CHAPTER 16
SEARCHING FOR A BETTER WAY

Our review of empiric and idealistic approaches gives us indications of utility. Either method may render fundamental objectives available to us based on the commonalities among humans. Both offer techniques by which we can investigate our concerns of happiness and pursue our goals more effectively or efficiently. An examination of both fortifies us with warnings regarding corrupting or misleading influences. Still, these methods leave us in grave doubt whether they can provide sufficient instruction on what will make us happy as particularized individuals. Individual empiric approaches may deliver some insights, but developing these insights may expose us to high cost, delay, and error. Individual idealistic approaches are hampered as well. Our view seems to be obscured and restricted by our emotional inhibitions. Even if we gain a sense of our ideals by the way we feel about the satisfaction of our needs, our imagination of ideal circumstances is often undefined and insecure. Accordingly, both individual empiric and idealistic approaches leave us wanting for guidance on what will make us happy.

Considering the systemic inadequacy of these methods to improve idiosyncratic aspects of our happiness, we may wonder what alternatives we have left. Since both empiric studies and idealistic constructs seem to fail in designating what will make us happy, we may conclude that it is impossible to derive a coherent existential philosophy from them how to achieve individual happiness. For certainty, we appear to be reduced to pursuing our needs in a generic mode that is based on our commonalities. For individual guidance, we seem to be limited to trials in our pursuits led by often unclear notions of ideals. We can detect whether pursuits meet our ideals of happiness, but may not be able to define these ideals very well. Even if trials succeed, we might be missing a systematic, comprehensive approach that can optimize the fulfillment of all our needs. By building experiences based on where our trials guide us, we may in time develop worthwhile and relatively stable manners of pursuits. Much of that may be due to our increasing technical proficiency once we have identified needs. Only, that identification may come at a price of painful errors along the way, may never come, or arrive too late to relieve much pain. Moreover, the utility of principles we construct from our experiences may be limited because changes in our needs or in other circumstances in which we must or choose to pursue our needs may impose new challenges. The improvising, fragmented nature of our pursuits may limit us in acquiring timely and complete knowledge of what will make us happy.

Awareness of this situation may engender despair and resentment toward ourselves. We may blame ourselves for not being wiser, for not anticipating outcomes. In addition or instead, we may hold our environment responsible. We may ascribe fault to its creators or governors, other groups, individuals, and even objects and events for our inability to generate and maintain the level of happiness we crave. We might oppose a variety of purported adversaries and obstacles. Some of them may indeed limit or work against our happiness, and our interests may require that we stand our ground against such forces. But we may also battle restrictions or infringements on our activities that assist our happiness. We may not be able to grasp the difference if we do not possess a comprehensive understanding of our happiness. Even where we correctly identify limitations and infringements on our activities, we may not be able to counteract them effectively or efficiently. We may act mistakenly when we identify causes, attempt to defend against them, or try to overcome the opposition of our environment in providing means. These errors may waste resources as well as unnecessarily damage our relationship with our environment and make cooperation problematic or impossible. We may further focus on obtaining means without a genuine requirement for them or specific understanding of their utility. We may regard the pursuit and high esteem of certain means or types of means by others as indications for the potential of these in our pursuits. Not possessing or having difficulties in accessing them may move us to deem them even more desirable. Our needs might contain general notions of means. Yet these notions may be too undifferentiated to assure or enhance positive results. Without knowledge which means are better or best adapted to our needs, and which might cause us trouble or the extent of that trouble, or whether and how they might have positive and negative aspects, we may erroneously fight for or against a variety of means. Even if we could designate suitable means, our unconsidered manner of their pursuit might cause us to engage in activities that are not in our best interest.

In our awareness of the relative futility of our efforts, we may become wary, lethargic, and disappointed in an existence that fails to meet our desires in spite of our apparently best efforts. We may try to cope with our despair and resentment toward ourselves and our surroundings. Our helplessness is often such that we feel compelled to contort ourselves and our circumstances to forestall the pain of needs and pursuits we cannot sufficiently define. With such resigning strategies, we tend to solidify the deficiencies in our knowledge and other resources and our lack of motivation to overcome them. We may thus make no or only few meaningful strides to improve our happiness.

If we refuse to give up, we may keep struggling under the odds we are handed and develop coping mechanisms and diversionary abilities for the pain that we unavoidably incur. Still, despite that accommodation, we may wonder whether this is the best we can do. We may examine empiric and idealistic approaches we have identified for signs that we might be able to rise from the disappointing state of our happiness. We may review these approaches more intensely because, notwithstanding their shortcomings, they are the only available methods for understanding and interacting with the world, for the formulation and the pursuit of our wishes, for the fulfillment of our needs. Both result from, fortify, and represent the pain-pleasure mechanism that lies at the heart of our pursuits. Both the empiric and idealistic aspects of our pursuits are born from our experience of needs, pain and pleasure, the more comprehensive factual correlations of these experiences, and our mental capacity to process these factors. Both aspects are essential conditions for the successful pursuit of happiness. Without taking account and looking forward, we could not create happiness. What will make us happy is a combined subject of empiric and idealistic aspects. We ask what our circumstances are and, if they are painful or give rise to fear, we ask what we would like them to be. This intimate correlation makes it confounding that empiric and idealistic methods should not be able to collaborate to give us satisfactory answers to our question of what we want and that they seem to have only limited utility.

