CHAPTER 13
CRITICAL EXAMINATION

There appear to be two complementary ways by which we can determine the applicability of an existential philosophy or of any part of it. We can investigate its components and mechanisms. We can explore its premises, its arguments, and conclusions and determine whether we agree with them. Notwithstanding, we may distrust such a theoretical and apparently rational treatment because happiness is an emotional experience. We may presume that we do not possess sufficient references in our experiences to determine whether a philosophy can make us happy. We may therefore prefer to determine its applicability depending on its results. Proof by implementation represents a clear method for finding out whether an existential philosophy can provide us with competent guidance regarding our happiness. Existential philosophies that claim applicability to our person would have to allow us to verify them by putting the claim of their applicability to the test. To be legitimate, an existential philosophy must be able to withstand our empiric scrutiny. Otherwise, it cannot validly claim to pertain to us.

Such a verification method for a philosophy may appear to be unscientific and primitive. However, it is the embodiment of fundamental scientific confirmation to insist that the instruction provided by an existential philosophy leads to the predicted result. If it does not lead to the predicted result and such failure is not due to extraneous circumstances, it is incorrect and we may decide to abstain from further application. If following the instructions of an existential philosophy in assembling certain components produces its promised results, we may regard the explanation of that philosophy as proven. We may assume until we find otherwise that its hypothesis poses a complete explanation for all circumstances of an experience within the claimed range of the hypothesis. These categorizations may become refined by the evaluation of similar incidents. If instructions always fail to confer the promised happiness, they fail to account for a necessary ingredient and are therefore false. If the allocation of the described components produces the predicted result part of the time, the hypothesis can only account for some circumstances that are pertinent to its claim. It may miss some ingredients or not account for interferences. It is a working theory that, although it grants some guidance, does not represent the last word. It is only partly true because it does not account for all aspects to generate the result it claims to describe. It constitutes a preliminary explanation for a phenomenon that might be superseded by another explanation that can account for all observable incidents.

If we consider external existential philosophies to be provisional models and apply empiric exploration modes, we should be able to keep sufficient distance from them so we do not succumb to aspects of them that are not in our interest. However, an approach of empiric verification may not be efficient and may cause problems in our pursuit of happiness. We may not be able to obtain or assemble the circumstances that the philosophy requires to create happiness. Hence, we may not have an opportunity to determine whether it has the potential of making us happy. Yet, even if we could obtain and assemble the required means for an empiric verification, we may incur similar problems we encounter in trying to derive an existential philosophy of our own from trials. Empiric verification carries the systemic disadvantage of potentially high risk and cost. A philosophy's claim that it is applicable to us may focus that risk and cost to particular trials. But it may also intensify risk and cost because it may prompt us to comprehensively invest trust, other mental efforts, tangible resources, and patience. Its incompatibility with other manners of pursuit and the resources it demands may prohibit us to try other philosophies contemporaneously. By the time we find out that a philosophy does not serve our happiness, we may have lost important, most, or even all alternative opportunities or the will or resources to actualize them. Applying a philosophy to find out whether it can bring us happiness may then expose us to unconscionable risks. These risks appear particularly high where a philosophy cannot point to a record of prior implementation.

We might fare better if we could determine the compatibility of an existential philosophy in a theoretical state without implementing its instructions. Instead of trying to build the structure suggested by a philosophy, we would examine its building plans to determine whether we approve its principles of construction. Even if we can sufficiently judge whether the result would be to our liking, we have to investigate whether it can be soundly constructed under the given scheme. To determine in advance whether a philosophy is compatible or more compatible than other philosophies with our needs, we have to investigate its constituents and its processes. If there are no technical flaws in the argument, the cause for disagreements among philosophies must be a difference in the ingredients of their argument. It must lie in different premises that stem from a discrepancy in what they assume to be true or false. Such a difference may be attributable to aberrations in purportedly empiric data, their perception, or their other processing that form the premises on which their theory is built. To establish whether an existential philosophy is compatible with our dispositions for happiness, we must find out whether we can agree with its premises.

In reviewing an existential philosophy, we may have to review several layers of premises. We would regard the ultimate conclusions of an existential philosophy as hypotheses that must be substantiated. Each hypothesis would have to be shown to follow from the correlation of its premises. That correlation would consist in the interaction of premises according to properties and interactive laws by which they have to or tend to abide. These properties and interactive laws would constitute premises as well. The interrelation of true premises is presumed to produce true results. The conditions needed to prove a main hypothesis are divided into two categories. The first category is represented by premises that can be relied upon without additional proof because they are accepted as true by those examining the truth of a hypothesis. The second category contains subhypotheses whose presence still has to be proved. The proofs of these subhypotheses constitute subroutines of the main proof. These subroutines would follow the same formal principles as the proof of a main hypothesis. Each of these subhypotheses would have to be traced to premises that can be relied upon without additional proof because we accept them as true. Once a subhypothesis is confirmed, it can be categorized as a premise that now can be relied upon as true in a higher level of argument.

