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through the decision-making process. As such, physical death is mainly of psychological significance. It is quite appropriate, in this context, to consider smaller, less sweeping instances of failure to control events as "small deaths." In my view, full experience of the awfulness of these small deaths can have considerable developmental value by teaching a person humility in the face of imperfect control over one's life, and directionality in emphasizing the importance of those aspects of life most amenable to control. In contrast, Dr. Farber chooses the gadfly role in his article, and ends with little to offer the reader beyond legitimately questioning the value of attempting to treat death and dying as if they could somehow be without pain. . . .

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The New Thanatology

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I was amused to find myself called a thanatologist by Leslie H. Farber in his article, "O Death, Where is Thy Sting-a-Ling-a-Ling?" [June 1977]. Although my version of existential psychology certainly considers death, this consideration is not central. Importance is placed on living well, and the contemplation of dying is only advocated insofar as it may improve life. Dr. Farber emphasizes the only paper I have written discussing dying, and excludes many other papers (some appearing in the same magazine as the one he cites) focusing upon living.

He also misconstrues my meaning. I do not believe that becoming familiar with death removes its sting. In this regard I would join with him in criticizing Ernest Becker, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, and most other thanatologists. I believe that in unmitigated recognition of the awfulness of death, one gains perspective on the importance of living intensely and purposefully. This process is only dampened by removing the sting from death. More than Dr. Farber realizes, therefore, I agree with his general point.

But he seems to have little by way of a position on the psychological importance of death and dying. My metaphorical concept of "small deaths," which he criticizes, is an attempt to explicate what is important about physical death, namely, that it constitutes the ultimate disconfirmation of the ego's attempts to plan and control life

the matter of humility. We are dealing here with a policy of thought in which there is no misfortune or discomfort or tedium so tragic or so trivial that it cannot be cherished and dignified as a miniature "death," with all the happy clarity and enhancement such encounters are said to produce. This is a system that drains out the particularity of ordinariness while at the same time applying a pretentious gloss that reduces everything by inflation. How such systematic rhetorical violation of experience can offer instruction in humility is beyond me.

LESLIE H. FARBER writes:

Since the subject of my essay was death, dying, and the new thanatology, not the lifework of Salvatore R. Maddi, there were things I had to omit. However, in view of the fact that Mr. Maddi's line on death, so to speak, is in the constructive, prescriptive mode that is standard to the new thanatology, I do not see why he should be dismayed to be "called a thanatologist"—even though I did not, in fact, call him one. I merely summarized and quoted from one article of his, whose point of view on death matters seemed well within the mainstream of current conventional wisdom on the subject, and a good example of certain aspects of it I wished to point to.

Mr. Maddi protests that he does not believe in removing death's sting. Indeed, he would rather capitalize on it. He finds its "awfulness" to be a lively source of purpose and inspiration. This up-beat, utilitarian position does not separate him from "other thanatologists" as clearly as he appears to think. More than Mr. Maddi realizes, our disagreement remains crucial.

Mr. Maddi has more appetite for restating his views than I have for repeating my objections. I would refer any interested reader to my original argument.

Just one item caught my attention, however, this time around: