

## CHAPTER ONE

# Radical Altruism

### *An Anomaly to Modern Psychology*

#### A REAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN ALTRUISM AND SELF-INTEREST

My friend John (not his real name), a social worker, operates out of a tiny office of a health clinic in downtown Seattle. Many of his clients are homeless, jobless, familyless, addicted, and often have some form of psychopathology. Some have criminal records, and most have broken-down, sad lives. Others live in low-rent housing, such as low-income elderly, disabled and working people who survive on meager incomes and whose need for services might be temporary. John helps people get their welfare checks, a little medical care, food, a bed, whatever they need and he can find. With other advocates, he pesters city hall for affordable housing, less police harassment, and more dignity for those who have been pushed to the edges of our high-rise, high-tech, high-energy society.

Although John's family is the center of his life (he shares with his wife the care of their young boys), he sacrifices lots of time, money, and energy he could otherwise spend on himself and his own for people whom he sees in his office, or whom he seeks out in shabby rooms and under viaducts and in packing crates behind warehouses. Each one represents for him an individual with dignity worthy of respect and concern, given with humor, sometimes anger, and lots of compassion. John loves his wife and boys, his clients, his fellow workers, his friends, and most others not on this list. He belongs to a noble class of people who work quietly, answering the call to serve the poor and weak, and who noisily speak out about the injustice of power systems. These workers, L'Arch assistants, teachers in tough schools, hospice nurses visiting those who are dying, and many others show disinterest in advancing their careers, stockpiling possessions, and empowering themselves. The folks in this layer of soci-

ety who provide a buffer between the rich and the poor, the privileged and the marginalized, the strong and the weak, have taken seriously the "preferential option for the poor." They have replaced their *egos* with *Others*. They have distinguished themselves by their answer to the call of the needs of Others.

We should not raise John and his fellow workers too high for honor. They do not, godlike, *create* good work out of some special storage of goodness lodged in their hearts. Rather, they *find* goodness outside themselves in their clients, goodness needing help; and they *respond* with selfless service. They usually do not carry out what ethicists call, "supererogatory acts": those beyond the call of duty. They only do what could be expected of all of us. The call to service addresses not only service providers; it is aimed at us all. Levinas and many others tell us that the call for responsibility to others defines the fundamental feature of the human psyche. John, and others in human services, most people in many ways, and all people in some ways, choose to answer the call.

But the most important thing we must recognize is that none of us *choose* to have the call addressed to us. The call comes to us. The call comes to the human psyche! It comes to each of us from the outside, from the Other, from the inherent dignity, legitimate needs, and essential weakness of our neighbor. We all have our weakness; we all depend on each other; and we all call to each other. Also, we do not *choose* to respond. We choose the manner in which we respond. Turning away is a response. Every kind of response is a response. No one chooses the call, and no one chooses not to respond. No one responds with no response.

Jean, another acquaintance, might be an example of self-corroding cynicism. Expressing a kind of raw pleasure in this activity, Jean frequently throws out these sharp critical observations of the faults of others. She likes to show off her acute observations of their slightest idiosyncrasy. She shakes with a kind of delight when she can point out someone's big mistake. Since she also incessantly complains about the weather, the traffic, the government, local cultural habits, and all her neighbors, those who work with her do not take her critical style too seriously. Most of us simply close our ears to her cynicism, having gotten used to her. But we have also become inoculated from frequent injections of cynicism in popular culture nowadays.

Having maneuvered her way into a middle position of authority, Jean blames others when things go badly. She rose to her position of power by convincing those above her that she could do a better job than the former director. But things have gotten worse under her management. While efficiency in the agency suffers and morale fades, she defines herself more and more as the victim. She takes advantage of all the perks of

the office and legitimates new ones based on her sense of personal justice for the trouble her supervisors have caused her and their stupidity for not paying attention. However, she does not seem to be happy in this "position of power."

But we should not judge Jean too harshly. Her cynical psyche seems a product of modern advanced society. Jean had all the learning advantages this highly evolved society has to offer. She received degrees in social work and has attended many seminars in management. She learned sophisticated knowledge about how people think and behave, how social structures and processes operate, skills in critical analysis to contrast efficient from inefficient stratagems, and motivational programs to increase productivity. But Jean did not receive in her socialization process an accompanying lesson in modesty and self-questioning. She was designated for early success, trained to move rapidly through the system, and protected from failure and any insights about the paradoxes of power. The educational system, the organized social structure, and the enticements to success by marketing have all paradoxically sabotaged her.

#### PSYCHOLOGY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE CYNICISM OF MODERN IDEOLOGIES

Rather than blaming Jean, let me briefly outline what has been the anticipated outcomes of modernity, how the expectations have been fulfilled, and how modernity's success has paradoxically produced such cynicism. Hopefully, this brief and simple description will help to build the case for questioning modern psychology's contribution to our cynical nihilism. I will organize my outline around the three traditional psychological levels: the cognitive, behavioral, and affective styles.

*Cognitive enlightenment* and our release from ignorance have been the crowning achievement of modernity. Within the cognitive realm, both the natural and human sciences have exploded in knowledge over the last 300 years, accelerating each century and decade the production of methods, theories, facts, and their resultant "truths." Moreover, scientific knowledge has been widely dispersed, offered to most contemporary citizens through schools and the media. While there are still many of us naive about physics, chemistry, biology, and other modern sciences, all have become at least casual students of human behavior and many claim to be rather good practical psychologists, astute observers of political activity, and skilled micro-managers of at least our own micro-economic systems. The knowledge gained by the human sciences has been commercialized and made available to anyone connected and interested. We consider ourselves perceptive of the intentions and motives of others, and especially of

ourselves. This modern knowledge gives us confidence in judging people in our daily lives, planning courses of action, and enjoying our self-confident sophistication in figuring out the meanings of people.

*Behavioral efficiency* in the actions of machines in the physical realm has helped accomplish our advancement in knowledge about the nature of things. Within the human realm, efficiency in the management of both individual and social actions allows us to smooth out our organizational systems to accomplish highly productive work. People can be trained to do amazingly complicated tasks to become highly effective workers. Mishaps are called mistakes; we expect efficiency if proper techniques are applied. Just as ignorance is inexcusable, so failure due to lack of skill is unacceptable. Where only effort is needed in the use of available application, success is open to everyone. With the refinement of techniques in psychology and personal management for self-improvement and organizational management, modernity has apparently reduced the likelihood of failure.

Finally, *affective enjoyment* of available consumer products has increased to create a comfortable lifestyle for the majority of citizens of the locales of modernity. Within the affective realm, both the accumulation of consumer products and the easy access to entertainment provide nearly instant gratification. With the production and distribution of so much *stuff* and so many *happenings*, we expect every modern citizen can live a life of pleasure like never before. With the advancement of medicine to rid us of pain and machines to replace work, discomfort should be on its way out. All this was anticipated and hoped for with the explosion of knowledge in modern science, the refinement of technology, and the production and market distribution of consumer products.