Because a hypothesis rests on its necessary premises, we cannot agree with its truth unless we can agree with all of these premises. To identify the ultimate premises, we have to follow the deductions of its arguments from the ultimate proof in the reverse direction upstream. We have to investigate the arguments until we arrive at a class of assertions that are not questioned or deduced any further. By reversing the synthesis of an argument, we may be able to trace back to ultimate premises that we can accept as true, dismiss as false, or classify as indeterminate. Our acceptance of a premise as true, our dismissal of it as false, and our final determination of it as uncertain are founded on whether it matches our direct or indirect impression of how the world works. Both types of experiences have sources at different processing levels. In its most basic form, what we regard as true will be based on experiences that result from our direct sensory exposure. These acquisitions lead to concepts in our mind from our impressions and interpretations of what we sense. We attribute properties to objects and to events and their components. We infer causalities and principles from their interaction. We may also obtain such concepts with the help of other sources. Such indirectly obtained concepts are divided into sensory information and interpretations of sensory information as well. A segment of this purported external sensory and interpretive information will be verifiable by our experiences. However, we might not have

any previous experience of a premise and may not be able to institute an adequate experience by direct experimentation or observation. The source of external information or its interpretation may be so removed that, in spite of the investment of all our efforts and the assistance of external sources, we may be unable to determine its truth or falsity by direct indication. Where external premises do not lend themselves to a direct witnessing or substantiation, we eliminate these sources from our consideration or concede such information in consideration of its circumstantial credibility. Depending on our reliance on secondary information, what we regard as true or false may then largely be a matter of trust. That trust may be manipulated by external sources or by us without influences. But trust is not limited to external sources.

We also apply trust to our mental facilities in the processing of information. We use our judgment depending on how far we trust our own sensory perception, our interpretation, and the absence of manipulation. We are likely to form a repository of topics whose truth or falsity we cannot determine and with regard to which we must withhold judgment. Because the determination of what we regard as true, false, or inconclusive is a matter of our judgment, our ability to render such judgment properly is critical. Our judgment is largely formed by our preceding determinations because we ponder newly emerging information on their basis. New experiences are subject to our perceptive, rational, and emotional processing capability as well as our personality traits and previous experiences that might have been involved in forming and might more immediately influence how we apply that capacity. Our mental capacities may limit our absorption and consideration of available information. Even if we possess sufficient perceptive capacity, our rational or emotional convictions may limit, falsify, or block the registration or the subsequent processing of information. Further, our emotional traits may sway or prevent us from accessing or fully using our rational capacity. They may interject wishes as perceptions or facts into rational or emotional consideration. Moreover, our personal and our environmental circumstances may lead us to different exposure to information and a divergent desire for it. They may focus our perceptions, inquiries, and consideration on the experience of certain events and objects rather than others. The resulting state of mind may provide individuals with dissimilar understandings of how the world works or should work. This divergence of views on what is settled or unsettled, what requires inquiry and what does not, on what is true or incorrect, poses a problem for philosophies. It affects whether and to what extent they appear agreeable to us. If we do not share their premises, we will not likely be able to share their conclusions.

Identifying the premises of a philosophy can be a difficult task. A philosophy tends to focus and explain its own gains in knowledge more than it would dwell on something it considers as already established. In laying out its argument, a philosophy cannot well develop and prove all underlying relevant facts from the beginning of time. It may be counterproductive to describe all necessary premises, including those that its originator regards as obvious and unquestioned, and even more to prove their truth. Most of the originator's efforts would be spent on such traces instead of laying out the purported philosophical development that builds on them. Certain circumstances have to be assumed as an established basis. Beyond the removal of premises from proof requirements, many premises may be considered to be so unassailable and universally understood that they do not even have to be stated. Out of a greater number of purportedly undisputed premises, the originator of a philosophy will then pick a limited number that are regarded as required to create proof for a hypothesis. An additional determination will be made whether to merely state these premises or whether demonstrating their truth is necessary. It is often unclear how this decision whether to state or prove a premise is rendered. The purpose of proposing a philosophy is to convince others of its applicability. For that reason, its originator will likely make that determination according to the supposed level of acceptance of certain premises in the targeted audience. As a consequence of this assessment, the architect of an existential philosophy might stop short of developing an argument sufficiently far into its premises to obtain our acceptance. If we consider such a philosophy worthy of continued consideration, we have to engage in the dissection of premises ourselves or call upon external assistance to arrive at premises whose veracity we can judge.

