CHAPTER 6
EXPERIENCES AND INFLUENCES

If we knew nothing about what makes us happy, we could still call on basic facilities to help us in determining a fundamental concept of our happiness. The most direct facilities would be our senses and their immediate emotional effects. They would assist us in establishing a basic framework of our happiness by indicating what feels painful and what feels pleasurable. Our facilities are further amplified by our capacities to analyze, synthesize, memorize, project, and compare facts we connect with these emotional events. We can apply these mental facilities to formulate not solely our immediate responses to pain and pleasure. We can also use them to influence our future, to evade or prevent pain and to obtain pleasure. When we involve these forward-looking abilities, we determine the happiness or unhappiness of circumstances at a distance instead of relying on our impressions at the time of their occurrence. The detection of whether a prospective cause serves or hinders a need does not arise through our senses at the time. It is a result of our mental processing of past sensory information, of experiences.

When we introduce our experiences into determining whether a prospective course of action will cause pain or pleasure, the relationship between cause and effect in a predicted occurrence is a construct of our imagination. We will not know whether our predictions of pain or pleasure and our reactions are correct until and unless the anticipated result occurs, fails, or at least begins to occur or fail. We may be able to predict a result with reasonable certainty a few steps before we stand to incur pain or pleasure if we possess a sufficient understanding of the factual setting and involved causalities. Yet, if we lack guiding experiences, face new ingredients or constellations, or are subjected to interference by other powers and actors, we may not be able to determine future causalities with adequate reliability. Known and unknown, foreseeable and unforeseeable causalities may overlap and intersect. We may not know of actual or potential events or may not sufficiently understand them. We may not possess enough experience to predict particular outcomes reliably or even with a reasonable margin of error. The correlations may be so complex or foreign that we cannot forecast them or even decipher them after they occur. We may have to close such deficiencies by making assumptions, drawing parallels, relying on conjecture, and allowing for possibilities. This invites the risk of misinterpretation, omission, error, and ensuing detriment or failure into our pursuits. These threats likely prompt us to widen our experiential horizon so we become better equipped in our forecasts.

We may attempt to accomplish this widening by obtaining information about the external sensory impressions of other individuals or of machines with sensory capabilities. In addition to including such information from sources beyond our own, we may incorporate the rational and emotional processing of this information by such sources, including internal sensory phenomena, into our mental processes. As we combine these sources with our facilities of judging what makes us happy, we move away from the direct proof of our senses and our processing of their signals. We progressively rely on the experiences and judgments of other sources for a determination of what does and does not benefit our happiness. This reliance is problematic even if it only pertains to communications of external sensory impressions. Our removal from the immediacy of these impressions exposes us to an elevated risk of misconceptions. The external sensory information we obtain from other sources may have been captured, contained, translated, reproduced, transmitted, or received in ways that do not allow us full access to the entirety of relevant information that could have been observed. Its collection may have taken place at locations, at times, or under circumstances that do not permit a complete account of what happened. Beyond that, the information we receive may not be a true reiteration of the original external sensory impression. The medium or technique of recordation, storage, or relay of such information may filter, modify, exclude, or enhance aspects of available information. Such alterations may be unavoidable in consequence of the technical limitations of a medium or the ways by which information is located, captured, translated, contained, reproduced, transmitted, or received.

Such inadequacies of external sensory information related from other sources may afflict humans and machines. However, human involvement provides an additional factor of unreliability and intentional or unintentional manipulation. The information would inescapably be processed not only by the sensory but also by the rational and emotional apparatus of the perceiving and relaying individuals. Although a certain treatment would happen as well in the acquisition and subsequent processing of information by machines, their construction may exclude or limit rational and emotional processing. Further, individual variations in human perception and in other mental processing appear more difficult to reveal and assess. We may encounter not only diversity in the ability but also in the willingness to register or to relay sensory information. The acquisition, storage, and communication of external sensory information may be influenced by the interpretation of its context. That interpretation may be subject to previous experiences, the mental attributes, and the current attitude of the observer. The

influence of such processing may be difficult or impossible to contain. The person obtaining a sensory impression may try to extract rational and emotional responses before passing on sensory information. Then again, such a person may give in to or embrace rational and emotional treatment and may try to influence others to whom external sensory information is passed. There may be an agenda to manipulate others under the use of selected or skewed external sensory information. Information may even be produced for purposes of communication and for the manipulatory effect it may have. Such tendencies may be concealed by the use of information gathering and communication technologies, methods, personnel, or institutions that purportedly provide assurances of authenticity but are in fact used for ulterior purposes.

