

CHAPTER 5

PRESENT LIMITATIONS

Our experience tells us that the best manner to get what we want is to influence our surroundings by our actions. Some of our objectives may come about independently without our involvement or may be offered to us to be used. But most of our needs, most of our wishes do not fulfill themselves. We must make them happen. We have to edge out our happiness from neutral circumstances and against various adversities, using tools that support our objectives. Maximizing our happiness requires work. Whether we obtain what we want can depend on a multitude of factors. These may include individual intelligence, knowledge, skill, vision, logical scheduling and implementation, preparation, flexibility, commitment, and physical strength. They further comprise environmental factors such as the state of technological, economic, and social development and our access to its results and resources for our purposes. They also consist of the more correlative factors of our connections and bonds, social status, attractiveness, and abilities to influence. They finally contain dispositions of other humans, their cooperation, resistance, interference, or competition regarding our pursuits.

Some of these factors may not be accessible to our control, or at least not to the degree we need them to be to make our wishes come true. Still, quite a number of them seem to be in our hands or can at least be swayed or acquired. This partial malleability empowers us. It means that we can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our efforts by improving the effectiveness and efficiency of these factors. To accomplish this, we have to consider the requirements of our needs, the approaches for their fulfillment, and the consequences of our actions. If we implement our insights with circumspection, we should be able to increase the success of our pursuits. Improving happiness may then appear largely as a matter of acquiring knowledge and its careful application to the other resources we have available. This conclusion seems obvious. We spend a considerable number of years in upbringing, education, and training to develop instruments and strategies for the pursuit of our happiness. With sufficient dedication and preparation, we should go far. Yet we might wonder how far these attributes can take us. What should be our expectation? We might be subjected to powerful encouragements assuring us that we can control our fortune. Apply yourself to your ambitions and you will succeed. Where there is a will there is a way. You can do anything if you put your mind to it. This is what we are told. If this is posited as the promise of our existence, it forms the standard by which we measure our success.

For most of us, the practical application of this principle is not working to our full satisfaction. Eventually, we find the promise broken that we can get whatever we want if we give it enough effort. We may find ourselves at a distance from our ideal of happiness. We may be satisfied with one or another aspect of our existence. Nonetheless, a discrepancy between our state of affairs and having all of our wishes become reality may remain. Regardless of how circumspect and dedicated we may be, some and often considerable room continues to separate our situation and what we consider to be ideal happiness. There are always aspects of our existence that leave something to be desired. We cannot always get what we want, no matter how much we might try. Sometimes, it even appears that the harder we push, the more we insist, the less we obtain what we want. We run into resistance, experience limitations, fall behind, and we fail. These deficiencies keep us occupied asking ourselves why they occur. We may consider the possibility and admit that the encouragements for perfection we received were exaggerations. But we may still desire to identify why we did not succeed. We may investigate our failures or inabilities and try to find the causes that slow us down, block our rise, or make us slip up.

In that investigation, we tend to divide the possible causes into those that lie with us and those that are attributable to external factors. We seek fault either in us or in our surroundings. If we find fault in us, we may take responsibility. We may admit our error, inadequacy, or failure to rise to the challenge. We may concede that we could not formerly and perhaps cannot now deal with certain circumstances. We may commit to change our ways to avoid the same or a similar failure from recurring in the future, or we may resign to our inability. Then again, even if we find fault in us, we tend to express it in correlation with external circumstances, in terms of our interaction with our environment. This expression is facilitated by the prevalent lack of a clear distinction between internal and external causes. Our inabilities and failures usually accrue as a result of our relation with the outside world, as do our successes. We and the outside world seem to be prerequisite components for the pursuit and creation of most of our happiness. This relation to outside factors may cause us to shift attention from us to external causes. To the extent we perceive a cause of a failure or inability to be found in external conditions, we may look at our problem as existing external to us in its entirety. We may let the great number of external causes and influences on us lead us to the conclusion that our entire existence is the product of outside forces. It might seem that our creation as the result of our environment and its effect on us delineate all we are and the entirety of our demeanor. In com-