Even if we should be able to locate and agree with all relevant premises of a philosophy, we may not possess a guaranty that following it will improve or maximize our happiness. The reason is that happiness cannot be purely based on rational derivation. The structure a philosophy proposes to shape has to resonate with us emotionally as well. We do not think happy; we feel happy. Besides tracing the premises of a philosophy, we also must establish that its deductions are in conformance with our emotional preferences. If we lack the ability to identify emotionally with the derivative settings of happiness of a philosophy, it may not be able to bring us the happiness it promises. An existential philosophy may postulate an arrangement of circumstances and behavior that surpass the conditions we have experienced so far. We may have difficulties imagining the composite and specific experiences of happiness in its described ideal world. When we produce an

ideal system of happiness in our mind, our perceptive vocabulary and our capabilities of rational development and structuring may precede our ability to emotionally evaluate the effects of these imaginary concepts. But even our perceptive and rational capacity to imagine the totality of what is proposed might be overburdened. Beyond the logical comprehension of premises and deductions, we might have difficulties following described concepts with our imagination of a practical environment. To discern whether the ideal world of a philosophy is feasible and represents our ideal, we might imagine such a world and place ourselves into its environment in our mind's eye. We might be able to envision some of that setting and its emotional effects by populating it with similar experiences we have already had. In areas without parallels or sufficient references, we might supplement these features with more imprecise desires of departure generated by the pain of our deprivations. Such a manner of forecasting the feasibility of a philosophy and our emotional reactions to it might not be reliable because of the topical and incomplete nature of our vision. A philosophy might pose perceptive, rational, or emotional circumstances that are so removed from our experiences that we cannot anticipate them and their consequences. Because their ideals have not been verified in our experiences, we are asked to take a leap of faith concerning their feasibility and capacity of granting us the desired type and intensity of happiness.

To develop this trust, we may be relegated to collateral indicia. It may be established in similar ways as our trust regarding indirect information. Still, in this case, a greater investment of trust might be required because of the possibly more comprehensive effects that following a philosophy might have for our fate. Our investment in trust rises as philosophies present us with aspects of their imagined system that are fundamentally new. Such trust might even have to be invested by the originator of an existential philosophy. Although a philosophy will be in large part based on experiences, it may not represent a mere account of these. It may correlate and extrapolate experiences in ways that exceed anybody's experience. An existential philosophy may begin as an expression of a desire, of hope to locate a system of order and guidance. It may spring from the imagination of an ideal setting where the originator's wishes are resolved. As a result, the hypotheses of such a philosophy may exist initially in the originator's mind without a conscious deduction from premises. Proving the applicability of that ideal may be an afterthought to achieve and prove the grounding of a dream. The purportedly deductive development of an existential philosophy may succumb to wishful thinking. Even if a logical deduction can be construed, it may not convincingly carry the deduction.

Because of this wishful origin, an existential philosophy may be disposed toward displaying only corroborating possibilities. Even if we agree with its premises, processes, and deductions, there might be factors or interferences that the philosophy does not adequately consider and accommodate. Its implementation is not only a matter of logical deduction from premises. It is further a function of the environmental setting in which the designated sequence of events is to occur and the motivation of its proponents. The mere theoretical possibility of connecting steps to build to a result does not necessarily inform us about the strength of such an approach, about its likelihood of success, or its costs. This is particularly so when we try to gauge complex systems of happiness that depend on multiple sequences by multiple actors. We might not be able to predict whether a particular philosophy can succeed in establishing or maintaining the conditions to make its promised benefits available. Nor might we know whether its successful realization would improve or maximize our happiness or the happiness of anyone else. To find a dependable resolution to these issues, it seems inevitable that we implement a philosophy. Without our commitment and the appropriate participation of other individuals, we may not be able to achieve sufficient knowledge about the feasibility and applicability of an existential philosophy. Even partial participation may not be sufficient to give a fair assessment of its potential. This places us in the difficult situation where we must weigh the positive and negative implications of following a philosophy against the implications of not following it because of incomplete information. In addition, we might have to weigh multiple philosophies against one another. The number and indeterminacy of avenues and choices may confound us.

Yet, before we even arrive at these potential problems of selection, we would have to overcome internalized obstacles that do not allow us to fully examine the potential of a philosophy. We do not usually find ourselves in a situation where we live free of existential philosophies and are approached by them with a fair chance to evaluate their applicability. Most of us live within a framework of one or more existential philosophies that have already gained a following, obtained common accord, or reached institutionalized status. We may find our world saturated by religious, social, economic, and cultural viewpoints and traditions. Their impositions may override and preempt our free consideration of them or of other philosophies, or the development of our own existential philosophy. Their instructions on how we should think, feel, and conduct ourselves may have established themselves as an integrated, structural part of our mind, our society, and our tangible conditions. Their pervasiveness may largely determine the disposi-

tions and circumstances that guide our choices. They may have permeated us and our surroundings to such a degree that we are incapable of separating us from them. They may be so settled that we regard them as reflections of objective facts rather than subjective theories.

