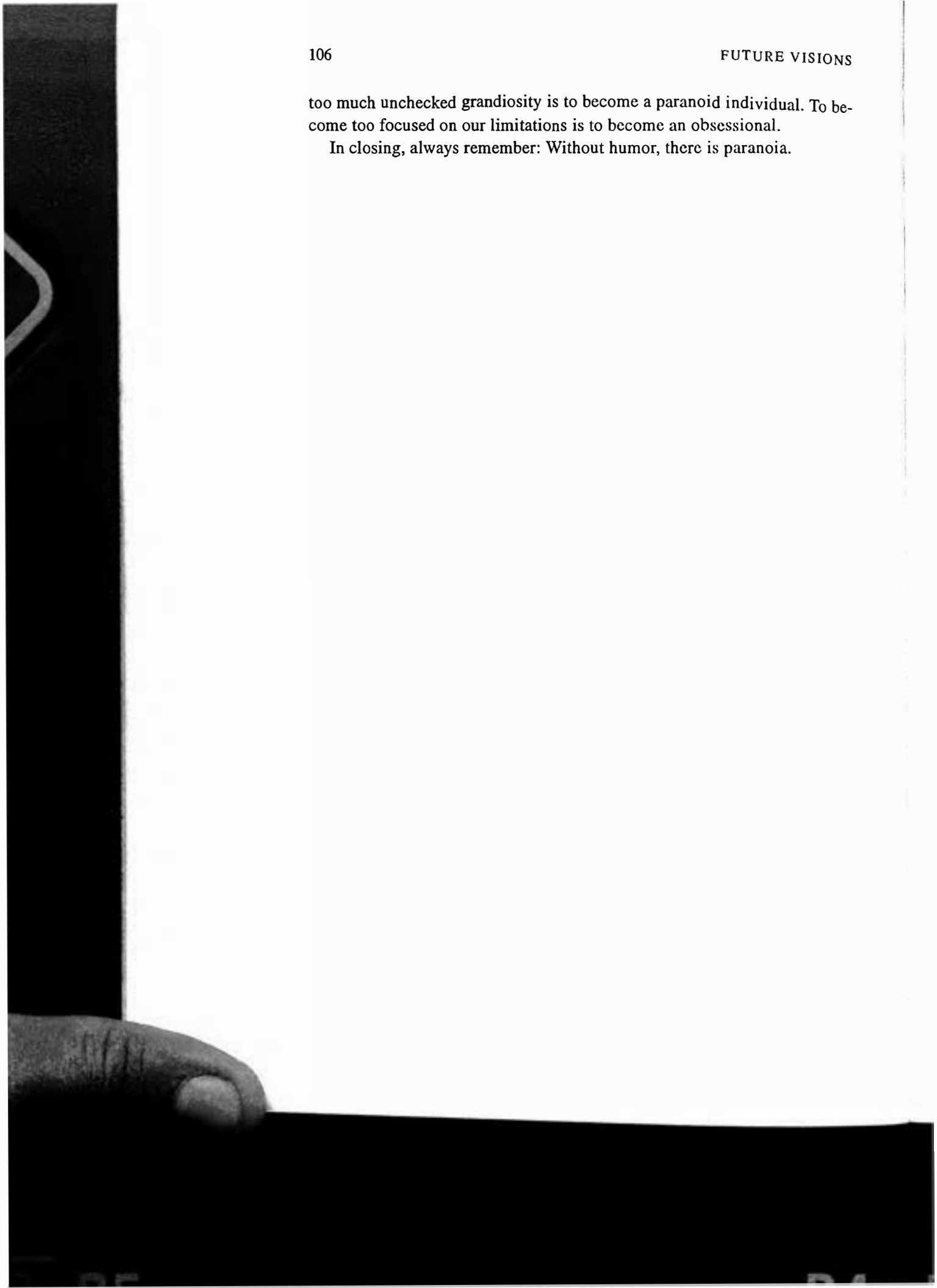
too much unchecked grandiosity is to become a paranoid individual. To become too focused on our limitations is to become an obsessional.

In closing, always remember: Without humor, there is paranoia.