As we near the end of this extraordinarily productive twentieth century we have found, however, that individual and social *understanding, success, and happiness* have not grown like our *science, technology, and consumer products* had promised. The mythologies of mastery, progress, and freedom from the hard knocks of a primitive world are in doubt. Postmodern cynicism has accelerated in the last fifty years. This half of the century has seen disillusionment and fear. The last ten years has seen an explosion of signs of cynical despair. Our present cynicism is not simply arrogance, abusive manipulation of others, and self-indulgence. We have always had those problems. Our cynicism is the intertwining of arrogance, manipulation, and indulgence with the deflating of the great expectations of modernity. Rather than getting better, things often seem to be getting worse.

Modern *enlightenment* has frequently turned into postmodern criticism of official knowledge and institutional structures, and deep distrust

of most of our fellow citizens. At the cognitive level, our postmodern fears of not knowing what we suspect others know and hide are being fed by ideologies of suspicion. Enlightened demagogues spread their comprehensive and certain explanations of why things are going so badly. Religious, political, economic, and psychological theories calculated to appeal to our vested interests are being offered through sophisticated marketing techniques, mostly over television. These *ideologies* provide us justification for cleansing ourselves of any accountability for problems and criticizing the ignorance, hypocrisy, and culpability of those in charge.

Modern *efficiency* has turned into postmodern manipulation of the system. At the behavioral level, our postmodern fear of failure motivates compulsive control of our immediate environment. We have skillful techniques to manipulate the mechanisms of social control: we learn how to make the system individually work for us. We justify taking advantage of others and the system within the accepted practices of competition. Postmodern cynicism assumes no limits to the ego beyond those put in place by other competitors through their skillful manipulation of the system.

Modern *enjoyment* has turned into postmodern addiction to short-term pleasure at the cost of long-term happiness. At the affective level, our postmodern fear of suffering motivates our driven consumption to indulge instant gratification, turning luxuries into conveniences and finally into necessities. We justify the unjust distribution of goods and painful poverty, the depletion of natural resources and damage to the environment, all under the conviction of the ideologies of individualism that aim toward personal, even if isolated, satisfaction. If I correctly hear the many social critics, especially the political challengers who insist that the incumbents are letting society go to hell in a hand-basket, then all the great advantages of modernity have only turned out to sabotage us.

Let me return to Jean. I have picked out those qualities that allow me to use her as an example of a contemporary cynic. This is unfair. She is more than these qualities. She most frequently works hard trying to make things run smoothly in her agency. In face-to-face situations she is usually kind and considerate of others. I have also picked out those qualities of John that allow me to use him as an example of a contemporary person of responsibility. This is also unfair. He is more than these qualities. He stubbornly holds on to ideals even in the face of failure, loses his temper and criticizes bureaucrats for bungling the paper work on some of his clients, and indulges some habits not good for his health. John's generosity is not purely disinterested. He gets egoistic satisfaction out of helping his clients. John is not perfect. He is human like us all.

Furthermore, I cannot judge Jean too harshly. I find myself not terribly unlike her. Those paragraphs I included just above criticizing science, technology, and the distribution of consumer products are quite cynical. We have all inherited this postmodern style of egocentric cynicism. But as Sloterdijk says, we are unhappy with our cynicism. We long for the simplicity, humility, and patient compassion for each other that would get us closer to an idealized existence. I have no basis to be arrogantly critical of others. I have no justification to be selfishly manipulative of others. I have no right to deny others their needed goods in the process for my indulgent consumption.

The history of the development of the modern era is complex. I wish to attend only to the contribution of psychology to our modern cynicism. While modernity has appropriated psychology's ideological justification for self-interest, we inhabitants are haunted by the faces of Others calling us out of ourselves to honor, respect, and serve them because of their inherent dignity and need.

When I do my own phenomenological reflection on being human, I must be *kynical* of my own self-righteousness because I directly experience that I have no choice in being called to responsibility. Responsibility is assigned me independently of my abilities, my occupational or familial role, even independently of my generosity. I am defined as a human person commanded to be responsible. I sometimes self-righteously try to convince myself and others that I have nobly chosen to be a servant of the needy, but this is my foolishly arrogant ego asserting itself. Authentic service is called, not self-chosen for its own glory.

Cynically, many would say that I do have a choice, and my freedom to choose my own rights should take priority over any needs of others. Cynicism says that John's choices fulfill his own need to be a caretaker, that his service to others arises out of motives of self-interest. But this critical judgment represents a distortion of the social, psychological, and spiritual basis for his self-sacrificing and other-dedicated work. During much of John's day, his psyche resides in and dedicates itself to others, specific others with hurting bodies and anxious souls, not abstract others. Any psychology that interprets John's commitment to others as nothing more than the satisfaction of his own personal needs has founded itself on a narrow cynicism. That kind of restricted cynical interpretation of John represents perhaps a defensive accusation justifying the accuser's own selfishness or, perhaps, a vested ideology. Or it is simply vicious. But most likely this cynicism and its judgments arise out of a culturally based psychology, derived from an *enlightened* scientism that reduces human behavior to natural forces stimulated by an individual need like hunger,

or from an even more *enlightened* and galloping *humanism*, a simplistic liberalism that exaggerates individual autonomy.

Psychology has a difficult time describing human experience and behavior other than as events of an ego-centered being solely concerned with itself: either an ego forced by biological and instinctual causes, similar to plants and animals, or a willing ego empowering itself for personal self-esteem. Psychology seems unable to make sense of the stories of genuine *radical altruism*. *Radical altruism is an anomaly that does not fit psychology's fundamental paradigm.*

Although researchers have been studying the psychology of helping and altruism for decades (such as Batson, 1991; R. B. Cialdini et al., 1987; J. F. Dovidio et al., 1990; J. A. Piliavin and H. W. Charng, 1990, to name only a few important representatives), their approach is still based on what Levinas calls fundamental *egology*. Their definitions of altruism are not close to Levinas's understanding of radical altruism. In its science and practice, psychology seems stuck in the paradigm of psychological *egology*. Whether described as determined or as personally free, the self or ego is the center of the self.

On the other hand, many people learn their home-grown psychology in traditions that make sense out of the paradoxes that placed the ego outside itself, in others. Such paradoxes include notions like "the loss of self in the service of others as the way to gain self," "life coming out of suffering and death to the ego," "weakness revealing strength," and "the needs of others calling each of us out of our selfish selves to help."

As a psychologist, I have been baffled by the effort of much of my profession, in both its research and practice, to make us better able to deny those events of weakness that *happen* to us as mythically valued only to serve the powerful. Most of the self-help texts, according to Gary Greenberg in *The Self on the Shelf* (1994), urge us to define whatever desire we have to help others purely for the sake of others as "disordered and needing recovery." Self-development manuals offer exercises to practice skills to empower oneself for the competitive worldly arenas. Psychology today seems to urge us to orient and justify all our action as efforts to be responsible only for Number One. While people are committed to others (e.g., people like John sacrificing their own comfort to help others), psychology has a thin theoretical basis to understand their altruism.

