

## I \*\*\* *On Being Open and Closed*

Some people are very open. Their faces shine with a light that radiates out from some hidden source within themselves. Their hearts, filled with warmth and well-being, overflow in a generous expansiveness, a spontaneous sharing of an inner abundance. From them a flame of life flashes forth, igniting new life in others. They care passionately about people, rejoicing in the creativity and the happiness of others, grieving over their tragedies and their self-betrayals. Their words and actions issue directly from an intense center of powerful passion. They love life.

Such people do exist. It is difficult to acknowledge this. Even if we allow ourselves to become aware of them we tend to find fault, for we feel envious. Since their very existence reminds us of the extent to which we are missing out on life, we cannot bear to see them as they are. If someone attempts to describe them we are likely to dismiss him cynically as a mere sentimentalist. Or, alternatively, we see the radiant people but elevate them to a distant pedestal that is unattainable by us and therefore not tantalizing.

Sometimes, however, we can see them realistically, as an invitation and challenge to new hope for our own lives. This is more likely to happen if we realize two things: they can give so much only because they are open to receive, and they have become open because they have acknowledged and dealt with whatever makes them closed. Their abundance is not a private possession or a proud achievement but rather the outcome of an openness to life energies available to all of us. And their openness is not just a natural endowment, but depends on an ongoing process of uncovering, and letting go of, the ways in which they have been closed to life. Indeed, as they persist in the process, ever-deeper layers of closedness emerge to resist the growth in openness. As one gets to know them, it becomes obvious that they are not always

open, always radiant. Their human nature is the same as ours. They differ from us only in degree, not in kind.

All of us are both open and closed. We have inbuilt tendencies toward participation in life and defensive structures that keep us imprisoned within ourselves. The issue is whether the closed stance or the open stance will be dominant in our lives. It is true that some people start by being less closed than others, but for almost everyone there is a possibility of gradual change toward greater openness. Since each stance affects everything we say and do and feel, the choice is of momentous importance. But since the process is only partially conscious, many of the most profound decisions in our lives are made without our being more than dimly aware of them. This chapter is an attempt to become more aware of the process, bringing it more fully into the light of consciousness and understanding, available for free decision. It is not a matter of doing an inventory of one's life, listing its various contents so as to decide what is dispensable, what needs changing, and what is missing. The decision has to do with basic attitudes that pervade everything one does and thinks and feels—all the contents of one's life, whatever they are.

People differ considerably in the extent to which they are closed; that is, self-centered and self-preoccupied. In some the stance is minimal, but in others it is very blatant and extreme. There is a joke about a narcissist who talked about himself for two hours and then stopped to say, "I'm sorry, I've talked too much about me. Let's talk about you for a change. What do you think of me?" Usually, however, closedness is less obvious. Many social conventions help us to conceal it from ourselves. Sometimes it is even successfully disguised as altruism. Yet it is often fairly easy to detect in others. In the presence of a self-preoccupied person, even if she is charming and outwardly interested in me, I feel that I do not matter in myself, but only in my significance for her.

Self-centeredness is very difficult to see in oneself. The operations of my self-centeredness are mostly unconscious, and they are manifested in behavior which to others may

seem self-centered but to me may seem quite natural, especially if I am not clearly aware of what it feels like to be open. A person who is not aware of any language other than English is not aware that he talks and thinks in English. Similarly if I am not aware of an alternative to a closed-up life I do not realize how constricted my present existence is. Moreover, I have a great deal invested in continuing a self-centered existence and in not becoming aware of its alternative, for self-centeredness is an unconscious strategy for psychic survival. It is a second-best mode of existence that I adopted early in my life because it seemed better than having no existence. Any challenge to this desperate compromise is alarming. So in general the more self-centered we are, the less we are aware of it. This means that if we are to uncover the ways in which we close ourselves off from participation in life, we need considerable courage and honesty, as well as a vision of what that participative life would be.

For some people an additional obstacle is the religious teaching to which they have been subjected. Often religion justifiably attacks one form of closedness, namely pride or self-inflation, but goes on to confuse and constrict human life by praising another form, a so-called humility that is really self-humiliation, a self-deflating submission that is still preoccupied with issues of comparative power and status. To make matters worse, religion often reinforces our tendency to regard any personal shortcoming as a justification for self-punishment, so the discovery of self-centeredness becomes an occasion for destructive, paralyzing self-recrimination. It is possible, however, to struggle in more creative ways toward greater personal honesty and openness. And, as we shall see, there are religious conceptions that can express and reinforce a stance of openness to abundant life.

