

CHAPTER 3 PASSING ON

Our experiences are encased in an irretrievable past to which we have no other access than through our memory. All the happenings we can recall will not occur again. They are lost forever. We comprehend this most distinctly when an experience of great pleasure concludes. We will never be positioned quite like this again. The particular happiness we experienced is locked and lost in the past. If we try to revisit conditions of the past, these conditions will have changed. Even if we manage to approximate earlier circumstances in an effort to experience the same occasions of happiness they once caused, we and their effect on us will be different. Further, our happiness will change if we attempt to preserve and to continue it after we first experience it. Its inherent dynamics may cause it to abate. Even if we can renew it, the requirements of its maintenance, intervening conditions in us and our environment, and its mere continued presence while other circumstances develop will render it different. These changes or their consequences may range in severity. Yet, throughout, we can only create similarities to former happiness. Our attempts will be limited by the distinctiveness of the constellations we are striving to regenerate. We cannot arrest the development of us or our surroundings. We must leave stages and segments behind to never truly be able to return to them. The past may lay the basis for future happiness. Still, that does not change its passing character. We cannot hold on and we cannot go back. We helplessly watch our experiences drift away. The past is sealed.

There is a fundamental sadness to this experience of our finality. Oddly, this unhappiness applies regardless of whether an event in our past was bad or good, happy or unhappy. The passing of a painful event can make us unhappy as well. Once it has happened, we cannot alter it. We might only manipulate our memory of it as a dissatisfactory substitute. We cannot turn back the course of events to the setting from which they arose. We cannot recoup wasted time and effort. The potential to create a happy occasion at a certain moment has passed. In addition to haunting our memory, past occurrences may define our present and our future in disagreeable ways. We keep wishing we or someone else could or would have acted differently, that circumstances would have been different to spare us these afflictions. We mourn missed chances and our inability to correct past pain-inducing events. Thus, regardless of whether we cherish an experience or abhor it, we probably would go back if we could. We would want to experience the happiness of pleasurable events again and might try to enhance them.

We would also want to relive occurrences that led to overproportional pain so that we could create better outcomes. Such unrequited wishes place us into a difficult situation. We can neither relive pleasure nor correct the causes for pain. Our incapacity on both counts causes us pain because it leaves us helpless. We may try to counteract that pain by engaging our memory to place us in our mind back into former experiences of pleasure. We may replay unhappy events in our mind as if we could revive them and could change or overcome them. Yet, apart from learning lessons for our future demeanor, these mind travels are necessarily hurting us more than they soothe. The pain of perfection haunts us because there seems to be nothing we can do to counter it.

The only possibility we have to combat our pain over the loss of the past is to connect it with occurrences in our present and future. We may try to continue or reopen past events where we find sufficient circumstances for a revival. Where that is not possible, we might try to produce similar circumstances by reenactments that give us an opportunity to derive similar happiness or to prevent similar unhappiness. Even where we do not go that far, we may try to commemorate joyful and mournful occasions to apply them for present and future support and direction. We may let the past serve as a reminder for present and future behavior. We may regard it as a representation of pleasurable conditions we should strive to emulate, regain, maintain, or on which we should build. Alternatively, we may look upon it as a representation of circumstances we must endeavor to avoid, prevent, or change, or for which we must seek redress. These incentives and activities do not empower us to surmount the absolute impossibility of a foreclosed past. We can only project into the present and the future the accomplishments we would seek if we could access the past. By that transfer, we may hope to keep the past from being perfected. We may attempt to compensate for its impenetrability by readdressing our wishes and actions regarding it toward the present or future. Placing past events into the context of similar present and future occurrences allows us to regard them as episodes in a continuing undertaking. The potential of finding similar fulfillment or avoidance of pain to which we were formerly exposed may assist us in coping with the inaccessibility of past events. The semblance of a continuance or iteration may enable us to ameliorate our pain of perfection. Still, no matter how well we fare in compensating endeavors, the pain induced by the closed character of experiences keeps accumulating throughout our existence. The factual and emotional weight of past events threatens to catch up with our efforts to produce new events of happiness. This makes our memory of times when we had fewer of these burdens precious but also bitter.