pletion of this reasoning, all our failures and inabilities would be the product of external forces as well. We may sense that such a sweeping conclusion may not be correct. We experience that we can use or influence outside forces and their effect on us, that they can be blocked, attenuated, overcome, or turned in our favor. We also experience that where that is not possible, it may be possible to modify our position in relation to such unchangeable outside forces. If we want to make our mark, if we want to achieve our objectives, we will have to work with outside forces. If we cannot use them as they are or if they interfere in our pursuits, we will have to change, obstruct, or destroy them or arrange ourselves relative to them. Our demeanor toward outside forces greatly determines our happiness. Although we appear to be largely a product of external factors, we might often be able to shape or select their influences and thus take at least partial charge of our fate.

Nevertheless, we may continue to ascribe great power to external forces that interact with us. Even if we perceive that we can influence our environment, we may continue to perceive us and our actions to be influenced if not controlled by external forces. In spite of our best efforts, we remain broadly exposed and subjected to the nature and behavior of outside forces. Even if we apply everything in our power to control them or to position ourselves in reference to them, we might not succeed in dominating or evading them. External forces continue to have great influence over our happiness that is independent of our endeavors. We may therefore contend that they are in great part responsible for our fate. Following such thoughts may lead us to become hostile against our environment or to reject responsibility and resign our fate. We may accept less than ideal conditions, accommodate pain, and not pursue our happiness to its greatest possible extent. However, acknowledging the unalterable presence, effect, and causality of external powers does not warrant that we attribute responsibility for our happiness or unhappiness to them. External powers may have no or only conditional interest in our happiness. Even if they take an interest in us, attributing responsibility for our happiness or unhappiness to them fails to acknowledge that they follow their own agenda. Their interference, neutrality, or assistance is a function of their trajectory, their objectives. We as individuals are the sole force unconditionally committed to the fulfillment of our wishes. Because only we have an uncompromised and immediate interest in our happiness, our happiness and unhappiness are wholly our responsibility. Once we acknowledge this, we can approach the context in which our happiness occurs as a directional relationship between us and everything else in which we must extract what we need from our circumstances.

It would seem that to increase our happiness, we have to limit the influence of external aspects over us and gain control over them and use them as means to fulfill our wishes. But our attempts of fulfilling our wishes are imperfect because we have limited power. Moreover, our efforts are embedded in an environment that is also populated and controlled by independent circumstances and powers that might not yield. This leaves us with limited opportunities to achieve our wishes, a limited ability to be happy. The limits of our ability to transform our wishes into reality can be divided into two main categories: general and individual impossibility. General impossibility means that what we wish for is currently impossible for any human or combination of humans to accomplish. The category of individual impossibility includes all results that are generally attainable but cannot be presently reached by a particular individual or groups of individuals.

The area of general impossibility includes areas of science and technology humans have not discovered as well as all claims that violate the substances and laws of nature that have been found to exist from observations of nature. From these observations, one can derive a set of seemingly universal abstractions, a code by which they can be expressed. Although these abstractions are derived from specific observations of our world, our observations of some facts and principles seem to be unopposed wherever we look. This universal confirmation may inspire confidence in us that such facts and principles contain independent, immutable, universal truth by which every substance must abide. These general abstractions are regularly called mathematics or logic. To differentiate them from attributes that are limited to certain substances and their behavior, we may refer to logic and mathematics as universal laws of nature. We may refer to the principles that seem to be attached to particular substances as specific laws of nature. We may designate the efforts to derive universal and specific laws as science. We may further call the efforts to employ these insights on substances for the production of means technology. As we explore and lay open the structures and processes of nature, we gain knowledge of the substances and laws by which it is organized. These insights may increase our selections to shape us and our natural environment and to make us and it compliant with our wishes. They raise our knowledge of what is possible and shift our impressions regarding the boundaries of general impossibility forward. But our developing understanding also apprises us of boundaries in substances and their principles of organization. The ordered character of the world we discover constrains us to proceed within and by its rules. The absolute nature of such limitations warrants calling them boundaries of absolute impossibility.

