

CHAPTER 4

AFTERLIFE

As long as our technological and organizational accomplishments do not carry far enough to guarantee unlimited personal physiological existence, we will experience fear of death and a desire to overcome this burden on our happiness. The ultimate terror of being aware of an absolute deprivation of our needs without any ability to change our pain compels us to find a more suitable alternative. To edge out a bearable existence, we must resolve what seemingly cannot be resolved.

We may try to attack the physical evidence of our death by inverting our impressions of it. We may claim that our current physical existence is an illusion, a dreamlike condition or a fantasy into which we are temporarily immersed and from which we will revert to reality upon our death. Such a concept initially appears to present a promising potential of survival. Yet, upon a closer inspection, we find that we have to address many or all of the same questions because our current existence is the only existence of which we are aware and in which we can function with our mental processing facilities. Our awareness and its subjects seem to be provably physical phenomena. The concept of a simulated physical reality compared to otherworldly forms of elevated reality threatens to deprive our contemporary needs of all meaning of which we are aware or which we might visualize. Further, even if we accept aspects of us and of our surroundings as an illusion, we develop similar questions and fears as we display regarding our physical death. We must ask which part of us is being immersed in a simulation and therefore real. Although we might suspect that we will make a transition from this to another, more real world, and that we should be familiar with that world because we emerge from some type of simulation, we possess no evidence for that proposition. We might die and a character that we hosted or emulated might continue. Nor do we have any idea how the world to which we might revert could be more real than ours and how comparable it might be. Because its conditions are claimed to be different in unspecified ways, we cannot define what of us would survive or what that survival would be like. We would continue to face uncertainties that instill us with similar types of fear. For these reasons, we still have to find a solution to our fear of death.

That solution is offered by the same mechanism that causes our fear of death, by our inability to imagine our death. We consider the absence of definitive information about awareness after death to be an uncertainty. We may view it as an opening to consider and convince ourselves of alternative settings that can help us to overcome our fear.

In imagining more favorable circumstances, we may attach impressions of survival to our physical remains. We may picture that our awareness, personality, or capacities continue to be attached to them. Such a position is not entirely unreasonable. All physical aspects of an individual except those whose absence caused the death appear to be as present immediately following death as they were immediately before death. The only difference seems to be that they are not animated. If we could immediately repair the cause of death, they should be working again. Where that is not currently possible, we might be able to preserve a person's body as it was immediately after death until the lethal damage could be repaired and thus bring such a person back to life later. Yet, short of such measures, we cease to exist as a physical organism and decay into disorganized and further disconnecting arrays of atoms. Even under best efforts, visions that relate our live attributes to the decayed matter of our body are tenuous and not very satisfying. They require the acknowledgment of a radical deconstruction that is not compatible with our compulsion to imagine that all or at least some of our human characteristics will survive. We may therefore abandon theories of survival that include physical aspects.

Instead, we may pursue evidence for the survival of an ethereal essence that leaves our body and continues to exist independently. In our mind, there is reason to believe in such a reduced continuation of our existence. Although our mind comprehends itself to be located in our body and our experiences allow us to point to our head as its main repository, it is immediately unaware of the structures and processes that constitute it. This makes it unsurprising that our mind lives in a resulting awareness that regards itself as separate from our body in its sourcing and its existence and assumes to have a nonphysical quality. Even as our direct impressions are supplemented by science, and science progressively ties our mind to our physiology, we may resist accepting these insights against all evidence because our direct impressions seem to contradict these discoveries. Even if we partly submit to reason, we may maintain that position for any parts of our mind that science has not verified to be physically sourced. We may invoke the concept of a spirit that is distinct from our physical existence. We may acknowledge that there is a bond between our physical and nonphysical properties during our physical existence. However, we may believe that it can be severed because of the separate nature of our ethereal identity. We may believe our mind or parts of it to merely inhabit our body. Under this belief, the essence of our mind is not affected by our physical death beyond losing its physical setting and instrumentation. Once we submit to our intuition, we can rationally maintain hope in

the existence and survival of such a nonphysical essence because we are not confronted with positive proof to the contrary. In contrast to the stark evidence of physiological death, there is nothing to evidence the demise of ethereal attributes. If they existed, their nature would make them characteristically impervious to physical proof.