Not being able to imagine any methods beyond them, we may consider the possibility that we might not be using these methods in a manner that is appropriately considerate of their functionalities, that we might misapply their capabilities. Their utility lies in offering us an arsenal of techniques. It is up to us to identify, select, and relate these to find answers to the question what makes us happy, and to use them in implementing the answers. This function of empiric and idealistic techniques appears to be similar to many methods that allow us to explore and produce an array of substances for a variety of uses, that allow us to find and implement content. These techniques do not tell us for what to search, what product to create, or what process to operate. The derivation of a particular product is built into a technique as part of its possibilities. However, it may constitute only one of many products that can be generated through or with the support of a technique. This tends to turn techniques into general methods that can be adapted to various objectives. Because they are separated from the specifics of our motivations, they do not contain the answer to the question of our choices, of the purposes for which we might use them. The direction to seize upon possibilities they offer and the subjects of their en-

gagement must come from different sources and have to be developed under different standards. They spring from emotional impulses that our needs issue, and, because our happiness is a function of our needs, our needs govern what will satisfy them. Empiric and idealistic methods cannot pose or deduce motivations independently. Nevertheless, we may be able to apply them to coax our motivations out of us and to bring their intent into reality. They may enable us to render our desires conscious and to build a concept of our happiness from these desires. This has already become apparent with regard to commonalities of needs. Empiric and idealistic techniques can assist us in delineating shared principles of happiness, building them to their closest approximation to shared ideals, and in deriving a philosophy that comprises general insights about the nature and the workings of happiness and its fundamental requirements. The task now is to build on these general aspects to include our idiosyncratic aspects. Such an expansion is necessary because subjective aspects are of an essential importance for our happiness. They carry importance not only as surplus installments to be considered in addition to the general aspects of our happiness. Our idiosyncrasies are often inseparable from the common aspects of a need. Without their accommodation, we might not fulfill underlying existential needs, let alone derive sufficient happiness. They modulate the basic ingredients of a need to form a particularized, consolidated entirety. Although we may be able to derive universal basic truths and basic fulfillment from commonalities, our idiosyncrasies insist that we advance beyond these. The individuality of our needs requires that we employ empiric and idealistic techniques in particularized ways. If we do not comprise our idiosyncrasies in defining and building happiness and our philosophy of it, we create incomplete and thus substantially ineffective guidance. We have to narrow the potential of general needs to our individual requirements if we want to advance our happiness.

We must scrutinize why empiric and idealistic techniques have been instrumental in affording us general insights but have failed us in more particular inquiries. There appears to be an obvious reason for this failure. The commonalities of our needs and the nature of happiness are highly accessible to reason because they reflect objective requirements for individual and collective survival and thriving. In contrast, our idiosyncratic modulations appear to be a profoundly subjective aspects of our personality. Individualized needs may appear to be only partly traceable by reason. They consist mostly of emotions that do not seem to be a cogent or even a useful reflection of objective circumstances. Rather, many of them seem to constitute irrational deviations from sensible pursuits. That may make it appear as if individual-

izations of existential needs were of a different quality and may foster doubt whether the exploration of idiosyncratic needs can make much use of our general insights. Beyond a lack of objective association, difficulties in accessing, measuring, and communicating emotions seem to leave it to us individually to ascertain our idiosyncratic traits.

We may interpret our unique potential of insight as isolation. We may believe that we are left to our own devices to find who we are. But that is not entirely so. The prevailing subjectivity of what we attempt to find does not require the method for finding it to be subjective as well. The advantage of an objective method to elicit subjective content would be that, although we might have to undertake most or all of the work in revealing it individually, our exploration could rely on preexisting procedural knowledge and guidance. Such a technique could reduce error and enhance our odds of finding our happiness. It might save us considerable individual effort, leaving us free to concentrate on deriving the essence of what makes us individually happy and on moving forward with the implementation of our insights. The requirements of such a methodology for finding and pursuing individual happiness are demanding. It would have to be able to help us establish what makes each of us individually happy and how that happiness can be accomplished, maintained, augmented, and maximized. Its procedures would have to be applicable regardless of who we are. It would have to be neutral with regard to our personality, experiences, culture, beliefs, education, geography, technology, or economy. That presents a challenge. To keep the undertaking pure, one would have to look for universal procedural principles by which individual happiness can be determined yet abstain from suggesting what to think, feel, or implement substantively. As difficult as this task may seem, we have reason to conclude that it can be accomplished. The details of what we want may be highly subjective and may critically depend on our individual circumstances. Nevertheless, we possess indications that we may find a technique of revealing what we want that is common to all humans. The basic commonalities among humans in the fundamental character of their needs and their shared physiology, as well as the shared characteristic that they customize shared needs by idiosyncrasies provide the foundation for such a technique. They suggest that a general procedure might be devised that all humans would find helpful in extracting the particularities of their nature. We have previously tried to derive valid principles of happiness from commonalities and, because of particularities, have only succeeded in part. But our focus was then on finding substantive guidance. We now are using insights from that search into the nature of happiness to build a general methodology.

