
Samuel N. Gillian's Beckerian Educational Philosophy of Fear/Terror



R. Michael Fisher

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Technical Paper No. 102

In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute

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The In Search of Fearlessness Institute is dedicated to research and publishing on fear, fearlessness and emotions and motivational forces, in general, as well as critical reviews of such works. Preference is given to works with an integral theoretical perspective.

Samuel N. Gillian's Beckerian Educational Philosophy of Fear/Terror

R. Michael Fisher,¹ Ph.D.

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Abstract

The author, who had been corresponding with Sam Gillian (2004-05), an important radical educator for our times, suggests it is time to re-evaluate Gillian's offerings of a philosophy of fear/terror, which is primarily based on the work of Ernest Becker. The paper gives a brief biography and concentrates on the relevance of Gillian's critical pedagogy, which is so far virtually unknown in the field of Education, especially in academia.

Life seeks to expand in an unknown direction for unknown reasons. Not even psychology should meddle with this sacrosanct vitality, concluded [Otto] Rank.
-Ernest Becker²

Feeling separate, the sense of conflict between man [sic], on the one hand, and nature, on the other, begins.
-Alan Watts³

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² Becker (1973/97), p. 284.

³ Watts (1951), p. 46.

The Fearlessness Movement Context

[T]here is one suggestion that I might make at this time (other than the fact that you should read my book *The Beauty of Fear*) concerning your understanding of fearlessness. On your website and in your e-mail to me, I notice your use of the words “fearless” and “fearlessness,” and I am moved to inform you that more than thirty years of research into fear dictates to me that this concept is bogus. There is no such thing as “fearlessness,” a word that needs to be stricken from dictionaries as the lie that we all-too-negatively-terrified human beings traditionally have been telling ourselves. — Sam Gillian⁴

The focus of my research since late 1989 has been to understand what makes people, organizations, cultures and nations do what they do. It is *motivation*, the deeper the better, that I wish to uncover. The trajectory has focused on “fear and fearlessness” as a transdisciplinary inquiry but because of my background as a professional educator by formal training, I am always snooping out the relationship of *fear and education* that has existed in human history and how it plays out in today’s world.

“Fearlessness,” when taken literally, on the surface, may sound simple and merely behavioral as some kind of variant of courage, indicating there is some desire behind it to be *free of fear* as a virtue or as liberation itself. I entertain those notions as have diverse thinkers off and on throughout its struggle to develop and mature. Yet, there is more to it. That’s a larger topic beyond this technical paper. Suffice it to say, that is not the only way I conceptualize fearlessness. And, it does not mean an erasure of fear—in fact, quite the opposite. It means to become, as the wisdom of the Indigenous worldview teaches, a *connoisseur of fear*.⁵

⁴ Personal communications, May 6, 2004. I acknowledge that in this technical paper I am using personal e-mail communications with words from Gillian that he has not given me permission to use. At age 81, if he is still alive, he has been uncontactable; so I have taken a rare move to quote him anyways because I truly believe our relationship, and his radical truthing philosophy would be such that there is no reason to hide his voice from public in any form. If he or others are offended by this, they can let me know and I’ll reconsider publishing his words, which is done for educational purposes only.

⁵ I draw these notions of a universal generic Indigenous worldview (pan-Indianism), Indigenous psychology, and the germane articulation of an Indigenous fear management approach, from the teachings of Four Arrows (initiated Oglala Sioux) or Dr. Don Trent Jacobs (see Jacobs, 1998, pp. 156-75; Four Arrows, 2016, pp. 4-8; Fisher, 2016).

I believe, as do many other critics, E., W., N. S., that the plague of humankind is more or less due to excess fear that has been repressed, denied, and goes underground to poison the best of what humanity can be. In the underplayed attention to the study of fear, and its concomitant poor fear management/education, this is where rotten roots begin to grow in the domain of motivations. At least, that's my foundational premise of fearlessness work and what I have proposed to improve things *via* a universal required critical "fear education" on this planet. Such a fear education ought to be as commonly understood and valued as sex education or death education.

Because this type of education is a hard-sell in Western societies, to say the least, and very hard to attract enthusiasm in the field of adult and children Education, my turn has of late been toward the historical study of the various educators who were, or still are, attempting to promote the Fearlessness Movement.⁶ They would not use this term but nonetheless, arguably that is what they were, or still are up to. This is a consciousness and/or social movement that I have coined in order to study it as a phenomenon.

Regarding this movement is a dynamic ecology of interrelationships, of which deep genetic and evolutionary forces are at play. My basic dictum: *When fear appears, so then does fearlessness.*⁷ I have argued this principle of Life itself can be found in any species, if one 'reads' the phenomenon through a particular lens of analysis—that I have called *fearanalysis*.⁸ Point being, if my colleague Sam Gillian were reading this right now, he'd have a strong reaction to it and would, with some humor, lead me to listen to him as like a 'grandfather' in regard to why he doesn't think people need more fearlessness, rather they need more fear—they need to be more attending to just how afraid they are, even how terrified they are all the time. The world is terrifying. He would persist in such claims, as he does in his books, and as I am sure he did in his workshops and classroom school teaching.

I have lived a very different life than he, taught in very different environments than he. We have differences and we have similarities in how we think about fear management/education. Regarding the latter, he wrote to me: "We need to stay in closer contact. When I read this latest fearology [paper] from you, it was as if you were inside my mind. We definitely

⁶ E.g., Fisher (2018).

⁷ E.g., Fisher (2010), p. xv.

⁸ E.g., Fisher (2012).

think alike...”⁹ It is upon this tension between he and I that the following history of Sam Gillian unfolds. Our relationship is an ongoing dialogue, as is this paper. In February 2005, in the midst of communicating with Gillian by email, I desired to create a fictional interview of some radio host talking to me about Gillian’s first book (for fun, I have included a short excerpt from that unpublished text in Appendix 1).

Brief History of Samuel N. Gillian

It is always good to hear from a fellow traveler in this terrifyingly
awesome universe of ours. — Sam Gillian¹⁰

Samuel Nathan Gillian Jr. (1939- ?), a black African-American educator, has fallen off the map. I am looking for him still.

His presence on the internet is near nil¹¹ but in reading his work again in the past weeks his expanding spirit is ever-present, and his vital ideas deserve (re-)accounting in this current time, especially with so much fear/terror everywhere—example, the George Floyd uprisings, COVID-19 pandemic and destabilizations of all kinds over the planet. Things are going to get a lot worse (more fearful and terrifying) likely before they will get a lot better.

So, for Gillian and myself (and some others)—it is imperative we reform, transform and re-shape our human relationship with fear (i.e., fear management). In the field of Education, this humble awareness today, is critical, and beyond words that neither Gillian nor I can fully express but we have felt it, working independently, for several decades, it seems fitting for us to return in tandem, in textual dialogue, at least for a while. I dedicate this Technical Paper No. 102 to his legacy. Albeit, such an accounting of Gillian’s life and work here in this limited space is only a skeleton of his offerings, the more complete biographical and intellectual work is going to have to wait for future publications.

⁹ Personal communications (email), Jan. 24, 2005).

¹⁰ Personal communications (email), May 6, 2004.

¹¹ Interestingly his name does not appear in the ERIC Documents data base for educators, nor on the internet except for one author (other than myself), discussing neurodiversity, who shows admirable respect for Gillian’s (2002) book as a resource—see Armstrong (2010).