Short of traveling back in time and of accessing or even commanding the version of us existing at the time, our efforts will lack satisfaction. But traveling back appears to be prohibited by laws of nature. Alternatively, a reversion of circumstances might be permissible, but involve unmanageable complexities. Further, it may not yield the experience we seek because we would generate another event in time without affecting the previous occurrence. Even time travel would not be able to truly set us back into the time. We would want to preserve our experiences since then to savor the satisfaction of going back or if only to act differently at this time with consideration. If either of these methods were possible, they may not have been invented. Even if they were technically available, they would have to be strictly controlled to not unacceptably modify already evolved circumstances in which others have rightful interests. This would require severe limits on both.

Hence, we are now and might forever remain confined to creating new incidents of happiness in an effort to compensate for our loss of the past. Yet, even the already inadequate consolations these compensations can provide are limited because our ability to pursue them deteriorates with our physical condition as we age and will end when we die, if not before. Usual mechanisms of addressing actual or potential pain do not apply here. We are left with the awareness that happiness will eventually be categorically denied to us and that this denial limits the number of our chances to obtain happiness. We are inexorably running out of time. We are withdrawing our pursuits from a restricted account of chances. Every opportunity we pass, false or inept choice we make, obstruction of our efforts, and experience of pleasure counts against our finite ability to create happiness. The finality of our experiences places an additional pall of irretrievable passing on all our pursuits. Our pain about this may be remote as long as we possess life and vitality and no reason to deem them in proximate peril. As opportunities pass, succeed, or fail to emerge, we presumptively have many chances of happiness left. But our confidence wanes and our fear rises as we physically decline and move closer to our life's natural conclusion or when other causes threaten us with injury or death. The only remedy appears to be to safeguard our constitution and life for as long and against as many causes as we can. That might seem to be a technical problem that should be manageable with proper development.

When we inquire why we want to survive, we invariably name pursuits of other needs as reasons. We might therefore doubt that our need for individual survival exists independently. It may be a composite of our other needs that originates in their concern for their satisfaction that is contingent upon the fulfillment of all other existential

needs. This shared, equal, multilateral motivation that all our individually relevant existential needs acquire may give us the impression of an overarching need for individual survival. A similar mechanism may apply among our collectively relevant existential needs. The resulting need for collective survival and thriving may comprise all individually relevant needs. However, although our need for collective survival and thriving may be based on our individual existence, it also incorporates needs that aim at objectives beyond. The fulfillment of these may require or may benefit from the subordination of our individually pertinent needs and our individual survival need. That preference seems to mirror the apparent expendability of individuals as tools in the overarching development and continuance of a species. If we are pressed to choose between our individual survival and the survival of our species, we are disposed to prefer the continuance of our species. Moreover, our individually significant needs seamlessly produce a basis for needs directed at collective survival and thriving without our exposure to dramatic choices. That might be concealed by the at times contingent nature of our needs that directly pertain to the support or protection of our species. There may be periods during an individual lifetime when some of these needs are not developed, continuing, or triggered or do not motivate us in sufficient strength. During times when we are not charged to serve or are not fully dedicated to serving our need for collective survival and thriving, we perceive that this service function is not or not solely the motivation for our individual survival efforts. Still, our underlying disposition is to invest and, if we deem necessary, sacrifice ourselves, including our life, when these needs call on us in a fitting context. Conversely, if our continuing existence and our contribution to collective causes seem to us critical or helpful, we will support and defend our life. But this does not represent the entire reason we want to live. We also perceive an independent, self-serving cause.

We may find this aspect initially difficult to explain. The motivations of individually relevant existential needs to achieve fulfillment should be neutral regarding our individual death. Death does not directly affect these needs in that together with our capacity of fulfilling them our need for their fulfillment ceases as well. Arguably, we only have a fear of our finality because it runs against a distinctive need for personal survival. Without it, there should be nothing for us to fear. We would simply endeavor to fulfill our other needs until we cease to function and could fulfill them no more. This appears to be a mode by which most other life forms exist. Humans dramatically diverge from that approach. The distinguishing factor appears to be their expanded capacity to anticipate their death rationally and emotionally. Without