This conclusion may not only be the consequence of direct indoctrination in which philosophies claim applicability of their theory. It may also be the result of indirect absorption from our environment. When we learn about our world, we may become exposed to philosophies through the surroundings they have shaped. The facts they have created may cause us to adapt to them to meet our needs. Implemented philosophies might enter our mind through their results even if we would not know of them directly. By their implementation in our surroundings, their subjective claim of how happiness is to be obtained attains a semblance of objectivity. They shape our reality in conformance with their claim and constrain us to pursue our happiness within their parameters. These parameters may prevent awareness of or sufficient familiarity with alternatives. If they offer some way to pursue our needs, we may believe that we have all possible means available to obtain and maintain our happiness. Our missing knowledge of other objectives or manners of pursuits may cause us to regard sanctioned objectives or ways as exclusive or superior. Our direct and indirect permeation by existential philosophies may foreclose us from questioning them or their installations. This renders ingrained existential philosophies sources of prejudgments. They may compel us to view ourselves and our world through the prism of their explanation and direction.

Emancipating ourselves from existential philosophies that surround us and have permeated us often requires great effort. To decide competently whether we wish to embrace them partly or entirely, we first have to be free from them. We must gain detachment from views we have come to accept as an ingrown and natural part of our reality. To begin that process, we have to realize that their content might not be genuinely ours and that they might not represent the ideals of our happiness. Gaining such an initial insight might already prove to be a challenge. The burial and suppression of our own ideas of happiness and the formation of our ideas by external philosophies may leave us with little awareness. We may not possess a manifest record of the replacement of our autonomous ideas with foreign influences. We may believe that we are independent thinkers and do not abide by any philosophy obliviously. Even if we are aware of the influence a philosophy exerts on us, we may be of the opinion that we freely chose to follow it. This may lead us to protect the disingenuous, external state of our ideas about happiness as our own against any criticism and doubt, in-

cluding our own. Because ambient philosophies are regularly absorbed under the bypass of our critical abilities, we might not be able to apply finely tuned critical mechanisms to them later. Once a philosophy has become uncritically absorbed, it may cause us to act and react according to or similar to instinctive conditioning. Its motivations may not be conscious to us, and we might react with predictable responses to certain stimuli. This relegates us largely to the function of a relay device for those directing a philosophy. Once we are taken in by an existential philosophy, overwhelming contrary evidence may be necessary to disabuse us of the notion that it represents applicable ideas of happiness. We tend to hold on to such a philosophy stubbornly in spite of painful results. Rather than holding a philosophy responsible or even questioning it, we may try to blame its erroneous or insufficient application and other factors that interfere with its application. Our adherence is regularly assisted by a reduction of philosophies to conclusory principles or their symbolic representations in persons, places, or objects. These simplifications may not be a mere result of traditions and of the correlated institutionalization of structures and practices. They may be intentionally conceived to preempt our independent consideration. Our individual and institutionalized societal internalization of them and our instinctive obedience when they are cited as legitimization for activities to support or protect them may be powerful instruments to keep us compliant and acting against our interests.

Even where philosophies have not progressed to shape our personality, we remain capable of gathering some reflective distance, and know of or suspect deficiencies in them, we may continue to hold on to them. We may find it hard to distance ourselves from them because we remain surrounded and held captive by the environmental reality they have produced or they dominate. That domination may cause us to conclude that we have to put up with a philosophy that is to some degree incompatible with our happiness to enjoy the remaining benefits. We may not even distinguish whether a philosophy has created or usurped environmental conditions. We may consider our interests too connected to a philosophy or to the system it governs to explore or to act upon our secretly held opinions or doubts. We may fear losing the advantages we derive under the existing regime. We may believe that we have already too much time and effort invested in what we might have to discard. Changing our position may require the admission that we were mistaken or ineffective and wasted a piece of our existence. We may be concerned that a modification will not permit us to maintain relationships that we believe impossible or difficult to substitute. We may fear the impairment or loss of our authority, influence, status,

capacity, or support structure if we deviate from familiar circumstances. We may also hold back because we lack confidence that we possess sufficient capacity or preparation to assess for capable approval or disapproval the philosophies that surround us, judge matters of our happiness independently, or cultivate our personal existential philosophy. We may not know with sufficient security how to obtain distance and assessment powers or how to act effectively upon receiving the resulting insights. We may not possess access to critical information or to alternative philosophies. We may be uncertain whether another value system can successfully replace a philosophy to which we are currently subjected. We may be afraid that if we do not hold on to our current direction, we stand to lose our value system and become directionless. These factors may form a prohibitive disincentive to our development of a separate concept of what we want. They may dissuade us from undertaking critical assessments or dramatic changes. We may rather attempt to find happiness under current principles than look for better guidance in the unknown. We may try to adjust principles or their applications to serve us better. But as long as circumstances reasonably meet our needs and we do not possess a firm knowledge of conditions that could dramatically improve our fate, we may give in. We may preserve or at least suffer a habitual system and, by implication, its ruling philosophy even if we deem it useless, deficient, or detrimental.

