

CHAPTER 36

LOST AND FOUND

When we think about the world and our place in it, we may at times struggle for answers. We may take refuge in the technical features of our existence and the fact that we have development capacity. Science provides us with tools that allow us to access objective circumstances. Still, although we may possess confidence that we can increase our insight regarding ourselves and our environment, some very fundamental questions seem to be far removed from our current understanding. Where do we come from? How did we come to be? Did we develop or were we created? What caused us to develop or created us and why? We could present a similar line of questions regarding such a cause or causes. Our ultimate questions are how everything came to be, why it is as it is, where it is moving, and what our situation is in this scheme. Without answers to these questions, we may feel lost. We may be able to discern sequences from which we draw inferences and at least narrow possible explanations. We can hope that we will one day find out more about the modalities and reasons of our existence and existence in general. Yet, until that time, we are reduced to making the best of our existence without a full understanding of what we and our world are about. Notwithstanding such a deficiency, our chances to succeed appear to be promising. We can rely on our intelligence, one another, and environmental tools to make a relatively happy life for ourselves. For the time being, answers to fundamental questions do not seem to be necessary to safeguard our survival and thriving in most of the pertinent concerns. They only appear to be of practical relevance regarding individual and general barriers. But these weigh heavily on us. The fundamental character of the limitations in our capacities to form the world to our liking causes us to suspect that the solution to overcoming them might be hidden in the answers to unresolved fundamental questions about our existence and the existence of our world.

If everything were as we desire, our questions of how these arrangements came to be and why we should so thoroughly benefit from them might be even stronger. We would ask how we should form and use our wishes to forestall us from defeating ourselves. To the extent our needs can find satisfaction, we might ask such questions already. However, the fact that we encounter individual and general obstacles and impossibilities and that some of our most pressing wishes remain unfulfilled appears to indicate that we are not at the center of the arrangements we witness. It leaves room for explanations that build on coincidence or necessity. We face the possibility that human existence

is unintended and meaningless in a larger context or that we are only temporary factors in a programmed, logical progression. Both of these prospects are contrary to our needs. We want to have lasting purpose. The purpose we desire is fundamentally tied to needs of service to our fellow humans and of earning appreciation by other humans. But we seem to want to go further and presume that humanity has a purpose that justifies its survival and thriving. We also want to be assured that we possess the power to shape our fate. We want to become able to do what we desire so we can secure our individual and collective survival and humanity's imputed purpose. These issues combine with more instantaneous barriers to form a momentous complex of concern.

Because we hope to find solutions to our concerns in answers to the fundamental questions we ask, these questions seem to pertain to essential issues of our happiness. Not being able to answer these questions with certainty places us into a distressing state of mind that continuously threatens to overshadow and suffocate our happiness. In a desperate attempt to fend off or at least to contain this threat, many of us will speculate concerning answers to humanity's fundamental questions. The prospect of total freedom to shape the fate of humanity and its power to transform its environment might frighten us because such powers might conflict with sources and agendas for human existence about which we speculate. We might therefore endeavor to reconcile our desires for human self-determination and purpose with the possibility of a higher plan. We may claim that all aspects of human existence, including its failings, are part of that plan. We may deem it necessary that humans follow the plan if they are to succeed and that its purpose includes and possibly equals human purpose. We may accept that humans are or can be active ingredients in the implementation of the plan. We may trust that challenges are presented to aid individual and collective human development. Such speculations may invoke the idea of a programmed character of our existence. But they may keep a semblance of self-determination by recognizing an element of human freedom to serve or deny serving such a plan. We may also assert that human impossibilities become irrelevant or will be conquered under transmutations of existence we cannot currently fathom that will have us approximate or merge with the cause of our existence. We may discredit our current existence as a transitory separation. While we might not offer convincing answers to our fundamental questions, we might assert that humans can or will receive knowledge of them. Under such impressions, we may either claim to have found what we were looking for and to wish for nothing else or we may declare that we know how continuing deficiencies can be mended or that they will be mended.