Boundaries of absolute impossibility may describe limits of specific laws and intrinsic logic that cannot be surmounted regardless of our efforts. But judgments about absolute impossibility are frequently unreliable. Like all other impressions of impossibility, they may refer to a current objective or subjective inability to accomplish a task that might be resolved by sequences building toward that task. There may be unexplored potentials that we might be able to uncover as our understanding develops, thus allowing us to dissolve concepts of impossibility. Our impressions of impossibility may derive from instinctive dispositions but primarily arise from our experiences. Scientific methods seek to exclude error from the conclusions we draw. To that aim, we seek to establish laws from our observations that seek to cover the entire extent of a phenomenon and grant us comprehensive guidance. After we gain a partial footing in observations, we venture theoretical forecasts about the entire spectrum of a phenomenon that we perceive or imagine. While we render assumptions about the scope of applicability of laws, scientific insights stretch only as far as our practical experiences will support them. As long as we have not covered the totality of our predictions with confirming experiences, we might find contradictory circumstances. We therefore cannot be definite whether a result contradicting a law we posited is absolutely impossible. Similar reservations have to be allowed regarding the depth of a phenomenon. As we understand more about components and about possibly successive component levels, an impression of absolute impossibility might dissolve into manageable constituents. Hence, we cannot exclude that our concepts of absolute impossibility will change as our practical capabilities reveal more of the workings of nature. What we call absolute impossibility may not only represent a matter of missing breadth and depth of inquiry. Humans may also lack the capacity to detect some of the circumstances of nature or to comprehend the substances or principles they imply or even their unordered nature. We may face a general impossibility that is based on human limitations in the processing of information rather than absolute impossibility. We may refer to this as our general conceptual impossibility. It may be permanent, or temporary if it arises from remediable deficiencies in the development of the human mind or of assisting facilities to which it can connect.

Even if we develop an accurate idea of what exists and is permissible or mandatory under the laws of nature, we may lack the ability to implement the resulting potential on the scale or in the context we desire. We thus meet the barrier of general practical impossibility. It pertains to technology that is deemed possible under the substances and laws of nature we have derived but is beyond anybody's capability

to create at the time. General practical impossibility appears to have two causes: a lack of knowledge or a lack of other resources. Humanity may lack the requisite knowledge to make objects and events work according to what should be possible under the provisions of nature. We may be at a stage of collective development at which no individual or group can currently devise a workable strategy to create a certain result although we cannot find it barred by laws of nature or can establish with certainty or with encouraging probability that it is permissible. Further, even if humanity may know how a certain result can be obtained in practical terms, it may still not have the necessary practical means to fulfill a wish. It may lack access to the resources it would take to accomplish the objective. When we consider these two aspects of general practical impossibility, we discover that the issues of knowledge and of resources are often related. There may be a wealth of resources available, but we may lack the knowledge to locate, access, extract, develop, shape, or employ them. Knowledge may then be merely one among a number of other resources. Some practical barriers may remain insurmountable. Yet the marshaling of resources may eventually be possible if the substances and laws of nature allow it and if sufficient amounts of the pertinent substances exist and can be reached as a result of technological development. Humanity might have or develop the mental capacity and be able to set forth the necessary efforts to attain the required knowledge and technology to allocate such substances. Under these conditions, general practical impossibility would be temporary. Barring general conceptual impossibility, it would only last until observations and trials have uncovered scientific insight and our practical capabilities have caught up with that insight.

Our ability to explore and understand nature allows us to formulate practical objectives based on what we have found possible toward which we can orient our implementation efforts. As possibilities appear and are found to be worthwhile, humanity engages individual and cooperative efforts to mend its practical deficiencies through the development of technology. Our recognition that the deriving of substances and laws of nature and the synthesizing of objects and events from them elevate our practical capabilities spurs us on to expand our exploration of nature and to reduce our conceptual and practical impossibilities. Consequently, humans customarily desire scientific and technological development to expand their practical capabilities past their current state and to come into the possession of means that they believe to be necessary or helpful for the advancement of their happiness. That desire may be broadly shared. Nevertheless, most individuals do not personally push the boundaries of scientific knowledge and