By the mid-1940s, Maslow's interests had shifted decisively toward human motivation and personality. He had just formulated his seminal concept of the "hierarchy of inborn needs" and was beginning to grapple with new theoretical issues about the essence of human nature. With an optimistic temperament, Maslow unequivocally rejected the gloomy Freudian perspective that self-gratification is the overriding human drive. Written in 1943, the following paper represented Maslow's unpublished lecture notes for his personality course at Brooklyn College.

19

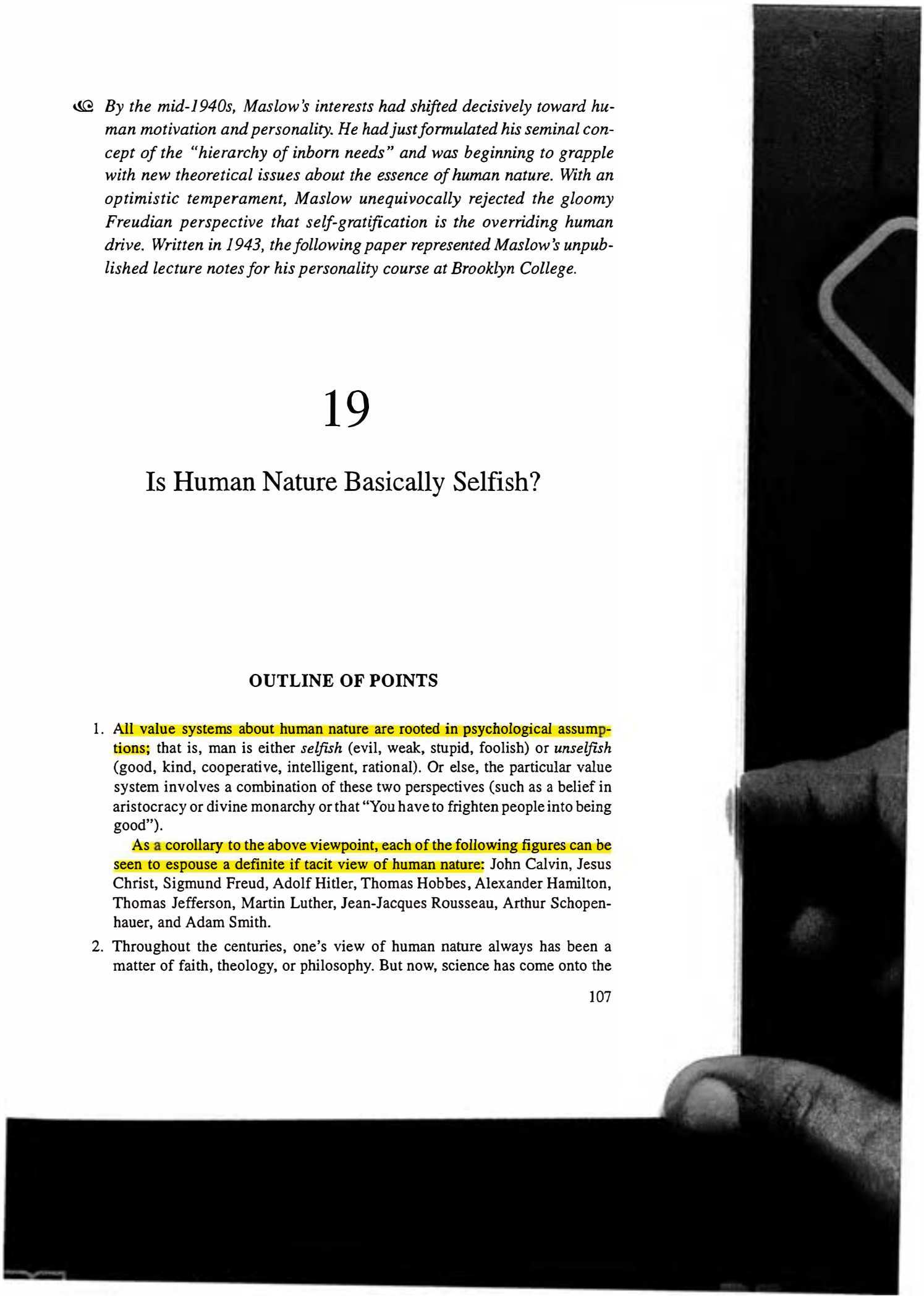
Is Human Nature Basically Selfish?