When individuals engaging in such speculations are asked how they know about these momentous facts, only few if any will set forth a comprehensive explanation that permits the review, discussion, critique, and possibly a rectification of their factual premises, arguments, and conclusions. Because their claims are not based on facts or cannot be logically inferred, many such claimants might concede that they do not know what they contend as a matter of factual perception and rational deduction. Rather, they might state that they believe. For them, that may amount to an irrelevant difference because they may believe with a conviction that approaches or equals the effects of knowledge. Instead of explaining how they arrive at their conviction based on objectively verifiable perceptions and rational insights, they may refer to emotional experiences in essential elements of their arguments. Some things, they may argue, cannot be rationally explained or perceived in rationally relatable terms. They may declare that our emotional mind can mend deficiencies in our perception and rational understanding of reality. Rational minds would have to agree that there is more to reality than our senses of objectively verifiable facts and our rational mind can trace. Only, that does not imply that we should fill deficiencies in our knowledge and capacity to know with emotion. If we permit that, we risk replacing reality with wishes of what we want reality to be.

All our emotions arise from current or anticipated deficiencies. Under reference to our experiences, our needs drive us to form wishes how we would like deficiencies to be filled. These wishes might not be narrowly tied to reality. Particularly as we face circumstances in which we do not possess confirmed guidance, we are given to speculation. To obtain fulfillment of our needs, it may be necessary to imagine subordinated means where proven means are not available. Still, the exploratory casting of our rational mind is subsequently controlled because the results must prove to be capable means for us to continue previously experimental practices. To succeed in a world that functions according to natural substances and laws, we must identify, understand, and employ these. To make our imaginations feasible, they have to be based in fact. We may not have to know how to construct our objectives when we form them. We may not even have to know all components yet. Nevertheless, we must place our objectives within an objective realm to allow us the construction of speculative concepts in relation to them that we then can test and prove or disprove. To expand our knowledge, we expose aspects we know to aspects we do not know in settings over which we try to gain control. We try to trace the interaction of known components in constellations among them that have not been observed yet or with components that are still unknown. As

a result, we discover knowledge of previously unknown circumstances. The direction of this scientific process is based on scientific speculation. A speculative concept as to what will be revealed has a place in scientific speculation. It may be necessary to formulate worthwhile attempts to advance knowledge grounded on faint indicators, undefined impressions, or hunches. The fueling of such concepts by our needs is necessary to advance our knowledge through intentional exploration. But the resulting hope or belief is only a temporary exploratory utility, a placeholder until we can replace it with experimental knowledge.

People who permanently shape their conduct based on speculative concepts might agree that the scientific treatment of some subject matters is necessary because they recognize that they could not exist without practical solutions. They might want to advance our practical knowledge. They might even admit that they would like to substitute parts or the entirety of their hopes and beliefs with knowledge. They might concede that hope alone poses an inadequate basis for conducting their life. However, they may also proclaim that belief that is based on emotional assurances provides a permanent, satisfactory solution in the regions where we have not yet achieved scientific knowledge or where we might never achieve such knowledge. The emotional relief they experience by interleaving speculative constructs that help to resolve or soothe their fundamental distress serves them as proof for the correctness of their explanations. When confronted with the fact that belief is an emotional machination that causes us to trust in the existence of facts despite a lack of proof of their existence, they may assert that these emotions are reflections of or responses to forces that humans cannot objectively perceive or rationally comprehend. They may point to the fact that emotions are perceptions as well and that behind them stand causes that are as real as the perceptions we can objectively measure and rationally process. They may call attention to the fact that all of our needs and their satisfaction are emotions and that even the fulfillment processes of many needs seem to be dominated by the existence of emotional states in others, thus leaving obviously physical and resulting perceptive and rational concerns behind. They may try to take refuge in the impression that our emotions are not tied to natural substances and laws. The relative difficulties in illuminating what emotions are and how they come about compared to objectively verifiable perceptive and rational processes suggest a nonmaterial, supernatural quality that is veiled in some respects but still reaches into our world and controls us. The fact that emotions possess experiential reality for us makes it difficult to comprehend that they do not have an independent reality nor direct consequences in the world outside our