the resulting state of human practical capabilities forward. The complexities of science and technology at the forefront of exploration may reserve the advancement of these to a comparatively small number of experts. Behind such experts, there may be other individuals or groups with the necessary resources and with their own motivations to establish and maintain certain developments. Unless we participate in such circles, we may not be aware of the efforts that have been and are being undertaken to push the theoretical and practical boundaries of development. If we are sidelined from undertaking or sponsoring scientific and technological development, we remain relegated to using scientific knowledge and existing technology to which we are permitted or can independently gain access. In this area, we contend with individual conceptual and practical impossibility. The conceptual or technological capability we seek might exist, but we may not have intellectual or practical access to that capability. We as individuals or a group may lack resources that others possess. Particularly if we are aware of our shortcomings to realized potential, we might try to improve our capabilities to match or to exceed the conceptual or practical state of others. We can undertake to close the differential autonomously or by obtaining resources from or in combination with other individuals or groups, including those who already possess desired results.

If we cannot implement a wish in spite of our best efforts at the time, we may deem its fulfillment impossible regardless of the reason. We may not distinguish individual and general or other aspects of impossibility. This lack of distinction may have a negative effect on our motivation to keep pursuing an objective and our success from such a pursuit. Understanding the distinctions of apparent impossibility may be determinative of our chances to overcome our current impossibility and the strategy we might pursue. If we recognize that a deficiency of means is attributable to individual impossibility, reaching such means moves within a more likely field of possibilities because it excludes absolute impossibility. Further, if the result we desire has already been accomplished by others, it becomes more likely that we might develop such a result or acquire it. Although our chances might be remote, the achievement by others of what we hope to accomplish indicates that we might succeed as well. To estimate our chances of success, we may explore by comparison whether our obstacles are of a practical nature or arise from a lack of our autonomous or assisted capacity to process information. We can then concentrate on compensating our deficiencies. If a result should be generally unavailable, an alternate approach may be needed. The nonexistence of what we seek may give us pause. It may mean that nobody has tried what we endeavor to achieve, that

all others failed, or that they found the result to be unattractive. Examining their thoughts and efforts might be instructive. Beyond that, risks, costs, and benefits are usually less calculable in undertakings to overcome general impossibility. To obtain a maximum of information about these aspects, it might be helpful to understand whether we are confronted with a matter of general practical, conceptual, or perceived absolute impossibility. Overcoming a perceived absolute impossibility appears to carry the highest risk of failure and may involve the greatest effort because it controverts our collective experience. Surmounting general conceptual impossibility might challenge us similarly. Forays to overcome absolute and general conceptual impossibility might present problems whose solution attempts exceed what one or a few more individuals can or are prepared to bear. In addressing a general exploratory or implementation problem, the adversities may be more definable. Yet even solving such a problem may involve risks and investments of resources we might not be willing or able to carry alone. Arguably, the fact that nobody has succeeded in overcoming obstacles of general impossibility does not necessarily mean that they could not be overcome other than by a collective effort. Still, even if individuals advance to obliterate general impossibilities, they may have to rely on cooperatively obtained means or find such reliance helpful. Moreover, it seems likely that efforts to overcome individual impossibility could benefit from cooperation by others who wish to overcome their individual impossibilities as well or from assistance by individuals who already have accomplished the goals to which others aspire. Accordingly, cooperation seems to offer itself as a possible universal facilitator.

Not all individual impossibilities that we encounter are so fungible that they permit fulfillment by acquiring processing or practical capabilities from other sources. There seem to be individual impossibilities that we ourselves must defeat to obtain fulfillment. Even if the objectives of needs can be fulfilled entirely by exterior sources or by us with their help, our happiness might be disturbed because we did not provide that fulfillment ourselves. In these cases, not only the results particular attributes enable us to achieve are important for our happiness. We additionally value our possession of the enabling attributes, the capacities they convey to us, and enjoy the exercise of these capacities. This nonfungibility burdens our pursuits because the attainment of attributes we seek may be relatively difficult for us and at times impossible. The impossibility to be satisfied unless we generate means is different from the other types of impossibility that are concerned with practicalities. We may call it personal impossibility. It can cause grave consequences because much of the satisfaction we gain from the ful-

fillment of our wishes is produced by achieving objectives through our personal attributes. A lack of certain personal attributes may not curb our wishes to possess them. It may strengthen our desire. If we cannot close the discrepancy between these wishes and our reality, we may have no other choice than to obtain assistance to prevent larger losses. But the nontransferable character of personal attributes and their application may prevent us from finding adequate satisfaction of an array of needs ranging from needs that pertain to social correlations to needs for self-determination, privacy, expression, self-realization, and self-respect. These wide-ranging deficiencies threaten to fill our existence with mounting frustration of these needs and resulting pain.