In the absence of a requirement to provide scientific proof, we cross into the domain of belief. The character of our nonphysical essence and the parameters according to which our existence continues are exposed to speculation that carries as far as our imagination. We may envisage that our essence undergoes a metamorphosis. We may posit that it splits into aspects of being or that it combines with other essences. We may imagine it to include or exclude all, part, or none of our current perceptive, rational, and emotional capacities, our experiences and memories, our personality, and a nonphysical copy of our body and its functions. We may imagine that this essence continues in a nonphysical form on earth or somewhere else or that a physical body is constituted for it to inhabit and that this body is a human body or the body of another life form on earth or in another locale. The range of these often incompletely considered conditions of our existence in the afterlife may engender a wide variety of views about our existence after physical death, our environment, and our interaction with that environment. To find satisfaction in imaginary constructs of our afterlife, we must create a vision that affords us with an impression of sufficient continuity to warrant our conclusion that we will survive. This requirement sets functional limits for our fantasies. But we may soon discover that even basic constructs are afflicted by this concern.

The foundation for such a concern is the fact that, regardless of what else we may conceive to be the aftermath of our physical death, we imagine being reduced to our nonphysical aspects when we die. To convince ourselves that we will continue, we must expound how this state and any subsequent state or states we imagine to develop from it preserve our essence. That may seem to be most problematic if we believe that we will remain in a nonphysical state after death. To distinguish such a state from the terrifying vision we fear, we do not want to be haunted by physical needs that we could not pursue and fulfill. To distance ourselves from the vision that generates our fear of death, we may imagine that these needs will terminate. Arguably, the changes of our personality would be natural and not coerced. Once our principal need for individual survival has been fulfilled and no longer depends on the functions of its supporting needs, these needs should naturally disappear. Even our need for collective survival and supporting needs would seem to lose their purpose because our personal survival would

secure the survival of our kind. To the extent existential needs previously prosecuted their own purposes, the loss of their physical context might neutralize them as well. Without a physical basis, we might not feel needs related to that basis anymore. We may therefore expect that we will adjust to our new being spontaneously without pain. But such a reduction raises the question what needs or aspects of needs would remain and whether these would allow us the attainment of adequate happiness. To preserve some remaining needs that might continue to bring us happiness, we might attempt to distinguish between needs or aspects of needs that we acknowledge to be physical because they are tangible and other needs and aspects whose physicality we deny due to their relative intangibility. We might ponder that the happiness we are to experience might be sourced in the absence rather than the fulfillment of needs we consider to be physical. We might believe that we will enter a state of clarity, of peace, of rest, of freedom where our essence is released from the vexations of physical pain, fear, and desire, is liberated from the toils and sorrows of our physical existence.

While this may initially appear to result in a desirable state, we may have difficulties picturing how we would then create happiness. We would have to acknowledge that most of our existential needs and most aspects of our principal needs for individual and collective survival and thriving are needs for physical survival. The termination of our tangible needs would cause us to lose the satisfaction of their fulfillment. Even if we would not miss that fulfillment because our related needs would have terminated, our experiences of happiness would be diminished. We may believe that some intangible needs or aspects that we might deem separable from a physical existence might retain a continuing purpose. All of these needs or aspects would be collateral needs and thus, by definition not define existential core concerns but perform assisting functions. Without tangible references, our pursuits of intangible needs or aspects would lose their function as existential needs in the service of our tangible survival. Even if we held that our needs serving survival contain a nonphysical aspect, survival would no longer guide us because there would be no remaining function if we secured our ethereal survival. Without issues of survival, the concept of thriving would be reduced to identity with the remaining needs. To still produce happiness, these needs or aspects of needs would have to form objectives that we regard worthwhile in themselves or in the advancement of other remaining objectives. But the continued existence of purportedly intangible needs or aspects is difficult to imagine because all of them appear to require tangible means and strategies or a tangible setting for their generation or at least their expression.