As difficult as it is to use words to accurately represent one's ideas, one could contemplate for starters Sam Gillian's core teaching about reality: "Fear is what life is all about."¹² The sooner we admit this and re-educate ourselves in this regard, the better. If we as societies "misunderstand fear," wrote Gillian, we "miseducate children"¹³ and the entire complex of citizenship suffers and with that, democracy can only limp along disabled. Those are my kinda words too; and thus, for 30+ years I have, independent from Gillian, been calling for a revisionist approach to designing a high quality 21st century "fear education" for all.¹⁴

His inspirational motivation workshops with parents and others boiled down to his pedagogical *modus operandi* above and beyond any content to deliver—and, that was: "I show others how to be afraid" (in a useful and good way). He has no use for the too common philosophies, theories and ideas about "freedom from fear" as an educational, sociopolitical and/or spiritual goal.¹⁵ He also chose to "approach the study of fear" as "etymological and logical" by which he means common-sense and pragmatic and "without reliance on any authority," he wrote to me.¹⁶

From what I have researched about him, he was truly unique to challenge this, while many of his arguments and attitudes were crafted no doubt from his unique on-the-ground experience, as a black man, teaching in the Bronx in New York; and, because of his wide and deep reading of thinkers, of whom he praised primarily Ernest Becker (existentialist) and to a lesser extent Alan Watts (Zen Buddhist) as two outstanding influences.¹⁷ That alone makes Gillian, in my mind, an eclectic and potent critical thinker—who I am not shy to call an important organic *educational philosopher*. No doubt many loved his philosophy and teaching, and some could not em-

¹² Excerpt from Gillian's (2005) bio (p. 285).

¹³ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁴ E.g., Fisher (2003). Independently as well, Desh Subba (2014) has been from a unique Eastern and philosophical-literary perspective, equally dedicated to this re-visionist project *via* what he labels a "philosophy of fearism" (see also, Fisher & Subba, 2016).

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 285.

¹⁶ Personal communications, May 10, 2004.

¹⁷ From his Acknowledgements, Gillian (2005) wrote, "Having never met them in person, I will be forever grateful to two critical thinkers whom I think of as my most important mentors for laying out their accumulated wisdom in books that had a profound influence on this one. They are the late Alan W. Watts who wrote *The Wisdom of Insecurity* and the late Ernest Becker who wrote *The Denial of Death*. I will never cease to think about the many ways that they have changed my thinking..." (p. viii).

brace it. The Ernest Becker scholar, Daniel Liechty, admitted (after reading Gillian's first book *The Beauty of Fear*):

This book really snuck up on me...and I suspect my reading experience would be typical for other busy and somewhat jaded academics. In the first few chapters, I'm impatiently thinking, "OK, OK, I get it, redefinition of fear." A few more chapters in, I'm thinking, "Hmm, this is really interesting....And by the time I got to chapters on the fear of change, learning how to suffer positively, and the cultivation of faith, love, courage and compassion, I found myself really hooked into Gillian's perspective, and using this understanding of fear to interpret the feeling states of my moment to moment existence. In retrospect, I can easily see in this book the work of a really great pedagogue.¹⁸

Anyone who arises from the grassroots, takes higher education degrees¹⁹ and maintains close contact to the frontlines all the way through as a life-long learner/teacher is no slouch to be dismissed. His emancipatory project is obvious all the way, to assist people to empower themselves beyond the negative aspects of fear as an oppressive force. And more exciting to me as a fearologist is to find someone with such life passion writing about my favorite topics with seniority over my years of dedication, his 40+ years studying "fear" is unheard of in the field of Education, as his bio page reveals:

Understanding language and human behavior has consumed Sam's adult life. It was this quest that led him into researching "fear" as a subject beginning in 1972. Since 1986, he has been conducting motivational workshops based upon his research. The workshops have been presented at educational conferences mainly to parents of school children. Sam believes that it is fear alone that has kept parents from playing the critical role that they must play in their children's education....He is working on a [second] book, currently entitled *Fear and Education* [was changed by 2005 to *Terrified by Education*].²⁰

¹⁸ Liechty (2004) in the front matter of Gillian (2005).

¹⁹ Born in Mount Vernon, New York, he "holds a bachelor's degree in English Literature and a master's degree in Education from the City College of New York" (excerpt from bio, Gillian, 2002, p. 199).

²⁰ Ibid., p. 199.

In 2004-05 he and I talked on emails about fear and education. I reached out to him because of his books (*The Beauty of Fear*, 2002 and *Terrified by Education*, 2005), which I purchased directly from his publishing company Phemore Press, Inc. (which no longer exists). And that's where he got to know about me and my work. I had not then, nor still now, ever met anyone in the field of Education as enthused and willing to explore critically the notions of fear and fearlessness as brother Sam, a label he asked me to call him if it felt right to me.

Although engaged in his various teaching and writing projects, he was more than generous with his time and patience to explore with me the respectful and serious critiques I had presented to him about his two very unique books (again, as an educator-author, who was not an academic). I had just finished my doctorate on the growing insidious *culture of fear* and all its varied impacts, and pursued that research within an Education faculty in Canada,²¹ and I was enthusiastic to talk to teachers who cared about what was happening with the impacts of fear on society and in educational settings.

Looking for a moment, beyond the content of Gillian's two interesting books, he was a dedicated school teacher and adult educator²² in New York City South Bronx for many years. He appears to have retired from teaching July 1, 2002,²³ of which he remarked: "These are the best years of my life....There is nothing more rewarding than my being able to use my life-long experiences and learning to write books and conduct workshops for the purpose of showing others how to live a more enjoyable life,"²⁴ by which he included a more meaningful and caring life consistent with the common good.

²¹ To my surprise and delight much of my doctorate work was sponsored by the Canadian government (citizens) *via* a full 3-yr Social Sciences & Humanities Research fellowship.

²² As of 2002, Gillian taught 21 years in middle school during the day, and for 15 years he taught essay writing skills in adult education classes in a Harlem GED program at night, and whenever he could he taught motivational workshops in the community (bio page, Gillian (2002), p. 199.

²³ Personal communications, Feb. 18, 2005.

²⁴ Gillian (2005), p. 285.

Some Colors of Ernest Becker Through Gillian's Philosophy

First, it is appropriate to say that little has been done overall in applying Ernest Becker's philosophy and theories within the field of Education. This is a relative assessment based on the fact of Becker receiving a Pulitzer Prize for one of his books, among other impressive achievements. Educators typically have not been attracted, and those that are attracted have typically not creatively revised Becker's philosophy to fit their own views or teaching situations. I have discussed this issue and the 'whys' behind it in another technical paper²⁵ and so won't repeat that here; suffice it to say, Gillian is one of the more creative educators to apply Becker's work in the field as a practitioner but also in two very important books, one on fear, and one on fear/terror in education generally.

As one current American pre-service school teacher, whose life has been positively transformed by Becker's work,²⁶ said, "It can be very difficult to find other people who are familiar with or receptive to Becker's ideas, especially in education. It might *seem* like the 'wrong' place for it at first..."²⁷ I would agree, education may seem like the wrong place for Becker's ideas (or Gillian's) because they are somewhat darker and deeper in their understanding and configuration of human nature than most educational philosophers tend to offer. This darker version was obviously very appealing to Gillian, who grew up and lived and worked in a somewhat darker side of the urban world, in a community of his own people by race, color, and culture—but to him it was a world of immense and joyful awesome possibilities as well as tragedies. There is little else we know about Gillian's biography besides the bits he has shared in his books and in correspondence with me (2004-05).

