CHAPTER 38
THE INSUFFICIENCY OF CONTROL

If the adequate procurement of means for the fulfillment of our needs were our sole concern, we would notice that our desire for increasing means ceases after we have reached a certain level of procurement security. Instead, we can often detect a continuing dissatisfaction as our security in the supply of means grows. As our circumstances improve, we wish for more or better means. As our wishes are satisfied, we devise or we express new wishes. As our ability to form our environment grows, we develop additional wishes to increase our capabilities. The more power we possess, the more we seek. No matter how far we have come, we want to go further. The reason may be that we have not attained perfect fulfillment. But our dissatisfaction with states of apparent fulfillment indicates that there may be no level of accomplishment at which we would consider ourselves to be fully satisfied and without any wishes. A wishless, content existence seems impossible for us.

We may attribute our dissatisfaction at least in part to our high mental capacities. With lesser powers of our mind, we might have settled into an existence controlled by our genetic and possibly some acquired traits. We might have established a common mode of existence that would allow us to carry on in familiar patterns and sequences and to find satisfaction in the application and perfection of these patterns. We would have developed a niche of existence, a way of life that follows certain rules and covers little new unless our genetics or natural circumstances change. We would share this type of existence with all other forms of life in our realm. Arguably, our capacity to understand and adjust our environment and ourselves has not only granted room but has also given rise to a need to match our capacity with actuality. Once we suspect that progress in our ability to fulfill our needs seems possible, we feel the need to find that progress, no matter how far we may have already advanced. We might even try to cultivate expanded or new needs in the hope to gain more or new experiences of fulfillment. Short of that extension, we desire to reach higher states of perfection by taking advantage of our entire potential, by developing our means beyond those we have currently achieved. Consequently, we try to push the boundaries of conditions that will permit us to maximize our happiness. We search for more refinements and for more effective means to transform our environment and ourselves so we can experience more satisfaction. We look past the established and secured and try to bring the unknown and unattained into our domain. This ambition requires us to include coincidental methods into our pursuits.

The critical ingredient for this expansion of needs and of means may be located in our imagination. When we face the world, we stand confronted with the two aspects of what is and what is not. We understand what is by the immediate impressions of direct or indirect perceptions and their rational consideration. What is not comprises everything except the present. It includes what never was, what is not anymore, what has not occurred yet, or will never occur. Since we cannot change the past, our expansion of means is directed at the future. We can project past and present facts into the future. We can analyze and synthesize objects and events we encounter. But we can also synthesize them or their components in manners that transcend the context from which they were derived. We can connect and amalgamate previously unconnected aspects into visions of objects and events that have no precedent in their combination. The actuality of such combinations is preceded by our imagination. Our imagination can be based on knowledge and consideration of the properties and resulting laws of substances and the objects and events they form as well as on assumptions of their opposite, their absence, or combined or scaled aspects. We can use our imagination to think of situations and events in the past or present that would have happened, not happened, or happened differently with altered facts. In addition, we can imagine such components to form situations in the future. Because we may imagine alternatives to what we have perceived, our imagination may produce mental constructs that are contrary to what can be brought into existence. Still, we possess an opportunity to expand our potential because some of the correlations and gradations of aspects we perceive may be feasible. Even if many imagined settings will not be achievable or will not yield usable results, the variation of settings gives us the ability to find, try, and exhaust all that is possible within the parameters of nature we can perceive and in which we can act. By systematically trying all possible combinations, we are destined to venture across combinations that constitute successful means if such combinations exist.

While some of our research might be a general undertaking of randomly combining components to see what might result from their combination, many of our efforts may be more focused. We may add, modify, or subtract components in specific sequences or combinations we suspect of yielding benefits. In that suspicion, we may be guided by similarities that we have observed in another context. We may also be guided by the particular objectives of our needs and wishes as destinations and by our deprived circumstances as starting positions. The nature of our needs may enable us to look for means among a reduced array of combinations we deem capable of connecting to that nature.

With every enrichment of our experiences, with every comprehension of the components and the functions we observe, the range of combinations we can imagine grows and becomes more complex. The more we know about the world as it is or as it is set to be, the more we can apprehend what it might have been, is not, could be, or could become. That we can imagine constellations that do not exist challenges us. Imagining such settings paired with the absence of such settings in our reality generates a conflict between our inner and outer world. It induces us to exist in two worlds that diverge in certain aspects. This discrepancy of imagination is necessary to pursue and fulfill all except the most basic needs and wishes that only instruct us to engage in activities without a concept of their accomplishment. The targeting of higher needs and wishes involves the imagination of settings that differ from our contemporary situation. In less developed life forms and to some extent in humans, these imaginations may be in the configuration of instinctive samples or recalled experiences. What is not may then be a mere copy of what was. But humans can vastly expand their wishes since they can add objectives from their imagination. It grants increased form to needs and therefore generates new wishes in their extension. A repetition of what was does not seem to suffice to maximize our happiness if we can imagine circumstances that we suspect of making us happier. Our needs compel us to fill the differential between what is and such suspected circumstances to prove whether our imagination is correct. Out of the many possibilities we can imagine, we must identify components and combinations that are feasible, will serve our purposes, and will serve them better than alternatives. Once we have detailed these steps in our mind, we must implement them.