The concept of a nonphysical situation leaves us without references regarding our intangible needs. It would also deprive us of most, maybe all, reasons that we should care about the preservation of our awareness or our essence. Everything about us would change so dramatically that it is difficult to consider the result a continuance of our identity. Such a state does not appear desirable to us. The reduction it implies does not seem to fulfill our need to survive but to confirm our death. We may try to imagine an existence that allows needs and aspects of needs we deem to be nonphysical to emerge from their current physical context and to be elevated into an ethereal existence. We may envision the further development of these needs and aspects of needs. Yet, even if intangible needs would develop to constitute their own purposes or to take on other purposes in an ethereal context, we may question whether they would possess the capacity to equal or exceed the happiness we could develop under the entire spectrum of our present needs. To match the potential of our earthly needs for happiness, additional, presently unknown unearthly needs and manners of pursuit might have to arise. But we cannot fathom what forms of happiness could replace the happiness we would lose by the elimination of tangible needs. Even if we had a description of our adjusted and our new ethereal needs, we could not emotionally attach to them and the state of being they imply. They would be fundamentally alien to our current form of existence. Apart from a nebulous notion that nontangible needs and aspects survive, we have no perspective about how we might be able to derive happiness in an ethereal state after our death. Even if we could be assured of happiness in such a state, we might not attribute much value to it. Our essence would have to pass through a radical transformation so we can engage in a new existence defined by adjusted and by novel nonphysical needs and manners of pursuit. The alterations to our being that might be required to make happiness in nonphysical form achievable call even more into question how much of our identity, of our personality could remain intact. This renders it difficult to conceive of a nonphysical afterlife as a desirable state.

Even if former needs had lost their purpose and we had novel ways of achieving happiness, our memory of former types of happiness whose achievement would be foreclosed might infuse us with a sense of loss. We might not have specific desires and wishes for the fulfillment of earthly needs anymore. Still, it would seem that, as long as we possess an emotional cognizance of happiness, we would emotionally connect to former experiences of happiness, particularly if they are of a different type. We would perceive pain about the absence of earthly pleasures, circumstances for their pursuit, and our inability to sample

them again. In addition, we would have to feel loss about being radically and irreversibly pulled out of all familiarity and emotional connections we had, regardless of whether our needs have changed. These effects might only be averted if our memory of former happiness were extinguished. This prospect that, in excess of our physical identity and most or all current needs, our awareness might be wiped out as well heightens our apprehension further. The likelihood that such a radical break of our consciousness and departure from our nature might be required for a happy afterlife violates the idea of continuity that is implied in our need for individual survival. The existence we might gain threatens to be unrecognizably distant from who we are in this life.

Our anxiety over that possibility combines with our doubts that our afterlife should be happy or even happier than our present existence. The sweeping reduction of our needs and our insecurity about what needs could remain, whether they might increase in impact, and whether needs might be added leave us in great anxiety over whether we will be able to produce any or much happiness. Although such a future state might not translate into pain because related needs would not have survived, we cannot help considering such a state as unhappy. An important reason to regard an afterlife as desirable and potentially superior in supplying us with happiness is that it fulfills our need for survival. If our physical features and related needs do not survive, we might be left to derive a major part of our happiness from the survival of our remaining essence. We may wonder how much happiness we could feel about the survival of a fraction of our essence even if we would not be cognizant of its reduction. Also, building on our survival from a former life as a source of our happiness assumes that we will be aware of having survived our death at least in these aspects. That may not be possible if we are to secure a new existence without mournful memories. However, even if our awareness continued, we have no reason to presume that our survival would result in happiness beyond a period of initial joy. A memory of an existence with risk of death may fill us with appreciation for some time. Yet, after we have achieved a secure state of survival, that memory will fade in importance because it serves no further function in the pursuit of a need. Our guaranteed survival could therefore not be a sustained source of our happiness.