mind. We might not see that, although they are important phenomena that have an objective existence, their perceptive content is a construct of our mind that does not necessarily reflect objective facts in the way rational thoughts reflect objectively verifiable perceptive content. The argument that we can replace scientific knowledge with belief also has to contend with the fact that emotions can be progressively explained as physiological processes. In such explanations, they join a long list of other formerly unexplained phenomena that incentivized humans to supplement objective perceptions and endeavored rational explanations with belief. As science advances, traditional beliefs in supernatural aspects are forced to recede. That we cannot explain all we perceive and know or suspect that we cannot perceive all there is may prompt us to determine that mysterious forces dwell in areas that exceed our mental grasp. The spirits that we once presumed to inhabit and direct the nature and behavior of objects and events we could not explain have become dispelled. But our spiritual concept has remained alive in areas that resist perception and rational explanation.

Believers may only reluctantly concede their claimed supernatural territory to the progresses of science. In particular, they may take some time before they acknowledge that human nature and behavior can be explained as natural events. The immediate totality of human perceptions, thoughts, and emotions engenders an awareness that appears to be far removed from the great complexity of its constituents and the laws they follow. This entirety may remain such a mystery to individuals that they may continue to maintain that the sum of its ingredients does not equal the result of human awareness, at least to the extent emotional mental attention is involved. Beyond that, the state of human knowledge still grants ample space untouched by scientific intrusions in which they can source or find apparent evidence to sustain their faith. The assumption of supernatural forces is not simply a matter of undifferentiated emotional impressions. Believers commonly shape their beliefs because they encounter matters that they cannot perceive in objectively verifiable terms or rationally understand. Their beliefs may arise because they recognize such limitations and still attempt to find an explanation within their frame of reference. Humans encounter a basic limit in their objectively verifiable perceptions and their comprehension concerning the origin of humanity and of everything else, including natural substances and the laws by which these substances behave. The logic of our experiences compels us to assume that there must have been a cause for all of it, and the awe-inspiring magnificence of what exists compels us to conclude that an intelligent and all-powerful entity must have created it. However, we cannot per-

ceive nor can we understand how such an entity could exist or what such an entity would be. Hence, ironically, our perceptions of objects and events and our rational structures and processes induce us to take refuge in belief to resolve the enigma presented by the existence and structure of objects and events as well as our existence and faculties to perceive and rationally allocate them. Although we may acknowledge that we cannot explain this enigma, we may try to find an approximation to an explanation within our experiences. The imagination of an all-powerful creator and of us as a product of this creation evokes authoritative conclusions in us. We may interpret our existence, our capacities, and the means provided for us, as well as our relative superiority over other life forms as signs that benevolent forces are at work that take interest in our welfare. The idea of creation evokes the emotional imprint of a parent-child relationship. We may expand this concept. We may conclude that objects and events that prevent risks from materializing or that coincidentally favor us are resulting from supernatural planning or intervention with an intent to protect and support us. We may also interpret the exercise of our own faculties as guided by supernatural forces, at least if we submit to their guidance. These imaginations afford us with the hope of being surrounded by a caring, providing entity similar to how we remember or would have liked our childhood to have been. The parallels of our imagined sourcing cause us to engage in an imaginary mental regression to relive that seemingly ideal existence when we knew little of adversities and worries and felt completely safe and enveloped by unconditional parental love, or to feel such conditions for the first time. We embrace such an infantile state by extending unconditional trust and devotion to the source we believe to have brought us forth and to sustain our existence and our wellbeing and by believing anything we suppose being told by that entity directly or through purported intermediaries without reservation.

Another, connected basic source of belief arises from an enigma that impresses us even more. We cannot imagine what happens to us after we die. We cannot fathom what it is like to be dead because we have not had awareness of that experience and never have been without our awareness. Hence, we cannot help assuming contrary to all evidence of our disintegration that we will go on. Here again, we look for the resolution of an enigma through parallels with events in our frame of reference. Only, with our most immediate impressions consisting of death and its inanimate state and decomposition, many of the scenarios we can conceive might frighten us because they are variations of a contradictory existence of possessing awareness while being dead. The limitation of our mind to imagine what it is like to be dead is joined