Our subservience to philosophies in our environment is prominently demonstrated by our extraordinary reluctance to consider other philosophies, let alone to contemplate adopting any of them. If humans were successful in obtaining an independent view, there should be much more, and more intense, consideration of established philosophies and development of autonomous philosophies. The prevailing scarcity of diversification cannot be explained by the customization of resident philosophies. Most do not represent specific reactions to conditions that are only present in their area of prevalent entrenchment. Even if they represent particularities, the distribution of such particularities among humans should make such particularized philosophies more widely distributed. If they are general, the similarity of humans beyond their differences should enable their spread as well. Nevertheless, the coverage by philosophies seems to be largely a matter of geographic, ethnic, or cultural context, or of political and military power. The absence of critical activity may lead us to conclude that individuals subjected to resident philosophies are satisfied with the guidance these philosophies provide and that the lack of application elsewhere is merely a function of insufficient publicity. Conversely, it may be argued that an incompatible philosophy survives because of a lack of in-

formation about more applicable philosophies. However, these arguments regarding publicity lose power as access to information grows. Even if sufficient information is available, external and internal mechanisms and pressures of adherence continue. Populations' persistence in a prevailing philosophy may be due to indoctrination, compulsion, fear, lethargy, error, or to combinations of these causes. It may also be attributable to their inexperience how much more happiness could be gained through other philosophies. To compare philosophies, individuals would have to immerse themselves to these and render informed selections among them free from internal and external influences and pressures. External difficulties and their own resistance to avail themselves of such options may arrest individuals even if they feel discontented and information about alternatives is available. This makes inquiries about how happy individuals are with a philosophy unreliable. But even if they could freely sample other philosophies, they might be insufficiently impressed by these to leave or change their familiar environment because these might not offer sufficiently better prospects.

Beyond influences from external principled campaigns or presences, principles we create ourselves may hamper our consideration of happiness. Our internalization of experiences may independently give rise to intransigence. We may fashion principles based on a single experience, but their recurring application and utility infuse them with added authority. After we generate a principle or find it confirmed, we are not likely to recollect the particular circumstances of each incident that contributed to the adoption or maintenance of that principle. We tend to remember less than all of the relevant constituent objects and events, and we may not clearly recall the objects and events we do remember. When we encounter circumstances that appear to be similar to objects or events we remember to have given rise to a principle, we are drawn to apply the related principle as an automatic response. The partial disconnection from sources and mental processes that made us form and affirm a principle may position us to misapply that principle. Our failure to accurately recall the underlying circumstances makes it difficult if not impossible to distinguish and possibly adjust the application of a principle to dissimilar circumstances. Without the context of its origin and rationale, the principle becomes a rigid and imprecise directive. This disconnection of principles may have physiological reasons. As our memory of constituent objects and events fades, the derived principles may grow gradually disconnected from their sources. We may also bar our mind from questioning and correcting our principles and their application for reasons that may closely resemble the grounds that keep us committed to an external existential philosophy.

Not all reasons for our adherence to such principles are negative. They can be important for acting effectively and efficiently in our environment. Our ability to abstract our experiences into generalized principles permits us to categorize similar events by their essence. We can then apply that essence in the assessment or construction of other circumstances. This rationalizes our decision-making practice. When we face a task of assessing or developing circumstances, we can take guidance from our principles by comparing these circumstances with those that gave rise to our principles. Principles permit us to shorten considerations when we find sufficient congruence between the facts that caused them to be formed and facts we newly encounter. But we lose their benefits if we let them prevent us from considering disparate circumstances in addition to similarities. By holding on to principles without questioning them every time we apply them, we incur a risk of error. We become oblivious, automated executors of a program that may not apply. When we enter a decision-making process with a preconceived notion and we are set to sustain that notion, we reverse functions. Instead of having our categorizations serve us, we end up serving them. To optimize our response to a new situation, we cannot forget about the circumstances that formed a principle and blindly repeat only the result we derived based on some similarities. We cannot impose conclusions without scrutiny of the present facts and comparing them with facts that gave rise to our principles. We must consider situational information before we act or react. We have to inquire how the present circumstances differ from previously encountered circumstances and whether they might warrant a different response. We further have to ask whether they warrant a new principle, an exception to an existing principle, its modification, or its abandonment. Because such considerations yield superior responses, we must not permit our experiences to program us so thoroughly that our responses are automatic. We have to continue to learn and adapt. Our libraries of principles can rationalize considerations by presenting possible patterns of causalities that may amount to explanations as well as recommendations for our reactions. But they cannot supplant our considerations. Principles remain defined by the facts from which they were obtained until we ascertain that new facts follow the same principles.