Our reasoned doubts concerning an existence in ethereal form give us little reason to ease our fear over our physical death. Although our mindset induces us to believe in an afterlife, it is difficult for us to assuage ourselves with concepts that are beyond our capacity to comprehend. Visions we develop about how our nonphysical essence may continue to exist may look to us like improvements compared to the

frightening fundamental vision that induces us to engage our imagination. But the characteristic limitations and unfamiliarity of a nonphysical state and our limitations in imagining it seem unable to instill sufficient confidence that such a state could persist or that it would make us happy. We might therefore conclude that we are overreaching with our expectations of a continuance. We might suspect that our essence might not be commensurate with our mind. We might deliberate the evidence of the physical nature of mental functions and admit that at least some mental functions even beyond our physical needs and the satisfaction we collect from them might be of a physical character and will be left behind. We may entertain similar considerations regarding more obvious features such as our physical sensory facilities and rational facilities. Yet it is difficult for us to see what might remain of us after we subtract all these aspects. The loss of all that we can perceive our mind to encompass would deliver us back to our existential fear. More than that, we cannot help interpreting the loss of any mental facilities, any curbing of our awareness or capacities to produce awareness as a partial death of our mind. Hence, we cling to concepts of the afterlife that leave our mind intact. Such a result can only be achieved if we assume that all physical aspects of our mind possess a nonphysical equivalent that mirrors their capacities. But we then encounter the problem that, with the cessation of a physical environment, our mental facilities lack sufficient material with which they could engage to produce satisfaction. This would raise again the horrifying specter of full awareness in absolute paralysis. We may imagine this to be mended by being placed into an illusion that mimics our earthly existence and gives us the perception of a physical environment. Only, such an existence might appear to us as a consummate deception. It suggests that our existence would be without substance, without purpose. Even if our existence might already be an illusion, this is not what we perceive it or want it to be. Nor is it what we wish to be our setting after our earthly existence ends regardless of whether our present existence has substance. From our current point of view, a coming state of illusion appears more like a punishment than a reward. We may therefore not embrace the prospect of a nonphysical emulation of a physical existence or the continuance of an illusion if that were our present.

This leaves our reinstallation into a physical body in a physical environment as the only solution that could effectively neutralize our fear of death. Because all the happiness we know is a function of our earthly needs, we cannot picture happiness in the afterlife in any other way than the happiness we experience during our contemporary existence. Any purported new type of happiness is beyond our comprehen-

sion because it is outside the horizon of our reality and our imagination that is based on it. Accordingly, we regularly base our concept of an afterlife on the assumption that the conditions and the principles of our happiness will generally remain as they are during our lifetime. The best setting we can envision would be a re-placement into a human body and into a physical environment that closely resembles our earthly realm. We might also picture some enhancements to our body, mind, and environment that would make our afterlife more fulfilling. Yet paradise would be more of the same or higher levels of what we already desire. We might then imagine our existence in the afterlife as an endless lifetime. Unless our current reality is eventually sublimated into the state of the afterlife, the environment for such endless physical existence would have to be a location apart from our contemporary world. As an alternative, we may envisage undergoing repeated, perhaps endless cycles of birth and death in the same or other worlds.

