

# ONE

---

## Fear

*Be not afraid of sudden terror . . .*

PROVERBS 3:25

*The whole wide world  
Is but a narrow bridge—  
And one's main task  
Is not to fear at all.*

RABBI NACHMAN OF BRATZLAV  
1772-1811

*Fear not, my servant Jacob . . .*

JEREMIAH 46:27

Fear has many names but only one sensation, which ranges in intensity from mild trepidation and restlessness to terror, panic, and a sense of impending doom. Fear is more often referred to by less threatening labels, because they evoke less of the frightening sensation: anxiety, jumpiness, tension, being upset, rattled, troubled, or lost. It causes people to be extra cautious, shy, retiring, or diffident. As we shall see in the next chapter, the origins of this irrational fear go back at least to the time we take our first breath, but traces of it normally remain in us for life. Two main types of fear haunt most men and women from time to time: the fear of abandonment and the fear of engulfment. A third exists at the root of these two, and at the core of all other anxieties: the fear of non-being. This, the most terrible and profound manifestation of dread, is still relatively unknown except by its effects.

All these fears are irrational in the sense of not being evoked by dangers in the present. They are residues of long-past experiences that occurred in one's life soon after birth. Yet the long-term effects linger on, and the first step in the process of becoming free is to know exactly what enslaves us.

Fears caused by realistic dangers in the present usually steel us to meet them effectively, as long as they are not so large as to overwhelm us. Stage fright and other forms of signal anxiety, all being lesser threats, make us more alert and enable us to do well what we must or wish to do. A car accident in which we are not harmed may bring out the best in us—clear thinking, good judgment, and courage. During such moments we often act appropriately without being distracted by irrational fear.

A catatonic, withdrawn, and chronic backward patient who was hospitalized for over twenty years without speaking to anyone suddenly snapped out of his catatonia during a fire. To the surprise of all, he took charge of the orderly evacuation of his fellow patients. For a little while he reverted to his competent old self as fire chief. As soon as the realistic danger was over, however, he became catatonic again, and all attempts to reach him were in vain.

When we must suddenly face danger of catastrophic proportions, on the other hand, we are likely to be overwhelmed. Since we are powerless to do much, we often either panic or become numb. The same happens when a lesser danger stimulates, gives rise to, and ties in with suppressed fears of old. The combination is usually too much for most people to cope with successfully. When all avenues for flight are closed, or even when they only seem to be, we escape from reality. We become immobilized, temporarily or permanently, physically or emotionally. Many people become confused and unable to think clearly when they get scared. This aggravates the original fear. Without acceptable and rational reasons for a fear that holds us in its grip, we become more terrified: Are we also losing our mind? Anxiety thus often begets panic.

### 1. The Fear of Abandonment

We sometimes enjoy being alone, but we never enjoy being lonely. We at least have our own company to give us solace when alone, but we are only in the company of fear when lonely. The essence of loneliness is emptiness, and the essence of emptiness is terror. In loneliness a person often behaves as if he or she were drowning, grabbing at anything or anyone. The emptiness of a lonely weekend can be more terrifying than any real danger in the real world. A gaping nothingness. Two days without work make the three nights around them very long, black, and bleak.

Too much time for rest and recreation is a severe punishment for those who are very restless inside: It provides almost endless opportunities to experience panic.

Many single people rush to congregate in crowded bars at such times to establish some form of human contact. The dominant mood at T.G.I.F. (Thank God It's Friday) pubs is hardly thankfulness. It is anxiety. It is only superficially true that the very nervous young men and women who mingle there are looking desperately for sex partners. In fact they are looking for something much more important, although not necessarily knowingly: at least short-term companionship to relieve the frightening anxiety of loneliness. A warm body is the classic antidote to the cold grip of panic.

The fear of abandonment is present in men and in women, in the young and the old, in heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Divorced or widowed men and women often rush into a new marriage essentially to avoid this fear, although they usually deny having it in the first place. Yet, without it, nobody would get entangled so quickly in a new serious relationship.

People marry, they have children, they join clubs and causes, they mix socially, and they form alliances and friendships with other people as well as with dogs, cats, birds, and other pets—all to avoid loneliness, or at least to lessen it. Those who have not consciously known the fear of abandonment are often amazed at its intensity and how quickly it is relieved by company. One young woman never dared to go down alone into the basement of her house, even during the day or when it was well lit at night. To her own amazement, she suddenly found herself free of this fear as soon as she brought her new baby home from the hospital. She would now take the newborn in her arms and confidently walk down the steps. She felt safe in the physical presence of another live human being, even her own totally helpless infant. Feelings do not necessarily make sense, as she understood, and it required both candor and courage to admit to such senseless behavior. People normally hide embarrassing views of themselves, for embarrassment itself is a mixture of fear and shame. It is common for people to fear being abandoned because of such imperfections.

The nature of the fear of abandonment can be well illustrated by analogy: If an orange is cut in half, each of its halves has a large exposed and oozing surface. Since each is open to the air and not covered, drying soon begins. Before long each half-orange completely dries out and shrivels unless its open surface is pro-

tected. A whole orange is so well packaged in its peel by nature that its vitality and juice are not quickly lost.

Not so a half-orange. It would immediately experience a sense of foreboding if it had conscious awareness, and it would be overcome by panic. Such half-oranges are indeed really in "mortal" danger, their future and continued existence precarious. Their juicy center would soon be no more without corrective measures, and they would cease to exist. Like all non-whole objects, each cut orange faces the early prospect of emptiness.

The ideal covering for a half-orange would be another half of similar diameter and with physical properties resembling its own. It would fit best with its own other half. Neither would dry up very quickly as long as the two halves were superimposed upon each other and provided that they remained tightly attached. The same words and images are also used for lovers when they pine and yearn for each other. They also cling for dear life and embrace tightly as if they too were two cut halves of one whole. This is why the mutual pull is so strong. Union means survival and salvation, for oranges and for people who are not emotionally whole.

Although every person is physically self-contained, most people do not experience themselves as emotionally whole. They sense themselves as if they were cut in two, and sometimes even refer to their spouses as "my better half." What makes such spouses "better" is not their superior human qualities. Rather, simply by existing they help their mates "feel" whole, thus lowering their terrible anxiety. This makes such spouses very important indeed, though they are often rather deficient as human beings in reality—needy, angry, unreasonable, unpleasant, moody, or bitter. They may leave much to be desired, but all this hardly matters, for they relieve the sharp fear of abandonment by their very existence. Being "in love" brings similar relief. Non-harmonious aspects of a relationship are ignored or played down if the romantic attachment fills the gaping internal hole.

People sometimes commit suicide or murder, or they have nervous breakdowns and other serious troubles when a lover or a mate dies, deserts, or divorces them. Why? Not because of the pain that is associated with any important loss. Pain is bearable, but the fear of abandonment often is not. The breakup of a central relationship is often experienced as leaving a hole in the middle of one's abdomen, as if something were torn out from there. Many of those suddenly left by an important person sense themselves without any attachments, in danger of drifting into

outer space forever. The fear of non-being, described a little later in this chapter, is often activated at such times. It bubbles just below the fear of abandonment.

Losses always cause pain, even when a person is emotionally whole, though they do not always elicit fear. In the relative absence of fear the pain is only transitory, because time helps heal the agonies of mature mourning. Millions of people "out there" are reasonable candidates to replace the ones lost, though new relationships are not formed easily, and they rarely fit immediately as well as the old ones did. Like newly planted flowers that must be helped to take root, so new relationships must be carefully cultivated. But with effort and time, mature people normally fix their lives.

The situation is basically different when people use each other mostly for emotional shoring-up. A breakup then causes panic, which results from the sense of having been abandoned. The term itself contains the explanation for that panic: Adults and even older children can be left, but only babies can be abandoned. Leaving causes hurt and anger; abandonment—fear and possibly death. But adults often experience being left as abandonment, exactly as if they still were babies. Although actually safe, they have a sense of real, extreme, and immediate danger. Many people experience such moments as if their umbilical cord had never really been sealed shut: Their life substance might just ooze out through it, and they would be no more. Emergency help is needed *now*, they fear, before all vitality is totally and irretrievably lost. Most sudden marriages and suicides occur under such circumstances.

Those in panic are positive that "others" simply do not understand the dimensions and the urgency of the danger that confronts them. Why else would "they" still be so calm? When a security-providing relationship is lost, the result is pathologic mourning that consists of terror and panic and that appears endless and empty of hope. Death often seems highly preferred to bottomless agony. Physical illnesses often develop at times when the will to live is at a low ebb.

Our cortex learns much faster than our physiology, as we shall see more clearly in Chapter 3. Many adults continue to react therefore in ways they know make no sense. They cannot gain control over their reactions or feelings, even though they understand that the fear of abandonment is a useless leftover from another age, much more troublesome, however, than the intestinal appendix. We are at the beck and call of this fear, proving

once again that our feelings are much more powerful than our thinking and will. This further deflates our sense of being powerful, because we must acknowledge in spite of our posturing that we are not really in charge.

The existence of the fear of abandonment is often denied by those who find it very frightening to accept the fact that each of us is all alone in the universe, forever unattached once born. Although existentially true, this is often a source of much anxiety. The physical and emotional rootlessness of people in highly mobile societies adds to this sense of belonging nowhere. Families are smaller, supercities larger, and anonymity is the rule. Many fear that without some identifying documents on their person at all times they might collapse somewhere and nobody would know who they were. More than ever we live in a Kafkaesque world: Many have a sense that they are faceless, nameless, and with no connections. Such people are desperately eager to hold on to somebody and they are hungry to be held. Many fear being left, forgotten, abandoned. This is why many people want to see their names on plaques or in print, to be "eternally" remembered by others. This is also why some people are so driven to have children.