Initially, the claim that a general methodology of revealing happiness might exist is only a preconceived notion. It is an unsubstantiated claim that is derived from direct and indirect experiences and interpretations by its originator. Hence, there is a risk that the premises and arguments proving such methodology as well as the details of its method might be influenced by the originator's subjective viewpoint. Like any other theory, the claim of its existence begins with a hypothesis, an idea that is bundled with a wish for its affirmation. The claim that a general methodology of happiness exists is a proposition that its proponent wishes to be true. Thus, there is a potential that the premises and argument may be slanted in favor of proving such a claim. All precautions against the danger that we might be misled should therefore prevail until we become convinced of the methodology's objectivity. Then again, the claim that a general methodology exists by which we can find our individual happiness should not be greatly susceptible to substantive bias by its originator. After all, it proposes a technique by which we each are supposed to be able to identify, collect, comprehend, organize, and implement our own substantive tenets regarding happiness. Its immediate focus is the empowerment of individuals to discover and to examine their idiosyncratic substance by following the general method. Its goal is to assist individuals in the formulation of their own substantive existential philosophy. If the development of a general method could be kept free of substantive premises, assertions, or conclusions about happiness, substantive bias could be avoided.

But it is neither possible nor helpful to limit the development of a general method regarding happiness to procedural aspects. The form of establishing a personal philosophy of happiness cannot be entirely separated from its substance. The substance of our needs and our experiences according to their commands inform our development of a methodology for identifying our needs. This methodology takes on a substantive quality because it leads and connects to substance, however broadly defined or varied that substance might be. Without our notion of our needs, we would not be able to devise any useful procedural strategy for illuminating them. We would have no subject matter toward which we could orient our procedures. We would be aimless because we would not know what we are trying to find. Therefore, a procedure for the revelation of our needs cannot be created without a general concept of the substance of our needs. To the extent our research deals with substances and laws of nature, bias should be relatively easily excluded. These empiric aspects of our experiences naturally lend themselves to scientific review. Yet, because we explore our needs and what will fulfill them, we have inextricably chosen our ide-

als as the subject matter of our research even if we are looking for a technique to identify them. Due to their involvement, the empiric derivation of a procedural theory about finding the content of our needs, as well as its application, is in continuous danger of being taken over by conclusory shortcuts to what we presume to be our ideals. What we find is in unavoidable danger of being influenced by what we hope to find. Nevertheless, we must not ignore our wishes because they are the subject of our research. Rather than excluding them, we must register and learn to understand the dangers of circularity that emanate from our needs for the derivation of a method regarding their discovery. The circularity of common existential needs may already create a challenge for efforts to identify such needs. But their rational foundation in human survival and thriving makes this challenge manageable. The subjective influences of idiosyncratic needs appear to be distinctly more problematic. They may infect attempts to find a general method similarly to how they might taint the derivation of a more substantive general existential philosophy. Even if our logic seems sound to us, we may pursue strategies that obtain results ordained by our idiosyncratic mental traits. In our inquiries, idiosyncrasies might be difficult to separate from their existential underpinnings because it is in their nature to govern these for their benefit. We are necessarily hampered in our undertaking because we have not used the technique yet. The method we are trying to identify must take the possibility of such circularities into account and disable them. It must reveal our needs without giving them a chance of influencing the revelation process. We may be able to thwart such undue influence in the conceptualization phase of our method with relative ease because we are not approaching particular needs yet. We may obtain a general notion of our common needs and that idiosyncratic needs might interfere with common needs and attempts to identify these. We may also grasp that idiosyncratic needs might strive even more to interfere with revelation efforts that focus on their nature and activities. Still, to devise capable countermeasures against such influences that might hamper the development of a general method and a concept of our happiness, we must comprehend the substantive positioning of existential and specific needs better.

Understanding our needs fundamentally requires the reconciliation of their idealistic ambitions to their empiric roots. This is necessary to create clarity because an idealistic approach constitutes an outgrowth of the empiric method. The reconciliation of idealistic aspects with their empiric sources is based on an acknowledgment that ideals, needs, and wishes spring from physical phenomena, from the interaction of substances and laws of nature. This forces the conclusion that

they must be decipherable in an empiric, scientific, objective fashion. The empiric method finds fertile ground in the research of human affairs because of the great commonalities in the physiological setup of humans that can lead to the establishment of some general substantive rules about the nature of happiness. Such general rules are extensions of the principles at work in creating and maintaining our shared physiology. They refer to natural substances and principles in their application. This framework affords us empiric access to our existential needs. But it also assists us in ascertaining and judging our particularities. The particularities of our traits are grafts onto our shared physiological substance. They must correlate with and therefore conform to a certain extent to the framework of our common needs. That framework lays a universal basis for idiosyncratic needs and the parameters within which they can range. This appears to create an empiric foundation, a common denominator that helps us to formulate a scientific method for defining idiosyncrasies by their deviations within its parameters of existential functionality and beyond. It also provides a scientific basis for the possible modification, suppression, elimination, or even the creation of idiosyncrasies. The shared substance of our needs further supplies a basis for the development of derivative laws. These give direction regarding the practical applicability of that substance in the relationship of needs in us, among humans, and with our nonhuman environment. Because these laws spring from our common basis, their more detailed categorizations constitute commonly shared principles as well. Their more immediate practical relation with substances and principles from which our world is organized imposes these in additional detail as common foundations on our endeavors. Together, these human and natural laws posit the parameters by which we can identify idiosyncratic nonconformities and by which idiosyncratic pursuits must be judged because they must abide by them to succeed.