No doubt every teacher has a story or two that involves their students, colleagues or a mentor or life experience that pivotally shaped their educational philosophy and practice. I offer just a few examples from Gillian's autobiographic narrative, which characteristically shows up rarely in his work. He doesn't like to talk too much about himself. In his second book *Terrified by Education*, he wrote, "During the mid 1980's, one of my mid-

²⁵ Fisher (in press).

²⁶ "My worldview changed completely after I read that book [*The Denial of Death*]" (personal communications, Peter A. Pompa, July 5, 2020).

²⁷ Personal communications, Peter A. Pompa, July 6, 2020.

dle school students suffocated to death when the plastic top of a ball point pen that he was sucking on got lodged in his windpipe.” One wonders if that happened in his classroom, school itself or outside of the school? Nothing more is said about it. But this tragic, perhaps still a haunting ghost of the past for Gillian,²⁸ is an emotional child-story plopped right in the opening chapter “Caring is Fear,” as he sets down his philosophy of life and death in a book dedication to education (and somewhat on parenting). Specifically, the story wants to leave the indelible basic survival message ‘that there are dangers in this world’ and that learning to care for oneself and others involves naturally allowing and listening to fear: “If we think about it *carefully*, caring is about being aware, about being alert to danger, about being vigilant, about being on one’s guard....*caring is about being afraid*” in a natural and healthy way.²⁹

In another biographic story, Gillian tells of the nightmare dangers internally and externally of the “law’ of silence” or simply, he means lying to ourselves and others. Hiding from the truth and reality is something that also has affected him deeply. He wrote,

I lied to my parents’ custody battle over me when I was twelve years old. My father instructed me to lie when he told me how to answer the questions he knew I would be asked [in court]. And I had to go back home with him—not the judge. The judge did not swear me in, but he tried to instill the terror of untruth and consequences in me by asking if I knew what would happen to me if I lied. When I said didn’t know, he said, “You’ll go straight to hell when you die, young man!....[reflecting back, Gillian humors himself] Sorry, Judge, my fear of my father was greater than my fear of hell.”³⁰

Humor aside, just above this ‘cute’ story of lying in his own life, Gillian recalls the horrifying incident in France recently of two 13-year old girls raped by about 18 teenage boys. His re-telling only the barest of facts of the crime and its aftereffects on the victims and witnesses, obviously had impacted him—*via* his own distant hearing, as witnessing, is scarred (*via* capital lettered words) in his brain. He ends the teenage-fear vignette with what the teen boys meant for everyone to see, victims included: “Written on the wall at the scene of the gang rape was “THE LAW OF

²⁸ “Childhood is a terrifying time for parents and children” (Gillian, 2005, p. 20). One can only imagine what kind of childhood Gillian experienced in the predominantly black American urban environment, his schools, and family home.

²⁹ Gillian (2005), pp. 14-15.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 45-6.

SILENCE IS OUR SIXTH SENSE.”³¹

As will be evident later below, the educational philosophy of fear/terror is core to everything Gillian offers to the world and to the field of Education *per se*. Most of us, especially “progressive” types of educators will rebel (for the most part, not all) to what he is teaching about the nature and role of fear/terror. “We all lie *naturally*” he says (“present company included”),³² relying on the wisdom of his own experience and thought and Ernest Becker’s work—especially, Becker’s last post-humous book *Escape from Evil* (1975). I ask readers to stay open-minded, as much as possible, catching your own fear, not making that fear wrong, and thus, not making Gillian’s or Becker’s ideas wrong either. They are fodder for your own life and thoughts. That’s all this technical paper is meant to convey. Of course, it is important you’ll make up your own mind what is “truth” and what isn’t and needs to be tossed. It is all an *experiment* as far as I see, that is, trying to follow the work of anyone as serious and deeply committed to truth as Gillian or Becker. It is an experiment in learning about ideas, but more so, learning about your ideas about your ideas—and, who that makes you. It’s a bit of a roller coaster ride. On the positive-side, says Gillian, “Scary is fun!”³³ It makes us risk—and enjoy what it is to be fully human.

Some Specific Philosophical Ideas

Ernest Becker, was not the only influence in Gillian’s philosophy of education and parenting, etc. Yet, it is accurate to assume, as Daniel Liechty does in a book review of Gillian’s *The Beauty of Fear* (extended to *Terri-fied by Education*),

Gillian points to Ernest Becker as one of his main influences, and that influence is clearly in the warp and weave rather than in isolated [academic-like] quotes. Gillian does not mention acquaintance with Otto Rank, and so we assume Rank’s influence is funneled through Becker’s writings. Nonetheless, this is a very “Rankian” book, especially in Gillian’s view that, psychologically speaking, “fear of life” actually precedes “fear of death,” since fear of life originates in the earliest stages of individuation. It has often been acknowledged that Becker wrote mainly about the “fear of death” [darker] side of

³¹ Ibid., p. 45.

³² Ibid., p. 51.

³³ Ibid., p. 38.

Rank's dialectic, but very little on motivations for the positive, creative, and artistic implied in the other side of that dialectic. Many of us think that had Becker lived to write another major work, that is what he would have come to, and see it as an integral task for those of us working now to return to that Rankian dialectic and pursue that which Becker was cut off from pursuing.³⁴ Gillian's work is clearly a valuable contribution to that continuing goal.³⁵

This view of Liechty presents us with a question here in this technical paper to answer to: Is "fear of death" (Beckerian emphasis) really important in Gillian's expressed written philosophy of education, and/or his philosophy of fear/terror? No doubt that is a question that I will not be able to adequately analyze and answer here in this short technical paper and introduction to his life and work. Yet, it is worthy to pursue as a work in progress.

My first gut feeling, even without having thoroughly re-read Gillian's two books and our 2004-05 correspondence in any sufficient contemplative detail, is that Gillian was not too impressed with such a focus on "fear of death"—at least not overtly; but arguably, it's always there underneath his concerns, ideas and writing. After all, if he is continually telling us to teach children to be afraid and terrified (in positive way) then he is telling us in no uncertain terms that that is caring and loving—but more so, he is telling us that is survival—that is, survival is based on a fear of death motivational template. Gillian thus comes across Rankian in some ways (as Liechty suggests above) but his survival awareness is death awareness (by any other name). And thus, my argument is that Gillian is a definite Beckerian in outlook. That said, I have no evidence that Gillian had read Becker's own philosophy of education book (*Beyond Alienation*, 1967³⁶). Again, I am not sure what exactly Gillian had read of Becker other than Becker's two last books in 1973, 1975, as I have mentioned earlier.

Before diving more into Gillian's philosophy of fear/terror and education following from that, I wish to share a few aspects particularly that color the way Gillian writes and expresses his views, based on my experience with

³⁴ No doubt there is some valid truth in this but to the contrary Becker had made a "dark turn" and wasn't yet finished it—a point, I defend along with some other Beckerian scholars (e.g., Dr. Jack Martin) in Fisher (in press).

³⁵ Liechty (2004).