Those who have not consciously experienced this horror may think that these descriptions are merely metaphors. But the fear of abandonment is very real, and this is its real content. Grown-ups can obviously fend for themselves, but "most adults are physically grown-up children of various emotional ages. They typically act and react on the basis of their earliest life adaptations as reflected in their feelings."

How does an intelligent and otherwise competent adult finally accept the fact that he or she may be desperately afraid of being abandoned? With great difficulty. It sometimes helps a little to realize that few people are totally exempt from such anxiety, although not all people suffer equally, and almost everyone has periods of relative tranquility in life. It sometimes helps to remember that a profound fear of abandonment is a symptom of a real illness, not a sign of weakness. But most people continue to hide their fear as if it were a mark of shame. Days continue to be too stressful and too busy, nights too long and too silent, and weekends too empty and too meaningless—and all this must remain hidden. Such pain is almost too much to bear. Those in the grip of this fear are sure that everyone else has someone close nearby and that others are content.

Partial denial of reality is often the only option left to those

with much fear of abandonment, and it involves a partial but chronic loss of sanity. This is an extreme solution but not an uncommon one. Otherwise sane, intelligent, and competent men and women often distort themselves grossly to maintain their relationships with spouses or with lovers. Dignity and self-respect are usually the first, but not the only, casualties. People appease and please endlessly to insure that they will not be abandoned. They may be giants in the office, on the job, or at the club, but crawling dwarfs at home. The thought of abandonment rarely crosses their mind, but their behavior reveals these hidden concerns and worries.

The unseen fear of abandonment also has a tendency to escalate. Will this relationship continue as one gets older, less attractive physically, less potent or desirable sexually, weaker, less exciting? Is this job secure? The cost of appeasement is always greater appeasement. More and more of a person's interests are given up in the effort to please the other, to maintain the status quo. At rare moments of relative sanity people realize that their "adjustments" are degrading; but this further lowers self-esteem and aggravates the fear as it adds to the pain and to the hidden rage. This is when peace-loving and docile people sometimes break into murderous rampages. Those in the degrading prison of fear frequently warn their children and others not to follow in their footsteps, but they cannot themselves break out.

The well-educated and sophisticated are obviously not exempt, although many people still naively believe that more education is somehow directly related to better mental health. The well-educated are sometimes even more reluctant to accept their irrational fears. But this only insures that they bear the fear less well. As we shall see in Chapter 3, the visceral brain that is in charge of our emotional reactions is really not willing to accept commands from its younger neighbor the cortex, even though we fervently wish it would.

Separation from Mother is not really completed when the umbilical cord is cut. Emotional separation is achieved in fact only with great efforts over many years, and most people never complete the process at all. This is why the fear of abandonment is so common. Overcoming the emotional need and wish to be attached to others is hardly ever accomplished without pressure, because separating goes counter to Man's tendency to follow the path of least resistance. It is, however, the major necessary step in the process of individuation, our becoming emotionally whole individuals, not merely detached parts of someone else.

People in whom the fear of abandonment is especially strong become more frightened when their spouse or child begins taking steps toward individuation. Knowingly or not, they often sabotage the process, although it is in the best interests of those whom they claim to love. Parents sometimes hold on to their growing children too long, and they retard their legitimate attempts to become emotionally independent. Spouses or children of people in serious psychotherapy often try to stop it, for fear that those who become free would leave. Such frightened relatives have probably never known good relationships based on cooperation and mutual regard. They often act as if fear and guilt are the only forces that can hold people together. How would they know otherwise if they have never experienced anything else?

Those with little or no fear of abandonment can indeed no longer be held prisoner, but they stay in essentially good relationships by choice. The freedom to leave destructive, degrading, and damaging relationships is obviously not exercised in mature and decent ones. Such relationships are highly valued, protected, and nourished.

The boundaries of the self are like a psychological skin. They are well defined and reasonably intact in individuated persons. Such people survive well emotionally by themselves when they have to. They are no longer pushed by terror to find someone in a hurry in order not to be alone. Even without others they can exist without panic, although no sane person would want to live without the company of others. It is not only helpful but also truly enjoyable when fear is not involved.

Choosing to be with someone is basically different from clinging to a person. The former is based on free choice, the latter is an effort to lessen panic. But clinging does not insure emotional closeness, and it almost guarantees in fact that the partners will remain emotionally distant. The fear of being all alone often serves as a strong glue, however, which holds people even in poor relationships. But those driven against their free will, in a car or in a relationship, do not enjoy the scenery very much. They may smile bravely to hide the embarrassing fact that they are powerless prisoners, but they are in pain and degraded even when they hide their status from everyone, including themselves. The self-delusion is rarely total. Many husbands and wives, lovers, children, parents, and others know that they have secretly wished at times to be able to leave everything and everybody behind and just go away.

The optimal distance between partners in a relationship can be determined only by those free of the fear of being abandoned. The need for relief of this fear is seldom exactly the same for any two people. One may complain of being crowded, while the other is experiencing neglect. "Conflicts, divorce, and even violence are common in romantic 'love,' because the closeness eventually exceeds the tolerance for it by one of the partners while insufficient for the other." Hurt, anger, disappointment, bitterness, and more fear often result, although the one with the greater fear of abandonment generally yields on all matters and normally keeps these sentiments well hidden. The freedom to express such feelings does not exist when any fear is strong. Only bitterness then trickles through.

Ideal conditions exist only during or before the honeymoon of relationships, when the yearnings are most alike in both partners. The anxiety of each is lowered by the presence of the other, and both usually expect that the other will cause it to disappear altogether. The inevitable disappointment that follows most honeymoons springs from the painful realization that the partner failed to bring such happiness, though even this disappointment is sometimes denied for years. Hope springs eternal when nothing more concrete can be relied upon. The realistic adult need for distance is often overlooked by those who fear abandonment. But even the formal pact "till death doth us part" does not guarantee non-abandonment.

The basic assumption in romantic love is that the lover will always be perfectly attuned to all our open and hidden wishes for closeness. The secret and mostly unknown hope is for a replication of the infant's experience in the womb. The same yardstick is used, in fact, to measure both the "love" of a lover and the devotion of a pregnant woman to her unborn child: how much either is willing and able to satisfy the needs of the other before his or her own. Pregnant women must indeed deny their wishes and needs sometimes to protect the unborn fetus, but perpetual demands for such sacrifices are clearly unreasonable and damaging in adult relationships. The fear of abandonment is often so sharp, however, that to allay it people become emotionally enslaved. Those with extreme fear are often willing to demonstrate their readiness for self-sacrifice as a proof of their "love." Emotional cowering indeed lowers fear, but only for a short while. The partner whose presence is not assured must be appeased again and again, without end. Many people still expect their happiness to come from outside themselves, although it is

really impossible for anyone to produce feelings in others, or even in oneself, as we shall see later. All we can do is evoke reactions that already exist. When the capacity to experience happiness, rage, and pity is blocked—hardly anything will bring them up.

The processes of separation and of individuation are practically never completed automatically, because the fear of abandonment continues to hold us in its grip till it is forced to yield. "The wish to remain psychologically attached . . . co-exists with an opposite wish for self-sufficiency. . . . But since all children encounter situations that they are unable to master, fear often overrides the wish for independence. Really letting go of all mothering figures is therefore a very scary prospect, analogous to, but much more frightening than, letting go of the side of a deep swimming pool for the first time and daring to venture into its middle." Even unfulfillable dreams are not given up without fierce struggles. As long as we are only half whole, terror always lurks nearby, and an extreme sense of fragility is often present. When we fear abandonment, we desperately seek someone who is sure never to abandon us. Since no man or woman can ever fulfill such an impossible wish, we frequently turn to God.

Those without enough innocent faith in God or in something else withdraw like newborns into their individual shells for comfort. Here they "couple" with themselves, as described later in this chapter. They live here emotionally much of the time, venturing out only rarely for brief moments of contact with other people. Their retreat is as real as physical withdrawal. They speak little and they make no waves. They have given up. They have accepted the life of depression, isolation, and silence. Their quiet withdrawal is usually filled with a deep sense of futility, which can even exist in the midst of a whirlwind of social activity. Yet the price of not experiencing the fear of abandonment is to feel little of anything else, and cynicism is the inevitable result: "Is this what life is all about?" they wonder.

The sad story of the handsome Prince of Wales is a good example. He was forty-two years old in 1936 and the most popular member of the British royal family when his heart became entangled with Wallis Simpson. She was still married at the time to her second husband. Nobody took this affair very seriously, because the prince surrounded himself with many beautiful women. Besides, as soon as he became King of England and Emperor of India, he would automatically become the head of the

Church of England, and Parliament would forbid him marrying a divorced woman. Everyone understood these plain facts, including the prince, who was carefully groomed from early childhood for his duties as king.

The prince ascended the throne as Edward VIII in January 1936 after his father, George V, died. Hitler was already making threatening noises just across the English Channel, and the empire was not holding together so well. It was hoped that the young king would provide a new spirit of energetic leadership. But he was busy with other things. He became involved in Wallis's divorce from Ernest Simpson, a colorless but respectable businessman. Only then did everybody around the new king recognize that serious trouble was brewing. They tried to reason with him, but to no avail. The great "love affair of the century" was clearly interfering with the king's ability to think coherently. Reason took a back seat, as usual, at the height of feelings. Stanley Baldwin, the prime minister, also tried to talk sense to the young king, but concluded, "It seems that certain cells in his brain have not developed properly. This whole thing does not seem to cause him much anguish or internal struggle."

King Edward VIII abdicated on December 10, 1936, and became the Duke of Windsor, telling the British people and the world that he simply could not live without the woman he loved. Only in fear, not in true love, does one experience such a complete absence of choice, such a confusion between subjective and objective reality. People commonly make serious errors while in the grip of strong feelings.