These general requirements may narrow a pursuit of happiness to one feasible choice regardless of our personal idiosyncrasies or specific circumstances. We may encounter general principles that require close or precise adherence to a particular manner of pursuit. But that does not seem to be the case in many instances. Most of our common needs appear to permit a considerable variety of possibilities to satisfy their substance. The general requirements of our needs may be sufficiently expansive to allow flexibility in their definition and fulfillment. That is demonstrated by the range of idiosyncrasies among individuals we detect in the successful individual satisfaction of a common need. The requirements for the fulfillment of most existential needs occur in the form of parameters within which we may operate and still secure

their fulfillment. Within these parameters, we may distinguish conditions that are better or best suited to bring forth success. Thus, our insight into general conditions causes us not only to determine that certain substantive concepts are viable or not viable to meet the generalized purpose of an existential need. It may also permit us to differentiate a gradation among viable concepts in relation to their advantages and disadvantages in meeting that need. The idiosyncratic aspects of our needs superimpose onto this background. Still, the principal categorizations pursuant to general criteria of our existential needs tend to persist. A pursuit that is not viable to support a common need cannot become viable because of the particularization of such a need. If it cannot satisfy our underlying need, it will not be able to satisfy the composite of general and idiosyncratic features because idiosyncratic modulations cannot occur independently. However, the narrowing of existential needs by our idiosyncrasies appears to make it possible that conditions that fulfill the underlying need fail to fulfill the composite need because they fail to satisfy its idiosyncratic aspects. Further, idiosyncrasies may impose divergent gradations among the remaining solutions. Idiosyncratic particularizations may also disagree with derivative regulations and the definitions of their foundations in fundamental law. Their individual contraction of the range of capable pursuits and their variations in the ranking of pursuits may not leave a general substantive existential philosophy with much practical relevance.

Missing correspondence between general utility and individual preferences may lead to difficulties and possibly tragic results for the fulfillment of our needs. Our particularizations of common needs consistent with our individual personality traits may create demands that situate us beyond a sufficient approach to satisfy underlying needs by principle or available means. They may also exclude better or the best solutions within a general parameter. These problems might be aggravated by incongruences among idiosyncratic needs. Meeting requirements set by common needs comprehensively may already challenge us and call for compromises that restrict our ability to pursue each existential need according to its own criteria of success. But our internal particularities are bound to introduce requirements among our needs that additionally narrow our options. This would only be useful where strict guidance is necessary or helpful for the overall beneficial fulfillment of our existential needs. In all other incidents, it deprives us of opportunities to succeed or to excel in our individual or collective survival and thriving. In addition, idiosyncratic needs may considerably augment the incongruities that might already exist among individuals on account of their separately centered common needs. Competition

among individuals based on common needs might also be overcome by the application of common needs. But idiosyncratic needs seem to lack this capacity to harmonize. This may render them impediments to the fulfillment of common and idiosyncratic needs among individuals that may be difficult to resolve. These causes may weaken our position and enable other adversities to have more severe consequences. Our idiosyncrasies may position us to where we can meet our existential needs less well or where meeting them becomes less likely or impossible. Their demands may also impede their own fulfillment or the implementation of other idiosyncratic needs. As a consequence, they may depress or eliminate our chances of individual and collective survival and thriving or at least curb our chances of reaching happiness.

Hence, we may regard idiosyncrasies in our needs as potential threats to our happiness. This may appear absurd because they define in part what makes us happy. Still, the happiness they might produce might not be worth incurring the pain or the risk of pain they might cause. Any attempt to advance our happiness would have to take this consideration into account. It would have to support the adjustment of idiosyncrasies to approach and meet optimal settings for satisfying their fundamental common needs. Arguably, differentiations in objectives, abilities, and pursuits may be important for reaching, improving, and maximizing the fulfillment of our common needs in a cooperative manner and for the development of humanity. Yet specialization may not have to be a function in accord with idiosyncratic preferences. At times, it may flow from particular talents that we may possess regardless of our preferences. Conversely, it may result from shortcomings in our ability to fulfill our needs at the levels they demand. If we had all the capacities of other humans, the only required or useful differentiations among humans would be situational. We might fulfill a variety of functions individually or assume a variety of positions in a cooperative undertaking. But these differentiations would not rise to the level of entrenched particularities. We might vary our pursuits as required, to broaden our experiences, and to disrupt the monotony and lack of freedom of specialization. As our mental and tangible abilities develop, we should be able to meet our common needs better through versatility. This should particularly cause a significant leap in the satisfaction of needs that rely on our individual application or personal aptitude because it would alleviate our suffering from individual and personal impossibilities. Any advantages from a development of humanity through alterations that are initially idiosyncratic could be assumed and increased by planned, tuned modifications on a broad scale after restricted testing. Arguably, even if we possess versatility, idiosyncrat-

ic personality traits may continue to optimize pursuits by motivating particular efforts. That we can undertake a variety of occupations does not mean that we find any, let alone optimal, fulfillment in them and pursue them energetically. However, we might not require idiosyncrasies for such motivational purposes. We could think of a best reconciliation mode under an assessment of our common needs alone. To the extent our mental powers have not yet arrived at a level at which they can supplant idiosyncratic preferences in the facilitation of specialized utility, these may perform constructive functions. But our preferences may not correspond to our requirements for specialization. They may be founded on genetic or acquired modulations that are not responding to challenges we face, are ill-conceived or ill-constructed, or are in response to challenges that subsequently transform or subside. To the extent that is the case, we must obtain the capacity to modify, subdue, or eliminate such traits if we wish to improve our happiness.