such capacity, an apprehension of death may be limited to an immediate awareness of a threat to physical integrity. Many species possess mechanisms for fear that benefit their self-preservation. They may instinctively react to life-threatening circumstances. They might be able to increase or to shape the applicability of their reactions by learning about their environment. Some higher life forms might have some observational understanding of death as a termination of life functions. They might be able to infer the possibility of their own death. But species that do not reach human capabilities to anticipate might not have mindfulness of the categorical limitation of their existence and might possess no concept of nonexistence. Their fear of death might remain tied to certain types of events that trigger their fear of death. Even if they are under constant fear for their existence, their attitude toward existence and their need to survive may not be defined or influenced by the eventual inescapability of their passing. Nor may they possess a concept of the finality of death and the relative time spans of their life and their nonexistence. They would therefore not share the extent of fear and resulting motivations that inhabit humans. Our awareness of the inevitable approaching of our annihilation and our apprehension of final nonexistence critically expand the scope and intensity of our fear of death. That anticipation particularizes a need for survival that seems to transcend our other needs and to form a separate objective.

Even in consideration of our powers of anticipation, the subjective impression of such a detached need for survival seems hard to justify. Our fear of death should be limited to anticipating physical pain that might accompany dying as well as regret about not having satisfied needs and not having sufficiently compensated for past events of happiness and unhappiness. This may incentivize us to pack our limited time with as much fulfillment as possible. If we succeed in leading an existence of fulfillment, we should be contented. Yet, although we can anticipate that our existence will end, we should be able to resign to that fact because we can also anticipate that our needs will expire. This is where our capacity to anticipate appears to fail. Our awareness and our anticipation of death are flawed because we have never experienced our nonexistence. Even if we witness the endangerment of our existence, we have never experienced not being alive. Accordingly, we have no true concept of that state. This inexperience renders our need for individual survival unique among our needs because we have never experienced the entire span between its deprivation and satisfaction. We have only known its satisfaction and possibly its endangerment. In that fundamental ignorance, we might not differ much from other animals. But our higher mental capacity allows us to imagine that state.

Because we cannot imagine our nonexistence, we cannot help projecting a part of us as surviving into the time after our death. We stretch our imagination to a status of being dead in the literal sense, an existence in death. The outward consequences of death are drastically demonstrated by the evidence we observe when humans die. Because there are no physical signs of survival, we may conclude that we will continue in a more restricted manner. This leads us to a claustrophobic vision of an afterlife. We tend to envisage ourselves as beings without substance, as ghosts and spirits, as shadows of ourselves. The termination of obvious life functions suggests that we would not have needs anymore to fulfill these life functions. Still, we cannot let go of the impression of having needs because our needs and the activities in their pursuit define the essence of our nature, of who we are. We cannot imagine our existence without them. As a result, if we imagine our continued existence after death, we have to also imagine the continuation of our needs rather than acknowledge that they will die together with the organism that engenders them. Since that organism disintegrates, we must imagine another basis for our needs to continue. We may therefore try to imagine nonphysical sources for our needs. This increases our fear because we imagine our awareness of our physical disintegration. We further fear the phase upon disintegration. We anticipate that we will be in a state of pain because we foresee retaining our needs but having lost together with our physical existence the capability to fulfill them. We fear becoming arrested in a helpless state where our options to create happiness will have ended but all or some of our mental processing faculties are remaining intact. We visualize a setting where we are conscious, may even remember who we were and what happened to us, but are unable to do anything except stew in our awareness of decay and deprivation. We sense that we might be incapable of generating happiness without a physical existence. This vision becomes a part of our fear of death. The denial of satisfaction over the entire spectrum of our needs and the confined nature of our imagined existence deprive the prospect of a continued existence after death of its appeal. Instead, we contemplate it in horror. Our fear of death and conversely our need for individual survival then reveal themselves as constructs of our existential needs that anticipate a permanent state of deprivation. Without that anticipation by these needs, we would have no fear of death beyond the fear pertaining to the period until death.