According to the strict laws of those days, Mrs. Simpson's divorce would become null and void if it could be shown that she had relations with someone other than the husband within six months after the decree. So Edward lived alone for these six months in a castle near Vienna. He appeared as a pathetic child—lost, torn, desolate, and in constant need. It was obvious from his demeanor that he was inextricably caught in the iron grip of fear, since he was temporarily "abandoned" by Wallis. He was emotionally so dependent on her that he phoned her repeatedly, day and night. The newspapers reported that he "worshipped" her.

"He was like a child in her hands, the poor man," said a friend, Lady Alexandra. "He suffered so very much. Wallis was able to rule him without restraint. From the moment that he fell under her spell he seemed to have fallen apart altogether. But close

friends like us knew that he would repeat the same scenario all over again, without hesitation. I don't believe that he was sorry about what has happened."

Edward VIII was raised to be king, but only intellectually. "The young usually receive insufficient as well as incorrect guidance or help in the difficult task of maturation. The central role of feelings, and especially of irrational fear, is usually ignored." Emotionally he remained forever a boy, living in a dreamworld and never understanding the concept of work or the moral dilemmas of his day. He admired Hitler and liked cocktail parties, gardening, and golf.

Those who were given unlimited means, ample time, and almost every imaginable opportunity to make a man and a king out of this boy failed grossly. Their basic flaw was in their assumptions about the nature of Man, and their understanding of the educational process was therefore wrong. But these same assumptions remain essentially unchanged even today, and they still are being used throughout the world.

The duke became somewhat interested in public service years later, but it did not amount to much. His belated willingness to serve was only a response to his increasing awareness of the pathetic emptiness of his existence, although rich, well connected and well educated, a charming celebrity, still handsome, and married to the woman of his dreams. He learned very little and much too late. His life was essentially wasted.

Wallis Simpson was often described as a scheming social climber, but she was also an insecure and spoiled child who discovered that her femininity and looks gave her the power to command what appeared to be security. This is a well-traversed path, wide as an avenue, and very commonly used by beautiful and sexy women everywhere from the beginning of time. Both of her previous husbands probably failed in "making her feel safe." A dashing and popular prince would surely use his swift sword to slay the dragon of fear that taunted her mercilessly. It is the stuff that fairy tales are made of, but these two children acted as if it were real. "Most adults are physically grown-up children of various emotional ages." Both Wallis and Edward merely tried to survive, and they had very little choice in what they did.

Wallis liked partying. The highlight of her day was her appointment with her personal hairdresser. The couple had very few intimate friends, but they were always busy attending clubs, shows, and private parties. Edward went along with her, but night life, daily calls to the Swiss stockbroker and banker, and

golf were not enough to fill the next thirty-six years. Disappointment was inevitable. Although they remained together, the duke was clearly miserable. It was said that he never drank before seven in the evening but that he drank a lot afterward. A photograph taken before his death at the age of seventy-eight shows him as a broken and pathetic figure. He probably never understood what happened to him or why.

Those who knew the couple intimately agreed that, tragic as the whole affair was, everything fit. They were like two little orphans lost in a dangerous forest. Each idealized the other as someone powerful enough to allay the fear of abandonment. The duke needed a strong woman who would rule him; and she was drawn to him because he was a king, and therefore supposedly powerful. Tragically, neither was able to do for the other what each of them needed and wanted. They had no choice but to cling to each other and to their public facades. Even if they had understood what had happened, they would have had to continue denying it. He gave up position, power, prestige, and personal dignity for a mirage; she was lost in a dreamworld. They acted out a fantasy, and then they were stuck in it for life. Their lives were empty of joy and full of disappointment and pain, in spite of all the glitter.

No cells were underdeveloped or missing in Edward's brain, contrary to Baldwin's conjecture. The cortex is simply an irrelevant organ where panic is concerned. Edward's subcortical pathways and his physiologic patterns needed altering. "The characters of free men and women capable of governing themselves [must be shaped], since no one ever is born free, nor is anyone free of fear before he or she is freed from it." Edward could not rule others before he could govern himself.

The struggles of famous men and women with irrational fears exist in the public domain, and they can therefore be easily examined. What is true for them is equally true for others. We are all human beings who had a physical life-sustaining attachment to a mother before we were born. Each of us also had an almost equally intense emotional attachment to her, or to someone taking her place, during the first hours, days, weeks, and months of life. These attachments made it possible for us to survive. It would be unnatural and unlikely for anyone to give up such important connections willingly or easily at any time.

We may not always want to be near Mother once we do not need her for actual survival. We may fight her when she dominates our lives. But at any age when we experience anxiety we

normally want someone with the qualities of an ideal mother to stand by us and to comfort us. She comes in many shapes and forms, and is not necessarily an individual or a female. A cause or a male often fulfills the mothering function very successfully. We may be embarrassed by our strong wish to be supported and cared for, and we may also fear not being in complete control, which is why we may deny such wishes. But we really learn to depend upon ourselves only with the greatest of efforts and against the most persistent resistance.

A more ordinary example than Edward is the intelligent, forty-four-year-old, handsome, and competent professor who became involved in a health fad which included a vigorous daily aerobic exercise program. Financially comfortable, professionally successful, and happily married, he was the proud father of three children, "sitting on top of the world." But then, during a routine physical examination, some previously unnoticed irregularities were seen on the electrocardiogram. This could merely be a result of his exercising, he was told. Still he was advised to take it easy for a few days until a stress test confirmed the benign diagnosis, since more serious heart trouble had to be ruled out.

The man panicked. What would he do if he had to be hospitalized? What if he needed a coronary bypass? He was at the prime of his life, he thought, and just beginning to really enjoy himself. His wife and children were still young and full of life. Would he have to slow down and be forced to limit his career and social activities? Would his pretty wife stay with him in his deteriorated condition? Could he still satisfy her sexually? Would she seek the company of others? Would he end up lonely and forgotten, if not dead? Everything was suddenly becoming bleak and dark. The fear of abandonment activated the underlying fear of non-being. He was already busy mourning for himself.

It became more important now than ever before for him not to appear weak. He hid all his fears from everyone, including his wife, even the questionable EKG findings. All went well during the physical examination, he lied to her as he tried to smile. She did not notice his perspiration, the extra tensing of his vocal cords, or his frightened look.

Wishing to maintain his image as powerful, he joined her the next day for their usual exercise class, even though it was stupid, he knew, to take such risks with his heart. But "fear is often responsible for major errors in judgment, since it greatly interferes with the capacity to evaluate what one sees." Losing his life seemed less frightening than losing his wife. Their relation-

ship was solid, but he would take no chances in his panic. She might leave him! The taste of abandonment he knew well from his early beginnings, and he was not about to risk experiencing it again. But the horror of death was only a fantasy, and it appeared less horrible.

His story is in no way exaggerated. We humans can indeed exist without others, but we are reluctant to discover this. Emotional freedom is objectively an advantage; but we are usually not so eager to seek it, since it requires us to give up once and for all the dream of ever finding someone as perfect as an ideal mother. The thought of standing all alone in moments of loneliness and fear generally provokes intense anxiety. Yet by giving up our delusions we make room for our real strength in the real world. We are more powerful and less vulnerable when we are able to look to ourselves for reassurance and for support. Most people pretend that they have already reached this state, but in reality they experience the dread of loss, not the possibility of gain.

Individuation is the *active* process of mourning for dreams that cannot be, without passively becoming resigned to futility. Individuated people have not only more real power but also more energy and more interest in fulfilling possible dreams of their choosing. The process of making oneself whole is outlined in Chapter 6. It will become clear why this process can practically never be finished spontaneously and why it does not occur naturally in humans as part of growing up.

Young animals, by contrast, can fend for themselves soon after birth. But we humans do not run in herds, nor do we swim in schools. We are usually born singly and raised one at a time. Each of us is unique. Man alone among all living creatures was endowed with a "new mammalian brain" that continues to develop during the first two years of life, as we shall see in greater detail in Chapter 3. In a sense we humans are all born prematurely. Not only Macduff was "from his mother's womb untimely ripp'd." Each of us is expelled from the uterus when our body becomes too large to be contained in it. But our cortex becomes fully functional only much later. We can breathe immediately after birth, but many months must pass before we learn to stand tall; much more time must elapse before we begin to understand and to speak. A baby abandoned is a baby dead. Our physical dependency on our caretakers is much longer than that of most other species, much more important to survival, and much more encompassing and complex. It is therefore much

more difficult to give up. Most people hold on to various mother substitutes forever, unless such attachments are pried away from them. Subjectively, such emotional attachments are Man's ace in the hole, an emotional insurance policy that he holds on to for as long as possible.

Although we humans are born before we are really ready, everyone is nonetheless immediately regarded as an individual and given a name all his or her own. Each of us has a separate identity, and before long we also develop unique personality characteristics. We have an address, fingerprints, and our own Social Security number. Having been created in God's image, each of us is, like Him, one. We alone among all living creatures must learn to choose right from wrong. The task of becoming a mature adult is infinitely more complex than physically growing up. Humans are very reluctant therefore to ever admit that they have reached the point of full competence. They frequently try to postpone assuming their human responsibilities, and many appear always eager to seek guidance from others.

Sparta stands out as a symbol of hardiness and fortitude in the history of civilization and as a warning against the excessive wish for endless dependence upon others. The actual number of Spartan children that were thrown off the rock to test their mettle was undoubtedly much smaller than the number of people who have learned from this story that one must be stoic and self-disciplined to survive. In part it is metaphor: No child, Spartan or otherwise, was likely to survive such a harsh test; self-indulgence itself may have been the target. Even the Spartans would not let go of Mother's apron strings without pressure; even they had to be forced to become independent. The story condemns the yearning to be cared for beyond childhood.