by our natural fear of an impairment of our bodily integrity and our functioning. Further, the ostensible inescapability of death starkly and completely contradicts our endless desire to live, to survive and thrive. The factuality of our death might be too gruesome for us to bear. Our fear of the inevitability of our nonexistence and our imagination of a continued awareness of this might compel us to believe in the survivability of death against all indications and reason. In support of that belief, our imagination latches on to our inability to imagine any other state than being alive and our impression of the supernatural quality of our mind that we imagine not to be bound by the natural events we detect in and after death. Our belief in life after death is also supported by our impressions about creation. We think that the all-powerful entity that created everything could change the inevitability of death. More than that, we may deem it illogical that such an entity would go through the trouble of creating us and overseeing our existence only to let us rot in the end. Similarly, the emotional bond to a father or a mother figure that we construct from our considerations of the origin of the world, our origin, and our benefits and relative status is likely to fill us with a disbelief that he or she would not protect us from death. These considerations convince us to believe in our survival.

It then appears that very fundamental intuitive emotional reactions to impressions of creation and death form the basis for our beliefs. These emotional dynamics constitute a powerfully alluring force that directs our mind toward belief and gives that belief form. The resulting foundation for our belief provides a basis for the adaptive explanation of everything else that we cannot fathom or that appears to contradict the magnificence of the order and the grace that we imagine. We may rationalize incidents of pain as representations of supernatural wisdom. In additional consolation, we may find refuge in imagining a realm without pain beyond our knowledge and even imagination that surrounds our earthly existence and into which we will enter or return upon our death. The privilege of being permitted to enter this realm and the increased proximity of such a realm to the presence and perfection of our creator may enable us to envision levels and periods of satisfaction against which problems of our earthly happiness might seem insignificant. We may possess some fears that unfavorable mechanisms or powers may inhabit the unknown areas we imagine as well. We may also speculate that such powers have access to our current reality. Similar to how we might ascribe favorable occurrences to benevolent supernatural powers, we might attribute negative manifestations to malevolent supernatural powers. However, a belief in their dominance would defeat the comforting purpose for which we engage

in imaginary constructs. Our belief in their inferiority is supported by the idea that they, as well, must be a result of the all-powerful and caring creative force. To the extent we believe in malevolent supernatural powers, we must conclude that they have been assigned an ultimately constructive function under the creative plan. We may therefore construe inconsistencies with our assumptions of an all-powerful, benevolent power, whether we attribute them directly to such force or one of its creations, as lessons or tests that we are bound to fail if we waver in our commitments to our belief. This causes us to let belief trump any reservations. If we believe in the absolute priority of the larger scheme we imagine and in which we hope to partake, we may care much less or not at all about what happens to us or anybody else during our natural life. We may even go so far as to permit our suffering or to cause detrimental circumstances for ourselves to demonstrate that our commitment to our belief cannot be shaken. We may further interpret any negative events as consequences of a lack of commitment.

An unquestioning commitment to our belief is a facilitative and possibly a necessary security mechanism to shield our ability to maintain a satisfactory explanation for our concerns in the face of contrary evidence. However, to make its imperative unassailable, we must give it the semblance of independent justification. We may project our obsession with belief onto the all-powerful being we conceive. We may conclude that our belief is of extreme importance for it because of the all-important function it has in our life. We may more generally imagine that our creator demands and deserves mutuality. Hence, we may deem it necessary that we engage in practices that testify to our belief and reward our creator for the imagined favors granted or to be granted. We may feel gratitude and we may want to demonstrate such gratitude. The various aspects of our belief and our reactions to it cause us to construct attributes for the creative entity. Once we have imagined these, we may reverse that definitional process to arrive at the notion that this entity imposes regulations on us and has designated our attitude and behavior to be conditions for receiving continued favorable treatment. We may not dare to question our belief or the conforming practices for fear of repercussions. We may fear punishment if we fail and may engage in behavior designed to make up for failure. We may try to fit our existence into a detailed scheme we have constructed in our mind. We may also conclude that the interest of a creator in belief and correlated practices applies to all humans. Consequently, we may consider it an obligation to convert them to our imaginations. Our beliefs, together with the conclusions we draw concerning necessary adjustments in the behavior of us and others, constitute belief systems.