The continued questioning of a principle may be relaxed if we have populated its pertinent range of applicability with sufficient examples to be confident that phenomena within that range will behave consistent with the principle. That is particularly so in the application of laws of nature. Yet, in many of our pursuits, we do not investigate our activities under these laws. The principles by which we act are fre-

quently of a purported higher, human-made nature aimed to help us cope with complex amalgamated functions of nature or of human design. We search for principles that help us act and react in our natural and created environment without having to investigate each situation presented anew. We are trying to reduce a multiplicity of substances and laws of nature that are at work in us, other humans, or other objects or events to manageable, combined essences and rules. Even if everything we and other individuals experience, are, and do can be investigated into its components, their properties, and their interaction, our mind does not regularly function on that level. For the largest expanse of our development, we did not have access to a full technical investigation. Many of the technical details relevant for our decision making remain beyond our grasp even as such investigations become increasingly possible and available. Further, the great number and interaction of details make us search for higher-level objects and events and for principles by which they act, including principles by which humans act to simplify our life. Our ability to effectively and efficiently pursue our needs necessitates that we build generalized schemes of recognition, action, and reaction at higher levels. On the other hand, the complexity and variety of objects and events and their interaction make a situational review before we can apply such higher-level laws particularly important. We still must understand the relevant underlying facts or types of facts that led to the laws we connect to them. We must inquire whether newly experienced circumstances are sufficiently similar to the originating facts to sanction the application of the law or whether they warrant a different reaction. This deliberation threatens to derail our application of higher-level laws and the benefits we hope to derive from them. Our potential lack of knowledge about participating factors, as well as difficulties in sorting out immaterial factors, in correlating remaining factors, and judging the results, threaten to overwhelm us. They burden our existence with insecurity. We may strive to decrease that insecurity by adhering to principles even at the risk of misjudging some circumstances. We may take refuge and satisfaction in the notion that the application of principles we have adopted yields overall acceptable results even if it fails us sometimes.

Because principles are often necessary or helpful for us to function in our world, it is to be expected that we would maintain a bias in favor of them. We are tempted to treat a new constellation of familiar components or a constellation in which we recognize familiar components according to established principles. Even if we understand that it is important to explore the congruity of circumstances we encounter with the circumstances that gave rise to a principle, our awareness of a

principle that is recalled by certain aspects precedes our exploration of relevant circumstances. The existence of a principle thus carries a procedural presumption of validity. It serves as a working model, a start of our consideration. Yet, more than that, our tendency to hold on to principles seems to be based on our experiences that have found them to be adequately applicable. If we have already committed substantial attention to forming and confirming a principle, it appears reasonable to give diminished continued consideration to whether our position is correct. Even if we are not closed to the eventuality of deviations, we are protective of the utility of such models until we become convinced differently. Unnecessary confusion of established principles might imperil our ability to act and react effectively and efficiently. A defensive bias in favor of our principles filters out facts that are irrelevant to a particular pursuit. It would be unreasonable to question what we have repeatedly determined to be true unless there is a compelling reason. Moreover, it often takes principled and steadfast approaches to pursue an objective successfully and to bring it to the desired conclusion. To persevere in our pursuits, we may have to have an attitude that is not easily dissuaded or discouraged. We cannot preoccupy ourselves with investigating whether a fact should alter our understanding unless its relevance has been demonstrated or we have reason to believe that it has potential relevance. Until we are convinced on the basis of our experiences that circumstances are material enough to warrant a review of our position, it seems prudent to follow proven notions.

To overcome an established principle, a potentially amending, modifying, or superseding experience may therefore have to pass a rational defense mechanism. This mechanism requires positive proof or initially at least a reasonable indication that an apparently appropriate established principle is in fact inapplicable. This defense mechanism tests whether an experience is sufficiently relevant to modify or to discard a previously derived principle or to establish a new principle that deserves exception status or a different categorization. It may require a significantly higher burden of proof for deviating occurrences than for those that are in conformance with established principles. In the extreme, we may refuse to grant credence to nonconforming evidence until it irrefutably confronts us. Such a defensive stance may prevent us from considering and responding to changed circumstances, or it may cause us to react insufficiently or with delay. We may then conclude that the same mechanisms of building and adhering to principles that might serve us well in some respects may also be hindrances for the fulfillment of our needs in other respects, particularly as we or our circumstances develop in more complex and accelerated ways.

The difficult task we face is to distinguish and weed out irrelevant circumstances so we can consider those that may warrant the revision of our views. Arguably, we have to review every new aspect because we do not know whether it might change our mind. However, we might be able to speed up our review. During times when we are less experienced, we may lack sufficient references to draw competent distinctions between relevant and irrelevant changes. Every object and every occurrence has the potential to form, change, or destroy a rule. In such periods, it is vital for us to consider each circumstance and to learn how it fits into the concerns of our happiness. Even principles established by others have not yet gained sufficient depth of repeated personal experience to be wholly corroborated. While instructions, incentives, and repercussions might at least initially keep us in compliance with such principles, we might be willing to explore a variety of experiences that test their foundations and their confines. Such tests could result in our abandonment or modification of these traditional principles and the construction of our own, deviating principles. We may further encounter spaces where we can or have to experiment to establish autonomous principles without previous prescriptions.