This alternative of cycling through lifetimes confronts us with an immediate notion of limitation. Even if we should be reinserted on earth or elsewhere into a comparable physical existence with an array of familiar needs, amnesia about our former life seems necessary to allow us to lead happy lives. That may already be necessary if we merely change over once into an endless afterlife. But a memory of repeated lifetimes would have us accumulate burdens of not being able to access the past that might depress us to levels we can now only faintly imagine. Although we would possess repeated lifetimes to compensate for past experiences, such compensation would be particularly inadequate if the settings for our lives lacked continuity. We would mourn former lives and attempt to connect to and continue living them. We would attempt to live one integrated life through disjointed episodes. There might be other grounds we would not want to remember past lives or even that we had past lives. If we trusted that we automatically slide into a new existence that is not affected by our previous life, we might use our lives without care. We might even die intentionally so we can advance to a new setting. This might lead us to an existence of neglect, recklessness, or willful disregard for us and others. We would have to cope with the effects of our and other individuals' behavior in our current existence. Even if we believe that we can escape immediate repercussions by moving to a new life, we might hesitate because that escape still would come at the price of losing our identity. Moreover, we might return to a world where we experience the fallout from shortsighted conduct by us and by other individuals. Without our and their care, the conditions of unconditional reincarnation would deteriorate. These realizations might move us to appreciate the opportuni-

ty of each of our lives to create and experience happiness and to invest ourselves into creating better circumstances for our future lives. But these aspects of general care might not permit us to overcome frustrations about a continual separation from all personal connections. Regardless of our speculation about the reasons we could not remember the content or factuality of multiple lifetimes, our amnesia would be evidenced by our current inability to recall former lives. Unless we are all new participants in a scheme of successive lifetimes, we should recall our past lives unless such access is blocked. A showing that such memories might reside deeply sequestered in our mind might give us some suggestion of mental continuity. Yet, unless we can access that memory as ours in the presence of our mind and identify it as ours, it might as well be someone else's memory. That is particularly so if successive lives are not connected by genetic particularities and leave only generic human commonalities. Here again, we may ask whether we would lose too much of us to regard this progression as our survival. That question rises in intensity if we consider that we might not only transition among human forms but reemerge in other life forms.

These considerations distill what we really wish. If we must die, we want not only our mind to survive intact. We also want to be reinserted into a genetic copy of our body. Moreover, we would want our inability to access the past addressed. To the extent that is not possible, we hope to be placed into a setting of continuity in which we can reconcile with past happiness and pain. Hence, the solution we might desire most to overcome our fear of death is that, if our life cannot be secured without the experience of death, we will be reconstituted and inserted in an environment in all aspects as if death had not occurred. While we may additionally ask for improved conditions in our self or in our environment to make our afterlife happier, we may wish to retain as many of our circumstances as we consider conducive. The wish list born from our fear of death, frustration over our inability to access the past, and from possible frustrations in achieving the fulfillment of our needs during our lifetime, can then be extraordinarily ambitious.

Regardless of what we imagine or wish our afterlife to be, the complexities of arranging and maintaining it make us wonder how it might be achieved. Even the feared vision of an existence in paralyzed awareness would seem to require a creative act if not maintenance of our facilities and their setting. Our involuntary imagination of such a state does not demand evidence for us to believe in it. But that is not the case regarding states of survival that deviate from this default. We may find evidence for such states partly in the correlation of our inability to imagine being dead with our wonder regarding the existence

of the world and our existence. Because our current world by far exceeds anything that we could create, we may surmise that it must have been generated by an intelligent and omnipotent entity. Once we acknowledge the existence of such an entity, we are led to believe that it is also responsible for the world of the afterlife. Our belief in the existence and power of such an entity is particularly strengthened because of our belief in an afterlife. We may deem any continuation after physical death to be supernatural because it occurs contrary to all physical evidence and the rules by which our present world seems to operate. Further embellishment of such an entity is fostered by our desires regarding an afterlife. Fulfilling these desires would require inordinate skills as well as intense consideration, planning, and execution.