Possibly, technology could create or help us create certain personal attributes. This might involve nonbiological as well as biological conditioning or supplementation of our mind and tangible aspects of our body. Such artifices might not satisfy us because they may remain foreign even if we personally create them. We would always know that such attributes are not genuinely ours but that they were added to us. We may not be able to accept them as our own. Yet, even if changes or supplements to dispositions of which individuals are already mindful should not be accepted, their infusion from the beginning of individuals' awareness would likely prevent their rejection as foreign. Even if individuals were aware of their conditioning, they might not be burdened by results of external assistance because they would know engineered characteristics only as attributes that have always been with them. They might be missing additional attributes whose introduction might burden them with suffering similar tribulations regarding their authenticity as previous generations that were confronted with novel attributes. However, with their already existing acceptance of technological alterations to furnish attributes that can enhance their potential for the pursuit of needs, issues of personal impossibility might be greatly diminished or entirely fade away. Humans may grow to incorporate technology into their concept of self. In time, technological attributes might become indistinguishable to their carriers from natural attributes and their development. That would seem particularly likely if they could be seamlessly incorporated into direct impressions of an individual's self. Beyond such developments, they might also become accepted because individuals might not want to be left behind in the development that added features empower. Enhancements regarding common needs may encourage them to condone them in idiosyncratic areas as well. With the development of enhancing technologies, issues of personal impossibility might be disappearing to where humans may overcome all personal impossibilities at least relative to one another.

To the extent we cannot or we cannot satisfactorily address deficiencies in our attributes with technology, we might be able to compensate for them by our diligence. In many cases of missing or insufficient personal attributes, we can take steps that advance our position. We may improve our mental and tangible abilities by studying, practicing, or changing our approach. We may unlock and maximize our potential through instruction and training. While we may compensate somewhat for lacking original disposition with dedication and strenuous work, such exertions meet boundaries. They may improve underdeveloped attributes but may not be able to replace missing attributes. We may still fall short of overcoming personal impossibilities according to standards we set. As unrealistic as it might seem that we should possess certain qualities, we might continue to agonize over their absence. Depending on our wishes and the gravity of our shortcomings, personal impossibilities may continue to pose considerable problems for our happiness. Barring a fundamental change of our mental or our tangible capabilities, this problem may seem impossible to resolve.

But cooperation might provide an avenue to resolve or at least relieve concerns about personal impossibilities. Many of our needs inherently necessitate cooperation from others to provide unique means that we cannot generate. To bring about such a cooperation, we may have to engage our personal attributes in return. As long as we possess valuable attributes that we can offer, we may naturally accept the reciprocal application of other individuals' attributes. This may become progressively familiar for us as our cooperation expands to needs that we could pursue and satisfy ourselves. We may adopt a general mode in which we maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of our pursuits by exchanging efforts or their products or contributing them to shared results. This may permit us to more comprehensively use our personal attributes as indirect means toward our objectives because they serve the purposes of others. This use of personal assets may satisfy us sufficiently to accept assistance in areas in which we lack personal assets. Cooperating with others may let us leverage our strengths to compensate for our weaknesses. The valuation of our attributes in exchanges or joint efforts may help us to not only decrease conceptual and practical individual impossibilities but also personal impossibilities. It permits us to reduce our reservations toward accessing external attributes we wish we had because we earn desired means by application of our personal capacity. The mutuality of assistance counters the pain over our personal deficiencies with the pleasure over the benefits our personal assets provide. This may permit us to be content with the result as the best attainable solution. Rather than engaging in futile efforts

or wasting resources on approximating attributes that only come to us at undue expense, we might maximize the overall effectiveness and efficiency of our pursuits by focusing on improving and using attributes we already possess. We may further diminish our pain over personal impossibilities by helping others develop talents and capabilities that we lack. Through our assistance, we become partly responsible for and can savor their success even if the attributes we advance are not our own. Our need to support the survival and thriving of other humans offers the foundation for obtaining such vicarious fulfillment.