OUTLINE OF POINTS

1. All value systems about human nature are rooted in psychological assumptions; that is, man is either *selfish* (evil, weak, stupid, foolish) or *unselfish* (good, kind, cooperative, intelligent, rational). Or else, the particular value system involves a combination of these two perspectives (such as a belief in aristocracy or divine monarchy or that "You have to frighten people into being good").

   As a corollary to the above viewpoint, each of the following figures can be seen to espouse a definite if tacit view of human nature: John Calvin, Jesus Christ, Sigmund Freud, Adolf Hitler, Thomas Hobbes, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, Martin Luther, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Adam Smith.

2. Throughout the centuries, one's view of human nature always has been a matter of faith, theology, or philosophy. But now, science has come onto the



scene so that we may feel full confidence that an ultimate, definitive answer will eventually be found. Even now, many elements of the scientific answer are available to us. At least *some* scientific analysis about human nature is possible today.

3. Semantic confusion surrounds the problem. Words like selfish and unselfish have no commonly agreed-on meaning. An analysis of unresolvable arguments usually reveals unconscious or hidden differences among definitions. These words simply are not suitable for scientific discourse. Even within the conversation of the same person, particular meanings can vary.

   By semantic trickery (the hidden definition), one can prove that either all people are selfish or that all people are unselfish.

4. The only completely selfish person known is the psychopathic personality (interpersonal psychopath). Yet, the psychopath can behave unselfishly. We must, therefore, differentiate among the selfish act, impulse, and person.

5. Are there any completely unselfish people? Discuss the following: the masochist, neurotic dependency, the slave, full love-identification. These examples show again the necessity for differentiating human behavior from motivation. A psychodynamic approach, therefore, is necessary. Pure behaviorism can ultimately breed only confusion. It also is necessary to distinguish between "healthy" and "unhealthy" motivations.

6. The argument from observation of animals. Pseudo-Darwinism. The chimpanzee species, closest to the human, shows unselfish behaviors such as cooperation, altruism, and love-identification. To argue about human nature on the basis of animal observation is logically invalid. But if someone else raises the argument, it can be countered by pointing out the evolutionary basis for unselfishness.

7. *Selfishness* correlates with emotional insecurity and *unselfishness* with emotional security, self-actualization, and psychological health in general. Thus, we can say that unselfishness tends to be a phenomenon of inner abundance, or relative basic gratification. Selfishness can be seen as a phenomenon of basic deprivation, inner poverty, and threat—past or present. In an issue of *Psychiatry,* Erich Fromm's (1939) article titled "Selfishness and Self-Love" raises worthwhile points in this context.

EXPLORATORY NOTES ON SELFISHNESS AND UNSELFISHNESS

THE SEMANTICS OF SELFISHNESS

At the outset of this discussion, we can introduce a very large increment of clarity by highlighting various semantic considerations. Indeed, anyone

already familiar with this conceptual field would expect such an introduction.

As usual with any problem that deals with basic and important aspects—especially if the problem is an age-old one—it almost certainly involves a confusion of words used in different ways by different people, arbitrary impersonal definitions, confusion of symbols with realities, and all sorts of illegitimate abstractions.

If the problem is pursued by day-to-day conversations with a particular person who adheres to either extreme viewpoint, one easily finds that ultimately the whole argument will rest on some implicit, unconsciously held definition of the words selfishness and unselfishness. It has been my discovery that people who are willing to say that all human beings are completely and normally healthfully selfish will ultimately accept the following definition of selfishness: *Any behavior will be called selfish if it brings any pleasure or benefit to the individual.*

But a little thought will indicate that this definition prejudges and presolves the whole problem, because it automatically views all or practically all of human behavior as functional, that is, designed to produce some sort of benefit or pleasure to the individual. Such an approach is an effort to prove the case by arguing from a hidden, preconceived definition.

What can be done to counter that viewpoint? Several approaches may be taken. For instance, we can quarrel with the definition by pointing out that, after all, differences exist in human behavior and that there is something that must be called truly unselfish behavior. Or else, we can accept the definition for argument's sake and go on from there to emphasize that it is still necessary to distinguish through words the actual, realistic differences of which any individual is aware in relation to his or her own behavior or that of others.