³⁶ Becker's (1967) book on educational philosophy is rarely read and cited by anyone, as far as I can tell (with a few exceptions; see Fisher, in press).

his writing. During 2004-05 we kept saying we should phone each other, but me in W. Canada and him in New York City didn't make that easy and for various reasons it did not happen. I interpreted his email style and communication as often "arrogant" and populist as if it was in disregard to scholarship (which, on the latter point, upon reflection, doesn't totally make sense because of his study and admiration for the scholar Ernest Becker). He did admit to his New Yorker confidence, which could come across to Western North Americans as "arrogant" but truly he wanted me to tell him more about that so he could improve:

[re:] New Yorkers...no doubt, on target [with your critique]. And I am guilty of much that you assert....I need to learn more about it so that I can do something positive about it, for I don't intend to be so. I am very confident in my thinking, and that may be where the arrogance you speak of derives from.³⁷ [I responded to Gillian: "there is a difference between confidence and arrogance. I use the latter with you very carefully and sparingly, as I have no doubt your confidence is much more the major part of your personality and work. BTW, I get accused of being arrogant quite often."³⁸]

This style and confidence together, with Gillian's radically provocative ideas about fear/terror to many (including liberal "progressive" thinkers, a point I'll talk about later below) is a combination that can be quite 'off-putting.' But there is another problem this colorful educator brings forward in his determined stance as a populist critical educator. I challenged him as being somewhat dismissive at times re: my theoretical work on fear/fearlessness. It felt like his attitude was gruff because I chose to be a scholar on fear and fearlessness and education. Scholarship discipline was definitely not his road to follow, even though he had achieved a master's degree in education at a fairly well respected institute for educators³⁹:

About the scholarly/populist dichotomy that you speak of, you are right. My only intent is to be populist, something that I am very careful about upholding in all my writing....since I choose to use mostly words...that a person with an eighth-grade education can understand. In my second book, I up the vocabulary difficulty very little, for my audience is always the

³⁷ Personal communications, Jan. 26, 2005.

³⁸ Personal communications, Jan. 26, 2005.

³⁹ That is, City College of New York (Gillian, 2002, p. 199).

average person....I would never attempt to write a scholarly article for a scholarly publication....hoping that our approach dichotomy will not be a barrier....⁴⁰

The dichotomy, upon reflection, is not just in scholarly vs. populist, I believe there are deeper philosophical, if not ideological, roots to our conflicts during that time. I am more a realist-idealist (emphasis on the latter) and he more a realist-idealist (emphasis on the former). Yet, I suspect the deeper issue is that he follows a rugged Americanism ideology embedded in American pragmatism philosophy and I am more a continental philosopher with critiques of pragmatism. Becker himself (a philosophical anthropologist), according to one scholar, was pursuing a vision for the “Ideal-Real” social science and curriculum⁴¹ (note: Ideal is given priority before Real)—but it is hard to tell at this point for me just how Idealist (e.g., continental in philosophy) Becker was and wanted for us to be who theorize about education and/or teach in the field of Education.

There is no room here to pursue these things, including the “off-putting” potentials for readers who will encounter Gillian’s writing. From the little up-take I see in the literature in which Gillian has no online presence or citations by others to speak of, evidently my concerns above may be valid. When my life-partner and my teen daughter asked me what I thought about Gillian (*via* after just reading his first book), I said,

[H]e is a wise man...been around...compassionate soul...lived in the heart of urban tragedy and the struggles of the poor...I respect that....I feel depressed...because it would take me a book to argue my critical positions with him, and try to explain my complex fear theory...I just don’t have the time to do it, as I have to try to find paid work—and really, it is so depressing because Gillian and I are out there alone with these radical ideas and there is no community of interest at the professional or scholarly levels—and, we really ought to have our published journal where we can (as fearologists) discuss our work, critique our work, and...it just ain’t gonna happen—

⁴⁰ Personal communications, Jan. 26, 2005.

⁴¹ Scimecca (1978), pp. 100; and on p. 103 Scimecca refers to Becker’s course of a revisionist curriculum for a “liberal education” as “*An Ideal Curriculum*.” This accompanied by Scimecca’s assessment that “*Becker’s Educational Theory [is] for Radical Social Change*” (p. 104) and that tells me it is more Ideal(ist) than Real(ist)—as Becker’s educational philosophy and social theory was dedicated heavily to “freedom” (pp. 100, 106).

maybe 20 yrs down the road⁴²—but I would like to work with Gillian, but he is so far away—it’s just depressing. [I sent this raw response to Gillian as well⁴³]

That said, Gillian has been far more successful than I have in terms of finding audiences (e.g., his workshops, conference presentations) and selling his self-published books. He tells a short story:

My first book came out of my experience doing almost two decades of motivational workshops at education conferences. The participants repeatedly asked me where they could go to find out more about what I had revealed to them. I told them, yearly, that there was no place to go, since my ideas were self-developed. They then began to ask me to write a book, since I would see some of them year after year by doing workshops at the same conferences annually. So, I wrote a book and sold more than 800 of them at the next conference.⁴⁴

Where I tend to see publishing about ideas about fear education as equally as important as anything else, Gillian had been clear with me that his “writing has been mostly limited to attempting to solve direct problems in life, which to me is more important than getting my ideas published.” He is a more overt activist⁴⁵ as well, helping with writing “fliers” for his nephew “who was unfairly fired from a hospital job, and I stood outside the hospital with my large posters picketing and distributing fliers for weeks until the hospital offered him a settlement.”⁴⁶

Gillian’s Basic Philosophical Orientation

What is most important to Gillian (and myself) is to put out the message to the world that, in Gillian’s terms, “we have so much to learn about the role that fear plays in education”⁴⁷—of which he dedicated

⁴² It took some 14 years to finally found and enact this dream *via* the *International Journal of Fear Studies*; go to <https://prism.ucalgary.ca/handle/1880/110103>

⁴³ Personal communications, Feb. 8, 2005.

⁴⁴ That’s phenomenal (hard to believe) numbers; but there you go (personal communications, Feb. 8, 2005).

⁴⁵ He told me about several incidents of over activism against a school principal, and an ongoing set of battles over landlords raising rents and not providing adequate services (e.g., personal communications, Feb. 18, 2005, Feb. 20, 2005).

⁴⁶ Personal communications, Feb. 18, 2005.

⁴⁷ Personal communications, Feb. 8, 2005.

his second book to: *Terrified by Education: Teaching Children to Fear Learning* (2005). Now if that isn't a title to turn off a lot of people, I don't know how he could have crafted a title that would be any worse. Yet, that's all on the surface, and his work requires careful reading and reconsidering beyond any initial reactions and antipathies. What is clear is that Gillian would totally agree with what is already well-known by many educators, nicely put by the authors who penned the title of their article "Recognizing Student Fear: The Elephant in the Classroom." These authors wrote,

Understanding fear, its causes, and its impact on students can be important for educators who seek ways to help students manage their fears. This paper explores common types of student fears such as performance-based anxiety, fear of failure, fear of being laughed at, and cultural components of fear that impact learning....Specific strategies for educators are provided to help students manage fear-based behaviors and achieve emotional balance and academic success in the classroom. These strategies include educating oneself and students about fear....⁴⁸

Gillian, like myself, would cheer on any such initiative to better understand fear and to "manage fear-based behaviors" but predictably such a typical article on fear and education does not cite Gillian's or my books that specialize on this. Although it is a fact of such omission, the real concern for Gillian would be in regard to critical thinking—or, in other words, what biases are teachers and learners following by *habit*, by *negative defense mechanisms*, by *lies*, by *conditioning* and by *repression* (all terms used by Gillian⁴⁹)—whereby, they are not able to be free enough of such mechanisms and conditioning to gain accurate (i.e., reality-based) clarity on their human nature and their behaviors. He critiques, as characteristically the existential philosopher would do, the too easily accepted repression in the culture-at-large,⁵⁰ especially in America, that everyone is terrified—albeit, both positive and negative—the key aim is to keep the terrified on the positive side as much as possible. Here is where he is implicating a Beckerian analysis of the terror associated with and part of the denial of death—but more so, the focus of Gillian is just on the "terrifying" reality of existence, and that applies to the everyday reality we all live. We repress that, he

⁴⁸ Bledsoe & Baskin (2014), p. 32.