Technological, economic, and social advancement and cooperation present impressive instruments for pushing back many barriers of individual and general impossibility. Still, we and others might be left quite a distance from experiencing reliable satisfaction of all basic survival needs, let alone all of our existential needs. The progress of technology renders general material deficiencies a diminishing part of our problems. When we search for examples of detrimental circumstances in our existence, we recognize that, apart from accessing the past and overcoming death, most of our relevant wishes should not be affected by general impossibility. Nor does there seem to be a good reason why individuals should suffer great pain over boundaries of individual impossibility. There appear to be enough resources as well as conceptual and practical capacities to accommodate the existential concerns of all humans with the noted exceptions. Even the ability to conquer death with technological and social developments seems to be within reach. But a dearth of mental clarity encumbers humanity in realizing its developmental potential. Many individuals seem to have trouble understanding how to employ their conceptual or practical capacities or following that understanding. They may not have well-rounded, mature concepts of objectives they should pursue or the manners of pursuing them. Even if they possess sufficiently developed technological skills, they may therefore procrastinate or pursue erroneous or less than optimal strategies. They may select the wrong type, strength, timing, sequence, or combination of means. They may not use their resources in the most effective ways. They may lack motivation to address matters that lie within their capabilities because of unwarranted fear or disregard. They may interact with others in ways that do not optimize their interests. They may be disinclined to cooperate, have incompatible requirements, or be unaware of the advantages of cooperation or how to organize it. Deficiencies may also result from a preclusion of access to resources and from exploitation that deprives humans of the fruits of their labor or of other possessions. Perpetrators and victims may both suffer from the struggle engendered by this abuse. Problems may fur-

ther arise from the abuse of natural resources that may negatively affect individuals who did not participate or benefit as well as offenders. Such abuses may be caused or tolerated by ignorance or errors regarding one's own and other parties' needs and rights. But we also often find willful ignorance or disregard for the sake of gratifying dominant needs. We can further detect destructive acts that do not seem to follow such motivations and appear to be without purpose. Responses to actual or deemed violations of needs and rights, and replies to those, extensively add to deprivations. These factors of human irresponsibility are material causes for individual and general impossibility. Even if we should fare relatively well in such a setting, its strife and damage necessarily leave the level of our satisfaction short of its potential. Our needs seem to call upon us to solve our self-imposed limitations.

Beyond these limitations, other boundaries are and become visible whose dissolution may be helpful or necessary to increase the fulfillment of our needs. In many aspects of our individual and collective potential, we may be only at the beginning of what we can discover or achieve. The individual and collective determination and tenacity to fight limitations of our pursuits appear to be deeply embedded characteristics of humanity. Overcoming limitations is our individual and collective preoccupation, perhaps even our obsession. We incessantly determine and implement strategies to ameliorate our happiness. We dedicate our existence to the realization of our wishes, to the pursuit of our happiness. Nevertheless, our efforts might not yield the happiness we expect from such a towering investment. Although we might achieve moments and periods of happiness, some and perhaps many of our pursuits do not appear to produce the satisfaction we had expected. There may be simple explanations for such a shortfall. Besides our own errors and carelessness, we may be subject to obvious interferences and limitations that do not allow us intact pursuits or to savor such pursuits and their results. It is much more confounding when we encounter a failure of happiness where we seem to act responsibly toward us and others and suffer no recognizable encroachments. We may make adequate progress and achieve what we had set out to do. We may be reaching the objectives we thought would place us into a state of happiness. Yet these accomplishments may not translate into the satisfaction we had imagined. The objective validity and success of some pursuits may not be matched by our subjective impression. The reasons for such a shortfall are enigmatic because everything seems to be arranged according to our needs and proceeding as planned. Our dissatisfaction may prompt us to inquire whether we are truly pursuing our needs and how much happiness we can rightfully expect.