To the extent we cannot succeed in surviving, we will have to find strategies to cope with the crushing weight of our fear. One regular strategy is disregard. There would appear to be justification for this strategy if there is nothing we can do to overcome our death. The re-

lated fear does not appear to have a purpose because it will never be sublimated in the pleasure of fulfillment. It would seem then that the best we can do is to mask that fear and to distract ourselves from our awareness of it. On an individual as well as on a societal level, we may therefore attempt to eliminate the reality of death from our everyday consciousness. We may try to preoccupy our mind with particular intensity in the pursuit of other needs and their satisfaction. But we may also consider such a concentration of efforts to be a display of desperation whose effort to produce contrast reminds us of death even more. We may prefer to live our life as if it would last forever and as if death did not exist. In either case, we may avoid contact with death so we are not reminded of it. We may try to relegate it from a lifelong imposition to a minimum at the end of our life or the lives of others where we cannot avoid encountering it. Upon witnessing death, we may try to overcome this break in our awareness as promptly as possible. This focus on denial does not seem to fit with our predilection for accounts or simulations of deadly violence, death, and related horrors. But accounts of actual events related to death help us to numb our mind, to immunize us against our fear at a secure distance. Simulations fulfill a similar function. They additionally permit us to lull ourselves into the pretense that death does not exist, that it is a product of imagination. Its convolution with fantasy helps us to neutralize true reminders of its reality. Trivializing death helps us to ignore it in plain sight.

These strategies to numb or suppress our awareness of death or to immunize us against emotional reactions to it may assist us to contain our fear momentarily or even for significant distances of time. Yet our endeavors are ultimately ineffective and might even heighten our helpless realization that we will die and our desperation over that fact. We are bound to be confronted with death as persons with whom we share or once shared closer genetic or other ties or commonalities die. Based on the knowledge that we are of their kind or similar to them, their death makes the inescapability of our death conspicuous. We are further reminded by references to other individuals who have passed. Every organism we kill, observe dying or dead, or consume insinuates death. Life itself in all its facets points us to its antithesis of death. The passage of time, a change of seasons, and any decline we observe in us and in our surroundings suspend us in apprehension. Annually recurring events prompt our awareness that our ability to experience them is finite and inevitably decreasing. We are surrounded by a multitude of intimations that do not allow us to forget. Our unwillingness or inability to deal with death renders us unprepared for it. As we witness the death of contemporaries, encounter life-threatening conditions or

situations of increased risk, our denial is becoming brittle. When fear pushes into our awareness, we may try to find a more stable way of handling the reality of our death than by denial and desensitization.

Head-on acknowledgment of our finality does not seem to improve our happiness. The apparent inevitability of death may cause us to resign and to not pursue happiness or pursue it with reduced vigor because we perceive it as ultimately pointless. We may be frustrated that we are continuously being tortured by an awareness of our death without the ability to effectively overcome death. This frustration may combine with frustration regarding our incapacity to access the past. We may already turn against the notion of happiness because it taunts us with memories of pleasure that we cannot recreate, as well as past, present, and future pain that we cannot erase but can only hope to reduce. This frustration rises by our insight that the already dubious effectiveness of compensation efforts and our ability to experience non-compensatory happiness are limited by our dwindling lifespan. These incapacities may give rise to a defeatist approach to life. Our attitude may not be reserved to a lack of incentive to fight causes of death. We may welcome and promote its occurrence to abbreviate our suffering. This might be reflected in a lack of pursuit of existential needs, an absence of defense against external interferences, or actions to end our existence. Although we would deprive ourselves of remaining chances of compensation for the sealed past by this deportment, we may view death as a relief because it would stop memories we cannot mend. But if our fear of death should be warranted, incurring death will cause us the very pain we fear regarding both our memories and the end of our life. Our fear of death should therefore have a life-affirming effect. It should direct us to avoid death and to make the most of our life.

Our zeal not to miss any opportunity might induce us to follow any current pleasure we can attain. This view discourages us from investing time and effort into the building of elaborate means and plans. It considers the rewards of building for future fulfillment insecure and dubious in their relevance. It believes that, even at their best, eventual rewards from preparatory pursuits may not compensate for the time and opportunities to be happy we sacrifice in the meantime. This attitude appears to have its advantages. It seems to liberate us from pains of pursuit and from worrying about consequences of our actions and our future happiness. On the other hand, it may render us defenseless against internal and external interferences and unable to use opportunities. Our lack of attention and inquiry may even leave us unaware of them. Our concentration on present pleasure may make us reluctant to defend against endangerment until it interferes with our pleasure