The challenge to egocentric psychology that I hope to spell out in these pages is not, however, inspired by some pious religious idea or exclusively by Levinas's philosophy. When we look at secular literature, we find it filled with the ironies of both the self-sabotage of egoism and the admiration and honor given to self-sacrificing humble service. These paradoxes have been revealed over and over in literature and history. At

least since Homer's *Iliad*, 3,000 years ago, the foolishness of egoic war, arrogance, manipulation, and greed, as well as the honor given for self-sacrifice for the powerless, have been the consistent stories of humankind. The tragic flaw of power weakening itself, and the comedic recognition of the power of the weak because of their weakness, was described 2,300 years ago by Aristotle as the essence of drama and the human psyche. Yet contemporary psychology has still not grasped these paradoxes as central to the human condition. Psychology's choice to model itself after the causal and positivistic thinking of the natural sciences, and after the micro-political thinking of individuals in constant competition for what they decided were limited resources to satisfy private needs, has kept psychology from understanding the paradoxes of the weakness of power and the power of weakness.

#### PSYCHOLOGY: A PSUKHOLOGY AS WELL AS AN EGOLOGY

One of my theses is that most psychology today, certainly the kind influencing much of popular culture, attends exclusively to the study of the *ego*. The *psyche* of modern psychology is the *ego* establishing itself in the center of the individual personality, constructing its own identity, manipulating its environment to feed its needs, and enjoying the pleasure of satisfying those needs. This is certainly a legitimate science of much of human behavior. But it is badly truncated and wrongly named. It cannot understand authentic giving, that is, *radical altruism*. Modern psychology is not the study of the human psyche's ability to transcend its needs to find a deeper desire. Inspired by Emmanuel Levinas, I suggest we call the science of the ego, *egology*.

Humans are more than isolated egos. The word *psyche* was not originally the center of the self, the center of the personality. The Homeric *psyche*, or ψυχη (*psukhe*) originally meant "breath" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., vol. 12). Homer used this term also to refer to *life, soul*. The *psukhe* was the soul or spirit gradually breathed into and sustained by the life and love of others, by parents, family, tribe, by those for whom the *psukhe* was to be responsible, ultimately by the Spirit of the universe. A reflective phenomenology can still justify this ancient definition. Others *inspire* this *spirit* into the self. The word "inspire" means "to breath into" another. This ancient *psukhe* did not give birth to itself and direct its effort toward itself, as we find explained in contemporary *egology*. The *psukhe* was a gift from others. Only later, did "psyche" come to mean the center of the private personality. In the story of Western thought and practice, we have altered the meaning of the word "psyche" to justify our ideologies of indi-



vidualism and self-reliance, the self-sufficiency of self-creation and thereby our self-directed indulgence. This book will try to retrieve the notion of the *psukhe* as the *soul* generated by *others-breathing-into-the-self*, and, passively received, the authentic self is actively called to be a *self-breathing-into-others-for-others*.

On the one hand, I will use the term "egology" for the study of the ego establishing its identity, empowering this identity, avoiding weakness, finding its potential, and focusing on self-development. This ego thinks, acts, and feels as a part of nature (physical, social, what we've called "psychological" nature), where energies compete for control, where power is power and weakness is weakness.

On the other hand, I will use the name *psukhology* to urge the reader to pause, to question the dominant paradigm, to redefine the notion of *psychology*. This *psukhology* is the study of the self's having its identity inspired by others, animated by others, empowered by others, discovering the paradox of the weakness of power and the power of weakness to establish its fundamental identity of responsibility *to-and-for-others*. Psychology should be the study of both the *ego* and the *psukhe*, not reducing one concept to the other, but respecting the real distinction between them, and giving a priority to the *psukhe's* responsibility for others over the *ego's* ego-centered obsessions, compulsions, and addictions.

The word *responsibility* is used differently by different people especially during the last few congressional sessions and national elections. Gabriel Moran points out in his recent book, *A Grammar of Responsibility*, that some people use the word to mean that each person should be responsible for themselves, and no one else should be held responsible for them. Others use the word to mean that society should be responsible for those who cannot provide for their own needs. I do not intend to get into this debate. In chapter 2 I will show how Levinas offers the radical definition of *responsibility* as the inherent investment of freedom into the self by others to be used for the sake of others. He is fond of quoting (1982/1985, p. 100) the sentence of Dostoyevsky from *The Brothers Karamazov*, "We are all responsible for all and for all men and before all, and I more than all the others" (Dostoyevsky, p. 264). Levinas explains what he means by quoting this extraordinary sentence.

This is not owing to such or such a guilt which is really mine, or to offences that I would have committed; but because I am responsible for a total responsibility, which answers for all the others and for all in the others, even for their responsibility. The I always has one responsibility *more* than all the others. (1982/1985, pp. 98–99)

I will try to unpack this claim of Levinas in chapter 2.

This distinction between the *ego* responsible for itself and the *psukhe* responsible for others is not meant to divide classes of people, to separate out altruists from egoists, or to self-righteously judge between good and bad people. All of us exercise selfish ego functions, and all of us are responsible *psukhes*. The psychological nature of *responsibility*, basically absent from descriptions of contemporary psychology, inspired this work because of its conspicuous absence.

#### REFLECTION ON SOCIAL PROBLEMS SHOWS THE PARADOXICAL

One source of my thinking about the anomaly of psychology was in confronting social problems that individual psychology seemed unable to address. Although not formally trained as a social psychologist, my involvement and frustrations in social and political activity, and my observation of the growth of cynicism in myself and others, urged me to see psychology as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Being introduced to Levinas's philosophy of responsibility made clearer the call for a paradigm shift.

While I reconfirm my point that the world is not made up of two kinds of people, good and bad, I can conveniently distinguish between an egology and *psukhology* by first acknowledging the obvious truth that the powerful possess and enjoy their power, while the weak suffer their weakness. We notice, however, that powerful people frequently sabotage their own power, and the very weakness of the weak has a power over us. No one, neither the powerful nor the weak, disputes the truth of the power of the powerful. Some powerful people may be uncomfortable with their power, and some weak quite comfortable in their weakness. But the fact that power is powerful and weakness is weak is obvious to all: power empowers, supports, perpetuates, frees its holders; weakness, however, weakens, burdens, limits, even kills those who suffer from it.

Common are the arguments about whether the power of the powerful weakens the weak or whether the weakness of the weak brings on their own suffering. However, no one arbitrarily chooses between these two as lifestyles. In modernism, we assume a common understanding that people choose, defend, and justify their power, and avoid, escape, or excuse their weakness. If people choose weakness, it is for a strange and suspect purpose. The logic of this understanding seems indisputable.

Similarly, to justify their power, the powerful often claim personal qualities of talent and initiative and blame the weak for their own inadequacies and laziness. The weak sometimes justly accuse the powerful, and unjustly excuse their weakness by blaming others. Ideologies of justi-

fication on both sides have become highly sophisticated. These claims and accusations, although not the issue of this book, point to the insight that power and weakness are not simply opposites.

With only a slight tilt of our attention toward a deeper focus beyond the obvious, we notice that the weakness of a weak individual holds extraordinary power over us; for example, the vulnerable child commands the attention and protection of those around her. Likewise the power of the powerful forms the foundation of their own kind of vulnerability; for instance, the demands of the bully sabotage his own force.