⁴⁹ These terms are scattered throughout Gillian (2005), for example.

⁵⁰ See "culture of fear" and its role in education (e.g. Fisher, 2007).

says, and so everything after is a “lie” we tell ourselves; and educators, he claims, do this horrifically well all the time (see Chapter 13 in Gillian, 2005). One reason, is “Real critical thinking is just too negatively terrifying to us adults, which is why we have not spent our own lives learning and practicing it.” It would be too much of a threat, and that children learn as well from adults, he claims.⁵¹

Not unlike Becker to some degree, Gillian told me of his plan for a third book (which never happened). He admits his interest in “synthesizing science and religion” for its,

...everywhere in my writing, more so in my second book....My third book will be an extension of all this in more detail. Funny you should mention Ken Wilber [integral philosopher]. Someone else introduced me to his writings, and I have begun to research him....I will purchase *The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion* and read it, as you suggest....I have learned already, Ken and I have much in common when it comes to the negative and somewhat intransigent attitudes that both sides have that prevent such a synthesizing.⁵²

What a big vision Gillian had, re: the synthesizing of science and religion. He certainly didn’t seem to pursue this intellectually and in his writing as far as I can tell, but I saw snippets of his concerns in the correspondence—of which I’ll share but just a few:

a) in talking about the crucial “connection between fear and language” and “origins of language” which really intrigued Gillian, he led off with a Beckerian argument but quoting the famous modern rationalist philosopher Bertrand Russell “the awareness of human mortality, the beginnings of religious ritual” were motivated by fear; Gillian wrote: “From this, I can surmise that you too, view the origin of religion, for example, as a reaction to fear or, as you say, ‘human terror.’ Bertrand Russell, one of my longtime heroes, came to the very same conclusion almost a century ago. (Sigh! It seems as if it were just yesterday. Alas.)”

b) I have two brothers who are born-again Christians and who believe that, according to the Bible, the earth is from six to ten thousand years old. They

⁵¹ Gillian (2005), p. 243.

⁵² Personal communications, Feb. 18, 2005.

accept the story of Adam and Eve as a literal story....my two brothers, for example, and many others [due to negative terror] reject out of hand such statements [a la Russell's] as scientific nonsense or lies. More significantly, what [positively] frightens me is that religious belief causes billions of us human beings to reject without careful consideration....phrases that you and I...easily accept almost without thinking about the "truth" of them. What do I think is the "human terror" that drives us human beings to be "religious"? It is the fear of meaninglessness....Religions, in my mind, developed to give significance or meaning to life....Religions still do the same thing today—and so does science. Meaninglessness terrorizes each of us, no matter what our belief or non-belief systems may be. An atheist is just as terrified by the meaninglessness of life as a "religious" person. I put "religious" in quotation marks because, in my way of thinking, we are all "religious," regardless of how much we may reject organized religion.⁵³

Gillian was in favor of evolutionary teaching and religious teaching in schools and society-at-large. He thought it was horrible that public school systems were being negatively terrified in several states to teach equally that evolution is no different than religion in understanding nature and history of Life on this planet. With a favorable Judaeo-Christian leaning himself, several places in Gillian's *Terrified by Education* book he embraces religious discourse and argues for a "spirit of fear" that is good—that is, "the Jewish messiah will be born 'in the spirit of fear' (Isaiah 11:1-3). It is as true for the messiah and for "all human beings," Gillian wrote.⁵⁴ In contradistinction, all my work is about how all organisms have the "spirit of fearlessness." Gillian goes on to argue in detail in this same book, "The idea that we human beings can be free from fear contradicts numerous statements in the Bible about fear"—and, yet, my study of various W. theological traditions shows they present the case that "Perfect love casts out fear" and that humans are created not in the spirit of fear, but in the spirit (of God's) love. On and on, that is a discussion beyond what I wish to go into here. My point has been to show that Gillian found his view supported in certain readings of Biblical texts, and he wasn't afraid to use them.

Okay, clearly the messaging in Gillian's press release re: his two books says it plainly: "Samuel Nathan Gillian aims to revolutionize the national and world conversation about fear."⁵⁵ Now, what about "courage" in rela-

⁵³ Personal communications, cc to me, March 1, 2005. He wrote this for the Ernest Becker listserv.

⁵⁴ Gillian (2005), p. 101.

⁵⁵ Gillian (2004).

tionship to fear? Isn't it courage that ultimately empowers people? Gillian would say, empowerment is driven by the motivation fear; and courage a by-product that is motivated by fear;⁵⁶ because at base life is fear, fear is life. Of course, Gillian applauded courage but would say 'it has to be scared into us' to be actualized. His big concern was that "We are [negatively] terrified [ongoing by society] by our negative education concerning fear into being less courageous than we need to be..."⁵⁷

Not unlike Becker and most other Western thinkers (especially men), it is clear that Gillian did not have logical space for a notion of "fearlessness" (because he took the term so literally, despite my teaching otherwise)—and, so he at one point wrote his form of definition in his correspondence:

"Fear" is currently defined as 'a feeling of anxiety and agitation caused by the nearness or presence of danger.' So, I consider all my writing and workshops to be my dangerous way of agitating others into being more properly afraid, especially since, as I have come to understand it, fear is what life is all about. You can surmise that I will be agitating you more and more about the "fearlessness" you speak so often of. So, let me leave you with a more than century old quote from Mark Twain: "Courage is not the absence of fear; it is the presence of fear." I agree with Twain that "courage," a synonym for "fearlessness," is truly about being afraid—in a positive, healthy and constructive way. Peace and love, Brother Sam.⁵⁸

Gillian sincerely responded to my concern at times that his work would be received, in his texts at least, as too negative (even too scary) for most liberal folks, including most teachers these days. He responded: "I find it hard to think of my message about fear/life as a negative one." I would call it

⁵⁶ The plethora of authors writing about fear, especially in the last few decades who have made it their ambition to take fear out of the negative-association camp, have taken this same course of action as Gillian—that is, to make fear positive by association (e.g., Gillian's "beauty of fear"). I applaud this effort onto to a degree, because I see it is a project conflicted with a dualistic enemy (fear as negative) to such a degree it puts nearly zero effort into truly radicalizing Fear Studies. Fear-positivists, like Gillian, have a positive contribution to make but it what they leave out re: more complex conceptualizations of 'fear' (e.g., culturally-modified forms and how they taint all forms of fear and self) that I am most concerned with. I have written critically about these fear-positivists for decades (e.g., see Fisher, 2010, pp. 100-02, 132-3, 190-1; Fisher & Subba, 2016, p. 47). One fear-positive classic Gillian-type of claim is: "Fear can be more positive than negative. Not having a concept of proper or positive fear has led to all kinds of negative consequences for us human beings" (Gillian, 2005, p. 17).

⁵⁷ Gillian (2005), p. 23.