At this point I should say something about the intellectual origins of this chapter. In 1970 I began an earlier work, *Struggle and Fulfilment*,<sup>1</sup> which was supposed to deal with religion and morality. At first I considered beliefs: religious beliefs concerning the attributes of God and moral beliefs concerning how we ought to behave. But as I became convinced that matters of belief are secondary in both religion

and morality I began to study the attitudes on which the beliefs depend. These attitudes are pervasive stances of the whole personality which shape our responses to the universe as a whole and to each particular in it. As I investigated some of the most important attitudes, for example, basic trust, I gradually came to realize that they are both religious and moral. They are religious in that they are stances toward whatever unifying reality pervades our whole environment. They are moral in that they are virtues which radically influence the way we deal with other people. I also came to realize that they are "ego-strengths" that are crucial in the process of psychotherapy, and that they are constituents of human fulfilment. So it became clear that religion and morality and therapy can converge in stances which are central in human life as such. Openness is such a stance.

In *Struggle and Fulfilment*, however, the focus was on trust and the pervasive attitude of distrust that is its opposite. I described the struggle between these two as I experienced it in my own life and in the lives of others and as it is illuminated by religious and moral traditions. So the book arose not only from a new view of the inner dynamics of religion and morality but also from a process of personal struggle and change. When I finished it I planned to write some sequels, for the book contained brief sketches of various other struggles that are important in human life, and these sketches invited further expansion. I decided to begin with a book that would focus on issues concerning power and status. After a while I began to realize that in people generally, and me in particular, a preoccupation with comparative power and status is a central feature of a radically pervasive stance which I was only just beginning to recognize and acknowledge: closedness. Insofar as we are closed, we are preoccupied with whether we stand over or under others in power and status, and we alternate between self-inflation and self-deflation. Insofar as we are open, we can transcend this self-centered syndrome so as to share non-competitively with others in life energies that are common to all. Gradually I came to see that the closed person differs from the open person in an additional way. She is preoccu-

pied with how she stands or falls in comparison with others because she is out of touch with what is vital for herself. Insofar as I am closed I lack a love for life—not only life within others but also life within myself. I not only cannot get outside of myself; I cannot really get inside myself. This realization came as a shock, though fortunately I am also sometimes open. The investigation of what it means to be “closed” or “open” turned out to be not only a theoretical inquiry but also a personal challenge.

The contrast between closed and open stances can be described in many different ways. Religious thinkers contrast “sin” and “faith” or “pride” and “humility”; moral philosophers contrast “vice” and “virtue” or “egoism” and “benevolence”; psychoanalysts contrast “narcissism” and “object-libido”; existentialists contrast “I-It” and “I-Thou”; metaphysicians contrast “alienation” and “participation”; contemplatives contrast “the egocentric life” and “the divine birth in the soul.” I do not claim that these contrasts are all the same. Rather, I draw on elements in each of them as I write about “closed” and “open” stances. I shall write in a language that can be related to each of these different ways of thinking and that draws on insights from each of them, but that is less technical and more directly experiential.

There is a problem in the presentation. To explain what it means to be closed one must at the same time explain what it means to be open, and vice versa, for each is understood to a great extent as the opposite of the other. But each stance has its own characteristics quite apart from the contrast with its opposite. So I will paint pictures of each on its own as well as alongside the other. The overall picture will emerge only gradually as I proceed.

The most crucial characteristic of openness is difficult to describe. I call it participation in life energies. The most basic and primitive way in which this is experienced is as a physical sensation. Since some people have not had a clear contact with this, I will make a practical suggestion, although this chapter is not a “how-to-do-it” manual. It is possible to induce a brief and superficial physical awareness of life energies as vibration in a very simple way, which pro-

vided my own first clear experience of it. Rub the palms of your hands together vigorously for about five minutes with your eyes closed. Separate your hands about five inches and then bring them closer together, without touching. Move them apart again, varying the distance between them, concentrating on the space between them. Probably you will experience energy, in a quite tangible way, pulling and pulsating between your hands. A similar experience can occur, without any rubbing, in yoga-breathing meditation, though the energy will usually feel less "gross" and more "delicate." And during various disciplines such as zazen or bioenergetics or kundalini yoga there are experiences of energy "streaming" through the whole body. This happens when tensions and rigidities within the body, which ordinarily impede the flow of energy, are momentarily reduced. "Streaming" sensations also occur in genuine sexual orgasm.