I want to articulate in this book the *psukhological* paradoxes of the power of weakness and the weakness of power. This *illogical* (oxymoronic) relationship between power and weakness, found so frequently in the lives and events of powerful and weak persons, underlies the political, economic, familial, and societal ironies, conflicts, and happy surprises of daily life. However, the social, political, and economic twists and turns are not the topic here. My subject is the *psukhologically* enigmatic, ambiguous, and ironic events that plague and enrich our intra- and interpersonal lives.

Some people declare the very definition of power to be "the oppression of the weak." There has always been, and always will be the weak, and there will always be oppressive power. Others say that, yes, this may be so, but the name of this power is *injustice*, and we are obligated to bring dignity back into the lives of both the victimized weak and the oppressing powerful by efforts to more deeply understand the conditions supporting this injustice, and to work for justice, peace, compassion, and the defense of life and rights.

Policies, strategies and practices of social activism against injustice are not the point of this book. This book attends to the *psukhological* paradoxes beneath policies, strategies and practices. Because the best-laid stratagems often backfire in the unforeseen ambiguities of social existence, we need to look deeper into these human paradoxes. Practices succeed in spite of overwhelming odds: Davids beat Goliaths. Oppressive power self-destructs: the ambition of Ceasars inspire conspirators against these tyrants. I ask from these examples what constitutes the *psukhological* paradoxes that lie below these reversals of the best-laid plans, and the successes of the worst. And how can insights into these paradoxes help the science of psychology?

Is the answer hidden in a mysterious plan of a mysterious God, as some religiously faithful believe? Is it a natural selection too complex for us to have yet deciphered, as some positivists believe? Can we assume that, since all humans are created equal, those who design and profit from the suffering of others contribute to an imbalance, and, in a final reckon-

ing, either by divine intervention or natural selection, power will become weak, and weakness will become powerful? Is this paradox explainable by a sacred or secular calculus of reciprocity? These are not my questions. I raise them only because I think much cynicism develops because many people have put their hopes in these religious and mechanistic *ideological* explanations.

Independently of theological, sociological, or philosophical doctrines and disputations, the weak still struggle with their lives against powerful forces. They suffer their wants and insecurity, and anxiety and resignation to even worse suffering. Meanwhile, the powerful may suffer their own anxiety over the tenuousness of their condition and search for always more comfort and a more secure security, while enjoying their privilege.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PARADOX

To the question, What are the paradoxes of power and weakness? the response is: *power can be the very basis of power's weakness as well as its power; and weakness, still weak, can be the power of the weak.* At the foundation of both the individual and social struggles of weakness against power and power against weakness, we find these *unnatural paradoxes*: power nurtures its own weakness, and weakness possesses its source of power in that weakness.

This reality, however common, must be called *unnatural*, because it does not follow the laws of nature. It is unreasonable because it does not follow the dictates of reason. It is a *para-* ("beyond") + *-dox* ("opinion, teaching, doctrine"). It goes beyond our understanding that is based on that which we ordinarily expect. It defies the logical; it is *psukhe-logical*. The *psukhe* is not a piece of nature. Its unnatural nature is paradoxical.

For the focused attention to the paradoxical, I again suggest the name, both difficult to spell and pronounce, *psukhology*, to deliberately remind readers to resist the effort to reduce the study of the paradoxical to the study of some natural law of organic and/or behavioral forces within the individual person: the dispositions, the habits, the traits, and the personality styles studied by the modern science of *egology*. My effort is to remind the reader that the *psyche*, besides being an *ego*, is a *psukhe*; it is the soul gradually breathed into the person and continuously nourishing its life of responsibility with the breath of the souls of others. Others inspire, breathe into, the self responsible ways of relating back to proximate and distant others: parents, ancestors, descendants, contemporaries, neighbors, loved ones, even enemies, whoever touches the self. This fundamental paradox of the origin of the humaneness of the human reveals the

*psukhe-logical*. Contrarily, the facts of egology are not paradoxical; they are logical, natural, linearly causal.

Being unnatural, the paradox of the weakness of power cannot be made *doxical* (sensical) by reducing it to a simple conflict between two defined forces, one strong and one frail. This paradox cannot be read simply as an abstract lesson from the mythical and historical stories of the battles between a *power* that has lost its might and loses the struggle against a *weakness* that has surprisingly increased its strength. The weakness of the powerful is not the challenge from another power; the weakness of the powerful lies in their own power. The powerful hold on to their power, and it is precisely this egoistic holding of power that makes them vulnerable to weakness. Tyrants, perhaps originally motivated for the good of the people, gradually protect power for the sake of power, and are thereby toppled because they lose the loyalty of their people.

Likewise, the power of the weak is not the gaining of some new power. The weak are still weak, but their weakness is the source of their power. The blind person at the street corner stops traffic because of her or his lack of sight. It is weakness that powerfully stops traffic. These paradoxes reveal that the powerful, as powerful, are weak, and the weak, by their weakness, are powerful.

Analogously, the paradox cannot be reduced to the simple feature of a complex social distribution in which everyone has a portion of power and their share of weakness. Although many self-improvement books and programs claim that the only thing each person must do is look within his or her own weakness to find the natural source of power, to further empower that source, and use it in the competitive situations of life. Their simple prescription, in part at least, misses the point.

This book will not offer a self-development manual instructing how to use one's weakness to gain power over others. Although chapter 3 on power, and chapter 4 on weakness, mimic a bit the self-improvement books, the paradox we will look at in chapters 5 and 6 lies deeper in the human psyche and its social relations. *It is the very power of the powerful that is the source of their weakness, and the very weakness of the weak that is the source of their power.* It is the task of these pages to describe the psukhological features of this double-edged paradox.

Many books about the economic and political events of society articulate and exemplify the negative features of the sharp edge of power. I will let the economist describe the poverty of the affluent. I will leave the political scientist to point out the vulnerability of tyrants and revolutionaries. The educator-epistemologist can describe better than I the foolishness of narrow intellectual, logical, and rational minds. And especially will I let the biblical exegete spell out the gospel meaning of the threats of woe to

the powerful: "Woe to you rich . . . , woe to you who are now filled . . . , woe to you when all speak well of you . . . , for you shall be humbled."

I will also leave it to specialized experts to describe the other side of the paradox found in the riches of the unencumbered life of voluntary poverty, the political force of the gathered disenfranchised, the profound wisdom of the simple uneducated, and the blessedness of the weak. In these and other examples of social ironies we find the psukhological paradox of the power of weakness and the weakness of power.

This book also does not focus on what psychologists call the "passive-aggressive" pattern or disposition. Feigning weakness to manipulate others implies that the one so acting knows, at some level, the paradox of the power of weakness, and that this paradox could work for him or her. Yet the actual use of this deception implies that this fraudulent sufferer does not know that, as only a trick, this power itself is ultimately weak; or, that sham weakness is a self-destructive power, a gamble that the perpetrator's deception won't be found out and boomerang back to weaken him or her. We do want to ask, however, what it is that the passive-aggressive knows, at least in an unreflective way, if not in reflective calculation.

We especially want to ask: What is it about weakness that so moves others to lend their power? and what is it about power that makes it so likely to self-sabotage?