Still, we may hesitate regarding the adjustment of our personality because we consider it as the essence of who we are from which we have difficulties separating. In addition, we may remain apprehensive concerning external engineering of our personality. Much of it already appears to be formed by external influences without our participation or over our objection. We may therefore be reluctant to allow external influences even more power over us. Although we might acknowledge that external influence might be used to our benefit, we might fear its erroneous application and abuse. At most, we might agree to give individuals whose needs strongly include the promotion of our wellbeing some forming authority. Yet, even there, we may frequently have grounds to suspect that their formation of our personality serves their needs more than ours and afflicts us with transferred or otherwise instilled idiosyncrasies that pose additional obstacles to our happiness. We may not trust anybody with the reformation of our personality except ourselves. Even if it is inevitable that we obtain formational influences from external sources during phases when we are immature and impressionable, we would likely want to be in charge of later adjustments and judge whether an alteration is to our advantage. The problem with such an undertaking is that our personality may already be shaped to a point where it becomes difficult for us to identify or implement beneficial changes to our personality. In particular, our motivation to increase our happiness may be hampered by motivations of detrimental idiosyncrasies to remain. Their motivations may be pitted against motivations by impaired needs to liberate themselves. In this confrontation, our desire to overcome unfavorable self-restraint fortifies our desire to gain a better understanding of our idiosyncrasies.

We may define emotional idiosyncrasies fundamentally by distinguishing them from common aspects of our needs. Such a distinction also gains in importance because we may not accord to them the protection and support of common needs and because we use common needs as standards to judge the utility of idiosyncratic deviations. All this makes it necessary that we construct a complete general substantive existential philosophy. Scientific research might help us to reveal underlying existential dimensions of our needs. Yet, even if we discover a competent physiological method for measuring happiness, we might not be able to distinguish general from idiosyncratic aspects in the reactions of individuals. To the extent physiological indications are not available or sufficient, the distinction might be left to the registration and communication by individuals in whom these phenomena occur. However, because of the consolidated character of common and idiosyncratic aspects of a need, individuals who feel happiness as well as others who evaluate their expressions might not be able to distinguish them. This would reduce our exploration to identifying common denominators through uncontroverted affirmation from individuals that a certain cause makes them sense a certain type of happiness or unhappiness. This low standard might be necessary to obtain agreement on very basic definitions of fundamental rights. But it might not be sufficient for defining the full extent of common needs and rights.

That the scope of applicability of a general substantive philosophy should be described by the scope of its acceptance appears to be a fair requirement. No theory about human happiness that proclaims its applicability to other humans can deny the legitimacy of personal verification. It must be able to withstand the critical theoretical investigation and empiric verification by those to whom it claims to apply. For a theory that asserts general applicability, requiring general approbation is merely a matter of matching this assertion with its reality. If its principles are to be generally applicable, its underlying characteristics would have to be present or elicitable in each of us. Our critical theoretical investigation and its empiric verification should naturally meet with the concordance of underlying causes in us. We have a threefold safety mechanism at our disposal that allows us to evaluate the veracity of such a theory. First, we should be able to confirm its premises by comparing them with our perceptions of reality. Second, its argumentative steps and conclusions would have to comport with logic. Third, to prove that its general principles can offer guidance, we should be able to implement them successfully. By these measures, we each can individually and directly judge the soundness of a substantive existential philosophy through our own critical exploration and application.

Nevertheless, even if a common factor exists, its general approbation may not happen. This may not only be attributable to the foreclosure of our awareness, approval, or willingness to conduct verification by our idiosyncratic mental traits. Other genetic or acquired dispositions, experiences that do not give rise to traits, a lack of instruction, or the unavailability of resources may negatively affect our verification capacity. We may not have had occasion or the need to confirm or disprove the existence of a purported general rule. External circumstances may restrain our activities by prohibition or by manipulation. These factors may hamper practical verification even if the underlying commonality is provided. Such adversities may foreclose our ability or willingness to confirm general substantive principles as well as a procedural general existential philosophy. The grounds that keep us from recognizing general principles of happiness and other factors that fill the void may be unorganized. They may be the result of circumstances that are not aimed at setting parameters or giving instructions for our mind and activities. But some reorientations and impositions that undermine or block our recognition of the essence of our happiness may be more systematic. The entrenched quality of our idiosyncratic mental traits and other conditions may be considered as systematic even if their causes were not systematic. In addition, we may be subjected to systematic efforts by other individuals to impose a philosophy on us.

The offer of theoretical and practical verification by an existential philosophy may place such a philosophy in contention with other philosophies or with their constituent ideas because these might have to match that openness to persist. This contest may occur in individuals' minds as well as in a societal context. It intensifies with the extent of overlap in asserted coverage. Particularly a philosophy that declares general applicability is likely to be placed into an adversarial position with other philosophies or rudimentary philosophical concepts. Established concepts may try to preclude a new general existential philosophy to plead and prove its case. They may try to hinder its verification process. Resident personal or more widely held attitudes may attempt to influence our ability or our willingness to explore and reshape our notions of substantive happiness or of how happiness can be revealed because their existence might be at stake. They may engender adverse bias and fear that militate not only against change but even the consideration of change. They may make it hard for us to free our mind or our external physical circumstances to engage in dispassionate reflection and meaningful verification. They may induce us to forgo or may preclude us from considering, testing, recognizing, or acting upon the recognition of benefits even if they present themselves to our grasp.