or to locate means before we need them. This lack of effort is bound to affect our ability to reach happiness. It may keep us from accomplishing results that are required for proper and timely fulfillment of needs. Moreover, being driven by coincidences may encourage or even force us to act in negligent, reckless, or willful disregard of our future happiness for the sake of current gratification. We may even fail to maintain or protect, and might actively destroy, the resources on which we rely for the provision of future benefits. Our lack of foresight might motivate us to infringe or rely on the resources or pursuits of others to cover deficiencies. Hence, by making our happiness dependent on our immediate grasp of resources that we did not provide, we may expose us and others to avoidable current and future risks. This strategy then reveals itself more as a desperate attempt at a diversion from our continuing frustrations about our incapacity of accessing the past and securing an unlimited future than a usable strategy to fill our life with happiness. Its incompetence in securing success at high levels may not only punish us with deficient fulfillment and the strain of improvisation at the edge of failure but may even render death more likely.

The disadvantages of concentrating on immediate rewards may prompt us to try to maximize our happiness for the entire span of our existence. We may elect to investigate, embrace, and develop our potential to influence, even direct the generation of our happiness. Our awareness of this opportunity may propel us to seek a plan that allows us to maximize the fulfillment of all our needs and with that our happiness as a systematic undertaking. That may comprise fighting proximate and eventual threats of death and other threats as well as constructive undertakings to use the secured space for maximum effect in the support of our existential needs. While the inclusion of all our affairs and of our entire lifetime in our planning and execution creates complexity, it also maximizes our control regarding the fulfillment of our needs. It allows us to produce mechanisms of fulfillment for long-term and recurring requirements of our needs. It helps us to generate balance and security and infuses an aspect of predictability and calming confidence that we are making the best of our situation. We may continue to be subject to unpredictable circumstances, but we may be able to reduce detrimental occurrences or at least detrimental effects. We would let our awareness of our past and future finality serve as an admonition to organize our capabilities to their best effect.

Notwithstanding these considerations, the imposition of death and the associated pain are likely to continue even if we acknowledge that remaining alive is preferable and if we fight to keep our fear and pain contained by living life to its fullest. Our desperation may only be

avoided as long as we experience sufficient events of happiness. With their abatement, we may fall back into less constructive, inert, and ultimately harmful modes in our behavior. The damage of such behavior may not be limited only to us. Our connectedness with other individuals in our pursuits and our mere coexistence with others may expose them to unintended collateral impairment. But we may also resort to damaging behavior targeted at others to cope with our frustrations.

Our frustrations may antagonize us against deemed causes. The general character of these frustrations may take us beyond attitudes of retribution toward specific causes that elevated our systemic pain and fear. We may resent the world that generated us to be mortal and surrounded us with mortal potential. We may despise a reality in which we cannot relive our past. We may loathe that we should have to die while life will go on without us or that we should be encumbered by painful memories or societal stigma for past events we cannot change while others may live free of these burdens. These causes may make us wish for comprehensive destructive events as a purported defense or resolution. We may relish their occurrence, even strive to initiate and conduct them, or to support, widen, and intensify their occurrence or impact. The intent to destroy or allow destruction and the defenses by others who are exposed to the consequences of such intent may create a climate of violence. Even if these attitudes regularly do not find expression and can be kept contained, they may lead to an undercurrent of disdain for our surroundings that may erupt depending on how we fare and may elevate the threat for destructive behavior together with other incentives that by themselves might not possess sufficient gravity. These other incentives may be fundamentally manageable because all other areas of human concern offer devices to overcome obstacles. Even the sealed character of the past seems manageable if we have an unlimited future to compensate for it. But the overwhelming certainty and severity of death appear to surpass all other problems and leave us ultimately destitute of a capable resolution or accommodation.