#### THE PARADOX OF THE POWER OF WEAKNESS

Let me expand the example of the weak child. If most of us were to find an infant left lying in a public place vulnerable to harm by natural or human forces, we would unhesitatingly lend our power of protection. We would pick the child up, hold her or him, and search for the parent or guardian. We would likely do whatever was needed to provide the power the child lacked. If the child was suffering and hungry, we would deny our own comfort to get food, spending money and time to support her or him in this weakness. The weak infant possesses paradoxical power.

A less obvious example is the adult found lying in a similar fragile position and place, helpless in a potentially harmful situation. We make a quick and uncertain decision about whether the person is potentially strong enough to get back into safety, or if the person's weakness can only be helped by our intervention. Most people ask if the person needs help.

The difficult examples are of people who seem to have placed themselves in their weakened state by their own power. An adult lying in a public place vulnerable to the same harm, but presumably there by previous choices, like drinking too much alcohol, does not inspire all of us to

help. When weakness is obviously self-imposed, many of us do not lend power to help out. Perhaps we conclude that giving help would only increase the dependency of the weak, and support their self-destructive behavior. The popular term *dependency* is certainly legitimate in many cases. Aid adds to weakness, we often conclude. We judge that the irresponsible are not the un-responsible, and that those who are presently weak have the possibility and responsibility to eventually get out of their suffering. We often judge that this kind of irresponsibility deserves the pain of weakness, and that the only hope for those in this condition lies in their desire to escape from this punishment. This desire will be the incentive to freely will themselves back into personal power with self-help.

Other bystanders, however, judge that the weak, even if it seems they are responsible for their own weakness, still need help. Their decision to help is likely based on a few philosophical assumptions, to be more fully described in chapter 2. The first assumption behind helping another is that an observer cannot fully know that another is solely responsible for her or his own weakened condition: *the Other is beyond comprehensive understanding*. The opposite assumption is shaky: since the person made choices that got him or her there, he or she can make new choices to get out. A second assumption supporting helping is that we all have responsibility, by our human existence, for each other, both in how we get into places of vulnerability and how we get out: *the Other's weakness calls us, even commands us, to be responsible*. And finally, this judgment of the call to respond carries a third, very frustrating assumption that embodies the paradoxical, that is, that although we are able to help, although we have within us the capability, the power to reduce another's suffering, yet our help cannot reduce them and their weakness to the object of our power: *the Other is infinitely nearby commanding help, and infinitely distant, always exceeding our total understanding and our power to control*.

The insightful Bishop Kenneth Untener of Saginaw, in his request that diocesan personnel spend three months attending to the impact diocesan decisions would have on the poor, asked them to consider, "How shall what we are doing here affect or involve the poor?" He arrived at a list of insights ("The Decree to Discuss the Poor: What Was Learned?" *Origins*, August 1991) that embody these previously stated philosophical assumptions.

- (1) We tend to forget the poor poor.
- (2) The poor are often invisible.
- (3) The biggest problems are raised by the *undeserving* poor: help them help themselves; address the deeper conditions before you blame; and err on the side of largesse.
- (4) If you try to help the poor, you will sometimes get taken.
- (5) Helping the poor is not always a pleasant experience.
- (6) Food baskets at

Thanksgiving, toys at Christmas are good as far as they go, but they don't go very far. (7) Sometimes the poor are overwhelmed into inaction. (8) The poor also help the poor. (p. 164–66).

He points out that when we get too caught up in distinguishing the *deserving* from the *undeserving*, we get into an endless rationalizing conflict. Both the deserving and the undeserving suffer. Their suffering calls out to us to help. It does not call for our judgment about their previous free choices and therefore deservedness. Admittedly, everyone's suffering does not call us to give the same response, but it does call us, just the same.

Over and above their philosophical or political differences, those partisans who lean toward positions and policies for individual responsibility and power, and those who stress communitarian responsibility and power, hear or read with disgust about people who callously neglect the suffering of others, those who protect their own precious power solely for themselves and do not lend it to the weak. Both individualists and communitarians consider this kind of selfishness a weakness in character. Neither individualism nor communitarianism defends egocentric individualism that turns away from others' neediness.

Elie Weisel, like Jean Vanier, speaks for all of us.

In the face of suffering, one has no right to turn away, not to see. In the face of injustice, one may not look the other way. When someone suffers, and it is not you, he comes first. His very suffering gives him priority.

We are especially shocked and outraged by those who deliberately take advantage of others' weaknesses and psychologically, physically, or sexually abuse them. We tolerate, sometimes admire, and sometimes even honor attacks against the powerful. We condemn, however, violence against the weak, the widow, the orphan, the destitute. Fellow inmates show bank robbers respect, but brutalize convicted child molesters.

Yet the occasions when people take advantage of the weak and use power to worsen the defenseless suffering of others are so common that many social scientists and their philosophies would argue that this claimed *paradox of the power of weakness* is just another attempt to support a moral myth. It is not really a characteristic of the human condition. This claimed paradox is an idealistic vision of justice, perhaps for rhetorical and partisan ideology. Given the state of modern theoretical, and often practical ethics (MacIntyre, 1981; Cushman, 1990), the suspicion is not surprising.



## QUICK SURVEY OF ETHICAL THEORIES

In contrast to the radical alterocentrism offered by Levinas, the following quick review from Rachels (1993) of the major ethical theories shows how they tend to be ego-centered and self-sabotaging. An ethical theory like that of Levinas that is centered in the rights of others exposes its fragility when it confronts the "muscular ethical theories centered in the ego," to quote my son, Matthew. The ethical philosophies centered in the ego exemplify the power of power and betray their power by their own power.

Many contemporary *enlightened* observers hold a dim and cynical view of human goodness and acts of altruism as anything other than self-interest. Their theories tend to be either cultural relativism (right and wrong are the products of the customs of any particular culture) or psychological relativism (*right* and *wrong* are the products of the psychological choices of the private individual).

Another theory, moral contractualism, claims that neighbors form implicit and often explicit contracts to avoid violating each other because they do not want those others (or her brothers) to come back for violent revenge.

Utilitarianism claims that together and alone, people only act to maximize happiness: "The greatest happiness for the greatest number." Peace makes them happy, and violence makes them unhappy. Nonviolence is useful; it lets people get on with their lives of happiness.

These ethical theories (relativism, contractualism, and utilitarianism) that guide many psychologists, sociologists, economists, and political scientists are essentially egologies. Recognizing the shallowness of these approaches, Neo-Kantianism offers an ethical theory in contrast to the self-interest theories. Emmanuel Kant claimed that the origin of ethics lies in the ability of *reason* to arrive at moral requirements. Each of us goes through this explicit or implicit reasoning, "Since I would want others to never lie or kill me, I can claim their prohibitions to be universal principles, applying to everyone." These universally applicable principles are called by Kant "categorical imperatives" and are distinguished from "hypothetical imperatives." On the one hand, hypothetical imperatives are those actions we ought to do given the hypothesis that we want a certain result, for example, to learn to drive a car one ought to practice driving; if one does not want to learn driving, practice is not imperative. Categorical imperatives, on the other hand, are commanded of everyone. Reason, a universal ability of all human selves, has the power to keep emotions and personal motives from distorting our categorical impera-

tives. Therefore everyone should have a sense of duty. Reason self-legislates in the realm of morality.