The perils of intentional and unintentional falsification by humans and by limitations of communication technology are often multiplied as we become more removed from witnessing objects or events. We may rely on sources that in turn receive their sensory information from other sources. Each station through which information passes on its way to us may be subject to the same or to other shortcomings that may compound until the information reaches us. If we wanted to prevent these contaminations, we would have to investigate and confirm all external sensory information on which we rely. This proving process would ideally require that we observe the original circumstances. We might also be satisfied with duplicating events or gaining access to recordings that contain the relevant content in which we are interested in relative fidelity. Yet such access is often not possible or only possible in part. Beyond that, even if all information were directly available to us, we may not possess the individual capacity or inclination to address all of it. Undertaking the necessary inquiries to prove the accuracy of sensory information may require skills and resources that we are not able or willing to invest. Further, we may not be able or willing to shoulder additional inquiries regarding occurrences whose impression might be necessary to provide a complete picture of a phenomenon. To overcome these impediments, we may look for assistance. We might defer to sources that can find, collect, ensure the completeness, reduce the complexity, derive, and summarize information. We might also look for agents that can explain the significance of external sensory information on our behalf. The risks involved in the conveyance of external sensory information become compounded if we additionally place reliance in processing of external sensory information by other sources that exceeds conveyance. Any such processing may exacerbate the problems already involved in its conveyance. It removes us from source materials even more. We now allow other persons or machines

to evaluate facts they observed or relay and to present us with conclusions with regard to their meaning. Sources that engage in such a processing may not fully reveal their sensory basis or the processing from which they derive presented results. Interpretive processing may depend on the interaction of a wide variety of preexisting and accompanying factors. Because we now rely on an interpreter's judgment, we become exposed to all factors that facilitate and influence such judgment or its pretense. This expansion infuses an additional dimension of subjectivity into a process in which we invest hopes of objectivity.

If we lack the means or the willingness to verify informational sourcing and processing, we incur a risk that we may not have accurate and complete information. This risk poses a principal issue for the planning and implementing of our pursuits. We may try to avoid it by operating only on the basis of our direct sourcing of information and our mental processing. But our needs and our existence in a connected environment may not make such behavior a viable choice. Moreover, the problem by far exceeds immediate issues of information processing. Our presence and pursuits in an interdependent setting necessarily expose us to the conduct of others as receptors and providers of information and to resulting circumstances. It is often not feasible that we verify information and how it is used in areas that affect us. Our shared environment and our interactive pursuits frequently make it necessary that we subject ourselves to or that we engage in activities with unverified sources, if not directly then indirectly in terms of the circumstances they produce. The ways in which we acquire or are subjected to information and to its results join with the conditions under which we acquire resources or are subjected to circumstances that are not of an informational quality. But many of these are likely to be affected by information. We will want to know information about them and their sourcing that we deem relevant to our dealings with them.

Within the parameters of human interaction, we have to decide whether we need to, want to, or can afford to resort to our own faculties, assistance from others, impositions on others, and how we might react to similar considerations and activities by others. Both our withdrawal from interaction and our engagement carry potential risks and limitations. Our refusal to incorporate informational or any other assistance leaves us with consideration that is constricted to our perceptions, our knowledge, our imagination, and our capabilities. We may have reason to resort to such practices. We may in particular look for a removal from adverse encounters with others. But our restriction to self-sufficiency may hinder or prevent successful or at least optimized pursuits. More than that, it may expose us to conflict with others and