Still, as we become more experienced, we may settle down and cast our thoughts, emotions, and demeanor increasingly into a system guided by principles. Parallel with that hardening, and possibly due to our behavior as its consequence of it, unprecedented occurrences that could challenge our principles become less frequent. Even if constellations might change, they are increasingly composed of familiar constituents and patterns. Our rising knowledge of circumstances that relate to our principles may permit us to distinguish extraordinary circumstances. Then again, observing our principles repeatedly and even regularly confirmed may create a contravening potential of inflexibility. Although our evolution of principles may render us more adept in predicting the effect of situations, the resulting assuredness may cause complacency. As we increasingly encounter situations that are essentially familiar to us and we observe no material deviations, we will also increasingly form an opinion about the likelihood that material deviations will occur that would cause our principles to change. We will be progressively disposed to estimate the likelihood of change to be low or nonexistent. Even if we observe partial deviations, previously undisturbed experiences of conformance may impress us toward the belief that these are inconsequential. With this assumption, we may become less inclined to investigate circumstances and question our principles. We may ignore or discredit circumstances that should cause our views to change and instead act or react in keeping with our principles.

The risk that our decision-making process should grow inflexible seems to become even more pronounced as we connect our principles to form a systematic existential philosophy. In building this philosophy, we may strive to harmonize and complete our principles so that all our experiences fit into the resulting scheme. Rather than giving attention to unruly circumstances that our philosophy does not seem to cover competently, we may try to ignore or explain away such circumstances. We may defend parts of our philosophy that should be adjusted because we fear that its overarching configuration might be affected by concessions. If we subscribe to existential philosophies established by others, we would be even more exposed to the dangers of inflexibility because the origins of their principles are further removed from our insight. Moreover, the dependence of a multitude of individuals on philosophies to guide them, and that other individuals will act pursuant to them as well, renders modifying the doctrine of a philosophy a potentially momentous undertaking. Those who rely on a philosophy to give them guidance might weaken in their reliance if they witness its adjustment. They might wonder whether other aspects will be or need to be revised or retracted. Such questioning and independent thinking may create an environment where individuals are not unreservedly following a philosophy anymore. This affects the security of those who rely for the fulfillment of their needs on others to follow a certain philosophy. As a consequence, the modification of established philosophies to better reflect circumstances might be avoided in an effort to prevent the destabilization of entrenched reliance.

However, the modification of a philosophy might be necessary because it might not provide competent principles to deal with occurrences it purports to address. It might not have captured all relevant circumstances or formulated the best possible principles in response. Even if a philosophy would offer complete and correct interpretations up to its establishment, these may not apply to changed circumstances that had not occurred at the time of its establishment and were not foreseen. All existential philosophies are necessarily constructed from and based only on experiences and derived principles up to the time of their creation and take a point of view based on such experiences. Unless existential philosophies are successively adjusted to correct deficiencies or include changed circumstances, they are bound to remain or become misleading. The intransigence of a philosophy against better insight weakens it because it does not permit itself to intensify or maintain its competence. Even if it may temporarily succeed in defending and stabilizing its position, the failure to adjust may create an even bigger problem by fostering dissent and withdrawal of support.

Rigidly subscribing to a philosophy does not necessarily mean that we would not involve our mind in the endeavor to find our happiness. Still, even if we try to apply rational investigation to our issues, our doctrine institutes anchor points and barriers for our perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and behavior. These form strictures and impediments to finding and implementing what makes us happy. It is easier to detect such a state of captivity in others than in ourselves. Our distance in a different point of view empowers us to identify with relative ease how others are being influenced, dominated, and commanded by rigid guidelines that seem to impede their happiness. We can observe how they seem to be impaired, appear to be controlled, and seem to have lost their independence. We can examine expressions that reflect their skewed perceptions and interpretations. We can bear witness to their compulsions to adjust their circumstances to their fixed ideas of how the world is and how it should be according to their existential philosophy. Discussions with such individuals often take the form of mere declarations of position and rhetorical maneuvers. Their rigidity may cause them to reject a serious consideration of any other position or of the possibility that present circumstances might require the reconsideration of their principles. While we may criticize such obvious extremes, we may exhibit a similar rigidity and antagonism to growth beyond what we have come to accept as truthful under an existential philosophy. Some of these positions may exist because following them has proved to be necessary or useful for our happiness. But we may also discover that we take positions without exactly understanding why we take them or why they should rule superior to others. We often do not recall and do not critically investigate how our views came about. Even if we may be able to think of a rationale, that process may constitute an attempted justification after the fact of acceptance.