Believers may draw stark differentiations between their contextual merit compared to nonbelievers at least if these refuse to convert. That threat may cause actual or potential victims of faith impositions to convert at least superficially. Believers with an aggressive, competitive agenda may therefore succeed in converting nonbelievers to their faith. Further, individuals might be attracted by the benefits of being treated as a fellow believer. Moreover, once individuals and societies have become subjected to a belief, the permeation of their surroundings may not make it feasible or practical to dissent. While belief systems may then be established and persist under nonpertinent considerations, they may also frequently find uncritical adoption by individuals who look for guidance in matters that are open to and covered by belief. Common dispositions and the commonality of the fundamental enigmas and challenges that humans face lead them to construct similar basic beliefs. If they have not entirely developed their beliefs, these commonalities generate access for doctrines that confirm basic beliefs and provide additional guidance. Individuals may be impressed by the pleasantness of promised solutions a doctrine offers for their problems and the appeal of a belief system for similarly situated individuals. All these accessions may strengthen the conviction of believers.

Still, there may be limits for the allegiance a belief system may be able to sustain. To accept it and its rules without any doubt and to become fully committed, we may require evidence of its authority and correctness. Particularly if several belief systems vie to be chosen, such an additional evidence may be necessary or helpful to attract believers and keep them faithful. Even individuals who are instituting their own beliefs may search for such evidence. As a matter of logic, there can be no convincing evidence regarding areas we cannot perceive or understand. This is the reason we engage in speculation. But we may seek to obtain glimpses of those areas where supernatural powers reveal their connection with our realm and their nature in miraculous occurrences that defy rational explanation. We may rely on our own or other individuals' direct experiences of spiritual phenomena. As science advances, such phenomena are rarer to occur because it clarifies the meaning of impressions in individuals who have such impressions or is better able to resolve or to at least explain their confusion. Eventually, only a limited number of individual impressions might remain that confront us with phenomena that we cannot explain with scientific means and therefore lend themselves to spiritual speculation. Because such speculations are exposed to the regimes of belief systems or to other emotional suggestions, a desire to believe may introduce erroneous interpretations or even produce erroneous perceptions as evidence. It may

also prepare us to believe hearsay without our application of habitual safeguards. We may be willing to trust information that includes several levels of hearsay by persons whose existence, capacity, and motivations are frequently not corroborated. Originators or purveyors may be described in ways that purportedly afford them with credibility, often through more hearsay. Much of this purported evidence would be inadmissible, much less attain a sufficient level to achieve a favorable judgment in a court of law. We would not act upon such information in our everyday transactions. The potential for error and the ease and possible incentive for falsifying evidence in one or more of the stations through which information has traveled cast a heavy pall on its credibility. And yet, we may accept such tenuous evidence not only because we might be manipulated, but perhaps even more because we want to believe it since we strain for authoritative solutions to our problems.

Many stories that supposedly corroborate a belief as well as the rules of a belief system may draw rational credibility from the fact that they contain demonstrably useful principles for success in human existence. The expectation that such benefits will flow, and impressions that they actually do flow, from belief and from compliance with the principles it implies may be a major attractant to formulate and adopt a belief. Such a practical content may naturally result from the premise that humanity is the subject of special care or from considerations of physical existence as a preparatory stage for our supernatural existence. These assumptions may induce us to believe that we are to succeed in both our present physical and the supernatural realms. However, such an attitude might not be carried through because principles of belief may not be based on objectively verifiable perceptions and rational processing and inexorably focus on satisfying the demands of a fantasy world. Although belief may exhort us to acts aiming at supernatural benefits that also bring us current benefits, the expectation of supernatural rewards may frequently leave such success outbalanced. We may impose too much suffering on us or on others and suffer indirect pain by empathy, impairments of mutuality and our need for collective survival and thriving, or from defensive acts in reaction to the pain we inflict on others. Only, purported justifications by belief may not leave room for such reflective forms of pain to arise or to find consideration to a deterrent level for believers. They may have few or no reservations acquiring benefits at their own cost or the cost of others. They may consider such burdens on their happiness as necessary and helpful for reaching supernatural happiness. Such attitudes tend to interfere with the posting and application of useful principles for believers' current existence because they supersede such concerns. Practical