to losing such conflicts based on lacking socialization. Relying on ourselves may then be impossible, too cumbersome, or too risky or costly. On the other hand, reliance on information and other assistance from other sources or on their noninterference exposes us to their incompetence, negligence, and willful misconduct. Apart from becoming subject to the qualifications and the circumstances of others, participants in interactions with us engage in these with motivations of their own pursuit of happiness. We cannot trust that they have our interests in mind, much less that they solely have these in mind. All activities by other individuals, including all their communications and all purported undertakings on our behalf or with regard to us, are performed in the pursuit of their happiness. The attitude of others toward our objectives depends on whether and how much fulfillment of our needs is necessary, neutral, or adverse to their interests. The promotion of our happiness is coincidental to its consideration as a potential means in serving their benefit. This may make it hard to obtain or to be certain that we obtain information or other deportment from other individuals that benefits us or is even capable of improving or maximizing our happiness. Together with the potential that others might not be capable of generating results we require or might be otherwise precluded from producing them, our uncertainty about the motivations of others places an extensive burden on us. We must assess the extent to which a course suggested or taken by others is useful, neutral, or harmful to the fulfillment of our needs. We cannot unconditionally trust others.

Arguably, we suffer comparatively few problems confirming the adequacy of goods and services we acquire if they are standardized or regularly offered by particular purveyors. We can contract for a particular quality and quantity of a product or these might be imposed by law and even supervision. We and legal authorities might possess legal or legally authorized recourse if the product does not meet the applicable legal standards. Moreover, purveyors of products may guarantee the attributes of products they offer for fear of losing customers. This may give us reason to presume that products relevant for our pursuits comply to certain standards. Similar conditions may prevail regarding effects of circumstances that reside within the responsibility of others for other reasons. We may have the right to insist that these circumstances do not affect us or do affect us in certain ways and may have legal or legally authorized recourse if that does not occur. The accuracy and completeness of information might be established by these or similar criteria as well. These assurances gain importance the less we are able or willing to undertake external sensory or interpretive activities and instead rely on the capacity and motivation of others.

However, many concerns of our life are not organized according to rules of legal responsibility or guaranties. There may be more informal ethical tenets under which individuals are held or hold themselves to criteria of conduct. These may be partly effective to warrant an expectation regarding their compliance with certain standards. But such rules may contain substantial latitude and uncertainty and may weaken in spite of rising contact and interdependence because of the great scope and variety of interaction. Information flows appear to be particularly affected by a lack of reliability. As information we receive grows in variety, scope, and complexity and is easily generated, modified, and proliferated by an increasing number of sources, and because it is often provided without any assurances of reliability, we may have difficulties or may fail to establish its credibility. We may be subjected to a torrent of information in which external sensory information and interpretations by multiple and concealed sources and intermediaries may be amalgamated. This leaves us increasingly at a loss in confirming compliance with standards of truthfulness. Our inability may have us resign because we may not see how we can resolve it. Even where a resolution seems possible, we may deem ourselves unable or unwilling to invest the resources that are necessary to detect informational deficits and to cure them. This may keep us from producing an informed judgment regarding our pursuits. Besides specific clarity, we may lack more general insight about the opportunities and risks our surroundings contain. We may have an incomplete and incorrect understanding of reality. Even if we undertake a serious effort to verify facts, we may not make large gains against the mass of unverified information. To still meet, improve, and maximize the fulfillment of our needs, we may have to incur some risk that the information or demeanor we incorporate into our pursuits might turn out to be different. Not relying on any information and underlying circumstances may expose us to unwarranted anxiety and indecision. Chances to use opportunities or address threats may pass us by if we wait for verification of all relevant facts. We must rely on information about the behavior of others and the effects of their deportment in many respects with limited or no recourse if we want to maintain, develop, or maximize our happiness.