Nevertheless, our desperation may move us to attempt to manage death as we might try to manage other opponents to our pursuits. Beyond direct endeavors of attacking death by prolonging our life, we may attempt a strategy of alignment. We may try to counter our pain of death with the infliction of such pain in an effort to turn the negation of a negation into a positive. Such an attitude may begin with legitimate defensive efforts. We may try to neutralize sources of death by visiting upon them what they impose or threaten to impose on us. Such a stance may be necessary and effective in certain situations. But we may expand this selective concept to general application. We may

believe that we can protect ourselves against threats of death generally by assuming and exercising powers of death. We may deem that by aligning ourselves with the force that in the end appears to win, we too can win or at least protect ourselves. We may hope that, by joining what we cannot fight, by assisting and reconciling ourselves with what is set to kill us, we can render it friendly toward us. We may imagine that we can use death as an instrument, ally, or principal, that we can edge out a satisfying existence under its overwhelming power and protection. We may therefore seek positions that imitate the supremacy, unpredictability, and merciless efficiency in the infliction of damage and pain we observe in death. Even if we apply the power to threaten or to impose death sparingly or not at all, we may strive to mimic the power that the threat of death wields over the behavior of individuals. We may pursue such positions in various contexts and directions over other humans or even over our nonhuman living environment.

Destructive or dictatorial approaches toward our surroundings may cause repercussions directly or in defensive response. Moreover, if we succeed in suppressing or evading these repercussions, this does not resolve the causes for our frustrations. These shortcomings might discourage such approaches. However, if their perpetrators carry a defeatist attitude toward their existence, its endangerment, impairment, or destruction may not be an effective deterrent against their evil.

While we may deem such attitudes to be extreme and thus unlikely to occur, we all carry them in us as contemporaneous potentials and possibly even pursuits together with distracting and constructive reactions. Our proclivities might strengthen or diminish depending on how we fare. But it appears to be unavoidable that frustrations about the inaccessibility of our past and our future increase as we go on. The only force that might help us to escape detrimental reactions appears to be our need for collective survival and thriving. Because the survival and thriving of our species are the subject of our highest objective and are represented by a need that can be fulfilled in spite of our individual frustrations, they appear to offer us a superseding objective that is free of our limitations. Although fulfilling that objective and its supporting needs generates its own satisfaction that may raise our overall satisfaction level, it can also decrease the pain and fear over individual frustrations. We may take solace in the knowledge that all or a part of our physiological essence is directly and indirectly passed on and continues to survive and thrive through duplicates, descendants, and our species. Even if our individual genetic essence will be lost, we can take comfort in the prospect that our generic human essence may survive. We may be aware of risks that our duplicates, lines of descent, or spe-

cies might die and suffer. But these events are less certain or at least more postponed than our own death. The survival and thriving of our duplicates, descendants, and species are not merely surrogates. They constitute physical survival and thriving of our individual or at least our shared biological essence. This grants supplemental motivation to advancing the survival and thriving of our kind. Our need for individual survival and thriving prompts us in addition to our need for collective survival and thriving to expand the boundaries for our happiness beyond our narrow individual concerns. They both instruct us to meet the needs of other humans, to include their happiness in ours.

Still, as rewarding as securing the survival and thriving of other representatives of our species may be, it cannot fully satisfy our need for individual survival and thriving. That is because securing the survival and thriving of our physiological essence in a part or its entirety does not necessarily secure our awareness of that survival and thriving. It does not carry over our experiences and our consciousness that draws on these experiences. The nongenetic information in and about us may be lost. With that aspect missing, much of our identity would be lost. Some of our nongenetic essence might be remembered by persons who knew us and be held present by a few succeeding generations. To avoid being forgotten, we might attempt to make a record of that information or build other monuments that point to our perceptions, thoughts, and emotions. Yet the mere existence of these representations does not mean that they will be deemed worth preserving or that they will be accessed or identified with us in a meaningful way. To achieve even such a meager semblance of continued existence, the memory of our existence and its details would have to be particularly relevant for the existence of future generations. Only few individuals achieve that importance. Even then, we might be mostly remembered as a coarsely sketched silhouette, as a mere caricature. For most of us, who we were is likely to fade quickly in the awareness of others until little or nothing remains. Even if we should be exceptionally fortunate or astute to keep memory of us alive, we would not be aware of that fact. The death of our consciousness places us into a position of insecurity about whether, how much, and for how long we will be remembered. Moreover, it makes this indirect manner of survival as a representation in the mind of others rather meaningless for our happiness. While being remembered may console our fear of death somewhat, it remains insignificant as a matter of our individual survival.

