



June 30, 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

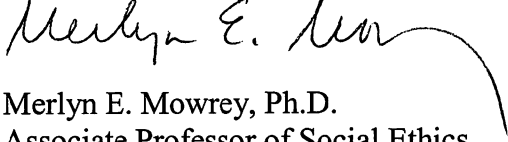
I have seen Greg Bennick discuss the documentary, "Flight from Death" before numerous audiences, to great effect. Greg co-produced this film with Patrick Shen and it is a powerful examination of the impact of death anxiety on our perceptions and behaviors. This topic may sound overly abstract or academic, but "Flight from Death" is neither. It's accessible, persuasive and gripping. First, it confronts us with evidence that the inevitability of death arouses our anxieties – often unconsciously. Then, it demonstrates that we often try to reduce that anxiety by convincing ourselves that we are superior to people who are different from us – people with different beliefs, worldviews, national or ethnic identities, affiliations – almost any kind of difference will do. What we are looking for are opportunities to demonstrate that we are right, we are the "winners," we count and will keep on counting, despite the fact that we will die. "Flight from Death" shows how death anxiety plays a role in our suspicion of "others," our tendency to degrade and ridicule them, our conviction that people whose values and beliefs differ from our own are at best, wrong, and at worst, evil. These provocative ideas give insight into human violence and Greg uses them to open up powerful conversations on a wide range of current events.

In 2003 I invited Greg (among others) to speak at a conference on violence at Central Michigan University, which began with a showing of "Flight from Death." Next, Greg led a discussion with students in the audience which was as exciting as the film. He was able to take complicated questions and respond with clear, direct answers, opening up new lines of thinking, new responses, and new questions. I talked with students after the conference and I still recall a common theme in their remarks: They got the ideas in the film, but it was Greg's discussion that gave them a startling sense of how those ideas connected with experiences in their own lives. A student sent a letter to the university newspaper describing this as the most exciting event she had ever attended.

In 2008, I organized another conference at CMU, examining how the threat of terrorism was being used in political/campaign messages. Again, Greg presented "Flight from Death" and led a discussion linking the film to this topic and the other presentations (by pollster John Zogby, social psychologist Sheldon Solomon, and author and political scientist John Mueller.) Greg's presentation was described by many audience members as the piece that "tied everything together" and "brought the conference themes into focus." Several students commented to me that after Greg's presentation, they would never listen to political speeches the same way again. I later learned that many people at the conference decided to come after hearing Greg's discussion of "Flight from Death" the previous night at CMU's International Film Festival!

Greg is skillful in making even difficult ideas commonsensical and relevant to peoples' lives and experiences. It gives him a powerful impact - he grabs his audience in a visceral way. His

background as a performer serves him well, and yet, in this context he goes beyond being an entertainer: His uses his dynamism, humor and spontaneity to make serious issues engaging, urgent, and exciting. His audiences – college students, in my experience – are drawn into taking ideas seriously, and thus are able to use them to make sense of the world in a new way. His presentations here have been impressive and memorable, and I look forward to working with Greg again in the future.



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