Notwithstanding, in view of the risks of relying on informational and other conduct, we may attempt to ascertain the trustworthiness of our circumstances. We may try to keep some level of rational control before and while we rely in our undertakings on positive, neutral, or negative circumstances. We may try to use our autonomous senses and considerations and a maximum of otherwise available information to determine the merit of information and our expectations regarding

other conduct. In areas where we must rely on the assistance or noninterference by others or might derive a benefit from such reliance, we may require proof of competence and intent. We may require operational assurances that the acquisition and the processing of the information we seek meet certain standards and that our own impressions are accurate. We may want to possess unmitigated access to the activities and considerations of involved parties. We may require that they lay their sources open and give us the ability to trace them and the process in which the resulting information is formed. We may want to know at what junctures and how external sensory information was obtained and processed or interpreted. We may require that our sources declare the deficiencies or limitations of their activities or results. To assure the full use of their capacities in the gathering and consideration of information, we may demand that sources must be motivated to serve us or that their motivations are sufficiently analogous. Where this is not the case, our verification procedures might have to be more stringent. We might resort to continual testing or other information collection to justify our continued reliance. But this collateral information forms an additional layer of information. Because performance verification may exceed our capabilities or inclinations, we may rely on others to perform such functions. That reliance regarding external sensory and interpretive information remains subject to similar potential problems and control requirements as the informational aspects it is to verify. We may have to engage agents to monitor other levels of agents. Similar structures may be required to obtain other assistance or to react to adverse circumstances. Where possible, we may strive to keep direct control over sources of information and other assistance. Only, the burdens of establishing their compliance with our standards may be so involved that they may interfere with our pursuits.

Such complications are a large reason we rely on legal or ethical enforcement options in many relationships that are of sufficient importance for us to establish and maintain high degrees of assurance. But there may be a number of valid reasons why we may not rest upon such assurances and seek verification. Much damaging behavior may not be covered by legal or ethical commandments, or these might not be accepted. If there are applicable legal restrictions, we might have to confirm that the party on which we legally rely is capable of carrying the burdens of noncompliance. That in itself may be a reason to undertake reliability investigations. Further, there may be settings where legally bound parties cannot be sufficiently relied upon or compelled to abstain from violations of their obligations or to answer and compensate for breaches of their obligations. Even if we could receive ad-

equate compensation in an event of breach, we may wish to avoid the burdens of legal enforcement proceedings. Similar and possibly even more compelling considerations may be appropriate for enforcement proceedings under ethical rules. Moreover, we may seek relationships that exceed what can be compelled under legal or ethical impositions. We may strive for a quality and quantity of resources, the stability and duration of their provision, or the development of a relationship that can only grow from high levels of dedication. While much of this dedication may depend on how we conduct ourselves, we may also look for signs that our investment into such a relationship is warranted.

The inquisitiveness of parties may be limited if they do not consider the expected benefits or the potential risk or damage from a relationship to be worth inquiry efforts beyond a certain level. But there may be many circumstances where the curiosity of parties is limited by other parties' resistance to verification. Such attitudes may be particularly widespread in collateral, coincidental, or casual interactions. Deeper inquiries or demands for information are likely to be more tolerated in relationships where one or both sides have substantial exposure to harm. Yet, even under such conditions, there may be limits to the accommodation of curiosity. Parties subjected to an inquiry may resent intrusions into what they regard to be their affairs, particularly if inquiries occur before a relationship is entered. They may interpret certain levels of inquiries as unwarranted imputations of wrongdoing or at least undeserved demonstrations of distrust. The levels at which offense is taken may vary broadly depending on the form and the substance of inquiry, the subject matter of the parties' relationship, their individual history and preceding relationship, their relative standing, and the general attitude of parties toward themselves and their environment. Further, parties subject to inquiries may determine that the potential benefit from a relationship does not warrant the disclosure or intrusion. They may wish to protect sources or trade secrets or limit disruption. They may be concerned about unfavorable revelations pertinent to the interests of an investigating party that may dissuade that party from acting in their interest. They may try to avoid possible efforts they might otherwise have to undertake to obtain approbation or to accommodate demands for remediation. They may fear the disclosure of unfavorable information that does not pertain to the rightful concerns of a requesting party or might also pertain to the concerns of other parties and whose dissemination might expose them to damage. They might not have an interest to dissipate concerns of the inquiring party because such concerns might benefit them. The extensive range of possible justified or unjustified reasons for disclosing or withhold-

ing information may render arriving at satisfying arrangements difficult. Unwarranted demands as well as unwarranted defensiveness may stand in the way of harmony. In most circumstances of human interaction, conventions have grown and may develop that define generally accepted levels and methods of verification. But tension may prevail in remaining deviations from common settings or in situations where no general or more particularized usages have been established.