Many non-Spartans have probably been scared by this story into resisting their push against progressing. "We know our mothers and we . . . hold on to them tenaciously and refuse to let go. In some primitive cultures mothers paint their nipples with a black and bitter substance when their babies are old enough, to force them off the breast." The wish for endless clinging to overcome the fear of abandonment is given up only forcibly, and the harsh example of Sparta serves this purpose. The regressive wish to not grow up can be seen all around us, even if we cannot see it so clearly within us.

The fear of abandonment is as old as Man, but it was more obscure when he lived a simpler and slower life in small communities. The presence of relatives and acquaintances in the

immediate vicinity provided relief and prevented this fear from surfacing. Modern transportation, high technology, and affluence made us mobile. We now enjoy ever-expanding horizons and encounter an endless series of new people and new situations. But with all this came anomie and alienation, a sagging sense of identity, loneliness, and the sharper edge of the fear of abandonment.

Physical isolation was not as oppressive when someone related or known to us could be counted on to be nearby. It was easier then to maintain the delusion that we were not all alone in the world. Today suburban life in big and often half-empty houses surrounded by sprawling lawns emphasizes our separated status. Even neighbors are often strangers. Life in apartment complexes with hundreds or even thousands of identical units above and below us, to our right and to our left, is not much better. Those living in such deserts of concrete often experience isolation and fear very acutely. Even though we live among many people, only a few of them have faces. Gray anonymity is modern man's mark of recognition. Desolation and a vague sense of danger are the rule.

Maurice Ravel fought his fear of abandonment by living much of his life in fantasy. He composed his second and final opera, *The Child and the Sorcerers*, in 1924 to a libretto by Colette. It was a story of enchantment, warmth, and surrealism. The director of the Paris Opera and others all agreed that Ravel was the ideal choice to write the music, says a biographer, since "He moved all his life in a world of children and animals." Ravel apparently suffered all through life from being undersized. But unlike Napoleon, who was also physically small, he remained tiny in his inner identity: "The worship of his mother was the center of his life until his 42nd year." Such idealizations generally result out of fear: Only the vanquished sing songs of praise and pay tribute to those who lord over them. Ravel's mother may have meant well and she may have done nothing wrong except to permit such worship. His biographer tells us that Ravel cherished Spanish folk songs and folk dances because of his "devotion" to his Spanish mother, and that he was so fervently attached to that "tender" and "lovely" woman that "no sentiment for any other woman could ever fill his heart. This attachment embraced all the characteristics of his personality, psychological as well as musical."

Some mothers encourage or even demand to be worshipped, and they can enforce compliance because their withdrawal

would elicit the terrible fear of abandonment. Ravel lived much of his life in this emotional prison, and that is why he overidentified with the mythological characters of his opera. His throat, we are told, "choked up with tears as the creatures of the opera bent over the child, whispering forgivingly in phrases hardly formed into words." This is what he too was hoping for. His term of imprisonment was lifelong. Yet this seems not to have bothered him, for he was freed in return from having to experience his horrible fear.

Many adults stagnate in destructive relationships because they provide at least minimal protection from the fear of abandonment, while others simply refuse to leave their parents to establish lives of their own. They live with them as fully grown people until one or both parents die. Then they have no choice but to leave. Such middle-aged, or older, men and women often react as if they have indeed finally been "abandoned." Overwhelming panic that shakes a person's entire being often sets in very quickly. In such cases the battle to hold the horrible fear of abandonment at bay has been lost.

## 2. The Fear of Engulfment

The very same panic that characterizes the fear of abandonment is also found at the root of the fear of engulfment. It is triggered, however, from the exact opposite direction. With every fiber of our being we fear that we will surely cease to be, or at least cease to be ourselves, unless we immediately escape. Safety exists only with enough distance to insure that "they" cannot "swallow," choke, or control us, and that we will not be manipulated, directed, or tricked. Such are the strange images and thoughts, usually co-existing together, that we associate with this fear. A basic protective readiness always exists to push away those who are experienced as coming too close. The fear of engulfment can be held in check as long as control is maintained of all relationships with others.

Salvation appears in the form of physical or emotional isolation. This does not always mean living alone, as William Holden and Howard Hughes did near the end of their days. Many who fear engulfment marry or become involved in other relationships, and they can have acquaintances and even friends of a sort. Social activity often hides the fear, both from those who have it and from others, since such contacts can remain forever

superficial and formal. But something is fundamentally wrong in such relationships, which becomes evident sooner or later because the wives, husbands, or partners sense that their mates are "not there," even when they are present. Such involvements are usually devoid of real intimacy and trust. Emotional isolation can be more insulating than real walls. People who greatly fear engulfment experience intense anxiety whenever their threshold of safety is trespassed by anyone, and they will go to almost any length to avoid needing others, which would render them vulnerable. Almost more than anything else, they have an excessive fear of becoming old, poor, or debilitated, a burden upon anyone, even their own children. This is why they tend to be stoic and why they want to be known as strong. Not necessarily believing it consciously, they act as if they know that all people are essentially unreliable or self-serving, capricious and possibly even malicious. They often prefer the company of pets over that of humans.

This fear sometimes shows in the fanaticism with which such people dismiss tenderness, sensitivity, and honest self-disclosure—which invite others to come closer—as signs of weakness. They often most distrust their mates, friends, lovers, and therapists—the people who could hurt them most. People are presumed guilty unless they have proven themselves innocent, meticulously and repeatedly. The fear is easily recognized by the excessive and endless worry about being controlled. Those fearing engulfment understandably tend to be very suspicious of and hostile to all authority. They are the perpetual rebels, even when they seem to conform. Their typical response to a friendly invitation is a cold or impatient shrug, if not a withdrawn silence.

The fear of engulfment is much more widespread than is commonly known. Like the fear of abandonment it is universal, but not generally quite so devastating. It is likely to beget endless emptiness and fatigue. "Loneliness is the best friend I ever had," said one such person who eventually committed suicide. Even death seemed preferable to close involvement with others. He remembered hearing repeatedly as a child that "a boy's first duty is to look after his mother." He learned his lesson very well. "She is a good, hardworking, and modest poor woman," he used to say of his mother, and "nobody out there takes care of her." So he did. Unable to free himself of the enslavement that he hated yet feared to let go of, he drank. This, he hoped, would drown his hopeless rage. He was trapped. He would immediately experience the panic of abandonment when he distanced himself

a little from either mother or wife, yet he felt "sucked dry" by their quiet but incessant demands when near them. They appeared so weak, meek, and suffering that he felt guilty for even wishing to escape. His suicide note read: "I was born to a mother without a vagina, but with two mouths. The demands are unsatisfiable. Someone like me is hopeless. Goodbye."

For such people, existence is always at the margin, and "home" always lies beyond the next minefield. Fear keeps them from moving, and this condemns them to stay out in the cold. Practically everybody is regarded as a threat. Those suffering from extreme fear of engulfment often live as if they actually sense that their psychological "skin" is incomplete. Without such a self-containing layer, all closeness is felt to be dangerous, since the possibility of fusion with another is a constant threat. Separateness is never assured. "They" are always more powerful and expect us to merge with them and to become their mindless appendages.

This stunted ability to trust others regularly interferes with the formation of lasting relationships, except with those who are equally scared. But the unseen fear often surfaces even in more casual contacts and it shows when such people must entrust their bodies to physicians, their possessions to financial institutions, or their secrets to friends and associates. The fear also keeps them from really relaxing: They customarily work so hard at it that they are more tired after they try. Vacations aren't enjoyable either when it is unsafe to lower one's guard at any time. Even yielding to sleep is sometimes too frightening, and chronic insomnia results. They find it very difficult to take it easy, since it would prove them to be mortal, not supermen and superwomen as they like to appear.

To be a little weak, vulnerable, welcoming, or friendly is to expose oneself to the danger of being taken over. Those busy with evading this fear of engulfment are usually driven therefore to seek more power, more money, and more influence in order to strengthen their position. Yet none of these are ever enough, since the hidden purpose of getting "more" is to conquer irrational fear. Rational explanations of the irrationality and futility of such pursuits by parents, prophets, or psychotherapists never make much of a difference. The hidden fear is recognizable also in stinginess, in hoarding, and in the inability to give generously of oneself, even to oneself.

When the ability to give food, enjoyment, or respect to oneself is badly damaged, such conditions as anorexia nervosa and its

apparent opposite, obesity, may be the result. Both are characterized by an angry holding out against and by the tenacious thwarting of the efforts of those who wish to force a change, even in the direction of survival and health. Both are dangerous and sometimes actually self-destructive solutions to the problem of having to fight back all intruders. They are but two examples of the many ways people find to overcome the fear of engulfment. Those who experience themselves as basically powerless and small really do not know that adults have more effective methods of asserting themselves.

An unwillingness or inability to accept gifts given freely is another sign of this debilitating fear: One should never be indebted. From this perspective, it appears that gifts are never really free. Even legitimate help is often regarded suspiciously and rejected.

Difficulties in reaching orgasm, especially in women, and premature as well as retarded ejaculation can also be traced to this fear, which causes bodies to tighten up under such circumstances. Being on guard and on constant alert obviously interferes with the ability to welcome anyone gently. Psychogenic infertility may sometimes result. If symptom-oriented sex therapy fails to bring relief, then the fear of engulfment must be tackled directly, as explained in Chapter 6.

Two opposing forces are in powerful confrontation within each of us, probably even before birth: the wish to remain safe within the womb, where all our physiological needs are constantly met, and the wish to break out and exercise our own will. These same two forces are in even greater competition once the young child becomes mobile. It resents being held when it wants to move and explore the world. Yet whenever something frightens the child, it rushes back to Mother to be protected. The range of movement expands with the child's curiosity and confidence, but then the cycle is repeated again. To frustrate either of these two forces arbitrarily or insensitively is to cause lasting damage, as we shall soon see.