In some people who are largely out of touch with their own bodies the experience of life energy is not physical and tangible in content but "mental" or "psychic" or "spiritual." Their ecstatic experiences of love or creativity or God are virtually disembodied. The physical dimension of participation is both blocked and hidden. Such a mode of contact with life energy is certainly better than none at all. But it is incomplete, just as purely physical contact is. Fortunately, however, there is a way of participation in which both body and mind are involved, for the blocks in both have been reduced. Then the whole personality is pervaded with life energies, and the participation persists rather than being fleeting and fragmented. What is then experienced is both physical (perceived in various locatable parts of the body such as the spine or the heart or the genitals or the fingers) and mental (saturating whatever one is thinking and doing and feeling at the time). Sometimes the physical aspect predominates and is in the forefront of consciousness, sometimes the mental. When both are present the state of elation and exuberance and excitement permeates the whole personality. When this happens, descriptions of participation in physical terms are both literal and metaphorical. John loves "with all his heart" because what he actually feels is a sen-

sation in the physical organ as well as something pervading his consciousness generally. And when Mary feels "inspired," her breathing may well be similar to what occurs when someone does deep yoga breathing to open the body up to life energy, though what she is most conscious of is not the breathing but something mental that has come to her: a new musical composition, or a loving insight concerning how to help a troubled friend, or an experience of ecstatic harmony with nature, or a vision of Christ.

Often the physical dimension of participation in life energies is obscured and not recognized for what it is. Many people who are not radically split off from their bodies have been aware of energies without being clearly conscious of this. They have felt deeply "moved"—perhaps by music or drama or dance—but the vibration-sensations of moving energy have been pushed into the background of consciousness. One reason why the hand-rubbing exercise or various body-involving disciplines are useful is that a clear perception of the vibration-sensations enables us to recognize them later when they are mixed with other elements.

Participation in life energies feels like sailing or white-water canoeing or body surfing or gliding. (Indeed, these are not merely analogies but also occasions for participation.) During a day of open participation, it is as if wild waves of water or wind invade and invigorate and impel us in all that we do and think and feel. Alert and sensitive to the broad ebb and flow of forces that surround us, in "tune" with the elements, we steer a course of our own. Empowered by forces from beyond ourselves, we enthusiastically expend and expand ourselves. Receptively relaxed and actively involved, eagerly taking in and exuberantly giving out, we rejoice in life.

Life energy is experienced not only within oneself but also outside oneself, in nature. Sometimes as I have gazed at a tree it is transfigured, as if sunlight were not only reflected from its surface but also radiated from deep within it in all directions. I feel an energy coming from the tree and I feel this stimulating my own zest for life. And, still more mysteriously, I feel that my own outpouring of energetic attention

seems to be stimulating or intensifying the outpouring from the tree, though there is also a sense that the vision of transfiguration is a way of discerning what is always going on there. Indeed, the whole happening comes as a gift, a blessing, a grace. One is active in it, yet one did not bring it about. One is participating in a flow and exchange of life energies that is going on always and everywhere. According to the witness of very open people, the infrequency of our awareness is due to our own insensibility. They see that although the concentration of life energies varies considerably in intensity from context to context, and especially from person to person (a very closed person deadens life energy within and around him or her), the vision of nature as transfigured is not so much a change in nature as a change in us—like blind persons suddenly seeing.

An encounter with a tree or a flower or a stream is for many people less familiar and intelligible than an encounter with a person. This is often the paradigm experience of participation in life energies. When two people who are very open in both body and mind meet together, life energy radiates out from each one to the other. Each is already “turned on” within and also “turns on” the other still more. Each is a creative catalyst for the other’s creativity. Each experiences a rise in the level of life energy. The encounter is not like two people feeding each other, where each person’s stock of food is depleted by the other. It is more like a dialogue where each person’s words stimulate new ideas in the other and the ideas come as gifts. Neither person is depleted. Each is renewed and refreshed.