The necessity for verification efforts may diminish over time as the relationship among parties is carried on in a satisfactory manner. Even if we initially employ stringent inquiries whether our sources are reliable, a record of consistent performance may build rational trust. Such a record may prompt us to eventually dispense with most or all requirements of rational verification. Still, it may often not be possible or desirable to build long-term relationships that allow us to reduce or relinquish verification. The parties may not wish to be involved in potential adversities arising from verification. Inquiring parties may not want to become exposed to disappointment or employ protracted verification campaigns before they can trust another party. Nor may their counterparts tolerate to be placed on probation for all this time. Additionally, the increasing ability or need to select interactions in a broad variety of matters with a broad variety of parties may cause us to demand more readily available indications that other parties or that circumstances connected to them perform to our requirements. We may refer to auxiliary indications in supplementation of legal security and guaranties. We may require professional qualifications, peer approval, and a record of activities and accomplishments in other relationships. We may refer to social standing, reputation, and other positions of accountability. We may require examinations, certifications, a lack of a negative record, positive references, or other convincing evidence that others depend in their pursuits on satisfying us. Alone or in combination, such indications may give us sufficient reasons to extend trust.

We might combine these and other rational criteria to establish or reinforce our assessment of trustworthiness. Yet rational considerations of trust or proof often might not be able to confer sufficient indications of reliability. We may have to decide based on incomplete or unclear rational indications. We may also look for levels or categories of means or for manners of provision that exceed rational considerations and invoke emotional aspects. To assist us in such situations, we may supplement or replace rational criteria with emotional criteria of assessing trustworthiness. Even if rational factors re available to us in sufficient scope and clarity, we may be disposed to add emotional considerations. Emotional criteria can wield momentous influence in our

decisions to trust others or their products. They may be so strong in some contexts that they override rational considerations. Frequently, we are predisposed or conditioned to trust or distrust particular influences based on nonrational criteria. Depending on the relative weight of these influences among one another and in relation to rational considerations, we may ascribe varying degrees of trustworthiness to different sources. The most fundamental source for the establishment of emotional trust appears to lie in the relationship with individuals who care for us during our upbringing. At a young age, we depend on their love, support, protection, direction, teaching, and approval. We have an instinctive existential emotional bond with them. We begin our relationship with these individuals without skepticism and reserve. We presume that they are knowledgeable and proficient, will promote and protect us, and have our best interests in mind. To some degree, we extend this emotional confidence to other family members. Our tribal instinct and the particular empathy for members of our family and our need to secure the survival and wellbeing of our kind through them cause us to believe in reciprocity. We presume special, mutual bonds among individuals we regard as family that induce them and us to act in the interest of one another. If this presumption of trusting and being trusted is disappointed, we are incredulous and suffer deep-seated emotional pain. A relationship of trust with our family appears to constitute a basic wish whose satisfaction or dissatisfaction lingers to bear heavily on our happiness. We continue to carry an emotionally motivated focus with us of what the relationship with members of our family was, is, could have been, should be or should have been, or what it should or could be in the future. The strength and persistence of our desire of trust among family members may lead us to suspect that it has a genetic basis over which we have no or only limited control. This conclusion is supported by observations of similar practices of giving and seeking protection and support among related individuals in other species that are mainly or solely guided by genetic programming.

We may expand the scope of emotional relationships of trust in the context of love relationships, friendships, relations with mentors, teachers, or idols. Beyond that, we may invest emotional trust into relationships with other individuals whom we recognize to be similar to us, individuals who share objectives, experiences, attributes, or certain aspects of their environment with us. We may project part of us onto them and conclude that their partial congruence should give rise to at least some of the confidence we customarily reserve for ourselves. Our identification with such persons leads us to assume that they act with similar motivations and performance standards and that they act in

our interest because we assume that they identify with us as well. We may have even higher expectations regarding persons who appear to have achieved a position to which we aspire. We may infer additional emotional bonds with such persons because of their purported leadership. Similarities may then cause us to transfer the devotion we originally reserve for our family. We may further invest trust in individuals who share characteristics with other individuals we trust. Finally, we may instinctively invest trust into a variety of social, economic, religious, political, and military associations that remind us of a family.