For example, if I treat a child cruelly on Monday and then kindly on Tuesday, certainly the child makes the differentiation between these two forms of my behavior. Even if we grant theoretically that all behavior is ultimately selfish, then we will still have to distinguish between "selfish-selfish" and "unselfish-selfish" behavior. After all, we cannot make real differences disappear by verbal tricks. We still must recognize that in actual, daily practice, human beings distinguish between what they—even if mistakenly—call selfish or unselfish.

Another way of saying this is the following: In the real world, we find differences in behavior, even though such differences may not be reflected in the conceptual world. But when such differences do exist in the real world,

they also should be reflected in the conceptual world. For example, we have a right to insist on some differential labeling for the following kinds of behavior: offering food to a starving friend versus refusing to give food to the same starving friend. Certainly, it is inadequate to describe both forms of behavior as selfish. In short, to attempt to eliminate a problem by verbal means is no solution to that problem. It will still remain, and we will simply have to use other words.

It is also necessary to point out that the same issue holds for the admittedly smaller number of theorists who claim that all humans are essentially unselfish. They typically employ something like the following definition: *Any behavior that does some good or benefit or that brings pleasure to someone else is unselfish.* Such a statement automatically describes all human behavior as unselfish simply by a preconceived definition.

The semanticist would make another point, which is that value judgments are attached to the words selfish and unselfish. Certainly in our culture, the word selfish has negative and undesirable connotations. Conversely, the word unselfish usually has virtuous and desirable connotations. The semanticist knows that when values are attached to words, then trouble and confusion are sure to result.

For our part, we must not prejudge the case. We must not assume that selfish or unselfish behavior is either good or bad until we actually determine where the truth exists. It may be that at certain times, selfish behavior is good, and at other times, it is bad. It also may be that unselfish behavior is sometimes good and at other times bad.

To summarize, we must understand that to bring the problem of selfishness and human nature into the jurisdiction of science, we must first develop an appropriate vocabulary with more precise, meaningful definitions. Second, to avoid any prejudging of the case we must eliminate the presence of value-judgments when formulating these definitions and words. We must employ a more objective, nonvalued terminology.

THE ARGUMENT FROM ANIMAL STUDIES

Very frequently, those who have sought to present in writing the notion that human beings are basically selfish or unselfish have pointed to animal behavior to buttress their viewpoint. Sometimes such writers have pointed to the behavior of the ancient "caveman" rather than animals. This situation has been especially true for philosophers, theologians, and political theo-

rists. It is really absurd how often such writers have turned to the proverbial jungle—to the wolf, tiger, lion, and other such animals—in an effort to bolster their contention that human beings cannot be trusted.

Why is this so absurd? Because even on theoretical grounds, such theorizing is completely invalid. We can never make meaningful statements about human nature by arguing on the basis of other species' behavior. Indeed, what may be true for the characteristics of one animal species may be the precise opposite for another. Therefore, the intellectual approach of such theorists should not be labeled as Darwinian but rather as *pseudo-Darwinian*. It is true that psychologists will cite animal research for a variety of purposes, but when they are cautious, psychologists will admit that they are relying on animal research for only the preliminary study of a problem or the refinement of an experimental technique, rather than for uncovering scientific truth about human traits or qualities.

But this is not the place for a detailed analysis of pseudo-Darwinianism and its fundamental mistake. It is sufficient to say that its fallacy has been demonstrated well enough so that no repetition is required.