Weaning from the breast or from the psychological protection of a mother must be gradual, though perfect timing is rarely achieved. As a result, some people continue to have a powerful lingering desire to be seen at all times, and guided, even as adults, which reflects their fear of being abandoned. Other people have more fear of being manipulated, and they are forever preoccupied with protecting their freedom to choose and to decide, as if someone were always eager to rob them of it. People

who fear engulfment the most are fanatic in their defense of "human rights."

The fears of engulfment and of abandonment are flip sides of the same irrational panic-in-existence, an ill-defined but real sense of dread that must be attended to. Most people work hard to keep it out of awareness. They dare not stop to find out whether there is a better way to handle it. Few of us wish or dare to face the ghosts of the past that torture us in the present, especially when we experience them as threatening our very existence.

For the newborn it is said to be good when the mother's nurturing breast is available and bad when it is absent. But this is a gross oversimplification. In reality, the available breast is only a source of comfort when the infant is hungry, either for food or for the security that sucking provides. The breast that is not withdrawn soon after the baby is satiated, or the one that blocks the infant's breathing, is also experienced as bad, and sometimes as deadly. It elicits anger, terror, or both. The helpless infant may actually learn to associate closeness with choking, thereby establishing "pushing-away" pathways in the visceral brain. The basic quality of our earliest experiences with mothering determines our lifelong susceptibility to the fears of abandonment and of engulfment. One or the other of these two forces is typically predominant within each person. "But the proportional strength of each changes from time to time, depending on later life experiences."

Anger and fear do not exist as distinct feelings at the very beginning of life, only as a generalized sensation of discomfort or of danger. This grips the baby when it experiences itself exposed and lacking attachments or orientation, or when the huge physical presence of Mother limits its breathing or interferes with its ability to move. Such moments have occurred in everyone's life, and they result from Mother's own anxiety, tiredness, or insensitivity. When frequent enough, they condition the baby to reject physical closeness itself. Mothers who are inadequate and very anxious tend to hold on to their very young babies too tightly and for too long in order to comfort themselves, thus making future closeness seem dangerous to the child.

Such early experiences also determine the baby's basic attitudes about power. An insensitive and overbearing mother raises children to be powerless victims who throughout life automatically overempathize with the downtrodden. They tend to favor the consumer and side against the manufacturer. They are usu-

ally vocal in their opposition to strong central leaderships and meticulous in assuring that enough checks and balances are in place. They are anarchists at heart, if not in mind. They see a scheming cult leader lurking behind every legitimate authority. Even as grownups they have relatively little freedom to make real choices. They continue to experience the world from the perspective of powerlessness, and in elections they generally vote their fears, not usually knowingly. They are against big business, big government, big labor. They are against organized religion, even if they belong to a church. These are the people who are most vociferous in protesting the death penalty and who see the evil influence of the military-industrial establishment everywhere. They often support conservationism and the preservation of endangered species because they overidentify with those who are threatened. The fear of being engulfed is at the root of their strong conviction that invariably "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Are we humans really so predictable? Generally, yes. Do we really have so little choice? Again, generally speaking, yes. Many of our attitudes are determined by our earliest experiences with power and with powerlessness. Such a view of Man is not flattering. We want to see ourselves as masters of our lives and as capable of making real choices. Yet the power of our earliest fears is so great that unless we free ourselves of them they will determine most of our political, economic, and moral values.

Mothers whose main fear is of abandonment raise children with more than the usual fear of engulfment, while those who most fear engulfment raise children with more than the usual fear of abandonment. Mothers who fear engulfment often experience even the demands of their newly born children as unreasonable and excessive, and they attend to their babies only poorly. Grossly inadequate mothering is not necessarily the result of evil intentions, and even extreme fears in children are no proof of parents' malice. More often they are merely evidence of deep pathology. (Chapter 5 addresses some of our difficult dilemmas in this regard.) Pathologic cruelty and uncontrolled violence are always inexcusable for any reason, since they are so destructive; but they are probably not as common as it appears these days. Fear magnifies any horror. Even average people with good intentions who really try to be good parents often produce emotionally damaged offspring, since nobody is able to exceed the harsh limits imposed by fear.

Life often resembles a balancing act between these fears of

being abandoned and of being engulfed. The first pushes us to be near, the second to be far. The first is alleviated when others come to us and cater to us, the second when they leave us alone and don't intrude. Everyone has experienced physical closeness as a source of security, inner peace, and pleasure—but also of pain, rage, and fear. We long to be taken care of but also to be the masters of our own fate. We proclaim ourselves weak so we may be helped, but also strong so we will not be taken advantage of. The balance we seek is for these two fears to interfere with our freedom the least.

If we had unlimited power and unlimited wisdom to use it, we would adjust our environment continuously to fit all our changing contradictions. Since we do not possess either, we must forever adjust ourselves—with or without awareness—a time-consuming, strength-depleting, and difficult task.

The pushing away that minimizes the fear of engulfment typically takes the form of angry, unfriendly, impatient, bitter, hateful, threatening, loud, disoriented, or violent behavior. People are sloppy, dirty, or smelly sometimes for the same reason. We usually assume such behavior automatically, without realizing how effectively we convey our subliminal messages.

Daredevil acts are also used to ward off this fear. To appear invincible and even unafraid when others cower demonstrates strength and shows that we need no one. Being subordinate or dependent, by contrast, is intolerable and therefore to be avoided at all costs. Even career "choices" are made to avoid this possibility. An independent businessman, contractor, or farmer is not told what to do by others. New recruits in the armed forces often get into trouble because of their fear of being submissive, as some graduate students do in highly regimented professional schools such as medicine and law. Many of the brightest flunk out despite years of painful, tedious, expensive, and dedicated preparation because they fear being engulfed in a highly competitive struggle.

When yielding is experienced as submission or as a defeat, chronic difficulties must be expected in marriages and in other long-term relationships. These require a mutual willingness to compromise, an impossible goal for those who fear engulfment. Marriages may last if the fears of the spouses are somehow balanced, but such relationships typically become an arena in which power is constantly being tested. In this tragic struggle, partners fearing engulfment often use the open or the implied

threat of abandonment as a powerful weapon against mates who are affected by it. This is an effective tool with which to control the distance in the relationship. Those who fear engulfment generally find mates, friends, and acquaintances who simply are too weak, too needy, or too scared to pose any threat. Unconscious choices cleverly satisfy both parties' pathologic needs. Both healthy and unhealthy relationships can continue to exist for many years as long as the emotional needs of both partners remain essentially stable and balanced. In this narcissistic era of affluence and sexual permissiveness, they tend to disintegrate, however, much more frequently than before. Still, the glue of fear can hold people together for a very long time, even today.

Fear of being hurt and perhaps even destroyed is usually one potent factor contributing to male and female homosexuality. Homosexuals perceive the opposite sex as less kind, less sensitive, less loving, and more abusive. The fear of engulfment is increased by close encounters with members of the other gender. Although homosexuals are labeled by sexual preference, sex is only a minor consideration in their choice of partners. Neither love nor sex draws people into serious relationships. Many would deny this, because otherwise they would have to accept and to acknowledge the centrality of fear in their lives. Like heterosexuals, homosexuals also form partnerships to lessen fear and to maximize human satisfaction. Most would readily admit that the non-sexual aspects of their lives with their mates are the more important. In this sense homosexuality is no different from heterosexuality. When the initial flurry of any sexual excitement is over, practically all stable relationships must provide some degree of comfort: Lowered anxiety is the most important component of this state.

The presence of this fear of engulfment also explains some of the strange paradoxes of sado-masochistic relationships. When closeness itself is experienced as a threat, sexual gratification that depends upon loving intimacy and trust is not possible. Intimacy requires that we disarm ourselves before approaching others, yet those with ill-defined personal boundaries often feel extremely vulnerable when in close proximity to anyone. The prospect of intimacy seems self-destructive. But sado-masochistic relationships do not require such vulnerability: Here pleasure is largely derived from having a sense of power. Close contacts involving physical pain are not experienced as a threat. Psychological and real arms and armor have a

place in relationships of dominance or submission. Closeness of this type is not only tolerable but also enjoyable. The sadist experiences power in the relationship directly, the masochist indirectly by tolerating and even by seeking gross physical abuse. The sense of power nullifies the fear of engulfment for a while. The sado-masochistic relationship permits a distorted form of closeness that is guaranteed to permit no merging.

The masochistic partner is usually thought to be the victim of the sadist, but in reality both are. Neither dares to be tender and trusting in a relationship based on mutual love and respect. The sadist becomes sexually excited from having the power to inflict pain, the masochist from enduring it. Both escape their sense of powerlessness while hiding their extreme fear of engulfment.

Power-hungry political aspirants seeking support for their cause often exploit the fear of engulfment, a specter so frightening to so many people that it has often swept dictatorships into power. The fear has also been fanned to divert rage and frustration away from rulers who would otherwise have been overthrown. An internal or external group is first designated as an enemy, and it becomes the focus of hate, anger, and physical abuse. As in sado-masochistic relationships, the abusers feel less anxious and more potent once they vent their hate on those who are unable to protect themselves. Mobilizing against any enemy minimizes fear in personal relationships as well. Husbands and wives often use each other this way, employing anger to hold their own fears in check. Imaginary enemies or grievances are quickly invented to serve this purpose when real ones are not conveniently available.

Even poverty, disease, and injustice can be used as common enemies in societies that would not tolerate hatred of racial or religious minorities. As long as hate of something can be fanned, internal turbulence can be temporarily ignored, as we shall see more clearly when we examine "hate" in Chapter 4. Hitler selected Jews and gypsies as his target; Joe McCarthy, creeping Communism. The most visible group or the most powerful can easily be made to look like the greatest danger. This is why the Soviet Union, the Ayatollah Khomeini, and Fidel Castro vilify U.S. "imperialism" so consistently. Still, many Americans naively fail to understand this classic device of political survival, and they try to prove their goodness and fairness, even to terrorists and outlaws, as if these were the issue.