Frequently, the emotional quality of a relationship of trust may be fused with a rational basis into a hybrid. The advance of emotional trust may be affirmed by rational circumstances. Conversely, relationships that are at first rationally based may convert into a state where trust becomes in parts or entirely emotionally motivated. We may interpret the rational basis for trust and the actual or potential benefit it confers onto us as an invitation by our benefactor to engage in emotional mutuality. We may infer that motivations by other individuals to assist in the satisfaction of our needs are attributable to their need to protect and support us. Accordingly, we may read motivations into the participation by others in rational transactions that appear to warrant a response of emotional trust on our part. Such inferences may be in error. Yet the apparent instinct in humans to grant and seek protection and support among one another favors the development of emotional motivations from rational relations of reciprocity. These motivations come naturally to us and seem to be unavoidable because they precede rational causes for cooperation. An emotional motivation may still be instrumental to initiate or to strengthen a cooperative relationship that is founded on rational criteria. A climate of emotional trust may be helpful or even required to uphold or develop such a relationship to full fruition. We may therefore unintentionally or intentionally signal our willingness to extend emotional bonds to parties who are or might be cooperating with us in a rational context. Even if we do not actively encourage emotional reciprocity, we may not foreclose it. Because rational foundations for trust are often not absolutely secure or able to guarantee performance, emotional trust can present a welcome binding agent. Not extending or responding to emotional trust might signal possible estrangement and disloyalty, especially if other participants indicate that they wish to engage in a relationship of emotional trust. It may cast doubt on the effectiveness and reliability of a rational cooperative commitment. It may give rise to suspicion that rational assumptions in favor of extending trust may not be warranted. The inconsistency implies a cause for the limitation or cessation of trust.

The development of emotional trust can also produce negative consequences. Once we develop emotional trust, our emotional bonds may become so entrenched in our mind that we may have trouble relating rational proof of untrustworthiness and experiences of unhappiness to unjustified emotional trust as their cause. Past, present, or expected satisfaction may motivate us to follow the influence of persons and groups we trust without any or with reduced indications of trustworthiness or in spite of positive indications that counterparties are incompetent or do not have our interests in mind. We may only react to the betrayal of our trust if rational indications of untrustworthiness translate into emotional responses in us that are so severe that they fundamentally weaken or break our emotional attachment.

Because emotional trust carries a sizeable risk of blindsiding us, founding our determination of what will make us happy on emotional trust may not be the best strategy. Yet large portions of our concept of happiness may be influenced by relationships of emotional trust. That influence is usually most invasive during our childhood. We build our autonomous capabilities generally by learning from sources we trust. During this process, we brace our dearth of experience and decisional aptitude by relying on sources of emotional trust. Ideally, their influence should in time empower us to discover our needs and define our wishes, to generate and strengthen mechanisms of rational trust, and to render competent independent decisions about our happiness. At the end of our development, we should be self-governing. Still, chances are that, when our childhood ends, many of us have not learned the skills to competently investigate our needs and how to pursue them best. Few of our early influences may teach us to be independent decision makers. While some may seek to condition us to assure our happiness, others might have more sinister objectives. Either way, many appear to be set on utilizing our unconditional trust to bias us toward adopting certain patterns of thought, emotion, and deportment. Such conditioning may disable us or leave us unprepared at the end of our upbringing to render our own deliberate choices regarding our happiness. But our needs and the wishes they ignite may not conform to the patterns of pursuit we have been taught. Thus, we may enter a period of rebellion toward the end of our childhood. We may try to find independence from taking someone else's word or command. We may test and endeavor to overcome unwarranted trust and to become self-initiated and self-considered. We may have tried to assert our self before. However, our impending adulthood is a time when this becomes critical because we have developed sufficiently in many respects to exercise autonomy and soon might be left to fend for ourselves. We are

crossing a threshold where we can chart the course for fundamental aspects of our existence for the first time. We expect and often are expected to take responsibility for ourselves. We may want to or have to determine how to support ourselves, how to behave, how and where to live, whom to love, whether to enter into commitments, and how to address such commitments. Previously, these decisions were made or prescribed by others or were not relevant. Now, suddenly, we are or desire to be in charge. We work on issues and make choices we have never faced before that may carry implications for large areas and long stretches of our existence. In exercising or struggling to establish our freedom, we might not know what to keep and what to discard.

