than ourselves.