When a common enemy disappears, rage that no longer has an

outlet becomes generalized and fear increases. Dictators are therefore usually in a hurry to find a new enemy as the focus of hate and terror. Internal minorities are obviously the best target, since they are present where needed and easily reachable. Khomeini's mass executions of Iranians and the Khmer Rouge's genocide of Cambodians not only changed the composition of each society but they also served to channel the hate that was previously directed at the Shah and at the U.S. The Russian intelligentsia was designated as the new Enemy of the People once the Bolsheviks had eliminated the Czar and the bourgeoisie. Ethnic minorities and Jewish doctors came next on Stalin's hate list, followed by the small neighboring Baltic states. Territorial expansions by force of arms are usually explained as measures taken to insure relief from the danger of engulfment.

Hitler used propaganda as if he understood the deep and primitive roots of the fear of engulfment consciously. Strict upbringing in the Prussian tradition probably sensitized the Germans to this fear, and Hitler regularly incited his followers by fanning it, using powerful sexual imagery. A young, blond, blue-eyed, buxom but innocent German maiden was often portrayed as the target of scheming, greasy, dark-eyed, long-nosed non-Aryans who would contaminate her unless all Germans united to preserve racial purity. In this context his exhortations sounded almost virtuous, an appeal not only to self-defense but also to decency.

No election campaign is ever totally free of appeals to this and to other primitive fears. Though Western democracies usually shun crass appeals to base emotions, at least traces of them are found here also. The readiness to react to the fear of engulfment is never far from consciousness.

Why was or is the United States eager to deploy MX missiles, to develop a "Star Wars" defense, or to station Pershing missiles in Western Europe? Why have the Soviets marched into Afghanistan, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary? Why are they threatening Western Europe, China, and the U.S.? Why do both superpowers spend such a large percentage of their gross national product on defense, at the expense of urgent social programs? Because their people fear engulfment by others, militarily, politically, and personally. We respond so readily to the manifestations of this fear in the outside world because we know its power inside ourselves so very well. But while essentially irrational in personal affairs, it often is valid in the reality of international relations.

### 3. The Fear of Non-Being

Of all the fears of Man, the fear of non-being is the first to appear, the most horrible to experience, and the most prevalent. It is so terrible, however, that it has remained basically unknown as a separate phenomenon till now. Yet it leaves its traces everywhere.

Proof for the existence of this fear, as for the curving of space postulated by Einstein, cannot generally be obtained by direct observations with our senses. Much of it must be deduced by inference, based on the many clues that we find in the lives of most people. It is the most primitive of Man's fears and it exists at the root of the two others.

If we did not succeed in warding off the fears of abandonment or engulfment, we might sense a trace of the vague, featureless, cold, black, and totally silent fear of non-being. We cannot pinpoint its beginning and we always wish its end, but without ever being aware of it consciously. The fear of non-being is not experienced as a presence but only as an absence, a void with an ill-defined outline, a hovering possibility of dread. Although these descriptions sound poetic, the sensations are real.

The fear of non-being is not the same as the fear of death. Death is a clearly understandable state, even if our legal definition of it is changing as our sophistication about it increases. Death is irreversible, incurable, finite, and associated with specific and predictable physiologic changes. It is followed by rituals such as funerals and mourning. Our understanding of death is a source of comfort to us, since we fear the unknown infinitely more. The horrors of non-being are not anchored in any known reality, and they are therefore wild and limitless. Man has always sought knowledge because certainty diminishes the domain of the unknown, where his most terrifying fears dwell. Even the most horror-filled conscious fantasies are preferable to the terrifying non-images of the unconscious fear of non-being.

How do we know that this fear actually exists and what its nature is? We used to have to infer it from observations of infants; we can now directly observe traces of it in adults who panic in psychotherapy sessions and temporarily lose their capacity to "know" reality as it really is. Without totally losing contact, they sometimes find themselves unable to think for a few minutes. They shake; they sweat profusely or become faint; their eyes widen and dart rapidly in real terror; and they have an

almost irresistible urge to run for their lives, even though they are in no real danger. Such reactions can be observed directly, photographed, and examined soon thereafter. They occur only in environments that are very safe and that are perceived as such. Under such circumstances the body can risk dipping into this horrible fear for a few moments. At other times this fear causes us to freeze and to react as if we were totally powerless. A smell, a sound, a long-forgotten gesture, or a motion can elicit traces of this fear; but it is never cognitively experienced and identifiable when one is all alone.

The existence of the fear of non-being is also confirmed in daily life. Just about everyone has sometimes experienced an "unexplainable" sense of suddenly falling from great heights, as if the earth itself were not solid enough to hold us securely. Most people have also known a sense of impending doom, "for no reason at all," as they have had dreams of dropping into emptiness. The images in such dreams vary, but the sensation is always dread. Our hearts pound very rapidly, we suddenly flinch, and only then can we sleep more peacefully. The bodily reactions are often all that we remember upon awakening: We still shake a bit or sweat, and our heart rate may still be faster than normal. Happily, the frightening images are usually forgotten quickly.

Man has always invented graphic details about the unknown to minimize the sense of danger. He attempted to "know" through his fantasies that which was not repressible and also not reachable by his limited knowledge. This is what mythology consists of. It was easy to determine what happens to the body after death, but it was too terrifying to contemplate the mystery of what happens to our personality, our "human essence." To assume that it also decomposes and vanishes was simply too dreadful a possibility. All civilizations have "discovered" therefore the details of "life" after death, and many have developed elaborate and expensive rituals to ease the "passage."

The hidden treasures in the tombs of the kings of ancient Egypt are the best known example of this preparation for the unknown. Today ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem riot against archaeological digs that might desecrate 2,000-year-old graves. According to their tradition, when the Messiah comes to redeem mankind "at the end of days," the dead shall live again. Every morning these God-fearing people rise to watch whether the Messiah's entourage can already be seen in the distance, and they fear that the dead may miss the revival if their "rest" is

disturbed. The stone-throwing protesters in Jerusalem believe such details with a fervent but childlike innocence, even if their acts are fanatic. The digs are fought with as much fury as one would muster in an attempt to prevent the murder of innocents. Those irreverent archaeologists might doom the dead to remain dead forever just as they are about to rise again! How is it, they must wonder sometimes, that non-believers fail to understand the obvious logic of their virtuous acts of protest?

Poor and simple folk everywhere have often slaved extra hard throughout life to assure that they will "rest in peace," at least after they die. This fantasy about the good life after death anchors the otherwise horrible and featureless images about what might happen later on. The emotions evoked by the possibility of nothingness after life, and after death, resemble too much the dread and more dread that we actually had to endure in the nothingness before we knew that we existed.

The newborn does not know what life is or that it ends in death. Since it knows nothing, it is also unable to give any meaning to its many sensations of being groundless, disoriented, and filled with the precursors of dread. (Chapter 2 will describe the origins of this seemingly endless absence of constancy.) Any sudden change in the internal or external environment of the newborn reawakens the barely slumbering fear of non-being, which squeezes, pressures, pulls, and tears at the infant as if it were a powerful giant and not merely a fragile little organism. Such experiences have many causes but no regular rhythm, so the newborn cannot brace itself physiologically in anticipation. It must be ready to respond to the unexpected at any moment. It also has no notion of time and therefore no capacity to anticipate a better future. No choice exists but to be constantly alert with only brief moments of relative relaxation. The subjective sense of danger at the beginning of life was titanic indeed. Man must not allow such a fear ever to reappear.

Our bodily reactions in adulthood "remember" the confusion and the terror from the time when only feelings existed and no thinking. Thought was not "knocked out" by our panic, it simply did not yet exist then. Even decades later as fully grown people we continue to dread the possibility of helplessness and we dare not let go of understanding and thinking: We normally use these to protect ourselves. But what about the things that we cannot know? We construct delusions about the unknown future and make them up to look like facts, to save us from the physiologic "memories" of the past. When faced with much un-

certainty, our body tends to react as if it were still in danger of experiencing those old horrors again. Many people "worry" that even thoughts about non-being might bring the faceless terror back. This is too much to risk. Early infancy was so full of dread because it happened before we had any tools to help us get oriented. Our conscious capacity to understand and to think is indeed the basis of our sanity and of our power to control things within and about us. It is obvious why Man has elevated thinking and knowing to a height even beyond what they deserve. Since we do not do well without understanding, we also invented explanations for the unknowable nature of God in every age and in all civilizations. Such beliefs dispelled non-knowing, which always had been associated with this fear.

People generally hope that when death comes it will be swift, involving no torture, fear, or pain. We wish to end our journey on earth suddenly, like Moses or old Indians on their mountaintops, as if by a kiss. We dread some things even more than death, such as continuous suffering without the ability even to die. It is not uncommon to harbor a secret wish that some loved one would help expedite our last ordeal if needed. Suicide only occurs because it appears as a way out of a horror worse than dying—a life seen as a curse, whatever its actual content. Those lost in an endless black tunnel pray for death to free them. Free them of what? Of living with hopelessness, at the bottom of which, lurking in hiding, lies this most horrible of all fears, the fear of non-being.