Coming of age poses a complex problem for us to which neither continuing prior patterns nor totally breaking with them may be an adequate answer. The problem and its solution may be more complex. Our determination to reject prior influences may be so strong that we select opposites. These may not be in our interest. Automatic opposition to former guidance does not show independence. It demonstrates continued direction even in its reversal. Further, by rejecting prior influences, we may open ourselves to new influences, merely replacing one external authority with the domination by another. We might also reject both old and new influences in an effort to develop or defend our autonomy. In an attempt to gain distance from influences and develop our own person, we may discard beneficial together with detrimental aspects. We may not be able yet to fill that void. Venturing out in rejection of all influences is near impossible because we would have to generate all principles that guide our actions. For many of us, undertakings to break free from influences are therefore ineffective and short-lived. Our lacking experience, resources, deliberation, and planning renders it often problematic to gain and maintain independence. Our mind contrasts this state with the relative safety of a familiar environment of dependence. Even if we dislike such an environment because it forecloses the potential that independence appears to hold, its comparative security may stay appealing. Societal pressures may place the powerful lure of relatively safe satisfaction of needs upon compliance and the threat of a more difficult existence upon noncompliance before us. If we have not been provided with enough encouragement, respect, and freedom to become a self-considered person and to value our independence over comforts, our adherence or return to conformance is probable. We would have problems overcoming the inhibitions and influences of our ingrained dependences and to suddenly be self-actuated and emancipated upon coming of age. Once we are retained in dependences and settle in, we are unlikely to overcome them later.

Even with the best education and attempts to facilitate our development into self-considered persons, there is a novelty to our independence. It still gives rise to a foray into the unknown. With luck, the foresight of our environment and care on our part, we may ease into new functions and succeed keeping painful learning experiences to a minimum. However, in many situations, we will be ill prepared and be prevented from taking on our new position of independence with certainty. Committing and learning from mistakes may be an unavoidable process at that stage. That we might not be ready to generate fully reflected autonomous decisions does not acquit us. Eventually, we will have to make up our mind. Not having a plan, not selecting a career, not picking a partner, not choosing a purposeful existence, not knowing what we want may be regarded as a defect by us and by our social surroundings. We perceive pressure to do something or run the risk of being excluded, marginalized, or dominated. We also understand that, if we fail to make decisions and act upon them, our situation may advance to where our selections may become progressively more limited or may run out. We loathe the thought that we might remain or again become dependent or that we might lose our freedom to control or at least impact our happiness. These prospects prompt us to decide and follow our decisions at the risk of being wrong rather than remaining uncommitted. When we inquire into the underlying reasons, we may not find much depth of guiding contemplation. Some determinations may be superficial and may seem to be the product of coincidence and whim. We may revoke them swiftly if they do not succeed. But some decisions appear to have deeper motivations. They elicit strong, continuing hopes and convictions. If we cannot trace these focal points to a self-considered process, they can only result from our innate genetic mental dispositions or influences exerted by external sources.

When we try to trace our decisions to their motivations, we often encounter unconsidered impulses that have enigmatic origins. We appear to be particularly susceptible to such impulses with regard to life-altering and existential topics. The smaller an issue is, the more the solution seems to lend itself to logic and consideration of the facts. When we ponder larger, more complex issues regarding our existence, our ability to exercise rational judgment appears to weaken. Yet, upon closer review, this occurrence does not seem to depend on the size of a challenge alone. Even large technical challenges may not derail our rational decision-making and proceeding. Rather, the problem seems to be connected to the circumstance that we make fundamental decisions with regard to our needs, our happiness. Here, related impulses tend to circumvent our rational facilities, critical thinking, and emo-

tional reservations. This positions us at partial odds with our impulses. We are not in charge of them. Instead, they seem to control us. We may deem that being at their mercy may not be in our interest. We may reason that being thoughtful and deliberate, placing our rational mind in control may prevent us from following damaging impulses. In an attempt to gain control of our impulses, we make an effort to learn, we try to better our odds at making decisions that are suitable for us.