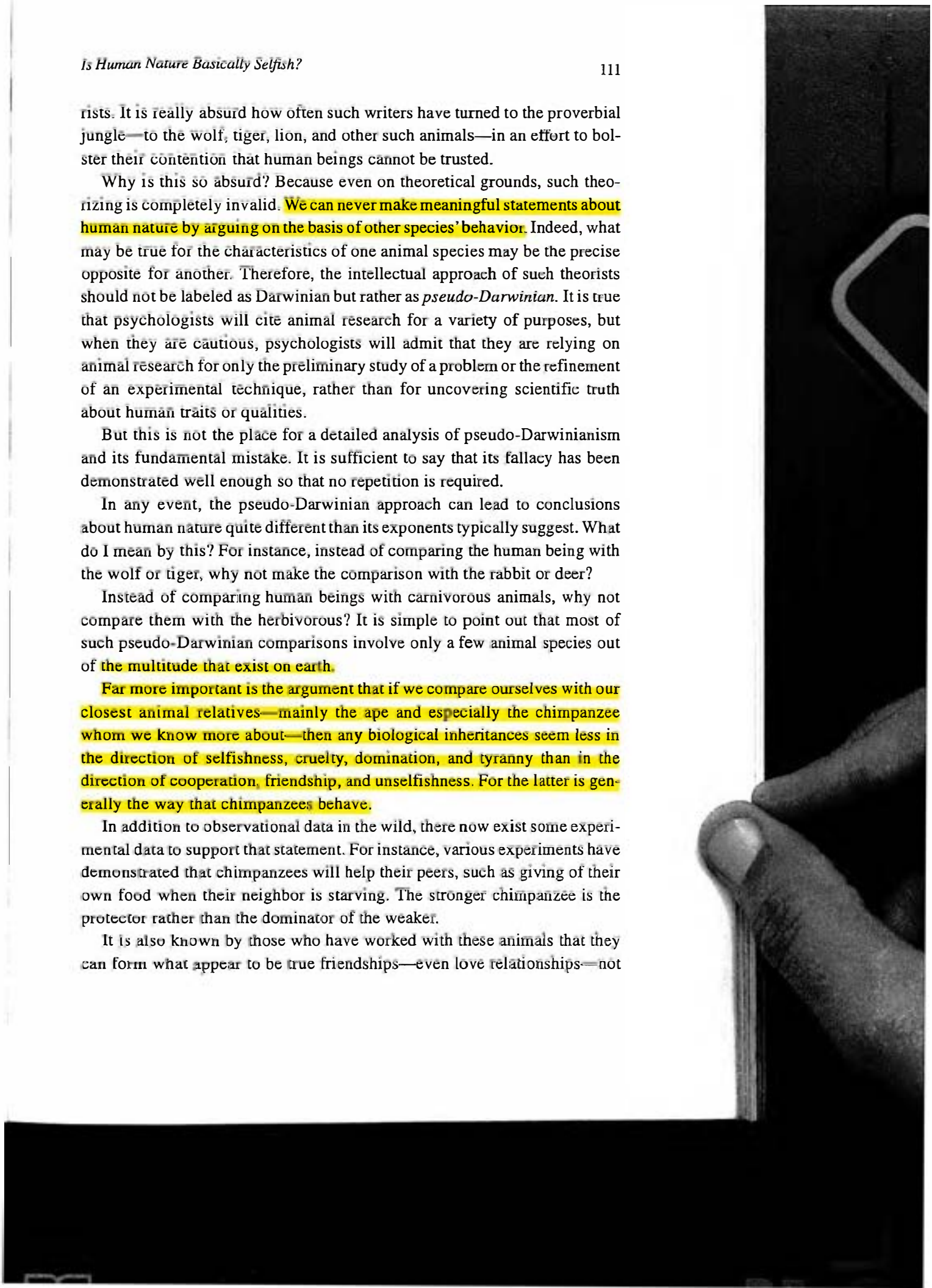
In any event, the pseudo-Darwinian approach can lead to conclusions about human nature quite different than its exponents typically suggest. What do I mean by this? For instance, instead of comparing the human being with the wolf or tiger, why not make the comparison with the rabbit or deer?

Instead of comparing human beings with carnivorous animals, why not compare them with the herbivorous? It is simple to point out that most of such pseudo-Darwinian comparisons involve only a few animal species out of the multitude that exist on earth.

Far more important is the argument that if we compare ourselves with our closest animal relatives—mainly the ape and especially the chimpanzee whom we know more about—then any biological inheritances seem less in the direction of selfishness, cruelty, domination, and tyranny than in the direction of cooperation, friendship, and unselfishness. For the latter is generally the way that chimpanzees behave.

In addition to observational data in the wild, there now exist some experimental data to support that statement. For instance, various experiments have demonstrated that chimpanzees will help their peers, such as giving of their own food when their neighbor is starving. The stronger chimpanzee is the protector rather than the dominator of the weaker.

It is also known by those who have worked with these animals that they can form what appear to be true friendships—even love relationships—not



only with other chimpanzees but also with the human beings who work with them.