instructions are frequently underdeveloped and skewed to fit the reservation of certain areas to the supernatural and nonscientific speculation of such systems, or they are left standing in unreconciled contradiction as less important than spiritual justifications. The resulting ruthlessness of believers to dispense with concerns of their and other individuals' needs may produce enough pressure to motivate potential believers to convert superficially. But the free adoption of a belief system by humans who are not swayed by belief alone still requires that they can recognize practical utility in belief systems. Often, such principles can be found in rational development that preceded or accompanied the development of beliefs and were incorporated into a belief system. There also seem to be instances where belief systems gave rise to practical constructs that had not yet entered philosophies that were based on objectively verifiable perceptions and rational consideration. To the extent belief systems offer useful solutions that can be validated by objective perceptive and rational examinations, they may deliver a valuable service in human development. Their intuition may predate proof of the existence of certain benefits. But that does not legitimize the emotionalization of our progress without a regular requirement of proof. Because belief systems generally dispense with proof and with a rational development, their practical guidance is frequently arrested at the time the system originated. As a result, belief systems that profess to serve human advancement and that contain aspects that pertain to such advancement may impose burdens of immobility and irrationality that cannot be justified under considerations of human reality.

This causes the increasing obsolescence of belief systems in areas where they cannot regress or arrest human development. Their assertion of dogma against better accrued knowledge reinforces this obsolescence. Where a more advanced independent comprehension has found acceptance, their insistence on superseded counterparts in their doctrines becomes a liability that corrodes their credibility not only in practical but also in remaining speculative aspects. Belief systems may be forced to address these incompatibilities with reality if they are to survive. They may not be prepared to abandon such concerns to other philosophies because essential segments of their doctrines may reside in the region of practical applications. Even where that is not the case, their popular influence may be linked to their practical applicabilities. They may be compelled to show that they do not only confer satisfaction in the supernatural realm but also in earthly existence. The unavoidable comparison of belief systems' practical relevance with practical philosophies may place pressure on them to similarly modify their stance or to be left behind, at least regarding such practical concerns.

Even with respect to tales of miraculous events that individuals will accept as indicators of a belief's truth, humanity has become and continues to become more demanding and discriminating. A growing number of events that formerly appeared miraculous have become explainable as humanity develops its knowledge. This reduces the credibility of beliefs that claimed or might continue to claim such phenomena to be miracles. Beyond that, the requirements for what impresses humans factually and emotionally and what they are willing to believe even from claimed authorities continue to rise. We have become more jaded and suspicious because we can refer to our own experiences and a historical memory of error and fraud as persistent causes of pain in our individual and collective existence. We may understand how easily belief doctrines can be established and usurped for disingenuous or ill-conceived purposes. We may be overwhelmed by the pervasive suffering and death that many belief systems have produced for believers and nonbelievers. Despite doctrinal justifications, their results seem to counteract their claim of assisting humanity in attaining more happiness. The overbearing and often violent conduct of belief systems may have us examine whether they have been perverted or ever were what they proclaim to be. In addition, the representation of belief systems in hierarchic power structures or their close correlation with these indicate their service to some interests over others or a threat of corruption. Moreover, their internal hierarchic structure and ideological attitudes and practices may reveal them as competitive organizations. Although their doctrines characterize them as defensively oriented organizations, the fictitious origins of their justifications for interfering in individual and collective reconciliation make them offensive.

We may wonder why belief systems regard it necessary to impose their authority in ways that do not permit choice or criticism. If they are, as they claim, the only true faith, insights should in time inevitably settle in their favor. Further, the unmitigated insistence with which speculations are claimed as fact may seem inherently incongruous. We may also be confounded by the number of belief systems and the exclusivity of their claims. Even if we assume that one of these systems has to be believed, the differences among the doctrines of many belief systems would require us to conclude that all systems that are in variance are either erroneous or fraudulent. The distribution of belief systems would compel us to conclude that most of humanity is being misled. Considering that overwhelmingly frequently individuals have not freely chosen their affiliation with a belief system but are born into it or later enveloped by it, we cannot escape the suspicion that our belief might be among those that would be necessarily wrong. Even if

we believe that the belief system to which we sense a particular affinity is correct, we must have misgivings because many other individuals carry such allegiances toward their conflicting beliefs. This might lead us to question whether and how much of our belief system is correct.