The mutual heightening of life energy that occurs in encounters is sometimes even more intense in a group where most or all of the people are open. It is as if the level rises in geometric proportion as additional people join in. The room becomes charged with a life energy that is partly tangible. It swirls around people and within them. It is poured upon them and by them in a lavish and electrifying way. This can happen in many different contexts: a service of worship, a therapy group, a work project, a dance party, a symphonic concert. As I write this I vividly remember occa-



sions of each kind. For example, when Rostropovitch conducted the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in 1977 his charismatic generosity of spirit galvanized both orchestra and audience in an ecstatically life-affirming way.

Sometimes a group can facilitate not only a momentary "lift" but an ongoing "high" as a mode of life. Some communities of people living together and committed to openness enjoy a fairly continuous and lively participation in life energy. This is typically expressed in a generous spirit of sharing and cooperation, giving and receiving in a mutual interdependence that liberates new creativity in each individual and that enables the community to create a physical and personal environment that affirms life. The sense of an abundance of life energy encourages people to be generous rather than self-protective, expansive rather than self-constrictive. The lived-out openness in dealing with one another makes possible a still higher participation in life energies, and this in turn fosters still greater openness to others. Most people require such a community if they are to grow in openness.

Openness to life energies involves openness not only to nature and other people but also to oneself. Each of us in our closedness has a secret yearning for a life that is full and rich and expansive. In most of us this yearning is heavily repressed and held down because such fulfilment has come to seem impossible. So we close down real aspirations and preoccupy ourselves with our comparative power and status. I find that participation in life energies shakes me out of this misguided self-preoccupation. Instead, I begin to enjoy being me. It feels marvelous to be alive as I am now. I can readily accept my limited power and status for I am actually drawing deeply on my capacities for creativity in relation to myself and nature and other people. These capacities become my own unique way of focusing and expressing life energies that I receive, channel, and give back in a new form. At times when I am open I rejoice in being me, and I rejoice in others as they offer their own creative expression of the fundamental gift in which we all share.

Openness brings joy. One feels expansive, happy, loving. Anxiety and despair recede into the background. There is a feeling of fulfilment. But the new cherishing of life in oneself and others brings a new sensitivity to whatever undermines that life. Openness brings a new realization that oppressive life-denying tendencies are at work within oneself and others. Along with joy, openness also brings a sober sense of sin. Along with a hope based on present participation in life energies, openness also brings sadness and indignation—how skimpy and perverse most human life is. Openness brings an acute awareness of just how destructive closedness is when it is dominant.

So we will now turn our attention for a while from openness to closedness. But before we do so I should issue a warning. It is important that as we try to be honest concerning our own closedness, we examine ourselves from a perspective of as much openness as possible. Otherwise the new insights will be merely oppressive, reinforcing our self-preoccupation and self-imprisonment. Later I will describe how one element in closedness is a self-deflation or self-rejection in reaction to the discovery that I am not perfect. This self-rejection is intensified by a scrupulous self-scouring for sins if the context makes openness a remote ideal of perfection. One essential element in openness is acceptance and forgiveness, not only of others, but also of ourselves. This is possible insofar as we receive acceptance and forgiveness into our lives just as we receive the gift of life itself, and insofar as we are resisting our closedness as well as we can at the moment—which may not be very well. In a context of self-acceptance and realistic hope for change, new insights concerning our closedness can be opportunities for growth.

As we look at some of the varieties of closedness we will in each case also consider the corresponding variety of openness. The first contrast is between *closed self-inflation* and *open self-inclusion*.

One manifestation of closedness is a preoccupation with how my power and status compare competitively with the power and status of others. In one extreme form it is a hope

or delusion that I am as all-powerful and all-important as God. This fantasy occasionally emerges explicitly into consciousness. I remember an incident I once witnessed in a therapy group. A young man with a long beard had been very withdrawn and self-effacing, always on the periphery of the group. One evening, however, he moved to a chair in the center of the room and as the rest of us sat below him on the floor he revealed his fantasies: "I am God. I look at each of you in turn and I make you disappear and reappear at will. Whatever I imagine and want happens. . . . Now I am alone, the center of the universe. I need no one. I am invulnerable, completely self-sufficient. I am free to become whatever I choose to become. I am all-powerful."