Modern social scientists, however, tend to hold that the Kantian belief in a morality based on the power of reason has been undermined by depth psychology, which shows that primitive narcissistic desires contaminate the very core of reason itself. They say our parents have introjected into our conscience whatever morality we seem to possess. Sociobiologists, equally suspicious of reason, claim we are genetically inclined either to violence or to care, or to a mixture. These attacks on Kant's theory of the supremacy of reason still claim that the force for or against moral action originates within the person. Responsibility begins in either the determined or the autonomous ego, not in the call to us originating from the needs of others; ethics begins in the self rather than from the Other.

Some ethicists are returning to a sort of Aristotelian focus on the notions of virtue and of natural right action. But the natural law theory centered in personality virtues is also based on the assumption that the ego is the center and origin of ethical behavior. With sufficient help from parents and other models each person will cultivate virtues and grow into a responsible citizen. Goodness is the quality of virtues and virtues are properties of the ego.

Natural law, contractualism, utilitarianism, and Kantian rationalism are all *egologies*. Their first assumption is that the origin of moral behavior is centered in the ego self-initiating its good intentions and actions.

The radical alternative to egoistic theories of ethics points out that the neediness<sup>1</sup> and worthiness of others, calling us to responsibility *prior* to our reason, *beyond* our individual desire for happiness, *before* forming any contract with others, generates the ethical command. This alternative is a radical *alterocentrism*. It calls for a radical *alterology*, a radical *psukhology*. It can be described as *radical altruism*.

Truly this call to be responsible and this paradox of the power of the weakness of the Other are not physical or biological laws of nature, nor are they certainly sociological or psychological laws. Human nature tends to be egocentric, cynically ignoring conscience, claiming the priority of *personal freedom over responsibility-by-and-for-Others*. Being responsible goes against nature. Ethics founded on the paradox of the power of the weakness of others over us, and the weakness of our egoistic power is not natural. Ethics is beyond nature. Ethical behavior transcends the ego's natural jostling with others for its place in the sun. A *psukhology* inspired

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1. The terms *neediness* and *needy* are not used here with any pejorative meaning. This is the nature of the human: to have needs.

by the ethical behavior toward the neediness of others would have to define the human as more than an object of nature responding to the forces of nature.

Claiming that the laws of nature do not generate ethical behavior is not a claim that ethical behavior is rare. Humans relatively consistently respond with responsibility toward their fellow humans. The secret Vanier speaks of is not, as he points out, so secret to so many. He ironically calls it a "secret." Although responsibility is not a law of nature, responsible behavior is an evident, empirical fact. People help out those in need. We might be tempted to claim that there is a quasi-habit to help, calculable by an inverse relation between the weakness of the needy person and the paradoxical power it has over us: the greater the weakness, the more likely we are to lend our power. The depth of the other's weakness determines the level of our help. For example, the younger the child, the more care it commands. The more the other's poverty seems to flow from conditions other than laziness, from conditions they could not help, the more likely we are to give generously. When another's pathology is seen more as an affliction than a result of poorly chosen behavior, the more sacrifices we willingly make to relieve it.

The power of the weak is that the person's weakness calls us to respond generously. When the call goes out to us we obviously have our individualized liberty either to give or to turn away from this call of the weak. We have the power, in the form of freedom, to respond either with help, or with selfishness, even viciousness. But we do *not* have the freedom to choose whether or not we are called. The call has its source outside of us coming from the weakness of the weak. The power of the weak is the Other's neediness. It commands us to respond to weakness.

When Elie Weisel says "one has no right . . . one may not look the other way . . ." he is saying that the *I* is singled out, I am assigned, I am the *one* appointed. I can't pass responsibility on. When I look, my very seeing designates me as more than a watcher. My exposure to the Other commands me to do more than see: I am assigned to open the eyes of my eyes and to serve the Other in her or his weakness. For each of us, signification comes before freedom. Being assigned responsibility comes before any autonomous will to respond. The Other's call signifies me before I am free to answer the call in my own chosen way. My election by others to be responsible precedes and is therefore independent of my capabilities and opportunities to be generous or selfish. Responsibility is universally commanded, even though it appears to be disregarded by so many of us protecting our precious individual freedom. I cannot use others' irresponsibility to justify my own. Belief in the *primacy of individual freedom* over the *primacy of responsibility* is an idealistic myth used to legitimate the

practices of an ego-esteeming culture supported by an ideological infrastructure. Against this myth, we are called to be countercultural. Each of us is called, but I can only speak for myself. *I am appointed. I am ordained. I am named.*

Another weakness (briefly implied above in the statement of the philosophical assumption about simultaneous *nearness* and *distance*) reveals itself in this relation between those who call and those called: *the power of those called can never resolve the weakness of the weak.* I can help out; I can reduce the pain; I can give access to my own and other sources of power. But perhaps my greatest psychological weakness is in my self-delusions that I can fully understand another's condition, that I can totally relieve another's neediness, that I have the power to create fulfillment in another. An authentic ethical response does not justify self-righteousness. The self neither initiates nor completes any ethical action. I am simply and always commanded. Being appointed does not give me dignity deserving honor; it only gives me responsibility.

This ambiguity, on the one hand, of the undeniable call, and, on the other, the impossibility of completing what is asked of me is paradoxical: the Other is both always and everywhere *proximate*, close to me (calling me before I can choose to respond, even calling me before her or his immediate needs call me), and yet always and everywhere *distant* (far from me, beyond the reach of my efforts to reduce her or him to an object of my generous and noble efforts in answering her or his call).

The otherness of the Other, her or his radical independence, is always the otherness of that person. The Other's otherness is not a limitation in me, an ignorance, a physical distance. The origin of her or his otherness is from their absolute worthiness. No one is a thing reducible to an object of my knowing, my controlling its conditions. All humans, even those whose actions are deserving of punishment and denial of some rights, are beings with a source of dignity of their own; each is ultimately not within my context, but is an independent nobility. Yet each is always there beside me, commanding responsibility of me. The dignity of the Other's weakness (worthy to call) places her or him beyond my power (impotent to reduce). The frustration of the inadequacy of my generous response can humble me more than the admission of my selfish responses.

#### THE PARADOX OF THE WEAKNESS OF POWER

The other side of this same paradox offers a mirror image of the power of weakness: the powerful indeed have power, but this power is the source of their weakness. Although the powerful often attract admiration and

imitation, and, by their promise for our gain, even seduce us to suffer the abuse of their power, there is a psychological tendency to be suspicious and repulsed by the claims of self-initiated and self-directed power. We sometimes align ourselves with the powerful against the weak in pursuit of our own ego-centered power. But the power of the powerful does not force our allegiance. We collaborate with power, and then at times, defensively rationalize our weakness to pursue power. We know power serves our needs, but we also know that it can whip back, strike us, and make us weak. The seduction of power is an illusion, but a seduction none the less.