It is a terrible fear, perhaps best described in the following dream: "I was very small, the size of a fingernail, and very light in weight, like a petal of a flower, and I was floating on the surface of a huge bathtub filled with water. It was not like swimming in a lake, because I was totally unable to move and did not have any power at all. I could not even thrash about and play with the water. I was just floating, unable to determine my course in any way. Suddenly someone had removed the plug from the drain, and the water level began to recede quickly. I could still move my eyes, so I watched with horror what was happening. My eyes soon got transfixed on the huge gaping hole, which was fast growing bigger and which sucked everything in very hungrily. I found myself soon at the edge of a large whirlpool, twisting and turning faster and faster. The speed increased as the circle became smaller, and I became dizzy. It was like being driven crazily at speeds of several hundred miles per hour in an open convertible, without anything to hold on to. Every-

thing turned gray, then white, or maybe black. Surely I was but an eye-blink away from being swallowed up. My heart seemed to stop beating and I did not breathe. Then I woke up. Cold sweat was running down my forehead."

Floating helplessly on top of a fast-emptying bathtub evokes, in a weakened form, the same feelings that one might have in endless outer space, suspended in total darkness, emptiness, isolation, and silence. All sense of direction is soon lost. Time quickly becomes indistinguishable and continuous, filled with the unending expectation that every next moment will be worse than the one before. An unseen "black hole," in which everything disappears forever without leaving any trace, is constantly coming nearer. Yet we never quite reach even that. The dream at least provided the dreamer with intelligible content, that of horrible engulfment. The fear of non-being that was evoked by it does not have even that. No conscious images are conjured up by it. It lies below them.

A sense of helplessness and hopelessness is associated with all irrational fears, but it is worse with the fear of non-being. It is totally disabling. Anyone in such a position would surely try to find some attachment to hold on to "for dear life." Mates, lovers, charismatic leaders, cults, and causes—anything will do at such desperate moments. This in fact is the soil from which cults sprout, and the continuing anxiety is what sustains them. Lesser fears always yield to greater ones. The fear of engulfment takes a back seat whenever the fear of non-being becomes the driver. First of all we must be. Second we must not be abandoned. Only last must we not be engulfed. All three fears often co-exist, although one or another is usually dominant.

Newborns do not know of bathtubs or of engulfment, and they cannot make up lesser horrors to comfort themselves with. Their terror is faceless and meaningless, and their sense of dread and doom is pervasive, everlasting, and totally out of control. And yet babies often seem to be carefree and even "happy" before they begin to be conscious. Such contentment is the result of contacts that babies make with objects, with other people, or with themselves. A sense of orientation and of being grounded brings with it relatively brief absences of fear. This pattern of recurring internal instability alternating with short moments of contentment often remains true throughout life. Physiologically, the neonate "expects" danger and pain even before it "expects" any pleasure from the nipple or from the thumb, both of which appear equally external, often unreachable, and generally uncon-

trollable. The sense of dread associated with the next unknown stimulus is the fear of non-being.

The first few hours, days, and weeks are the crucial period in the life of the newborn. With time, every little bit of knowledge gained diminishes dread. Babies are the fastest learners: A whole new world is literally emerging for them. They are actually flushed with the excitement of discovery as they gain consciousness. The fear of non-being is quickly forgotten as it recedes. As the years pass, we even push the memories of the old horrors out of consciousness, thus "hoping" to rid ourselves of the vulnerability to them. It is a neat and courageous attempt to do the undoable.

Though no images of the fear of non-being exist in us normally, it evokes recognizable sensations in practically everyone alive. These produce measureable changes in many of the body's functions, and they can be observed in sleeping infants, for example. They sometimes suddenly shake violently, as if they had just lost their footing, and they often awaken with a cry of fear. What settles them down most quickly is being held by someone calm and competent. Such physical closeness is similar to the intrauterine experience of being snugly embraced. Very young infants exist in a state known as "normal autism" all the time, except for the fleeting moments when they have such security-providing physical contact. This brings temporary relief from the ongoing dread and it enables them to begin exploring the external world. The newborn also gives solace to itself automatically by rubbing, rocking, socking, pulling, or pushing one member of its body against another, or against an external object. These are obviously not purposeful activities but only random contacts made when two separate parts find each other. Although both may belong to the same body, the parts do not "know" this, and they seem as glad to couple with each other as two lost orphans would in a dark forest. The sensory stimulation temporarily relieves the emptiness of disconnectedness and of total isolation.

Young babies suck their thumbs, for example, because the act brings about a sensation of physical wholeness. A circle is completed, an open circuit closed. The exposed thumb covers and protects the exposed palate, even as it is simultaneously covered and protected by it. Such experiences have been observed in utero. They represent the biological basis of the "knowledge" that close physical contact provides a sense of security. The forms and means of coupling become much more complex later in life, but the sense of security provided by the experience re-

mains basically the same. Holding and touching also relieve the sense of dread in adulthood. In the absence of another person we attempt to do our own comforting by touching or by rocking ourselves, by filling our internal emptiness with food or with alcohol, and by numbing ourselves with drugs. Failing in all these, we hold on to an imaginary reality with the help of ruminations, hallucinations, and psychosis. Somehow we try to survive.

The newborn lives in its own little internal world. The experiences of sensory-deprived adults offer us reliable clues about the nature of that existence early in life. Even well-adjusted and sane grownups become disoriented in a very short time. They begin hallucinating not much later. Even after receiving regular external stimuli for decades we still need a constant flow of auditory, visual, and other contacts to maintain our sanity, our orientation, even our ability to recognize people well known to us. Apparently we cannot store such experiences for more than a few hours. We need frequent reminders as to our current situation. The newborn has none, and in its "mindlessness" it is unable to receive any.

Daydreams and hallucinations may well be desperate efforts by withdrawn or autistic people to restore contact with some "reality," even if it is one only invented for this purpose. The organism apparently seeks even imaginary stimuli to help it orient itself. (Night dreams may serve a similar function for anyone asleep, although they also have other purposes.) To regard hallucinations merely as expressions of insanity, rather than as extreme and unsuccessful attempts to restore sanity, is a leftover from a less sophisticated past in which we classified emotional disturbances according to observable behavior. Most professionals grossly underestimate the power of irrational fears even today, and thus they pay most attention to behavioral disturbances rather than to these forces. But psychosis really is an attempt to cope with crippling fear that is experienced as threatening survival itself, just as inflammation is a reparative attempt by the body to fight threatening infection. The swelling accompanying inflammation may cause brain damage and even death when in the tight confines of the skull, even though it normally heals rather than kills. The same with psychosis: It helps cope with the horrible fear of non-being. Hallucinations may be jumbled, distorted, or confused pictures of reality; but even if they make only crazy sense, they are much more desirable to the one experiencing them than the absence of any sense at all.

Only the fear of non-being is terrible enough so that insanity and even death are preferred over it. People do not generally know how to protect themselves against this fear in a less extreme fashion because it has no recognizable features. How does anyone fight an unknown, unseen, and faceless enemy? It is impossible to determine at whom and where to strike, when to escape, or even where to. The ghosts we fear have describable features; darkness teems with creatures that have imaginary outlines, and phobias relate to specific dangers. Not knowing who stalks us or from which direction we might be hit is how we experience the nebulous and terrifying fear of non-being, the ultimate in vulnerability, "unknowability," and danger. Even cancer, which most people fear so much, has a known development and outcome.

Knowing correctly that we are who we are, where and when we are—as well as what, where, and who we are not—is what sanity consists of. A correct assessment of our self—where we begin and where we end, what is now, what was before and what comes later, what is outside of us and what is inside—allows us to relate to others sensibly. If we do not sense our own boundaries clearly, we must create distances between ourselves and others. We might not remain distinct otherwise. A fuzzy definition of oneself breeds generalized confusion about others. Are we who we are, or Napoleon? Are we here or in heaven, human or frog, awake or asleep, alive or walking-dead?

Yet even the confusion of psychosis does not obliterate the fact that there is something we call "ourselves." A person may believe that he is Jesus Christ, but at least he "knows" that he is somebody. The newborn infant does not possess even such a confused, but in many ways reassuring, picture of reality. It knows nothing.

Since the newborn experiences without comprehension, it is not like a psychotic person but more like a fish. Even worse, unlike the fish it is oblivious to real danger but not immune from the physical sensations of imaginary danger. A sense of imminent doom almost continuously "alerts" its tissues. But unlike the brain of the fish, the visceral brain of the newborn that is being "programmed" to respond to perceived danger, eventually becomes part of a conscious, reasoning being. In spite of the cortex, this visceral brain will continue to exist, and to control the automatic or autonomic functions of the organism in later years also. The highly developed new mammalian brain will eventually integrate all phenomena that it can recognize.

But how can even such a miraculous organ integrate faceless phenomena that it has no knowledge of? The "programmed" reactions to the fear of non-being were "registered" only in the visceral brain, and the nebulous outlines of this fear were never "seen" by the eyes that are controlled by the cortex. This explains why the cortex is blind to it. Knowledge of the fear of non-being, unlike the fears of being, is not obtainable by direct observation. We can know it only by piecing together the puzzle from the many fragments that we have collected.

What happens as infants come out of their normal autism? They are usually eager to discover the world when they dare, thus liberating themselves from the nothingness of non-relationships and diminishing their fear of non-being. Their subjective experience is that they have survived forever without any help from anyone. They do not know that anything or anyone existed before them. Slowly they are discovering an emerging mothering figure, but they must regard her with mixed emotions. Dependency on her is wonderful. Even an imperfect mother provides many satisfying, reliable, and consistent experiences. She sometimes responds with warmth, solidity, softness, and nourishment, and also with reassuring, pleasant, and rhythmic sounds. In addition she provides a nipple to couple with—almost as good, but not quite as reliable, as the thumb. She is not always present at moments of panic.

But if Mother is infantile, inconsistent, or grossly incompetent, we do not trust too much of ourselves into her care. We remain much of the time within the subjectively safe, if confining, shell of our shut-in selves, at least partially withdrawn and autistic. We tend to continue coupling with ourselves as before. We are much more experienced by then and can find our thumb with greater ease and speed. Sucking, rocking, rubbing, pulling, and pushing all provide us with autistic opportunities for coupling with our own body or with our favorite blanket or doll. Without any consciousness, each of us had to face the most critical existential dilemma of all: Whither security?