⁵⁸ Personal communications, Feb. 20, 2005.

existentialist (see below), of which Gillian was not willing to embrace as a ‘box’ to stick his views within.⁵⁹ This should not be surprising, as he is an iconclast—that is, a self-made man in most everything he ever did. He was proud to tell his fans “my ideas were self-developed.”⁶⁰

The so-called *progressive* educators and liberal education advocates in general will in all likelihood have a really tough time swallowing the Gillian educational philosophy. They will likely resist the near-total focus on life, schooling, family, etc. through the lens of fear/terror—as, essentially what *life is*. That’s too dark and too bitter, for the tastes of most. Gillian would counter: ‘oh, they mean it is *too real* for their tastes.’ No doubt, many progressivist educators have had (or will have) a hard time dealing with Becker’s (or Rank’s) philosophy and theories in general, as well as their educational philosophies specifically (see Fisher, in press). Yet, if it seems too doom-gloom on first take, Gillian’s philosophy of education is represented by him in the image of mostly happy children, for example, see his cover image on his second book (Figure 1).

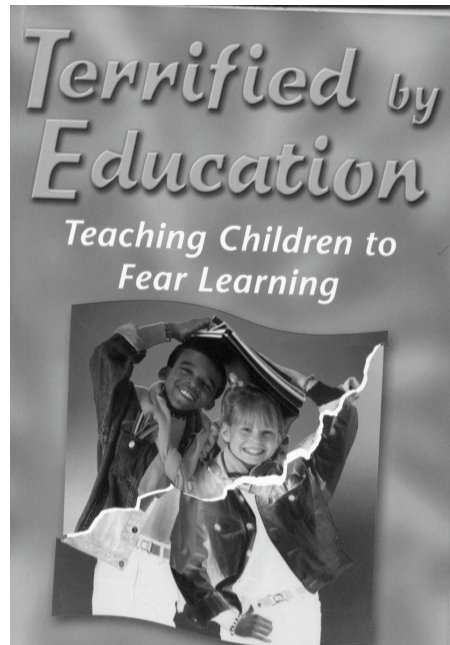


Figure 1 : Book Cover (Gillian, 2005)

⁵⁹ Personal communications, Feb. 17, 2005.

⁶⁰ Personal communications, Feb. 8, 2005.

The book cover in Figure 1 of course is not your average education book cover or magazine promotion ad, of the all happy children's faces. The subtle diagonal rip and/or deconstruction across the lower bodies of these school children indicates all is not well and needs attention like a traumatic wound. There's also the sense of the two children securing themselves from the impending 'sky is falling.' Yet, they seem bravely facing it. Certainly, that deconstructive (and reformist) critique is embedded in the fabric of Gillian's book but it is also one found in many progressive educators' (and critical pedagogues') texts as well. So what exactly is it that 'progressives' generally may find troubling as they go deeper into Gillian's book on "Teaching Children to Fear Learning"? What would they find troubling likely about Gillian's claims that "Caring is fearing,"⁶¹ "love is about being afraid"⁶² or "Fear: Our moral foundation" has too long been distorted and/or denied altogether by educators (and parents)?⁶³ This denigration of fear as central is at the heart of all violence, if not evil (as Becker and Gillian would argue).

For starters, and I can only barely touch on Gillian's *contra* views on standard liberal and progressive attitudes (especially in America), he wrote:

Teaching children to fear learning, however, can be done in either a negative [i.e., oppressive and destructive] or positive [i.e., realistic and constructive] way....Awareness is fear of knowing: it is the fear of knowing or interacting with one's environment.⁶⁴

This is a nutshell educational philosophy that is typically not appreciated by 'progressive' thinkers, of which I am and have been one for decades. Yet, I am looking at this philosophy and Gillian's claims about pedagogy that come from it and it indicates a realism (*a la* existentialism) to me. For Gillian, the world is dangerous and terrifying, something he repeats; and, to deny that is a lie, he also repeats. He observes the world of children as one where they need to be free to explore and risk but that we must by necessity teach them and scare them "into learning" about reality—which, includes their ultimate and their parents ultimate demise—that is, death. He doesn't focus on the death part. Yet, he really goes after progressive educators and parents (and the society that endorses them):

⁶¹ Gillian (2005), p. 11.

⁶² Ibid., p. 19.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 139.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 21-2.

One of the main reasons we teachers fail to teach children properly is that we reject the very idea of teaching a child by scaring it, which is exactly what we are *always* doing. We American [liberal] educators have gotten it into our heads [*via* systematic oppressive “negative education concerning fear,” p. 23]—and schools of education—that rote memorization or repetitive exercises, for example, damage a child’s self-esteem because they scare children so badly. Terrified “progressive” educators refer to these activities as “drill and kill.” So, all too many of our American schools no longer teach the multiplication tables or how to do long division.... We teachers are no longer needed as teachers who impart content but as “facilitators” who allow children to teach themselves by discovering their own knowledge.... And then we wonder why so many school children are not academically ready for high school.... There is nothing inherently wrong with discovery learning, but research has clearly shown that discovery learning works best with those children who enjoy advantageous social and economic conditions [*i.e.*, privileged class status].⁶⁵

In some ways, Gillian’s philosophy of fear/terror impacts his overall pedagogical philosophy and practice in the classroom. He comes across as a hybrid of traditional (conservative) and progressive (liberal). On the latter stance politically he focuses on class and racial differences as real and as key to shaping learning and development, on the former stance he thinks progressive education has gone too far to try to let children learn freely. This last point, can be re-worded. His seemingly traditional realism view is that too many progressive school educators and the philosophies of education they rely upon are fear-based themselves, where teachers are following ways of teaching because they are so terrified to damage children’s self-esteem. He is saying that a more traditional view of pedagogy is better than progressive views generally, because there is no big fear of imputing fear in the learning process—and, in reality, he asserts, children need to be scared into learning about their environment—an environment which is dangerous. Certainly, for the middle and upper classes and white-dominated communities where children are raised and schooled, the risks and real threats are much less—and, nearly buffered so much that those children grow up quite out of touch with the ‘world’ reality. This is the implicit social justice critique in his philosophy of education. Why this buffering and protection of loss of self-esteem is so over-emphasized could be explained by Becker’s theory (and/or Terror Management Theory)—which Gillian is aware of but does not feature it to back up his logic for his posi-

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

tion. He concludes, “Thinking that we are being ‘progressive,’ we reject fear as an educational tool because we have been [unfortunately] conditioned to think that fear is only something negative.”⁶⁶

With the critique of (white middle-upper class) notions of ‘progressive’ ways, we have to ask: Is Gillian’s philosophy categorically African-American, postcolonial, and would it fit in with the postmodern decolonizing and Indigenizing education movement (e.g., Four Arrow’s notion of a “connoisseur of fear”)? These are beyond the scope of this paper, but I would say that Gillian’s philosophy is leaning in these directions of ‘alternatives’ and criticism of the entire “System”—and, if pushed, Gillian would say that the oppression that damages everyone in a colonized nation is an oppression led not just by fear/terror but, to be accurate to his own view, is led by “negative conditioning” in regard to fear. In my language, Gillian is saying we have an inadequate and too negative approach to basic socialization and fear management/education.

Gillian’s critique raises the very issue for progressive and liberal education that I also have had for decades. We both would suggest that “fear” has just not been centralized, but more avoided (because of this “negative conditioning”); and thus, little new or in depth understanding is learned about the nature and role of fear—and, how fear by design keeps one in-touch with reality. The problem of society is that it creates denial and dissociated fictions that lead humans away from reality—a pathology itself (a very Beckerian notion). Anyways, if one was to centralize the understanding of fear and its dynamics as the way to go toward a healthier society, then a *fearist lens*⁶⁷ may be an appropriate ‘best’ tool of such a discussion. That leads to the next topic I have been thinking about since re-reading Gillian’s work.