When we are psychologically captured and driven by our own power, we know that our bondage is, first, our addiction to the sweet taste of power itself; second, our addiction to the stuff that power can purchase; third, our habitual blindness to the needs of others; and, finally, our fear of losing the power to exercise more power. Obsessive fear, compulsive needs, and sensory indulgence are the weaknesses of power. Self-perpetuating needs and fear of others' taking our power drive us into ourselves and away from others. The power of power can be self-destructive. It tends to burrow into and cling to the heart, rather than expose itself to the needy claims of others. Although I know this by watching others corrupted by power, I most clearly know this paradox of the weakness of power from my own self-corroding tendencies.

Just as the weakness of the weak calls me to help the weak, so does their weakness call me to challenge powerful others to serve the weak. Although, I am not free in being called to challenge the power of powerful others, I am free in the way I respond. I can be seduced by power, or I can oppose it. But it is the weakness of the weak that calls me to challenge power. Conscience is con- ("together with") + -scire ("to know"). Conscience is not a private whisper; it is knowing together, knowing that others know that we know. Not only do we "have no right to turn away" from the suffering of others, and to lend our power, but we are also called to bear witness to still others for the suffering of the weak.

I was struck several years ago, as I watched on television the great anthropologist Richard Leakey say that if it were only the fittest who survive, this fragile human species would not have come so far with so many weak members. The weak of the species have been powerful in commanding the strong, especially as a community, to protect them. The Darwinian thesis, a thesis that seems to be waning in importance in our biological sciences, but still waxing in our social sciences, especially in psychology, economics, and political science is challenged by the thesis that is beyond any thesis: *ethical responsibility*. Weakness ethically com-

*mands* power, precisely because it is unable to physically *demand* it by force.

### THE ITINERARY

I have an obligation to readers to show the roots of most of my insights in the ethical phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas. I borrow from him much of what I have already written in these first pages, and what I will write in the following chapters. I can only hope that I do not dishonor his extraordinary thinking. His books, mainly *Totality and Infinity*, and *Otherwise than Being: or, Beyond Essence*, make a radical turn from the course of the Greek generated Western philosophy that has provided the paradigm for modern social science. Therefore, part I, chapter 2 will be a non-scholarly but serious attempt to describe the key insights I have received from him.

In part II chapters 3 and 4, I will attempt a phenomenology of power and weakness. The task of phenomenology is to make explicit by the use of rigorous reflection on that which is lived out at the more implicit level. Phenomenology attempts to hold back prejudice and bias, including cultural habits and customs, theoretical and scientific concepts, and even personal styles, in order to reflect on the essence of a phenomenon as clearly as possible, and to describe it in general and understandable terms. This method is not for the exclusive use of those who belong to a modern philosophical tradition called phenomenology. We have a right to expect all social analysts to be unbiased. For example, we could expect any worthy and honest political scientist to describe the structures and processes of political activity (the events of people organized to maintain order through the use of government) without tainting his or her descriptions by advocating partisan ideologies and election techniques (the uses and abuses of political power). The same should be expected of an economist, a sociologist, a psychologist.

However, phenomenology, like other epistemological methods, is vulnerable to subtle self-deception. Reflectors and describers can convince themselves that they are clean of cultural and theoretical prejudice, and yet not recognize a deeper pre-reflective influence. For example, I will begin chapter 3 with the assumption that I could reflect and describe an unbiased phenomenological analysis of the experience of *power*. A phenomenology of personal power should simply make explicit what is assumed to be obvious to the careful reflection of any person. Therefore, I will begin with this assumption of obviousness. My method of reflection will be the simple act of *disclosing* what is commonly known to be known by anyone who looks and thinks about power. Objective thinking

assumes the phenomenon is able to be read the same by everyone. My method of description to others of this objective *disclosure* will be *declaring* how power is shown to everyone that it is powerful.

However, given my insight about the paradox of the weakness of power, I know these *disclosures* and *declarations* are susceptible to bias from my position of power attempting to write objectively about power. My method must either not take into account this insight about the paradoxical, or take it into account. My method to describe power *objectively* must be either foolish or ironic. Since I've confessed my insight, I cannot claim naive foolishness. The disclosures and declarations of chapter 3 are given ironically. I will ironically play the role of the "general observer" in his or her voice of the first-person plural pronoun "we," assuming the intersubjective "we" to be more objective than the personal "I," which is suspected of being too subjective. For example, I will disclose and declare, "We know what power is. Power is intelligence, it is skill, it is satisfied needs. And we know that our power can accumulate more power." So the use of the "we" is arrogant, I hope ironically arrogant, since I am really only an "I," not having consulted others assumed in the "we," yet assuming they would disclose and declare just as I.

I do not have the space in this book, or the philosophical sophistication, to do an adequate review of the epistemological question of objectivity. When I went to graduate school I learned how Edmund Husserl (1913/1950; 1931/1960), the founder of the school of phenomenology, outlined a philosophy and methodology to achieve *objectivity* in describing the events of human consciousness. Merleau-Ponty (1942/1967; 1945/1962; 1964), Husserl's student, was the biggest influence on me in my 1967–71 graduate studies. But it was Emmanuel Levinas who enlightened me with the insight that even a phenomenological description can embody a subtle prejudice, especially an egological prejudice.

In chapter 4, I will point out that, since weakness is weak, we often attempt to hide our own weakness, or at least excuse it. Yet sometimes we use our weakness to passive-aggressively manipulate others. Therefore, in order to avoid any prejudice about my own weakness, and to strive for objectivity, I will reflect on my observation of others and describe their weakness, rather than use self-reflection. Chapter 4 will be a phenomenological reflection and description of the origin of, and thus accountability for, the *weakness of the weak*. The method will be *exposing* and *accusing*.

However, the method here in chapter 4 must be even more self-consciously, more ironically arrogant than that of chapter 3. Here I will be pretending to assume myself, as describer, free of weakness while finding it in others. The *exposures* and accusations in chapter 4 are still within the egological paradigm. The weakness of others is observed and reflected

upon, and then described by me, the righteous observer, in the voice of the first person plural pronoun, almost royal or pontifical, "we," exposing the weakness of the third-person singular pronouns, following her or his introduction as the "person."<sup>2</sup> For example, "we are not so blind that we cannot see that that person is weak, and that she is hurting others and herself." I hope that this openly arrogant methodology helps to expose the problem of *egology*: if I begin from my ego, I inevitably violate the Other.