Piercing such a state of complacency and defensive inertia may be difficult enough with respect to philosophies we developed on our own. Yet our ability to accurately scrutinize principles theoretically or practically may be further impaired if we follow external philosophies. Our intensified adherence to them may build on deficits in our capacity, skill, or willingness to determine their truth or falsity. We may not conduct a theoretical verification. We may not follow arguments up to their premises to detect errors or deficiencies in those premises or arguments. Our failure to do this may be created or supported by a philosophy that wishes to gain our support. A philosophy may obstruct the tracing of its theoretical soundness by failing to lay open how it arrived at its conclusions. Its proponents may be motivated to manipulate or omit premises and arguments that they deem might not meet

with the approval of intended subjects. That might damage its influence on those who insist on tracing its premises and deductions. On the other hand, it may gain support overall by aligning those who are disposed or manipulated to not examine it sufficiently to comprehend its flaws. To compensate for and distract from deficiencies in its proof, a philosophy may emphasize premises, arguments, or conclusions that find broad acceptance. It may use popular views as premises, hypotheses, or to short-circuit or conceal an argument regardless of whether such views are structurally necessary for their philosophy. By championing agreeable positions, a philosophy may make its claims appear as a representation or logical inference of what intended subjects already assume to be correct. Our practical inability to determine the truth of a philosophy may largely flow from the esoteric and unrealized nature of that philosophy. To the extent its suggested structures and processes are matters that await future implementation, we may have difficulties to currently test its deductions and even some of its assumptions. Even where present empiric verification of aspects would be possible, a philosophy may encumber our practical verification by failing to set forth clear instructions. If a philosophy cannot assist us in certain areas, it may patently exclude them. However, such limitations may subject a philosophy to competition by philosophies that assert coverage of such extraneous areas and whose claim overlaps with areas claimed by the incomplete philosophy. This gives philosophies an incentive to pronounce a wider competence than they possess. To prevent us from recognizing that they cannot provide guidance in certain regions, they may leave their instructions in problematic areas general and open to interpretation. This renders them less effective in these areas but also less prone to opposition. Moreover, they may succeed in detracting us from their weaknesses by concentrating our attention on subject matters where they can demonstrate utility that serves our happiness.

Even where empiric and theoretical investigation would be possible for us, and even if a philosophy would not seek to manipulate us, we may rest on only partial verification and shy away from a closer examination. The comprehensive and often complex nature of a philosophy and requirements to invest substantial resources may be reasons enough for us not to take philosophies to task in an exhaustive manner. We may be willing to determine our allegiance to a philosophy on account of an abbreviated review. We may investigate some parts of it regarding their rational premises, arguments, and conclusions, and we may put some of its aspects to the test of whether they bring us happiness. We may take resulting evidence of compatibility as a reason to curb exploration instead of letting it encourage us to undertake a full

investigation. Particularly if we find a sufficient extent of agreeability regarding immediate concerns, we may be swayed to subscribe to its other parts without further reflection and verification and even without much care whether we agree otherwise. Regardless of whether we make the selection of the aspects we review or they are suggested, allowing circumstances or influences to outmaneuver our theoretical or practical verification renders us vulnerable to influences that counteract our happiness. Following unconfirmed philosophies exposes us to a risk that they or their promoters will place us in their service instead of serving our interests. Even if such abusive motives are absent, unconfirmed philosophies may lead us astray and impair or block our ascent to happiness or its preservation. Our failure to examine an existential philosophy for incompatibilities or our readiness to suffer them on account of its actual or its purported strengths may ensconce us in a system in which a significant part of our compliant activities is disconnected from our needs. It may also install in us a high threshold for reconsideration and reorientation. We might not revoke our allegiance until failure affects the topics that caused or supported our allegiance. However, at that time, the trust, protection, and support by us and others like us may have created facts that we cannot overcome. A system built in relation with a philosophy may be so firmly installed that we might not be able to change it or even escape it anymore.

Our ability to resist undue influences and to avoid corruptions of our needs necessitates that we understand critical methods and are able to bring these methods to bear and that we can exercise our independent judgment regarding the truth of premises. But we can only securely disabuse ourselves from misinvesting our confidence or from having our confidence misguided if we know what we want. We are then returned to the notion that the utility of existential philosophies in assisting us is contingent upon our independent awareness of what will serve our happiness. Without such an independent compass, their assistance cannot be effective or efficient and may be dangerous. Critical review methods provide significant instruments to disqualify disingenuous and obviously incompatible approaches and to prepare the field of possibilities for our selection. They might indicate areas where we have to gain additional experiences to make an informed judgment whether to adopt a suggested manner of pursuit. Yet, ultimately, we are reverted to our perceptive, rational, and emotional experiences for confirmation. Our ability to raise our happiness depends on our ability to evaluate experiences correctly and to competently conduct explorations in areas where we are lacking experience. The next chapter addresses difficulties we face in these independent undertakings.