How would Gillian have ‘fit in’ with the discovery of the *philosophy of fearism* (a la Subba et al. and Fisher)? Fearism, as I have argued, and eventually Subba agreed (reluctantly) is arguably a latest branch of the philosophy of existentialism. It is strangely provocative, to search my historical consciousness around ‘who were (are) they’ that came so close to my way of thinking about fear and fearlessness over the decades of the 1990s for-

⁶⁶ Equally he could have said here ‘we have been conditioned to think that risk [unsafety] is only something negative’ (Ibid., p. 26). In support of Gillian’s view, a vast amount of criticism about the “safety first” movement in education and W. modern society, for the past few decades, linked to the growing “culture of fear” (and “risk society”) criticisms, is due; albeit, that is far beyond the scope of this paper.

⁶⁷ “Fearist perspective” (or lens) was coined and defined by Subba (2014), p. 11.

ward? I mean they came to understand the vital centrality of fear and recognized it had not been given its due in philosophy, theology, psychology and so on. History had missed seeing fear for what it is. That's the kind of canon of the project that interests me.

The thinkers most close to me in this way, in order of appearance, Samuel Gillian (2004-), Four Arrows (2007-), Desh Subba (2014-). The last in this list, Subba, is the most intimate in terms of 'blending' with my work in a conscious and systematic way, even though Subba takes some directions quite different than my own re: fear and his *fearism*. We have co-written several articles on a philosophy of fearism and it has been a very mutually stimulating venture, with a future that I feel has a lot of possibilities to reach larger audiences. The strange and interesting part is that Subba, an Eastern thinker (from Nepal), who practices English as a second-language, came to his construction of a philosophy of fearism (i.e., making fear central in all human life including other species) *via* his fiction, poetry and literary criticism involvements as an established Nepali writer. Gillian as well comes to me as a "long career" teacher of "English and creative writing"⁶⁸ from New York. Four Arrows, an Indigenous educator, is also very well steeped in literature and music. I wonder what is it in literary-types that makes them so much more easily attracted to dark, depth (existential) psychology and philosophy, and in particular a focus on fear/terror?⁶⁹ A bigger question for another time.

The point of mentioning these three players in my 'circle of care' re: Fear Studies, is that they all are quite the iconoclasts And I guess so am I. All of us have spent decades, working independently,⁷⁰ to arrive at the same basic educational imperative: *society quickly needs a (r)evolutionary new conception of fear and its role*. Without this re-visioning of our socialization and education processes, fear, in its most excessive and toxic forms (e.g., terrorism) will destroy most all Life on this planet and make it soon an ecosystem unable to sustain *Homo sapiens*.

⁶⁸ Liechty (2004).

⁶⁹ When I shared this with my life-partner, she said, "All four of you are of different colors/races/cultures/worlds—red [Four Arrows], white [me], yellow [Subba], black [Gillian]."

⁷⁰ Other than Four Arrows, the three of us are not professional university scholars. We operate in the margins of academia (i.e., working class) and/or are 'progressive' (left-leaning) populist leaders/teachers (e.g., especially, both Gillian and Subba).

What Was Gillian's Relationship With Becker and Rank?

Gillian did at times write detailed long posts on his philosophy, like commenting around the question: “Why do good people do awful things?” on the ERNESTBECKER-L@listserv.ilstu.edu (e.g., Feb. 26, 2005). I have not searched out for more of those posts on that list serve, but it indicates that he was serious enough to be part of that group back in the day. Daniel Liechty, who hosted that listserve, and who was the longstanding VP for the Ernest Becker Foundation (EBF), has written to me about some of Gillian's history with that group and the EBF in the 2002-05 years:

I was thinking about Sam Gillian not too long ago and wondering how he was doing. I googled him and didn't find anything, so my fear was that he passed away....We [EBF] had him out to Seattle at least a couple of times in the early '00s [at EBF annual conferences]. My memory is that as the Ernest Becker Foundation moved evermore toward being mainly promoters for Terror Management Theory, it is exactly people like Sam who eventually lost interest, and lost touch, which is really a shame.⁷¹

It is interesting that in all my correspondence with Gillian (May 6, 2004 to March 1, 2005) we rarely talked about Becker and when we did it was with little depth or detail. We talked mostly about fear and fearlessness and education. On one occasion we talked about “existential philosophy,” which I'll share more about momentarily.

Indisputably, Ernest Becker is a type of 20th century existentialist philosopher, or at least one could say he has an existential depth psychology threaded throughout his oeuvre on motivation, which was at the heart of his project—albeit, with his own universal, eclectic, anthropological and integral approach. One reason to label him existential is that,

In all his work, Becker was searching for the primary motivation or impetus to explain human behavior. And after much experimentation Becker embraced death denial as his core unifying concept.⁷²

“Fear of death” is a big theme for a lot of W. philosophers going back to the Stoics and Epicureans but the existentialists gave this fear a good deal

⁷¹ Personal communications, July 4, and July 7, 2020.

⁷² Sheiman (2020).

of systematic credence, as have existential psychotherapists, psychiatrists and psychohistorians (e.g., Robert Jay Lifton). One could generalize, to conclude all existentialists, more or less, have adopted the face-to-face dark truth and reality of death (mortality) and its potent impacts on human behaviors (conscious or unconscious), be they individually and/or organizationally. Through the existential lens, everything is touched, if not tainted, by the specter called dying, and finally death.

Becker was no exception and I'm sure he wouldn't have rejected anyone labeling his work as existential. Yet, when pressed on it, Gillian a committed fan of Becker, seemed to refuse to be included as an existentialist or as a Beckerian. Recall, that he told me that from the start (1972) he had chosen to "approach the study of fear" as "etymological and logical" by which he means commonsensical and pragmatic—and, to be sure "without reliance on any authority."⁷³ And it is this chosen *method*, perhaps somewhat idiosyncratic (literary), as preferred approach to fear that led him down the road to a unique theory (perhaps) but to also dis-identify with existentialism philosophy(?) Upon my prodding, he explained,

Do I think of myself as an existentialist? Hardly, for according to my understanding of existentialism (correct me, if I am wrong), I would then be one who "emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual in a hostile or indifferent universe," who "regards existence as unexplainable," and who "stresses free choice and responsibility for one's actions." [I assume Gillian is quoting the dictionary here] The opposite side of all three of these issues is where I find myself....⁷⁴

Gillian goes into a long monologue on his views, in contrast to the (dictionary definition) of an existentialist stance. One point in his argument of dis-identifying from existentialist thinkers (perhaps, even somewhat from Becker) is that they all tended to pursue a notion of "freedom from fear" as a goal, by which that is a complex topic—yet, Gillian generalized to say to anyone (including me) that any pursuit of freedom from fear, in search of fearlessness, "is death."⁷⁵ You have to be a dead duck to be without fear/terror. He finds the pursuit thus, the search thus, as utterly a misguided waste of time for a living human. That is the literal crux of his own philosophy of fear/terror in a nutshell. And it is a significant ground of his

⁷³ Personal communications, May 6, 2004.