The reflections and descriptions in this part II, chapters 3 and 4, will have laid the ground for part III, chapters 5 and 6, for the *psukhological paradox* of the weakness of my own power, and the power of the weakness of the Other. The *egological* prejudice only partially revealed in part II, will be more explicitly shown to be *egological* by way of contrast to the *psukhological* methods in part III. In other words, chapter 3 will have been "macho" without admitting to it at the time: "I know power." I, as describer, will have demonstrated a self-righteous superiority. In chapter 4 I will have been even abusive of the weak in my accusations of the person's weakness, while hiding my abusiveness behind the effort to be objective. But the reader will, I hope, be able to see through my intended irony. My power will show a kind of weakness weaker than the obvious weakness of the person I describe. My bravado in describing (bragging about) my power in chapter 3, and my tendency toward violence in describing (vicious blaming) the weakness of the other in chapter 4, will now be exposed in part III as having been arrogant and vicious. Because I was arrogantly accusing her or him, the neediness of the Other confronts and accuses me of a self-righteous, egocentric violence, a tendency (weakness) to violate her or his fundamental integrity and dignity. In chapter 4, I was more than abusive; I was cynically abusive. I tried to demonstrate my acute perception of the Other's weakness, but was, in fact, unperceptive of my own weakness, my tendency to abuse the person. (I will return to Sloterdijk's definition of cynicism, "enlightened false consciousness," finally in an Interlude before chapter 7.)

This experience of being confronted by the victim of my methodological accusation and cynicism *exposes* me as violent. This exposure urges me to turn to new phenomenological methods for part III, chapters 5 and 6. The method of reflection is not a method in the sense of a chosen tactic to disclose a phenomenon. The origin of my reflection is in the Other's calling me to admit my ego-centeredness. I am passive to *being exposed*, and to

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2. This phenomenological *exposing* and *accusing* is distinguished from the research that Habermas says comes out of emancipatory *interests* (J. Habermas, 1972, *Knowledge and Human Interest*). Similarly, this is not the same as the *critical psychology* of de Boer (T. de Boer, 1983, *Foundations of a Critical Psychology*).



being called to responsibly admit it. My method of reflection and description of the paradox of the weakness of power, in chapter 5, will be *being exposed* and *confessing* to the reader my weakness toward violence. I am thrown back upon myself because I myself have been exposed as cynically abusive and am called to be responsible for my egological accusations, having attempted to claim in chapters 3 and 4 unbiased phenomenological reflections and descriptions, but now admitting my hypocrisy. My admissions of exposure are described in my *confessions* in the voice of the exposed first-person singular pronoun "I." "Here I am. I have been exposed. I admit I have abused the Other, and I am sorry."

But the dignity and neediness of the Other does more than expose me, accuse me, and command me to admit and confess. The Other calls me out of my ego-centeredness to transcend my ego-centeredness to responsibly be open to, serve, and sacrifice for the Other. The Other confronts me and calls me to avoid the tendency to use my confession to escape from the presence of her or his proximity by the use of an (egological) self-abdication, a giving up on myself in order to avoid responsibility, or to purify myself by way of self-flagellation. The neediness of the Other has the power to call me not to escape my identity, but to identify myself as responsible to know, serve, and sacrifice for the Other. This confrontation by the face of the Other neither debases nor minimizes my responsibility. It consecrates it, beyond my sanctimonious justification, because I am never the origin of my own responsibility, nor am I ever able to be absolutely successful in my knowledge, service, and sacrifice for the Other. My freedom, even to be responsible, is invested in me by the neediness of the Other. My freedom ought to be used responsibly for the Other. The method of reflection in chapter 6 will be, therefore, *listening to and being touched by the call to responsibility*. The method of description of this paradox of the power of weakness is humbly responding, "Here I am."

I hope to show that the origin of authentic phenomenology to exercise the most trustworthy *epoché*, bracketing prejudice for honest reflection, is from the Other. When I set out from my own ego to objectively reflect and describe my experiences of power and weakness of others, as I do in part II, I am inevitably biased. When my reflection and description of others is drawn out by the command of the Other for me to be honest, which happens when the Other faces me, then I am more likely to be honest than when privately reflecting. The face of the Other calls me to be honest. Certainly, I do not deceive myself into thinking that I cannot lie to another facing me; yet the face of the Other acts as a more commanding source of honesty than my own interest in being honest. Levinas's philosophy, as described in chapter 2, will help make clearer the methodology I intend to use in the book.

In part IV, I begin with a brief Interlude interrupting the progression established to move from the one-on-one dyad to the larger social situation of other Others, of triads, quatrads, multiple others. The extravagant claims of Levinas's *heteronomy* (radical altruism) where the Other has rights over the self, and the *self-skepticism*, *self-substitution*, and *self-sacrifice* described in chapter 6 seem "too much" for many of my students. I respond to their objections first by defending these idealistic descriptions of holiness by referring to Edith Wyschogrod's *Saints and Postmodernism* (1990). I then refer to Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983/1987) to show how our modern cynicism might conclude that this idealism is "too much." Finally, I justify placing limits on self-skepticism, self-substitution, and self-sacrifice not by reverting back into *egology*, but by Levinas's radical *heteronomy*, referring to Roger Burggraeve's *From Self-Development of Solidarity: An Ethical Reading of Human Desire in its Socio-Political Relevance according to Emmanuel Levinas* (1985).

Finally in chapter 7, other Others make their appearance. The Other who inspires me is not just an isolated Other, but represents other Others: all others. I find myself not only responsible for the proximate Other, but for the distant Other as well, paradoxically pointed to by the presence of the immediately proximate Other. There is never just the Other. There is always a third, a fourth, a hundredth, and so on. We are always a community, and each is responsible for all. The incarnate presence of the Other (always needy: hungry, thirsty, ill, homeless, depressed, anxious, suffering even in affluence and comfort) assigns me as the one responsible for others, and even responsible for the responsibility of other Others: to call others to community responsibility, because I certainly neither can nor should do it all. The organization of society both extends the call to me *from* other Others, more people than I ever meet face to face, to everyone; and society extends my responsibility *through* the help of other Others, more people than I can even imagine, through the institutional structures of society.

This recognition of my responsibility to other Others when the face of the nearby Other confronts me, often challenges my too facile response. I am questioned: How does the face of the Other represent all other humanity? I may see someone on the street and respond as if he represents all of humanity, yet be blind to the needs of this particular person. I tend to objectify this immediate person as "the representative of all humankind." Other times, I am called to an individual Other but lose sight of the face of humanity revealed there. I am so caught up in responding here and now that I forget my responsibility to others perhaps more needy. But then, no one ever promised that community responsibility would be easy.

The method of reflection and description of the paradox of the *power of community* in chapter 7 will be the social exposure of needs and rights, and the *communication* with each other of our *assignments* of academic/political/economic responsibilities to serve needs and respect rights. The method could be called "dialogal phenomenology."<sup>3</sup> The phenomenology of communicating our responsibilities, and assigning these responsibilities to each other will be from a "we," but neither from the objective (arrogant) "we," as in macho chapter 3, nor from the imperial (cynically abusive) "we," as in chapter 4. The reflections and descriptions will not be from the confessing accountable "I" of chapter 5, nor from the individually responsible "I" of chapter 6. The reflections and descriptions will be from a communitarian "we." "We are responsible. How do we do what we need to do?"

Before we do the five phenomenological reflections and descriptions, let us turn the page to chapter 2, and open up some magnificent philosophical insights of Emmanuel Levinas.

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3. I am deeply indebted to my colleagues here at Seattle University Psychology Department, especially Steen Halling, Michael Leifer, and Jan Rowe, for their pioneering work in developing the method of *dialogal phenomenology* (Leifer, 1986; Halling and Leifer, 1991; Halling, Kunz, and Rowe, 1994).