Yet, beyond finding comfort regarding the issue of capacity of a supernatural power, we must answer the question why such an entity should dissever our life into different existences and why it should accommodate our desires. The involved complexities suggest that there must be a reason. We may speculate how the entity that created this scheme might profit from it. In narrowing our speculation, we might query why results could not be accomplished in our continued earthly existence, through our expansion into additional habitats, by creating more worlds, by having us perish without an afterlife, or by disclosure and even direct intervention. Such speculation takes us so much outside our experiences, including our motivations, that we have difficulties finding plausible answers. We might therefore resign not to fully understand the motivations of a creative entity. But we might still impute meaning to the separation and the transition we purport to observe from our position. We might picture that the creative entity has prearranged our transition into the afterlife as an automatic, unconditional event. It might encompass a development through multiple existences. We might imagine a metamorphosis at the end of that process or immediately after our current life ends as a natural progression whereby our essence, after having seasoned in our body, leaves it behind and assumes its adult form. Then again, the traumatic separation of these worlds by our physical death suggests an interruption rather than an organic progression and that our welfare on the other side requires a saving act. That in turn implies that the selection of possibilities for an afterlife might depend on our worthiness. We might imagine that upon our natural death judgment is passed what our experience will be. We might contemplate that our worthiness will be determined according to our preceding behavior. Our qualifications might be virtues displayed, lessons learned, or the pursuit or achievement of other acts. We might believe that a preset, automatic decision mecha-

nism or a regulated bureaucracy causes our actions during our lifetime to have certain consequences. We might speculate that we decide our own fate based on insights we attain in the afterlife. Alternatively, we might believe that the quality of our afterlife depends on the discretion of the originating power or an agency. We might ascribe human characteristics to such a decision maker and deem the process to be influenced by such characteristics. Based on our experience with humans, we may deem submission, service, faith, respect, and flattery to be effective means to earn a favorable decision, particularly during our lifetime when the existence or powers of such a decision maker may seem uncertain or remote. Even if we should fail to securely qualify by our actions, we might hope that contrition, a commitment to future compensation for failings, or appeals for mercy might still qualify us.

We might deliberate whether the reward for qualification may be entry into the afterlife, while the punishment may be our exclusion from it. However, since our incapacity to comprehend death compels us to presume our continuing existence in the afterlife, we could not fathom being entirely eliminated. Our compulsion to fear death forces us to conclude that the decision at the end of our natural life will not be a resolution of whether or not we enter the afterlife but what the conditions of our afterlife will be. The envisioned conditions might include a range of gradations. They might comprise conditions in which some or all needs, the satisfaction of some or all needs, or some degrees of satisfaction are foreclosed. But we may wonder how happy we could be in an afterlife even if we were not subjected to any restraints. In contrast with the ultimate form of punishment, we might imagine our ultimate reward as the fulfillment of all our needs. Although this may initially appear like an obvious choice of the best situation we can imagine, we may develop misgivings whether the fulfillment of all our needs would equal ultimate happiness when we contemplate the consequences. To experience happiness in an existence after death, it appears necessary that we tolerate its counterpart, unhappiness, to some extent. The rooting of our idea of happiness in a pain-pleasure mechanism renders it impossible for us to segregate pleasure from pain in terms of its definition and as a required experiential counterpart. Experiencing pain without being able to do anything about it would subject us to a state that we seek to prevent. However, the unconditional fulfillment of all that we need might impose a painful paralysis as well on the other end of the spectrum that we visualize. To escape this paralysis, it appears necessary that we should be exposed to the potential if not the reality of deprivation and that our acts and omissions would have to be responsible for the enhancement of fulfillment conditions.

Hence, we can only imagine experiencing happiness in the afterlife if its mechanisms for the creation of happiness would be similar to how we accrue happiness in our earthly existence. We might raise our happiness by an improved quality or quantity of means made available to us and improve our choices based on insights we could gather during our life, during transition, or in our new setting. Yet these advantages would have to stop short of making our pursuits superfluous.