Although we are poorly equipped to make such "choices," they are nonetheless made by everyone alive. Very few people remain completely autistic throughout life, but the tendency to remain withdrawn in lesser degrees is the rule rather than the exception. Many withdrawn children and some adults who appear as organically retarded eventually develop normally, if late, proving that they were never really deficient, except functionally. Other organically intact children of very immature and dis-

turbed mothers remain forever at the margin of existence. They may thrive physically but not intellectually, emotionally, or socially. They are practically indistinguishable from the organically retarded.

Why would anyone pay the high price of autism? Because something more valuable than all the gratifications from the outside is obtained in return: the avoidance of fears, especially the fear of non-being. The autistic shell isolates the organism from experiencing reality in general, and it protects it from experiencing fear. It is an extremely expensive solution, but those who know of no better way to survive are often willing to pay even this price. "The push away from fear or dread supersedes everything."

#### 4. Self-Coupling vs. Self-Love

Basic concepts of dynamic psychology must be revised in light of these observations. The avoidance of "unpleasure" is obviously not a main motivating force of human behavior; avoidance of fear is. Freud did not really succeed in explaining why anyone would ever give up the "pleasure principle" in favor of reality. Heinz Hartmann tried in 1964 to fill this gap by claiming that "if the infant finds himself in a situation of need, and if attempts toward hallucinatory gratification have proved disappointing, he will turn toward reality; and the repetition of such situations will gradually teach him better to know reality and to strive for those real changes."

But hallucinations are not necessarily disappointing for infants or even for adults. They helped the infant survive when it had to face, alone, the most horrible of all fears. Besides "striving requires much self-control" and a taste for mastery, and no infants—or even many adults—possess either. There is a much better explanation for our turn toward reality. The Spartan children mentioned earlier in this chapter are a good illustration; even they had to be forced to leave delusions behind.

Most people give up autistic living, but only slowly, hesitatingly, cautiously, and seldom totally. We do retain the capacity to live in unreality, and we often use it—when we are lost in our thoughts, when we act according to our feelings, and when we ignore reality temporarily while awake and during sleep. Above all, we keep the option of living in delusions full-time when we experience externality as intolerable. Man has always been com-

forted by the knowledge that the exit doors of suicide and insanity are never too far away.

If the competition between pleasure and reality were totally free, the outcome would clearly favor the first. As a species we are well known for indulging "the desires of our heart" at the expense of our real self-interest. What else did the prophets of old warn against, and why do preachers today still exhort us from every pulpit? It is necessary to remind us again and again that the rewards of a mature and thoughtful life are greater. We do not give up the natural tendency to live by pursuing pleasure unless we are forced to do so by consistent, fair, and unrelenting fathering.

Self-coupling comes easier. This is how we all began life. In this mode of living—popularly known as narcissism—unpleasant or painful aspects of external reality do not affect us much, since we are exclusively preoccupied with ourselves. This is the "pleasure" of infants and of many adults, and it must be given up in order to live non-autistically in reality. Narcissism does not provide genuine pleasures; it only lessens the fear of non-being by providing room for existence in a delusional shell. The growing child gives up self-coupling only to the degree that it is persistently expected to adhere to reality in a context that provides sufficient encouragement, security, and support. No striving is involved in the early years of life. This will become clearer when we discuss fathering in Chapter 6.

Narcissism or self-coupling is the opposite of self-love. The latter requires that we avail ourselves of the many real blessings of life; very few of these can be ours within the shell of delusional withdrawal. When newborns couple with themselves they are merely trying to survive. Since they know nothing cognitively, they also have no concept of self, and so they cannot love "themselves." Besides, the capacity to love develops much later, if it develops at all. As we shall see later, loving requires that we give of ourselves. Newborns, young children, and narcissistic adults can only grab, take, accept, or reject. They cannot give.

Even the term "narcissism" is ill-chosen. Narcissus was not an unconscious neonate but a young man, even though he too was exclusively preoccupied with his self, like an autistic infant. We are told that he lived as if he were "in love" with his own reflected image, spurning all others. Yet those commonly called narcissistic spurn no one. All the newborn can do is couple with itself, and this is why "narcissism" is normal and inevitable for it. But the "love" of a grown Narcissus for himself was a sick-

ness, indicating a serious developmental block. Emotionally he remained a suckling. Like all adults, he must have known cognitively about the existence of others, but nobody existed outside of himself emotionally and behaviorally. For such people, others merely serve as objects to couple with, like a favorite blanket, or as things to be used and discarded, like a towel.

The price of such autistic living is always very high: One can have only a limited existence, more like a plant or a primitive animal than a human. Narcissus became a flower, and thus he felt fear no more. His suicide is so pretty that we almost fail to recognize it for what it was.

Narcissistic people often embarrass themselves because they normally act in a crude and uncivilized manner, like infants. Unreasonable and endless demanding comes naturally to them, and they see nothing wrong with it. What others try hard to avoid, they pursue. When on rare occasions they are able to observe themselves and their behavior, they are humiliated by it. This causes them to retreat quickly into their autistic shell again, a safe haven that excludes most pain. Although a horrible prison, this is where they experience most safety. They emerge only reluctantly when reality leaves them no other choice. Superficially, such behavior resembles that of people driven by the fear of engulfment. The end point of both is splendid isolation. But those who fear engulfment actively push away, while people who fear non-being just fade away, leaving all others behind.

Man has always tried to hide the existence of his irrational fears, both from himself and from others. Perhaps he believed naively that the unseen might magically disappear. Besides, he was too scared to be seen as afraid, for this would increase his vulnerability. Although ineffective and irrational, such behavior was the best he could come up with. The attempts to delude himself naturally failed, and he had no choice but to pay the high price in pain and in trouble again and again. No one knew that irrational fears, including the fear of non-being, could actually be eliminated. It is finally possible for men and women to live consciously now with dignity, pride, joy, and inner peace—but only after they vanquish these hidden enemies that exist within.

## 5. How Do We Know What We Know about Man?

Western science is generally based on empirical observations and experiments, and it is rightly suspicious of abstract formulations

that cannot be tested directly. Social and psychological scientists have thus narrowly pursued lines of research that are essentially quantifiable, mimicking the natural sciences and reflecting their professional sense of inferiority and inadequacy.

Although a tremendous pool of quantifiable data has been accumulated by social scientists all over the world, it has not made us much wiser. It is time to wonder if our dependence upon this approach has failed us. The principles and methods that work for physics may simply not be adequate to gain a real understanding of Man, a miraculous creature capable of observing and of examining his own workings.

Clinical observations and conclusions derived from them may be the only source of the clues that we need. Yet such observations have been viewed in the past as necessarily biased and therefore as unreliable and irrelevant. Clinical findings are indeed subject to major distortions resulting from the interpretations and misinterpretations of observers, and they are not easily duplicable or verifiable. People frequently do not even agree on what they observe. Two individuals watching a movie at the same time and from adjacent seats usually see at least somewhat different versions of it: The angle of viewing anything is always at least slightly different for any two people, but in addition, eyes have biases built into them. These must be recognized fully and adjusted for accuracy before agreement is reached on what is being seen.

Clinical data can be of great value if meticulous care is taken to correct their biases. We can no longer afford the luxury of simply dismissing such observations, even though they are far from perfect. We will probably have to correct our findings again and again, but whether we like it or not the gray area of clinical findings seems to be where the missing pieces of the human puzzle are hiding.

Even in the exact sciences the position of the observer affects the nature of his or her observations. The theory of relativity complicated the study of distant stars and galaxies at first, but it also made it possible to explore previously unreachable worlds and concepts. The problem is even more complex when we ourselves become the subject of our observations, because our fears of what we begin to see interfere with our seeing. But we discover fascinating new views once the central role of fear is recognized and its distortions corrected for.

We humans are and always will remain the ultimate instruments of our observations in any field. All our determinations

and measurements are really subjective, since by nature we are incapable of absolute objectivity. Not even our most finely calibrated instruments are totally reliable: We use Greenwich mean time as a fixed standard because even the most accurate clocks do not always tell time correctly. Subjectivity confuses us only when it is claimed to represent an objective reality. The construction of theories is always a subjective effort, based on human observations and assessments. No better building blocks exist. Try as hard as we can, absolute and total objectivity will forever elude us.

As we shall see more fully in Chapter 3, emotions or feelings are usually misleading and unreliable yardsticks of reality, and they often masquerade as thoughts. We must discount them therefore when we attempt to discover the hidden outlines of our real nature, which is only knowable when observed dispassionately. Events and facts that are charged with emotions can usually be evaluated reliably only after enough time passes for those feelings to become diluted. Likewise, difficult choices and important life decisions are best not made at moments of great enthusiasm. It is wise to become suspicious when we have very powerful reactions to what we observe or read. Feelings reflect past experience; they propel us to trust too little and to stay distant too much, or else they turn us into true believers and cause us to forget that honeymoons are not forever.

Our capacity to evaluate critically what makes sense and what does not often remains unused. Our wish for guidance from others is frequently so strong that we substitute the judgments of critics for our own, and not only in evaluating movies and plays. Many people are always eager to hear what pundits have to tell them about the meaning of things that they can easily understand without help. It is hardly necessary to recapitulate a president's remarks, but commentators do so regularly. The opinions of experts are frequently given excessive weight, as if such opinions are not also colored by feelings. The almost blind acceptance of the words of experts is considered more fully in Chapter 7.

Readers can trust their own evaluations of the material presented here, provided that "gut" reactions are excluded. These are often based on hidden fear, which can be recognized by the intense emotional heat that it tends to generate.