In these strategies, established points of view may relate to an innate apprehension regarding change. Implications of change by new philosophies may create fear of the unknown, of upheaval, and deprivation of presently secure benefits. We may therefore already autonomously develop sufficient apprehension to make us turn away from concepts that might benefit us. But established external philosophies may effectively use and cultivate such a fear against insurgent philosophies. These impediments might make it difficult or impossible for a valid existential philosophy to convince us of its applicability. Even if we are exposed to its teachings, we may hold on to confusion, inabilities, or erroneous pursuits. We may also follow those who purport to clarify our confusion and try to explain our failures with familiar references. We may favor established philosophies for the relative security they offer. Their ingrained mechanisms, societal sanction, and approval by persons we respect suggest that they offer valid manners of pursuit. We may cling to this notion against contradictory evidence.

The collective resistance by internal and external obstacles may render the derivation of common aspects of our needs difficult. It may also hinder the adoption of a common procedure that might assist us to derive more individualized substantive insights. Even if individuals could settle on general principles or at least common foundations for them, differences are likely to emerge when these fundamental principles or foundations are applied and to be given definition, thus resulting in disagreement. We may therefore have to settle on less than unanimous approbation results. The best preliminary indication of a common principle or a common foundation of a principle we may be able to obtain is majority consent. Yet the presence of competing existential philosophies and personal dispositions and circumstances may render even such a manner of consent difficult. Although we may find confirmation that certain foundations, principles, and assortments of such principles in a philosophy apply to most humans, their rejection by some individuals gives rise to the possibility that we might not be dealing with universal essences. We may try to save the concept of a general theory by claiming that it typically applies to all humans, except for aberrations. However, casting dispersions on those who disagree and their opinions and designating them as erroneous could not forestall the fact that our theory misses its proof by general applicability. We may not be able to show the difference between a general and a limited theory, between principles that are founded the commonalities among humans and subjective particularities. The margins of consent regarding general principles may overlap with margins of widely proliferated idiosyncrasies or unrelated erroneously held principles.

If a philosophy should not achieve universal corroboration, it must submit to such insecurity even if that is deemed undeserved by its proponents. Asserting the applicability of a philosophy over the objection of purported subjects would render such a philosophy into an oppressive ideology. In avoidance of assuming such characteristics, a philosophy that fails universal acclaim must console itself with the notion that it may at least provide guidance for some or perhaps many. But it would have to abandon its assertion of general applicability and could not be trusted as a universal guide in the pursuit of happiness. Arguably, the difference between general and more limited applicability of principles regarding happiness should matter little because all theories must prove themselves in our review before we accept their applicability to us. Still, we may be more motivated to test an alleged principle if we perceive that it might be generally applicable because this represents an increased likelihood that it can help us. A recipe with a smaller circle of approval bears less likelihood of compatibility with our needs and situation. We should be less inclined to try such principles unless there are other strong indications of their applicability. Hence, the appearance of general tenets of happiness is important for our individual orientation in how we might find happiness. Then again, widely cast principles may be slated toward the benefit of certain parties at the cost of others. The broad acceptance of a principle does not allow us the conclusion that it should be beneficial to us.

Even if we must maintain a critical stance on the proliferation of philosophies, the ascertainment of general tenets of happiness is also important for pursuits in social settings. If we can refer to common values and principles of pursuit, we can more easily fashion modes of cooperation and peaceful coexistence. Basic commonalities allow us to support and protect at least the core of our interests because these interests and the need for their advancement are shared. We may regard our commonalities of pursuit and the general principles that can be derived from them as the basis of a fair social order, as the foundation of just laws. The establishment of general principles of pursuit hence becomes critical for building and preserving our happiness in a world where we must, or have the opportunity to, correlate with other individuals. The inability to gain universal approval for a general philosophy might then constitute a significant obstacle to the establishment and advancement of our happiness in a social context. As we express idiosyncrasies in the pursuit of our common needs, our cooperation and our coexistence are burdened by individual differences. We might console ourselves with the idea that we might limit the establishment of a social context to individuals who are agreeable on most facets of

happiness that are affected by their contact and who are able and willing to manage their differences. Yet such a group of similarly minded individuals may not be sufficiently numerous or coherent to provide the functionality and harmony we desire. Further, contacts with disagreeing individuals and groups might be inescapable and induce discord. Thus, the inability of humans to reach agreement on guidelines for happiness forms a significant impediment for their happiness.

We might conclude that a systematic comprehensive improvement of our condition according to general substantive principles of happiness is largely illusory past a very basic level. We do not appear capable of categorically separating common from idiosyncratic needs beyond that level. We might only establish approximations of pure existential needs. Because our idiosyncratic needs combine with our existential needs to form a composite need, we might uncover existential needs to some extent by peeling away aspects we can recognize as idiosyncrasies. We might achieve additional progress in ascertaining common principles and bringing them to free expression by increased levels of scientific consideration and confirming agreement. Arguably, the genetic and possibly a generally conditioned acquired sourcing of our existential needs makes them persist even if they are covered by idiosyncrasies. They might be merely concealed, dormant, scattered, neglected, unreflected, or suppressed. But this common underpinning might also be reduced and contorted to where it becomes idiosyncratic. Even if we could find common substance, its oppression by our idiosyncrasies and our preference of them might depress its relevance.