Such conditions even seem to be necessary for our need to survive in the afterlife. Without the continuing threat of death, we may not perceive a need for survival anymore. Although our fear of death would subside if survival upon physical death were guaranteed, our pleasure about our survival would fade as well. Without the function of supporting and protecting our survival, our existential needs would also lose their ultimate purpose. That might prompt us or give us latitude to engage in behavior that might cause us pain regarding existential needs. Even if that pain would motivate us to fulfill them, we may give preference to the pursuit of other impulses if we deem such preferences to be protected by the impunity of our survival, therewith creating an imbalance. To continue our happiness about being alive and avoid damage in the pursuit of existential needs, our existence upon our death may have to be threatened by further possibilities of death. That would not seem to be a problem in a scheme of multiple cycles of life in which we would be kept unaware of our previous existence and confronted with frightening visions similar to our existing experience. But in a scheme that involves knowledge of successive lifetimes or a permanent afterlife where individuals could witness reconstitution after dying, the threat may have to involve more severe and perhaps final consequences to maintain an appropriate apprehension of death.

These are issues about which we might not worry at this point. For now, we have to consider what we can do to ensure that we obtain an adequate standing upon our transition through death. We do not know whether any of our notions about the hereafter or conditions of entry are correct. However, the stakes of our survival are so high that they may prompt us to attempt to improve our fate in case it exists and a qualification process applies. We may try to forecast the effect of our comportment and to determine what we can do to advance our chances of a happy afterlife. We may try to understand what a judging entity or mechanism might deem important in a decision. We may try to deduct such principles from the imagined nature of the afterworld and its organizing principles. Still, our ignorance and insecurity about the modalities and transitory processes of an afterlife make such planning difficult. We may be longing for leadership that can save us from

falling into any of the negative states we can imagine and place us on a course for a state that is advantageous to our happiness. This yearning may motivate us to give power to individuals and groups who suppose or pretend to possess answers to our questions regarding our afterlife. The function of such purported authorities may range from an advisory capacity to strict governance of our conduct. Their common denominator is that they declare to have knowledge required for guiding us in matters of existence after death. Mostly, they assert that we have a conditional opportunity to escape the pain of disadvantageous states. The opportunity is usually stated to be conditional because it is claimed to depend on our thinking, feeling, and behaving in ways that are prescribed by authorities. Our acknowledgment of such authorities may have us follow their commandments in any aspects of our existence they wish to govern, thus allowing them to take advantage of us. Even if we do not submit to a particular authority, we may be careful about the possible consequences of our thoughts, emotions, and actions. If we believe in an afterlife or at least consider it a possibility, we will want to avoid circumstances that make our transition to it less secure or our standing in it less desirable. We may let the potential consequences motivate us to build and maintain our own guidelines.

Ideas and guidelines about how to optimize our existence in the afterlife with actions in our present existence may be beneficial for the amelioration of present happiness. They may support the instructions we already obtain from the composite of our needs. However, there is a considerable risk that the principles of behavior we consider necessary to secure a happy afterlife might conflict with the instructions for a happy lifetime. The prospects of punishment or reward may loom so prominently in our mind that they may devalue the significance of our current pleasure and our current existence. If we regard qualifying for the afterlife as the function of our lifetime, we will not place as much importance on the optimization of our current existence. Rather, we are likely to view it as proving ground for our worthiness. We may imagine or be promised compensation in the hereafter for not acting up in favor of rewards in this existence and for obeying adverse instructions that we or purported representatives attribute to the determining entity. This attitude may amalgamate with an interpretation of our pain-pleasure mechanism whereby our pleasure will increase the more we endure pain. A belief that our rewards and their certainty will intensify with suffering disposes us not only to endure pain but to affirm and pursue it instead of pleasure in perversion of our needs. It further may render us agreeable and even zealous victims of exploitation, preclusion, and other injury in social or surrounding circumstances.