Tragically, we might never or only rarely and fleetingly be confronted by occasions that make us pursue such inquiries with the necessary profundity or extent. There might always exist some detraction from happiness that we might blame for our not being as happy as we imagine we could be if everything went our way. The imperfections of our pursuits render it difficult for us to distinguish causes for our unhappiness that are generated by nonintrinsic inadequacies from those that lie in the nature of happiness or our failure of identifying and following what will make us happy. Our lack of distinction may cause us to concentrate on addressing technical optimizations of our pursuits. However, before we can enhance our happiness through technical optimization, we must ascertain that the underlying objectives can convey the satisfaction we seek. We must first find out what we want and do not want, as well as what the necessary implications are. Our preoccupation with forestalling and solving technical disturbances might alone not permit us to gain adequate clarity about such issues.

We may negate such a lack of clarity and refer to motivational foundations that we consider to be securely competent. We may have favorite pursuits that we know are bringing us happiness. We may be certain about the needs these pursuits fulfill. We may reject the possibility that we might derive more happiness from these types of pursuit. But we may also identify pursuits that we regard with more ambivalence. If we inquire why we engage in such pursuits, we may find a somewhat undefined urge that is only described in general terms. We may respond with a declaration of values and principles that are important to us. It is often hard to trace how these became settled in our mind or how we know that they should guide us. We may not or not consistently live by these maxims that we apparently hold in some esteem. We may not have given them much thought or our considerations may have been largely abstract without much particularization. We may practice them merely in a perfunctory manner. There may be exceptions to this vagueness. We may know more regarding the background and meaning of some of our convictions than others. We may fully embrace some of them and try to live according to them. We may approve of some of them on account of their practical instruction, rationale, or an emotional bond. We may believe that some of them and perhaps all of them, contain important and useful insights about how we should live. Nevertheless, a few general statements like these cannot possibly constitute sufficient guidance to create, increase, maximize, and sustain our happiness. They cannot replace a clear definition of our needs. Beyond that, their capability as practical guidelines may be questionable. They are often too general or too specific to grant us

sufficient knowledge for resolving varying convolutions among needs and the situations in which we find ourselves. Many of our principles may then turn out to be thin layers of commonplaces. We may coddle ourselves in their purported security and resign to a life of mediocrity and partial frustration in which we battle problems whose resolution only vaguely represents our desires. To the extent we decide that our familiar values and principles are insufficient and that we want more, we struggle because we do not possess a well-developed idea of the internal and external circumstances and mechanisms that make us happy or unhappy. In such areas that lie beyond the refuge of guidelines we deem sufficient, we are bound to address issues of our happiness in ways that expose us to risks of damage. We are forced to consider and define our happiness in an erratic and fragmented manner. We may detect causes of happiness and unhappiness and address them as they arise and claim relevance. If we attempt to plan for our objectives and their fulfillment and engage in longer-term strategies, we run the risk of pouring substantial efforts into sequences that prove to be inapposite. Either way, we would not be in command of our affairs.

We experience that this is not a proper mode to maintain, let alone to improve or maximize our happiness. We would be more efficient and effective in our happiness if we could lead our life in a more confident fashion. Thus, we look for a strategy that places us in front of, in charge of events before they occur, a strategy that gives us control over our existence to the extent persistent impossibilities and uncontrollable interferences allow. Finding such a strategy does not appear unmanageable. We are not the first to seek happiness. Every human who ever lived has been confronted by the same fundamental difficulties of achieving happiness. Even if personalities, circumstances, and means differ and humanity has undergone development, principal needs and principal choices pursuant to them have remained similar. There must be models from which we can learn. Likely, we have been exposed to constructs that claim such an authority and we may have adopted some or all of their teachings. But the fact that we are not as happy as we wish to be places them in question. Although their proponents and we might blame us and other causes for shortcomings, technical optimization only becomes an issue to the extent we can be certain that our model guides us competently and that there is no alternative that can offer better guidance. If we are to gain control over our happiness, we must be able to make that determination. A similar determination is necessary if we are not predisposed by any model. In either event, we must become able to judge whether and how models match our needs. The next section begins to explore that endeavor.