To the extent idiosyncrasies obstruct our achievement of maximum fulfillment for their underlying existential needs without compensatory advantages, they would have to be neutralized. Moreover, if we could direct idiosyncrasies, they would work best for us if we could train them to help us select and achieve the best manner of pursuit for the underlying needs. Arguably, this is or it should be the focus of upbringing and education. Additionally, the superior performance by individuals whose genetic disposition stimulates them to engage in appropriate demeanor for individual and collective survival and thriving should favor the strengthening of such genetic idiosyncrasies. Both influences would contribute to establish positive idiosyncrasies that are most advantageous for the satisfaction of common needs. But the extent as well as the utility of such positive idiosyncrasies seems debatable. Our common traits already seem to contain ample motivations for their optimization and may already be the result of many idiosyncratic optimizations that have attained commonality. Further, optimization often requires more flexibility than idiosyncratic traits can tolerate.

Beneficial idiosyncratic motivations seem to compete with genetic and environmental causes that result in malformations and the proliferation of idiosyncrasies that damage the fulfillment of existential needs for those afflicted by them and others. It appears difficult to gauge which types of idiosyncrasies are more prevalent, which will finally succeed, or whether their competition will continue. Over time, this contest, its modalities, and its outcome may resolve whether humanity can survive or at least how successful and happy it can be. Yet how much idiosyncratic aspects of our needs interfere with our individual and collective survival and thriving is also essential for our current affairs and deserves to be more immediately addressed.

Current shortcomings of idiosyncrasies necessitate that we adjust their negative features and not merely depend on generational adjustments. If we do not let other individuals adjust our personality, we each have to address our own idiosyncrasies. We might try to regulate them if they produce more impairment than benefit or, if they already produce more happiness than pain, to make them more effective or efficient. If we decide that the benefit they generate is not worth the risk or cost they engender, we might try to modify, eliminate, or suppress them. If we determine that the happiness we receive from idiosyncrasies could be ameliorated, we may change them as well. But any such engineering may prove to be a daunting challenge. Features of needs that damage our happiness or fail to optimize it still contribute to our happiness during their pursuit and upon their fulfillment and detract from our happiness upon their nonfulfillment. The immediate damage to our happiness when we affect such aspects of needs may prevent us from taking action even if that would benefit our happiness. We may fear the elimination, restructuring, or inhibition of needs because we equate it with a partial death similar to our death as an entirety. If we are successful in eliminating or recasting them, a part of our personality will come to an end. We may associate painful consequences with such a purported partial death that we imagine to be similar to those we fear to loom upon our ultimate demise. Only, such consequences may seem more likely during our lifetime because we are certain to be aware of our deprivation. Even ideas of suppression may arouse claustrophobic reactions similar to our fear of death. We may build an apprehension against the elimination, revision, and suppression of idiosyncratic needs that may already arise during our assessment of negative idiosyncrasies. This may transform our concept of happiness to an ambiguous stance without reconciliation. The influence of idiosyncrasies we might have to adjust to improve our happiness may grow particularly strong if we are more successful in their pursuit than in the

pursuit of objectives that reflect more positively on our overall happiness. Our frustration about the state of our happiness may cause us to place additional emphasis on pursuits that reward us more readily.

Even if we recognize the damaging or the less than optimized effects of an idiosyncrasy, we may not be technically capable to affect it fundamentally. To the extent we cannot permanently transform or eliminate a damaging aspect, we are relegated to suppressing it. But this may only be a constructive choice where we receive more damage than benefit from it. Further, the continuous efforts required for suppression expose us to a mounting accumulation of pain and loss of resources. That detriment may prompt us to accommodate detrimental idiosyncrasies. We may find the pain resulting from the pursuit of a damaging need more bearable than the pain resulting from its continued denial. We may also find that a compromise between these states suits us best. However, regardless of whether we can eliminate or permanently revise a damaging need or we are reduced to suppressing it, confronting detrimental emotional traits and possibly other types of mental traits that contribute may be difficult. Idiosyncratic traits may customarily fail to appear to us as distinctive from their underlying existential needs. Even if we can identify damaging or nonoptimized aspects, we might not succeed isolating these traits. The attachment by idiosyncratic needs to underlying existential needs may enable them to control and call on defense mechanisms of these to enter the fight on their behalf. This may make them formidable contenders.

To identify the grounds for idiosyncratic resistance and address damaging or nonoptimized idiosyncrasies, we must have clarity about their sourcing. We must separate genetic and acquired mental dispositions from particularities that are more superficially imposed on us. Our pursuits are also determined by impediments originating outside our mind, as well as by the quality and quantity of obviously physical means in us and means generally in our surroundings. These conditions might dictate to us that we pursue our needs in manners that are damaging for our happiness or fall short of our ideals. Some of them might be improved. Others may present insurmountable individual or general impossibilities. These conditions form the setting in which we must try to find our happiness. By describing what is or may be possible, the objective facts defining our body and our environment leave an area of available possibilities among which we may choose means and strategies for the fulfillment of our existential needs. This area often only partly overlaps with the area of what will satisfy these needs. Not everything that is possible will be desirable. Nor will everything that we want on behalf of our needs be possible. We may have some

flexibility to adjust our possibilities to our wishes unless impossibilities are absolute. We may attempt to expand our maneuvering space into areas of current individual or general impossibility. To the extent our idiosyncrasies foreclose or hinder the selection of choices, we may venture to enlarge them by their revision, elimination, or suppression. But the competent management of our idiosyncratic needs may place a significant burden on us. Neither what we want according to our existential needs or according to idiosyncratic modulations nor what is possible may have crystallized sufficiently in our mind for us to render a determination concerning our most appropriate course of action. If the partial congruence of what we might want and what might be possible presents us with sufficient space to provide alternatives in one, the other, or both categories, we have to select. We have to determine which desirable or feasible solutions are acceptable, more acceptable than others, or most acceptable for a particular need. We further have to place what is possible and what might satisfy us into the context of our entirety of needs and the future fulfillment of the same need. We must systematically weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each available course of action to select the most suitable course in view of the entirety of our happiness. We have to govern our purview.