Additional incursions into the credibility of belief systems loom from scientific exploration into their documented sources. The tracing of content beyond claimed ultimate sources as well as the exposure of their mistranslation, variation, and deliberate manipulation, the invalidation of claimed historical events in their support, and the exposure of contradictions within them may compel belief systems to suffer reduced credibility. Such reduction may be all the more dramatic if belief systems assert the infallibility of documents containing their doctrines and of the doctrine itself. After some study, we may understand the internal and external circumstances that caused the originators or purveyors of belief systems to shape and adjust them in certain ways. But such an understanding makes us suspect that belief systems or at least portions of them derive from the particularities of individual dispositions and therefore might not present universal and lasting truth. We may also observe that the differences in the internal and external circumstances between such individuals and us further attenuate applicability of their teachings. Such differences may not be restricted to objective sensory and rational aspects or means. Our emotional dispositions might be dissimilar as well and possibly more advanced.

All these indications detract from the claimed authority and the content of belief systems. Individuals who undertake detailed investigations into the sources, doctrines, practices, and consequences of belief systems are bound to find causes for concern. However, most humans limit or do not undertake such inquiries. This may not only be attributable to coercions or manipulations that instill justifications for deficiencies. Reservations may not rise to a high profile because individuals may accept that their resident belief system contains truth and guidance and may prefer its deficiencies to a comprehensive void. Because a belief and its system may have been inculcated into them to a level that formed acquired traits, they may obey regardless of dissuading evidence. Even where such conditions do not apply, reinforced superstitions about supernatural punishment may have them abide upon the possibility that a belief system might contain related truth and power after all. In addition, the preservation of practical benefits and their advancement if they pledge to a belief and the potential of damage if they renounce it may keep them in line. As a result, individuals may despite evidence of irregularities continue to adhere to belief systems that surround them, possibly long after they have lost faith.

Even if we hold on to our beliefs as well as we can and concentrate on the parts that have not yet been proven false, our allegiance is bound to fade. It will diminish as we learn that emotional rewards that belief systems evoke or promise are based on human weaknesses, fear, error, and betrayal. As we develop, it may become progressively difficult to ignore the portions of belief systems that have been revealed as false and to continue our belief in portions that have not yet been disqualified. Belief systems that do not redact or retract their claims and modify their behavior with the maturing of humanity and its enlightenment regarding itself and its environment are destined to subside. However, until that time, they may stubbornly continue to assert their existence and mission. To persevere, they may intensify their efforts to instill, perpetuate, and take advantage of the fears, ignorance, and impressionability of individuals or to indirectly impose their domination on them. Such measures may delay, but ultimately may contribute to, their adjustment or dismissal. Their unreasonable resistance serves to deprive them of any remaining authority. If belief systems are to survive, they have to accommodate valid criticisms, set forth acceptable models for individual and collective reconciliation, and renovate their doctrines to the extent they contradict reconciled concepts of human happiness. Even their speculative portions would have to be measured by whether they serve reconciled human needs to prevent emotionally charged speculations from taking over our life and damaging our happiness. Accordingly, practical and speculative segments of belief systems would have to be measured under the use of our perceptive and rational facilities in relation to our needs and priorities among them.

Most of our life may already be guided by such a technique that uses all our mental facilities to evaluate and react to challenges and to plan our conduct. Compared to sweeping flights of fancy that purport to explain everything or make such explanation unnecessary and that grant beguiling assurances and promises, the comparatively slow, systematic progress of objectively perceptive and rationally bound speculation and reconciliation may appear dull and laborious. Its scientific approach to issues of our happiness might keep us wanting because it may not be able to readily answer the questions that give rise to belief. This places scientific philosophies at an apparent disadvantage in their ability to offer solutions and hence their attractiveness. To mend that shortcoming, scientific philosophies may overreach and develop speculative doctrines that take on the wishful characteristics of belief systems. Belief systems may then not only arise as constructs of a spiritual nature that invoke supernatural powers and events. They may also arise from the challenge to scientific philosophies to offer comprehen-