But I do not wish to make too much of such anecdotal observations. As I have suggested earlier, this whole line of argument is ultimately invalid anyway. However, I find it difficult to resist the poetic justice of "turning the tables" on the pseudo-Darwinianists by pointing to examples of unselfish, even altruistic, behavior in other animal species. Such a position effectively undercuts their argument that by studying other species, we can accurately conclude that human nature is essentially selfish, cruel, or domineering.

I would like to make a final point, and it concerns the prehistoric caveman. Typically, the cave dweller is presented as crude, cruel, aggressive, and even characteristically vicious. But there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever for this viewpoint. Virtually the only thing that scientists know about the prehistoric cave dweller is anatomy and nothing more. It always has been assumed that because the cave dweller *looked* brutish, he therefore behaved brutishly. Yet, it is quite possible that the cave dwellers were actually nicer—that is, more altruistic—toward one another than we are today in our civilization. I would not affirm this statement as necessarily true, but based on our limited knowledge, it is equally invalid to insist that the cave dwellers were cruel or vicious.

Let's admit that we know nothing at all about the cave dwellers. Popular depictions showing them wielding clubs on their family members or friends are just fanciful legends and not in the least derived from scientific truth. In assessing human nature with regard to selfishness, we must, therefore, reject all appeals to animal behavior or putative cave dweller behavior. They have no place in the debate in which we are now engaging.

"HEALTHY SELFISHNESS"

I have earlier pointed out that the words selfish and unselfish have attached to them values of varying kinds; that is, they are invidious words, to some extent prejudging the case. If it is possible to label something as selfish, then people typically will assume they should be against it and disapprove of it. But there have been psychiatric and clinical developments that make it necessary for us to reject as simplistic such an approach.

For instance, research on masochism clearly shows that a good deal of what appears to be unselfish behavior may come out of forces that are psy-

chopathological and that originate in selfish motivation. We must not always take unselfish behavior as its face value, for it may cover up a good deal of hostility, jealousy, and even hatred. Unselfish behavior that arises from such motivations—that is, put on for a purpose—must certainly be considered as psychopathology.

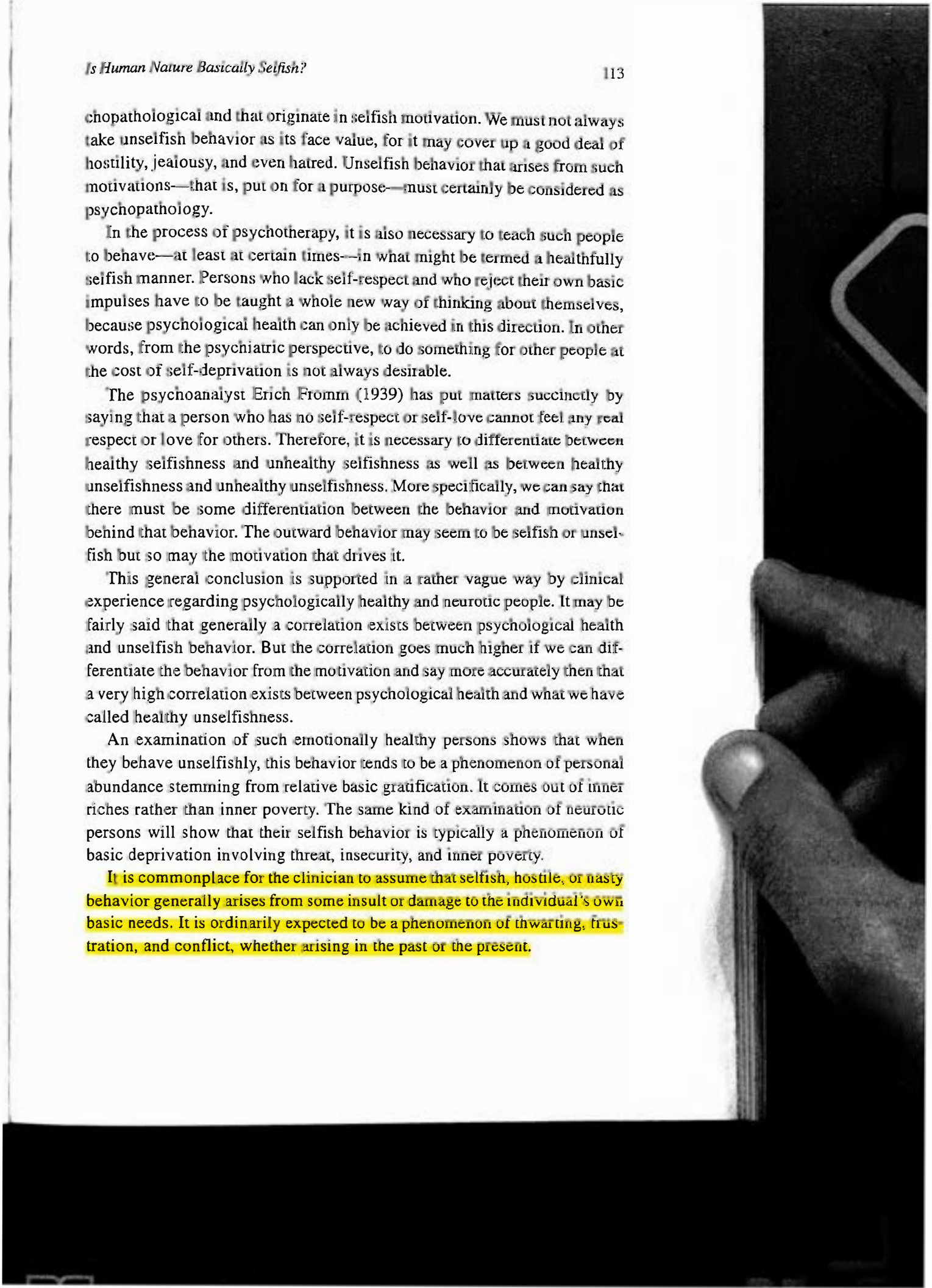
In the process of psychotherapy, it is also necessary to teach such people to behave—at least at certain times—in what might be termed a healthfully selfish manner. Persons who lack self-respect and who reject their own basic impulses have to be taught a whole new way of thinking about themselves, because psychological health can only be achieved in this direction. In other words, from the psychiatric perspective, to do something for other people at the cost of self-deprivation is not always desirable.