Still, if we worry about the technicalities of means and strategies while we try to understand our needs, we may introduce practical prospects into the definition of our needs that may confuse what we want with what is feasible, effective, or efficient. We may misidentify practical aspects that we consider to be potential means, obstacles, or boundaries with our wishes and needs. Such a commingling of principles can short-circuit our determination process to where we cut the extent of our needs to what is feasible. As a consequence, we may not know our needs and may not improve our practical abilities to match our needs. We may stunt the growth of our happiness. We may place our resources into technicalities that fail to match the demands of our needs or do not correspond with their ideals. To avoid these mistakes, we must gather awareness of our needs first before we look for practical means for their fulfillment. We must also refrain from prematurely judging our idiosyncrasies during their discovery because that might prevent us from fully developing our insights of their features. To adequately estimate the utility or damaging character of our idiosyncrasies and to address them competently, we must obtain a true impression of them. We must begin our undertaking to improve our happiness by allowing our needs to come forth and express themselves unfettered by concerns for requirements or consequences. We must find the pure substance of our needs whatever that substance might be.

To do that competently, a method that claims to help us derive such substance must itself be neutral regarding substance. If we cannot conceive of a method to reveal our needs ourselves, we may turn to external guidance. Invoking such assistance would seem to give rise to the same potential problems of possible undue influence as in the area of substantive philosophies. It seems that there is no way to exclude this risk entirely. Nevertheless, we can minimize undue influence in the assistance we use if we limit external advice to the investigational method and undertake the observations and interpretations ourselves. This might still expose us to some undue influence through the choice of suggested methods. But if a method that claimed substantive neutrality excluded certain substantive insights or guided us toward certain substantive insights over others, those allusions should become obvious because of their content. To forestall such an eventual bias, we must review the submitted methods concerning their neutrality. Moreover, we will have to be mindful not to introduce substantive bias of our own construction. Substantive neutrality is not only important to ensure the applicability of the method to anybody and to prevent external influence. It is also critical for our individual application of the method to yield an unbiased statement of our needs. Only if we obtain such an account can we engage in a fully competent substantive appraisal and treatment of our needs by comprehensively exploring their properties and interrelations. Maintaining such a critical position of neutrality appears difficult because our prejudgments may influence our application of methods. External and self-generated distortions of our needs may extend their damaging influences over our mental processes to this investigative phase. To minimize such influences, we must initially keep ourselves from placing our insights into a context of what we presently consider as proper, useful, frivolous, embarrassing, or dangerous. We must hand the idealistic sections of our mind over to our empiric facilities for a mere accounting. Our assessments must be reserved until later when we are sufficiently informed to make a judgment about what we discover. At that time, we will decide which features of our personality we want to keep, change, shed, or subdue, and which features should have priority over others.

Before we engage in self-discovery in application of external advice, we must verify our agreement with its premises and the correctness of its logic. In addition, verification that we have applied a proper procedure would ultimately be provided if it reveals our needs and enables us to implement those needs better. We will discern whether a suggested method works by whether it can assist us in improving our happiness. This constitutes a built-in device for uncovering the short-

comings of the method. If we do not succeed, we may be able to trace our difficulties to the method. Then again, failure may also show that we have not applied the method to its greatest potential. We may not have followed the method accurately or our defense mechanisms may not have permitted us a good, comprehensive look at who we are. We might have to repeat and possibly improve the processes that give us insight into our needs. Our application of that method might be examined and critiqued by other individuals. Such an undertaking might be helpful, but it may also present the same problems that we already encountered with regard to finding substantive guidance for our pursuits. It might be difficult if not impossible to give competent advice on procedural issues without considering the results of methods. Even if procedural advice can be kept pure, it might easily constitute or be construed as a substantive intervention because it leads us to substantive conclusions. Therefore, we might exercise caution in engaging external procedural assistance in our self-exploration. We might only involve such assistance if we cannot proceed adequately on our own. Such a point may be reached if we cannot identify or, in a subsequent stage, reconcile our needs or pursuits in spite of our best attempts. We might further enlist assistance to eliminate, modify, or suppress idiosyncrasies that unduly disturb the pursuit of other needs if we cannot adequately address these problems ourselves. Depending on our situation, such services might be essential for our success. Still, even with assistance, we may have much to explore, learn, determine, and possibly to correct that could not be undertaken by assistance for us.

Those who are looking for ready-made, easy methods to mend their issues with happiness might be disappointed that the development of our happiness requires methodical, careful involvement. They might be perturbed that there is no quick fix to their ailments, that they cannot simply engage someone or something to find and create happiness for them. However, we should be used to the idea that happiness is not easily understood or accomplished. Based on our experiences, it should come as no surprise that any approach that might improve our happiness would involve our commitment and effort. Expectations of shortcuts or that we could be delivered from the burdens of our pursuits without the related labors might likely be causes for much unhappiness because we would place our hopes and resources into strategies that are likely to fail. If we turn away from such pretenses and explore a procedural method to reveal the entirety of our needs, we enter new terrain. We leave preconceived notions of our needs and how we should pursue them behind and concentrate exclusively on what we find in us. The next chapter begins that discovery.