sive guidance. Such overreaching should be easily disciplined because these philosophies claim to be derived from objectively verifiable perceptions, recognized presumptions, and rational deductions that must be able to withstand rigors of proof. Even scientific speculations must contain a measure of probability in their extrapolation that is based on ascertainable circumstances. But their speculations may endeavor and possibly succeed in liberating them from such restraints in the minds of followers. Speculation in science is essential to develop new knowledge with direction. It is part of a technique we regularly apply to distinguish our scientific method from random trials and coincidental insights. It is legitimate to the extent it guides practical experimentation that can catch up with and prove or disprove its suggestions. Scientific speculation may therefore receive some time to prove itself to be factual. However, it crosses the line into belief if it demands more than a temporary and experimental variation of behavior without antecedent proof or confidence-instilling probability assessments. To escape such perils and derive use from scientific speculation, we have to create settings that confine the risk and cost of our explorations. The abandonment of a disciplined, scientific strategy invites error, subversion, and damage. Comprehensive speculative claims and resulting practical instructions of belief systems expose their supporters and others to unconscionable risks and the potential of great damage if their speculation fails to be accurate. Because belief systems base their guidance on concepts beyond current scientific criteria, they may be able to build and maintain their practices for extended periods before subjects realize that their leadership has failed. They might attenuate that realization by attributing blame to poor execution or interference or by defining failure as a part of the system that finds resolution in the supernatural realm. Against the blandishments of sweeping constructs and their dispersion of responsibility, scientific philosophies might appear unspectacular and hamstrung by their painstaking requirements. And yet, their advance in securing knowledge is bound to make methodical inroads into the world of the formerly unexplained that is the domain of beliefs to eventually supplant our childish attitudes with consideration and mental control exerted by a more mature version of us.

These inroads may be valuable instruments to regulate misconceptions and to liberate humanity from unwarranted fears and restrictions. Their potential of progression may fill us with confidence that we may one day be able to answer all fundamental questions and find resolutions to all barriers in human fulfillment. Only, a rational treatment of our concerns might not appear to be able to form a currently sufficient counterweight to the lure of irrational systems that claim to

have a comprehensive answer to all our questions. It might not seem capable of creating a scientific alternative that sets forth an alternative comprehensive concept of the world and our place in it. Until recently, that assertion would have been unquestionably true. We may still struggle for authoritative scientific answers and even legitimate speculation on the most fundamental questions that move us. Nevertheless, we may know enough to build a system that can answer with scientific certainty a large number of the same questions belief systems purport to answer. Such a system includes answers about the workings of the world as well as the requirements of our needs and their satisfaction. We can be confident that we can shape a system of practical philosophy without any reference to speculation. In addition, we may be able to engage in reasonable speculation. We may not be able to give a positive answer to some fundamental questions. But we might be able to narrow the array of possible answers based on what we know and possibly assign probabilities about what we do not know. While it would be irresponsible to change our behavior based on the remaining speculations, it seems legitimate and necessary that we look forward in our development and identify possible pitfalls and opportunities early.

A scientific counterweight to irrational speculation may not be able to currently find answers to our ultimate questions. Still, the answers it can deliver to questions how we can maximize our happiness can render our life fulfilling even in the absence of knowledge about origin and destiny. Even if we knew about these matters, they might not have much of an impact on our current strategies for maximizing our happiness because our existence is so far removed from these past and future events. Our lack of scientific answers might leave sufficient space for beliefs regarding these matters. Yet the assertion of scientific knowledge and scientific evaluation remove many false leads and false resulting ordinances that might otherwise affect our existence. The increasing scientific coverage of what assists the survival and thriving of humans individually and collectively and how to produce such conditions can rein in damaging untethered speculation. It forces beliefs to concede reality and to justify speculations and suggested consequences measured by that reality. Sincere beliefs should welcome this assistance because the substances and processes that science uncovers represent and give information about creation and its progression. Moreover, a scientific focus on human survival and thriving comports with the motif of special care for humans and their concerns that beliefs often imply. Science then moves into the center of our endeavors to increase our happiness. The following chapter begins to explore how far that promise of scientific development might be able to carry us.