The psychoanalyst Erich Fromm (1939) has put matters succinctly by saying that a person who has no self-respect or self-love cannot feel any real respect or love for others. Therefore, it is necessary to differentiate between healthy selfishness and unhealthy selfishness as well as between healthy unselfishness and unhealthy unselfishness. More specifically, we can say that there must be some differentiation between the behavior and motivation behind that behavior. The outward behavior may seem to be selfish or unselfish but so may the motivation that drives it.

This general conclusion is supported in a rather vague way by clinical experience regarding psychologically healthy and neurotic people. It may be fairly said that generally a correlation exists between psychological health and unselfish behavior. But the correlation goes much higher if we can differentiate the behavior from the motivation and say more accurately then that a very high correlation exists between psychological health and what we have called healthy unselfishness.

An examination of such emotionally healthy persons shows that when they behave unselfishly, this behavior tends to be a phenomenon of personal abundance stemming from relative basic gratification. It comes out of inner riches rather than inner poverty. The same kind of examination of neurotic persons will show that their selfish behavior is typically a phenomenon of basic deprivation involving threat, insecurity, and inner poverty.

It is commonplace for the clinician to assume that selfish, hostile, or nasty behavior generally arises from some insult or damage to the individual's own basic needs. It is ordinarily expected to be a phenomenon of thwarting, frustration, and conflict, whether arising in the past or the present.



So again, we end up with a new vocabulary. We may speak of the unselfishness of psychological abundance and the selfishness of psychological poverty.

OBSERVATIONS IN CHILDREN

It is possible to see very clearly in children the phenomenon that we have been describing. Unfortunately, it is usually accepted without further investigation that children are primarily selfish, much more so than adults. How such a conclusion could ever have been reached is hard to fathom, because even the most casual observation of children—at least of those who are emotionally healthy—will reveal many examples of truly altruistic, generous, unselfish behavior. Indeed, youngsters who are raised well and who are psychologically sound are apt to present to their parents problems related to unselfishness as often as selfishness. For example, such children are as likely to give away their expensive toys as to snatch these same toys away from peers.

Children's altruism has not been experimentally tested because admittedly it is difficult to measure. But this obstacle hardly negates the definite presence of unselfish traits in youngsters. Clearly, there is a lot of evidence already amassed to suggest that humans have a strong, inborn capacity for unselfishness.