Such megalomania is not a rare psychotic aberration. The young man was not crazy. His daily life would be regarded by most people as "normal," and though he was troubled he was no more troubled than many. Even as he spoke he knew that what he was saying was false. Indeed, he was uncovering a fantasy so that in his daily life he would be less subject to its sly influence. He had become conscious of a secret self-image that is common to us all and that provides an important motive in all our lives. It varies greatly in strength from person to person. In some people it is not dominant and in a few it is firmly subordinated. But in all of us it is at work, though its influence is largely hidden from us. Only gradually and painfully do I become aware of what goes on in my unconscious imagination, where I want to be the center of everything, unlimited in power and status. Instead of being dependent on anything or anyone for my existence and my significance I want somehow to create myself entirely by my own efforts.

The self-inflating fantasy of divinity is usually repressed, but it is manifested in the way we each engage ourselves in various projects. We each want to stand out from others, display a recognizable superiority, make a special imprint on the universe. For example, I sometimes detect in myself and others a form of closedness which can be called *tunnel vision*. In this state, the only thing of importance going on in the world right now is my project, my movement toward

achieving the goal I have set ahead for myself—whatever that is at the moment. The projects of other human beings feel like distractions that must be resisted, encroachments on my time and energy. Other people are important only insofar as they contribute (or fail to contribute) to my project. Often the project is not a selfish one; it is intended to bring good not only to me but also to others. But the project is self-centered; the crucial feeling about it is that it is *mine*. It is as if the tunnel down which I gaze were full of mirrors, so that whatever I see at the end is mixed with reflections of myself. Such a stance sometimes brings a concentration and intensity and single mindedness that results in considerable achievement. The price, however, is that one becomes increasingly alone in the world and precarious in one's existence, for any setback to the project constitutes a threat to the significance of life itself. When nothing else matters, nothing else can help.

Sometimes tunnel vision is characteristic of a group. The closedness of individuals is expressed in the closedness of a couple or a family or a commune or a nation. What happens is that one's individual egoism is disguised by being experienced as a group egoism: "We are the center of the universe, and I am part of this 'we'." Instead of focusing in a tunnel-vision way on *my* project as the most important thing going on in the universe, I identify myself with the group and I focus in the same way on *our* project. No other group or individual really matters. The competitive comparison and conflict is then between *us* and *them*. We are the special people, and they are either utterly insignificant or significant only in relation to us—as a mission field or as our enemies. Such group self-inflation can move a religious community or a nation either to an imperialistic encompassing of the globe or to a protective withdrawal from the contaminations of the world.

Insofar as a person is open, she does not need to narrow her perspective to a tunnel vision, whether this be individual or collective. She can devote herself with great concentration an intensity to a project, feeling that it is immensely important and worthwhile, without thinking that other per-

sons' projects are less so. Comparisons seem irrelevant. Indeed, she can be genuinely encouraging, rejoicing in the progress of others as she does in her own; and she can be supportive in times of failure. She has a special relation to her project in that it is what *she* is committed to and responsible for, but this does not set her apart from others. Such a stance is also possible for a group: "Our project is very significant, and specially significant to us because of our special relation to it, but it is not in itself more significant than those of other groups. If another group whose project is similar to ours is more creative, this is not a humiliation but an inspiration."

How is it possible to have such a strong sense of individual or group zeal without being comparative or competitive? It happens in my own experience when I feel that wherever there is genuine creativity we are all participating in an abundance of life energies that come as a gift. Each individual and each group can respond to this gift in a unique way. What I express is my own personal way of receiving and shaping this gift; it is my own distinctive contribution and self-offering. I can enjoy a sense of being special without being set apart from others, for we receive and exchange and express the same life energies. Instead of depending ultimately only on myself, I am interdependent with others in a shared life. Instead of regarding others as either useful or intrusive, I open myself to give and receive at a deep level. The relation between us becomes crucial to my creativity, and to theirs. Indeed we can consciously try in practical ways to build together a physical-social context that stimulates individual and communal creativity.