Unsure of ourselves, we may seek the advice of others. Some of those sources may be the same as in our childhood, some may be new. Some advice may be instructive. Other individuals may possess sufficient distance to see circumstances more clearly that our proximity to ourselves prevents us from distinguishing. They may help us by investigating for us or with us. They may provide us with the tools to examine ourselves, including our needs and potential courses of action related to these. On the other hand, following answers offered by others puts us at risk of making choices that reflect their ideas of happiness, not our own. No matter how much another person may try to identify with us and to comprehend us, that identification and understanding has to remain limited. The person providing advice remains separate. This separateness is the source of potential bias. It poses a viewpoint that is not ours. We receive suggestions of what to do if we were more like the advising person, if that person were more like us, or a combination of both. Even at its best, external guidance involves an at least partial superimposition among individuals and therefore has to result in at least partial inaccuracy. But opening ourselves to external guidance also exposes us to more insidious risks. It gives others the opportunity to use us for their purposes. This influence may evolve beyond a state of mind where we follow the advice of others. It may reach a level where we allow someone to govern our personality at least in parts. With such control, it may take little effort to make premises, thought processes, and actions seem legitimate that we otherwise would reject. Worse yet, once a manipulation takes hold, the subjected person becomes a superficially autonomous participant in pursuing the installed objectives. Such a person becomes a seemingly self-directed tool that in fact stands in the service of foreign needs, wishes, and pursuits.

One might assume that this type of brainwashing is reserved to unique constellations in which individuals whose mental immune system has been severely weakened are victimized. However, many of us are dangerously disposed to having our personality deeply affected by outside influences. We tend to follow certain individuals and groups we trust rather uncritically with answers to fundamental questions of our existence. We habitually trust assertions and explanations by pre-

sumed experts and authorities to tell us where we come from, why we are here, what we should be doing, and where we should be going. We accept their guidance on various levels of abstraction from the general parameters of our existence and our environment, over specifics of our life, down to our thoughts and emotions. We allow them to direct our ethics and our behavior, the formulation of our objectives and means. Once we acknowledge their authority, we rarely ask for proof or explanations before we go along and execute their instructions. We tend to trust their opinion and to not reserve judgment in matters that we concede to be under their authority even if they directly concern our happiness. If this trust in authority is misplaced, unfortunate and tragic consequences may occur. Our uncritical acceptance may induce us to overlook indications of incompetence, inapplicability, error, obfuscation, deception, and abuse. We may unwittingly follow foreign purposes that are not in our interest or at least not in our best interest.

To ascertain whether a particular piece of guidance is suitable for us, we would have to understand its effects on our needs. External guidance is only secure if we have the capacity of subjecting it to our critical assessment. Without such capacity, the risk is high that we will be influenced by guidance that does not match our requirements. We may use guidance to assist us in the process of exploring and identifying the objectives, means, and strategies that make us happy, happier, or happiest. Still, the risk of intentional and unintentional undue influence by these sources may render their application even for exploratory purposes misleading and possibly dangerous. Following external suggestions to direct our endeavors might embroil us in so many misdirected trials to ascertain worthwhile pursuits that the fulfillment of our needs may severely suffer. Further, we may be led into directions or required to make investments from which we cannot or can solely retreat under significant cost. This places us into a difficult situation. We have to find a way for validating the applicability of external guidance before exposing ourselves to it. If we cannot trust external direction to establish our needs and wishes, we may try to take a more direct, empiric approach that cannot be falsified. We may try to witness the application of external guidance to other individuals who are sufficiently similar to us to warrant a presumption of transferability. Better yet, rather than listening to what persons say and have others do, better than having us and others become test subjects for their ideas, we may try to find proof that their ideas are applicable from what they do to find happiness. We may be willing to adopt such ideas if there is sufficient similarity between us and them. The next chapter addresses whether such practical examples can provide competent guidance.