The inadequacy of attempts to console our need to survive and thrive through representatives or representations stimulates us to extend our individual life with the ultimate objective of eventually elim-

inating our physical death. We may invest efforts into technologies for the preservation and restoration of health and youth and even reanimation. We may further focus on technologies to transfer experiences and consciousness into biological copies or into nonbiological conveyances. Beyond fighting causes of death we consider as natural, we may try to eliminate the remaining unnatural causes. Although advances in fighting death may necessitate targeted scientific research and application, they may also result or profit from efforts to improve the satisfaction of other existential needs by technological, economic, and social means. But our setting may be flawed. After remedies for blocking natural causes of death have been found, implementing and maintaining these remedies as well as securing our existence and improving its quality in other respects may remain arduous and susceptible to inability, error, or imprudent attitudes. If we should succeed despite such detractions, our happiness may still be negatively affected by structural and procedural alterations that the achievement of these improvements may require or yield. High levels of development may present us with new, enhanced, or formerly hidden types of risk and damage.

The most evident threats appear to emanate from the fact that technological, economic, and social progressions facilitate and necessitate large-scale connectedness and organization of humans and their concerns in systems that may also depend on one another. These systems may benefit us by rendering some types of risks and damage, including some threats to our survival, more remote. Yet the scale of potential negative consequences often has grown to match or exceed the achieved attenuation of risk and damage. Integrated systems may be subjected to efforts to utilize their structures for the advancement of particular parties at the cost of others. Even without such usurpation attempts, these systems may be drawn into internal or external turmoil by their integrated functions. Not all such disturbances originate as systemic phenomena. Many large-scale phenomena may have localized and even individual causes. Interdependent circumstances of sustaining and advancing our existence may allow relatively small causes to grow and threaten us regardless how far we may believe ourselves to be removed from them. Apart from fearing such contagion, we may generally suffer from increased fear because integrated systems curtail our control over the pursuit of our needs. We sense elevated vulnerability to interference from others and the impositions of an interrelated society. The frequently complex and remotely organized character of our life makes it more difficult to act as we wish. Our vulnerability to and dependence on other humans, technology beyond our comprehension and control, and large-scale economic and other societal pro-

cesses and structures may curb our ability to pursue happiness according to individual terms. These attributes of integrated systems place us in fear that we might not be able to effectively pursue our needs or that their fulfillment might be taken from us. They place us in apprehension that assistance or noninterference might be made contingent on our compliance, that we might be controlled. We may fear that our existence, including our life, might be regarded as a mere accommodation in support of common concerns and subjected to them.

Together, these risks of progress confront us with considerable challenges. They may result in severe, including deadly threats for us, others, and future generations or may imperil the survival of our species. We may then doubt that our technological, economic, and social development will assist us greatly in our fight to conquer death or to ameliorate the period until its occurrence. But even if that pessimism should be misplaced, we may have to settle for incremental advances toward perfection of our individual survival and thriving. Even if we succeed in expanding human lifespans and in increasing the quality of life, the eventual denial of our need for survival is bound to continue until we achieve immortality. Even if humanity succeeds in halting or reversing the rate of physiological deterioration and finds cures for illnesses, we would remain susceptible to accidents, catastrophes, and to negligent, reckless, or willful acts. Even if we could solve these hazards of human activity, we might continue to face nonhuman interferences and general developments that could endanger our existence. We additionally would remain exposed to past and possibly continuing contamination, weakening, and depletion of our resources. Unless we can adjust ourselves to become indestructible or take over comprehensive control of our surroundings, the fundamental menace of death to our existence and happiness promises to continue even as our knowledge and skill advance. As long as we cannot securely eliminate death, our fear of death will continue. Our coping with our mortality through destructive reactions may attenuate once we conquer natural causes of death because that would remove a heavy burden of inevitability. This may move us to concentrate more on the managing of causes that lie within our capacities to prevent. But other causes may remain. As long as our fear of death continues, we will only find partial consolation in minimizing its chances of occurrence, filling our existence with more satisfaction and strategies that have some essence of us survive, or advancing the possibility that our species might find a way to eliminate death someday. Short of its complete elimination, no measures we can take or perceive can extinguish our fear of death. The next chapter explores the consequences of our enduring existential dissatisfaction.