Openness brings a broadened vision, a vast vista, for my own projects and my group's projects are ways of expressing a participation in life energies that are given to all humanity and that pervade the whole cosmos. I can participate in something grand: a universal stream of life energy. This vision is not a grandiose fantasy, a self-inflation. It is a self-inclusion. I am not the center of the universe, but only a part of it. Yet as a part I am important. I have my own unique self-offering to make in response to the ongoing out-

pouring of life, my own melody to contribute to the symphony of life.

For some people such an open vision may seem like a romantic dream, but for me it is sometimes an experienced reality. Often, however, it is blurred by closedness, and sometimes, when tunnel vision takes over, it is obliterated. When this happens life seems heavily serious and I am moved by anxious strivings. Occasionally a sense of humor can outwit this closedness and open me to openness. When I am caught up in closedness I cannot bear having someone laugh at me,<sup>2</sup> but I may be able to laugh at myself. I may manage to see that my tunnel vision is so pretentious as to be ludicrous. I am like a clown suspended by a large helium balloon, performing intently on the tightrope as if I really knew how to do it. When I see this, what matters is how I laugh. I may gently deflate the balloon so as to let myself down gently. When I land I can then stand erect on the earth, affirming myself as a limited being who has been a bit silly but is still worthy of respect. Or I may suddenly and savagely puncture the balloon in a self-shaming, self-sadistic way. Then I plummet to the ground and can only grovel there, painfully shattered. This severe self-deflation is also manifested in someone who chronically mocks himself, constantly putting himself down in his own jokes. For all his attempts at humor, he is still taking himself too seriously, obsessively comparing himself adversely with some inflated figure. It is a different matter to see my self-inflating strivings as an elaborate, pompous game—a comedy of errors posing as a momentous melodrama. But perhaps this perspective on tunnel vision as a funny foible is possible only if one has already had a contrasting experience of participation in real life as a basis for recognizing human dignity. Otherwise the self-mockery is likely to be scornful and cynical rather than affectionate and life affirming.

We make fun of pretentious people in either of these two ways. But some of the harshest ridicule is directed, not at self-inflation, but at *openness*. This is because we tend to *fear* openness. The move from closedness to greater openness is very frightening. Instead of enjoying the relative

security of a secretly self-sufficient way of life, I begin to expose to myself and others not only my strengths but also my radical neediness and vulnerability. This feels like a plunge into total dependence. I will be overwhelmed, swamped, engulfed, taken over. This is because insofar as I am closed I feel that if I am not controlling others, I am under their control—and clearly I am not controlling them if I am being receptive to them. Interdependence seems at first like helpless dependency. I am so used to running my own show in isolation that it feels as if pooling my energies with others will result in everything being taken over by others, and then taken away.

One reason for our fear of letting others into our lives is that we project on to them our own inordinate longings. Insofar as I am closed I want so much for myself—the whole world, no less—and I assume that others want this too. Instead of wanting a mutual relation, I want to possess, absorb, and devour, incorporating into myself whatever I can lay my hands on. When I project this craving onto others, it seems as if any opening up to their influence would mean that I would disappear. What could be more terrifying? So I must remain, at some inaccessible level deep within me, independent and aloof. People can penetrate only so far and no further; then they are turned back by my protective armoring. Insofar as I am closed, I *am* my armoring, like a nation whose entire budget is expended on defense. Thus in my fear of dependence I am very dependent, for my life is dictated from outside and I have no really free life of my own. The mighty bastions I construct are monuments to my own vulnerability, and the aggressive excursions I make into an alien world are diversions from my own dread of helplessness.

Insofar as we are closed we tend to swing between two fantasies, both of which prevent us from drawing on the life energies that are freely available and from seeing significance in our finite focusing of these energies. I am either god or infant, all-powerful or powerless, self-sufficient or totally dependent, everything or nothing, full or empty. I am either haughty on a throne or humiliated in a gutter, proudly defi-

ant or cringingly submissive, arrogantly exhibitionistic or shamefacedly shy. I am either adored by all at the center of the universe or scorned (or even worse, ignored) by all in outer darkness. Each extreme stimulates the opposite. If first one feels the vulnerability of an infant, one flees from this by somehow imagining that one is an invulnerable god. But then the awareness that this is a ludicrously unrealizable fantasy sneaks into the back of one's mind, the pretension is pricked, and the self is deflated. But as emptiness and helplessness return to some corner of consciousness one becomes so afraid of littleness and lowliness that one must return to delusions of divine grandeur.