⁷⁴ Personal communications, Feb. 17, 2005.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

logic from which everything else he teaches comes out of. He told me he was aware of those who (like the Buddha) may have transcendent philosophies (and/or Idealist philosophies) that would not be so materialist as his own on the topic of fear/terror—but “I just disagree with each one of them,” he wrote. And then he continued with his rationale of dis-identification from existentialism:

Rather, I am an admirer of Otto Rank, to whom I was introduced through Ernest Becker’s writings. [recall Liechty, 2004, who suggested Gillian’s first book “is a very ‘Rankian’ book” more so than Beckerian] In his book *Will Therapy*, Rank states, in his own not-quite-existentialist way, what I just said in the preceding paragraph. I came across his statement of these same ideas AFTER [i.e., independently] I wrote my first book, otherwise I would have quoted him. Rank argues, “The fear in birth, which we have designated as fear of life, seems to me actually the fear of having to live as an isolated individual, and not the reverse, the fear of loss of individuality (death fear). That would mean, however, that primary fear corresponds to a fear of separation from the whole...therefore a fear of individuation, on account of which I would like to call it fear of life...although it may appear later as fear of loss of this dearly bought individuality as fear of death, of being dissolved again into the whole. Between these two fear possibilities, these poles of fear, the individual is thrown back and forth all his life...” Exactly my sentiments, in other words. And what all this means is that both the beauty and the ugliness of life derive from our fears. So, what is our job as parents and educators, for example? Why to teach children how to fear, of course, which means to teach them how to live—since “fear is what life is all about.” [I think this last claim would not fit so easily in a Beckerian worldview, and maybe it does for a Rankian perspective]⁷⁶

A Few Concluding Remarks

Sam Gillian is a complex man, but a simple teacher. Those phrases came forward spontaneously. I learned a good deal from doing the research for this technical paper, to see that there is much I still have not digested. I have my homework to do before I would claim strong views and/or criticisms about Gillian’s work. I wish to write a longer piece on his philosophy of fear/terror and education. I encourage others to likewise do so.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

From many of the notes in the margins of Gillian's books back when I read them in 2004-05, it is clear I did not agree with him on several issues. I also see that I agree with him heartily. He is a great ally to those of us who believe that "fear" has to be re-visioned in (at least) our current W. societies. We also agree that the study of fear has to be able to integrate the arts, sciences and religion—under the method of philosophical open inquiry. The broadest and deepest knowledge have to be synthesized. Gillian was an example, perhaps not 'perfect' and always consistent, in this open-minded integral approach to study and to creating an educational philosophy for the 21st century.

If there is one thing that is missing that really is a shame, it is that he did not talk enough about his life-experiences that also led to his philosophical thinking. I find myself wondering why did he not include more such stories to help us in understanding his theory and his teaching. I feel like he 'disappeared' suddenly, and I don't know why. There are indications (and some stories of his life-experiences) in the correspondence that tell me he either went to prison or was killed, or died suddenly—or perhaps merely got very sick and was not able to write. It just doesn't make sense to me that at age 66, when we were corresponding, that he wouldn't have got to his third book and a whole lot more after if he was in fact well, or able. I guess that all won't be answered until a full biographical investigation is done.

Meanwhile, I believe this technical paper is a start to re-introducing this important work of Gillian's into the educational sphere. If more is accomplished than just an acquaintance with his ideas, then that would be to put his ideas into action—in schools, and communities and nations. That would be a great honoring of his work. Yet, Gillian himself, would also want us to take his work and give it a good critique now and then too. It surely, needs to be upgraded and modified, from many perspectives. I look forward to seeing those fruits grow from the roots and tree that Gillian left us with.

Appendix 1

[excerpt only from:]
 The Fearology of Sam N. Gillian
 Interview with R. Michael Fisher
 [Live on the Air, Feb. 14, 2005]

Host (H): Hello listeners and a happy Valentine's Day to you all. On a day celebrating love, it may seem strange that today's program is celebrating fear. Yes, that's right. If author Sam Gillian could have his way, we'd all be changing our negative attitude toward fear to something a lot more positive. Sam Gillian, author of *The Beauty of Fear: How to Positively Enjoy Being Afraid* (2002), believes, after 30+ years of research on fear, that we all ought to love fear a lot more than we do. And with us in the studio today is Dr. R. Michael Fisher, a self-ascribed fearologist, who has volunteered to share with us some of his thoughts on this provocative book by Sam Gillian, a book which David E. Smith Jr. says is the book that "...will revolutionize the way we think about fear." Welcome Dr. Fisher.

Fisher (F): Thank you. It's good to be here, especially with all the talk about love this Valentine's—it's great to see fear is getting some equal air time.

H: So, Dr. Fisher, do you think Sam Gillian is right?—that fear is a lot more beneficial to life than we have given it credit for? Is his book really a revolution in the way we think about fear?

F: Brother Sam and I have quickly become e-friends and colleagues on this study of fear and life. I define fearology, in its simplest form, as the "study of fear and its relationship to life." Gillian, in his first book, writes that "fear is life and life is fear" and the sooner we get used to it and get honest about that truth, the better this whole planet will be.

H: That sounds like kind of a negative attitude toward life.

F: At first glance it does, alright. I suppose he could have said, "love is life and life is love"....

H: And he would probably sell a lot more books and workshops.

F: Yeah, that's true but that's incomplete. I think Gillian believes the latter is true too. I'm serious, he is convinced that "The love of God is based in the fear of God" and our love of life ought to be based on our love of fear. Courageously, he has decided, as have I, in my own career, to research and write about fear and not so much on love, as the important ingredient to understand better, if we are to survive on this planet much longer. His work is not that revolutionary in the field of Fear Studies, as I will talk about later in this interview, but Gillian, a controversial retired prophetic-type

educator and black African-American from the Bronx, echoes my passion—and that of a favorite critical writer-educator-academic of mine—America's own Dr. bell hooks, a highly respected black neo-feminist, who has written a wonderful book entitled *All About Love* (2000), where she writes, "In our society we make much of love and say little about fear." Gillian and I would definitely agree.

H: Because we are too afraid to talk about fear, it just freaks us out?

F: Yeah, for the vast major of us. I must say I don't agree with all of Gillian's methods, finds and logic. But before we get into my critique, I have to say that he has written a book well worth reading. Yet most of his ideas on fear, are not new, and in fact there is a whole movement of authors trying to make fear a more positive concept. Sam just dresses them up in a unique style and delivers the goods with his spicy, if not hyperbolic, Methodist flare. But even if hooks, Gillian and I believe that most people are really too frightened to talk openly and learn more about fear, the critics abound and will challenge Gillian's conclusions at every turn, I suspect. Not that he minds, as he seems to like a good fight. For example, Gillian argues that no one, as long as they are living, can be free of fear. So, how do you then put that claim together with a brilliant philosopher-writer like the black feminist Maya Angelou (1993), who wrote a book for children entitled *Life Doesn't Frighten Me*.^[?] Angelou's refrain in the poem of the book is "Life doesn't frighten me at all." And you really get the sense from reading it that she bloody well means it!

H: I guess Gillian would have to convince her that she is wrong. Doesn't he write "...all attempts to get rid of fear totally are suicidal"? Doesn't he write, more or less, that anyone who says they are not afraid, are basically dead?

F: I'd like to see him try it—to her face. Now, that would be an event.⁷⁷ As a fearologist, I have to say Gillian has taken on a big bite of an immense topic. He deserves all the credit for his accomplished self-published work. We also ought to remember that his audience is a populist market, not [typically] academics like me. The problem is, he is teaching about fear management—what he refers to as "knowing how to be afraid"—and that has to be critiqued by fearologists and anybody else, just as I would want any of my writing on fear management critiqued. It is a civic issue that the best

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fear management education is taught to our next generation and to all of us adults too.... [to be continued]

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