A focus on the afterlife by which our current existence is viewed as a mere conveyance may also not bode well for the happiness of others. The actions we take against our own happiness may weaken our advancement of our needs for collective survival and thriving. In addition, a utilitarian vision of our present existence carries a tendency of devaluing current happiness in our treatment of other humans as well. Depending on what we deem the requirements of qualification for an afterlife to be, we may pursue our salvation not only at our cost but also to the detriment of others. With the overwhelming significance of otherworldly happiness at stake, we may fight anybody we perceive to not serve or to impede our salvation. Our intolerance will grow if we perceive that judging authorities support such behavior. It will further grow if we are told or suppose that the conversion of others to our beliefs and behavior constitutes a benefit or a requisite for our salvation. Such a mission may compel us to extend to others the burdens and resulting painful experiences that we regard to be qualification requirements or positive contributions toward a happy afterlife. We may then easily move from a defensive stance to an offensive interference in the pursuits of others. We may consider individuals or groups that do not comport with our zeal as agents of evil who would preclude us, themselves, or others from obtaining ultimate happiness. We may have few scruples to counter such apparent destructive forces with purportedly defensive destructive force of our own. We may declare that, because individuals who do not comply with our impositions will be excluded from a successful afterlife, their relegation to suffering is certain. We may therefore believe that we function as instruments of supernatural intent if we punish them. The devaluation of happiness in our earthly existence and the pain we cause by the application of our convictions may create a high level of unhappiness that increases our yearning for the afterlife. Our desolation may condition us to seek or at least to not avoid death for us or others. As a result, we may produce the opposite of the happiness for which we yearn. We may create hell on earth.

The belief that we must suffer in our earthly existence to gain happiness in the afterlife requires inconsistencies in several aspects. A creative entity would prosecute contradictory objectives with the creation of life before and after death. It would engage in the creation and advancement of life and reward us for acting contrary to that manifest intent. It would intensely motivate us to pursue individual and collective survival and thriving only to punish us if we follow that motivation. Moreover, if we believe in or suspect the existence of an afterlife and that we might gain happiness in it with our behavior in this life, it is reasonable to assume that our efforts to produce happiness in our

lifetime determine whether we enter the afterlife or how we fare in it. Such a behavior would be consistent with our behavior in the afterlife and prepare us best for the behavior expected from us in such an afterlife regardless of whether our needs then were similar. The division into a present dedicated to the pursuit, enduring, and infliction of suffering and an afterlife of happiness arises from our assumption that a decisional authority is afflicted with the worst human depravities and weaknesses. Such an assumption may be inevitable if we imagine an all-powerful creative entity that infuses us with irresistible needs for survival and thriving, exposes us to the absolute denial of these needs in death, and skewers us in lifelong agony of its expectation and the insecurity about an afterlife and its conditions. This realization may cause us to revise our views about that entity and whether we expect our afterlife to be happy. Beyond these concerns, we also must be concerned with the substance of our loss. Without the pursuit of happiness in our present realm, we would miss a unique and precious experience of pleasure. That would particularly apply if a focus on happiness should be missing from the afterlife or there should be no afterlife. But even if there is an afterlife and happiness in it is possible, this outlook retains validity. If our emotional awareness should continue, our regret of missing happiness during our life would remain as a pain of loss regardless of the happiness we experience in the afterlife. Even if we would lose our emotional awareness of our current existence in a permanent transition or when we enter successive lifetimes, this could not change that we would have irretrievably squandered experiences of happiness. Whatever we imagine the potential of an afterlife to be and regardless of whether there is an afterlife, there is no good reason not to value, not to maximize our happiness during our lifetime. The pursuit of happiness during this lifetime can only benefit us. It cannot possibly harm us now or in the eventuality of an afterlife. If there is no afterlife or if it is not organized by happiness, we gain by maximizing happiness for our lifetime. If we possess an afterlife and it is organized around happiness, we win on both accounts. There is no downside to our pursuit and maximization of happiness. We will experience disadvantages if we disengage from them. We may therefore decide to cherish this life's opportunities and maximize happiness in this lifetime.

Yet, even if we entirely focus on generating happiness with our best efforts, we frequently fail or fall short in achieving the happiness we imagine. The causes may not always be clear. Our chances of wisely investing our efforts may benefit from identifying the types of limitations that we can encounter and the general characteristics of their intransigence. The next chapter focuses on laying that groundwork.