Those alterations, mostly unconscious, are not restricted to people who seem to be obviously "disturbed." The dynamics are powerfully at work in many impressively successful celebrities. It is as if the person unconsciously says to herself, "I'll pretend to be glorious and grandiose so that no one, not even myself, can realize that I am tiny and trivial." But although one may fool others, it is difficult to fool oneself completely. The blurred outline of a humiliating self-image hovers in the background of consciousness where it is like a constant inner critic, mocking all one's attempts to be important. The person's life feels like a hollow stage performance. She acts out various magnificent roles in showy costumes, but all the while she is vaguely aware that underneath it all she is a naked nobody.<sup>3</sup> Others may respect her, but they are merely being taken in by an impressive display, for inside she has an obscure but powerful feeling of insignificance and emptiness. This pervasive sense of inner unreality can prevent her from seeing her own quite genuine achievements with an eye to their real worth, for all her actions seem to be mere play-acting and whatever she produces seems tainted with inauthenticity. Even if she is a creative genius she may be so plagued by self-humiliation that her finest work seems to her to be merely a fraudulent pretense.

Sometimes an artist is so caught up in this secret self-depreciation that she can never finish a painting. Her unconscious reasoning is that she and her work seem worthless,



but as long as the painting is still in process it is conceivable that it might turn out to be perfect and thus refute the verdict of worthlessness; and only a perfect picture could do this.

Such an addiction to perfection arises from a fear of total imperfection. In some people, however, the latter fear is dealt with by confronting it in an addiction to degradation. Instead of trying at all costs to avoid being put down, a person knocks himself down. Before anyone can hurl insults at him he insults himself, thus retaining some initiative, though in a perversely self-destructive form.<sup>4</sup> Instead of steering clear of shameful situations, he sets them up. The strain of striving to be a somebody can be eliminated if he gives up and goes on a binge that makes him a nobody. The binge is an alcoholic stupor or some other form of self-inflicted degradation that puts him where in fantasy he already lives: on the periphery of society, scorned or ignored. When he goes on the binge there is at least a feeling of tenuous dignity in that he is the one who is doing himself in. Instead of dreading his drab destiny and perhaps eventually succumbing to it, he is actively concurring in it. Thus self-destructiveness can seem positive. Sometimes even its final form, suicide, can seem comparatively creative. Such is the perverse power of our delusions, not of grandeur, but of shame.

But of course the two delusions are complementary. If one is operative, so is the other, though indirectly and not so prominently. Even when self-deflation seems to swamp the whole personality, as in a masochistic binge, the shame of being small comes partly from the frustration of a secret aspiration to be the greatest, and the sense of worthlessness comes from the reluctant realization that one cannot be perfect. And, conversely, when self-inflation is dominant, the hidden motive is a fear of being a nobody. Thus, for example, a self-inflating tunnel vision may be secretly fueled by a self-deflation concerning one's life project. At a time when I was becoming aware of my own tunnel vision I had a dream in which I was a little boy digging a tunnel in a sandcastle with a spoon, while all around me mighty men were operating

giant bulldozers and cranes to erect a skyscraper. No one noticed me in the midst of all this noisy and impressive work. To them it was as if I did not exist.

Although such a self-humiliating way of viewing one's project is obviously the opposite of a grandiose tunnel vision, both stances have two features in common: self-isolation and self-preoccupation concerning comparative status and power. One cannot make these two ways of being closed disappear merely by deciding to eliminate them. Rather, they can gradually be *eroded* as one becomes more open to a flow of abundant life energies that come as a gift and that pervade everyone and everything. Then one's project still matters, but it does so within an inclusive vision in which other people's projects as well as one's own can be appreciated as an interconnected part of a larger, cosmic project.

Religious writers have often stressed the dangers of self-inflation, pride, wilful self-assertion, and so forth but have often ignored the other side of closedness, the shameful self-deflation, the self-humiliating surrender of the will. There is of course a sense in which openness involves a "surrender of the will"—the self-inflating will which tries to control everything. But openness means that such a will is replaced, not by an infantile passivity which is its foil and fuel, but by a stance which transcends both. Openness has two aspects: an active receptivity to life energies that enables us to be nonwilfully creative, and a humble acceptance of our general and individual limitations as human beings. Closedness acts out fantasies of illusory expansiveness and illusory constriction, but openness deals with real expansiveness and real constriction. The open person really is magnificent and flawed, cosmic and frail. The divine treasure is in earthen vessels.

We have seen that one manifestation of self-inflation, of illusory expansiveness, is tunnel vision. Another manifestation is the kind of altruism that is always helping others and never letting others help oneself. So we will now consider *altruism as a form of closedness*, contrasting it eventually—and paradoxically—with a "*solitude*" that is *necessary for openness*.

One way I can effectively disguise my closedness and hide it from myself is by being altruistic. Sometimes altruism is an expression of openness, but often it is not. The difference depends on whether the real focus of interest is on the people and their needs or on *me* being helpful to them. Sometimes as I am helping someone I notice the self-centered feeling, "What a fine thing *I am doing*." Fortunately it is possible then to switch my attention. Indeed, such shifts can be a matter of daily discipline in everyday life, not harsh or judgmental toward oneself, but firm. Sometimes no such shifts are needed, for I am continuously present to the other person. At those times being open comes quite naturally and unreflectively. Often, however, I am not even aware of my closedness and so I cannot begin to challenge it. Then I need other people who can detect it and point it out to me. More than that, even when I have become aware of it, I sometimes need a powerful presence from them to stir me out of it.

All this is relatively obvious. "What-a-good-boy-am-I" altruism is self-centered. Other kinds of altruism express closedness in more subtle ways. For example, there are many people who have a life-style in which they alternate between devoted service to others and private self-absorption. The service is typically of a kind that involves taking on a great deal of responsibility for others, whom the server allows to draw on his or her own energies. The server becomes a supportive crutch rather than a spur who stimulates others into activities that draw on their own energies. After a while the server feels drained. Other people's needs or requests seem like insatiable demands. The server feels beleaguered and resentful. It seems necessary to withdraw into privacy, cutting off connections with other people. The energy system then becomes self-enclosed, like a baby sucking its thumb. The inner monologue is, "What matters now is my own feelings, my own needs, not theirs; I cannot give out any more energy; I must conserve it, holding it within myself. My resources are depleted and scarce. Instead of saying 'Yes' to every demand, I will say 'No' for a while." But after a while the person returns to the phase of altruistic service, and the cycle continues.

What needs to be seen here is that the altruistic phase is also a form of closedness. Both phases have a continuing basis: an attempt at *self-sufficiency*. As a helper of others, I do not feel dependent on them. Insofar as I take responsibility for their lives, I prevent them from intruding into mine. In extreme cases, taking responsibility for others becomes an attempt to control them, completely negating their freedom. In less extreme cases, it is a matter of not encouraging them to take their own initiatives. But in all cases I thereby exclude them from real contact with my own life. I remain aloof and independent. Closedness makes me afraid to reveal my own neediness and vulnerability lest I plunge into a state of total dependence. But I can feel secure as the voluntary servant of someone else. I can even devote myself to that person to the extent that he or she becomes for a time the center of the universe. I feel safe because I retain ultimate control of the situation. I can return at will to my own position of inaccessible preeminence, like a "Lady Bountiful" who delivers food hampers among the poor for several days, all the while knowing that she can at any time return to her mansion on top of the hill outside of town. (This is very different from the New Testament idea of divine "kenosis" or self-emptying, where Christ actually relinquishes his power and status, and ends up crucified on a hill outside the town.)

Insofar as I am closed, my altruism moves me to do unto others as I would have them do unto me. I yearn to be loved and cared for, but instead of letting others in on my needs so that they can help me, I help them; then I withdraw so as to cope with my own needs as best I can myself. Even the commandment that I love my neighbor as myself can be understood in this way: help others and then help myself, but do not let others help me. At all costs I must remain self-sufficient, and this means being always a giver (to others, to myself) and never a receiver.

Many people in service professions structure their daily lives in accordance with a pattern of service and withdrawal which expresses an underlying drive for emotional independence. During their work life they serve others and during their private life they recuperate by serving themselves. This