Our implementation efforts seem somewhat simplified because we usually do not combine each separate aspect of the world we perceive with all other aspects to detect possibilities. Nevertheless, there remains a vast terrain for us to cover with experimentation. The risks and costs do not permit us to spend our entire existence under experimental conditions. Our pursuits will have to be fundamentally guided by our instincts and by their automatic instructions in reaction to our perception of circumstances. In addition, we may largely follow established enhanced recipes that we already tried and confirmed. Our improvement efforts may thus be limited and ordinarily incremental. We may undertake departures according to our imagination and embark on courses of implementation that significantly depart from what we already know and can securely accomplish only if we have a sufficient reason. The engagement of our imagination and the selection of coincidental pursuits may closely relate to the degree of our deprivation.

However, while we may target our imagination to fulfill certain needs, it may also more generally impress all our needs. As long as we are not completely convinced that we have reached an ultimate state of perfection in our current and future satisfaction, imagination may breed discontent by giving us the impression that there might be pursuits that could avail us of improved fulfillment. Dismissing that possibility is difficult. It is in the nature of objects and events that are not that they are likely to be much more numerous than what is. Existing facts have a singular nature. In contrast, what is not comprises opposites, gradations, as well as mixtures of qualities and quantities. It can be anything else apart from what is. What is not can have a myriad of identities. This supply of possibilities makes it difficult for us to categorically reject the existence of meaningful alternatives to what is. To find out, we will likely have to deploy at least partly unknown combinations. Our wishes constantly challenge us by focusing us on the differences between what is and what is not. We are struggling to merge these two worlds by developing our concepts of what will benefit our pursuits and our ability of implementing these concepts. We may relatively effortlessly implement alternatives to our current reality that we believe to suit us better. Such settings might not work as we conceptualized. But this is only part of our problem. In many cases, we may not reach our imagined result because our capabilities trail our imagination. Our realization of what ought to be is curtailed by what is, our understanding of what is, and our ability to affect what is and bring it to match with what we imagine. Our imagination usually outperforms what we are capable of implementing. To possess the capacity of implementation, we have to select wishes that are feasible under the circumstances we can find or derive and build on them toward our objectives. We must orient ourselves on the basis of available resources. This limitation of our imagination to feasibility is constantly placed in our mind when we formulate and pursue wishes. The incongruity between what we can conceive and what we can reach places us at risk of remaining dissatisfied. Because our imagination of pursuits and objectives we deem useful may always leap ahead of what we can reach, we may always expect more than we can achieve. Even if imagined settings might not confer additional satisfaction, we may be in persistent apprehension of possibilities and that we are lagging behind.

The nature of our needs is not to accept this discrepancy. Once we imagine circumstances that appear to have the potential of satisfying needs or satisfying them better, we specify them as wishes regardless of whether we possess the capability of reaching them. Such wishes exhort us to improve our capabilities. They drive us toward perfec-

tion. The ideals we envisage place us under persistent pressure to increase our risk exposure and invest additional resources. In many pursuits, only a mediocre degree of fulfillment can be attained within safe margins of control. Our desire to maximize our fulfillment tenaciously pushes us into areas where we hope to profit from coincidental occurrences. In following coincidental strategies, it seems unavoidable that we endanger and damage certain pursuits and achievements that have or could have been obtained. We endanger and sacrifice resources we have already secured or stand to secure so we may achieve new objectives. The investment and endangerment of controlled and serendipitous resources and opportunities appear to form necessary ingredients in accessing the positive potential of risk. However, if the risk in coincidental pursuits materializes, we might lose part or all of our invested and our other controlled or serendipitous resources, and possibly our capacity to generate or obtain resources. Moreover, we might not succeed in detecting practicable pursuits. Our disappointment regarding that circumstance may combine with pain we experience over the actualization of risks and losses in pursuits that are feasible and add to our undercurrent of pain that we seek to mend. This may give rise to a self-amplifying mechanism in which the disappointment over failure spurs us on to engage in a greater number or intensity of coincidental pursuits to cover deficits. We may regret that some of our wishes lead us beyond our control or settled serendipities. We may fear the uncertainty and possibilities of negative consequences to which they expose our ability to generate happiness. We may resent the pain and fear of failure and loss. We may also be rationally critical because wishes and endeavors that remain within familiar parameters would regularly appear to have a higher likelihood of succeeding and causing us to prosper within their limits. We may at times doubt whether the expansion of pursuits into unfamiliar regions is necessary to be happy. We might be able to survive, and to thrive to some extent, by remaining within settled parameters. Still, our needs direct us toward destinations past these reservations, past our fears and the pain we sense when coincidental pursuits fail. They counter negative emotions we incur in coincidental pursuits with the pain we feel if we fail to pursue our ideals, the pain of regret that we might have succeeded but did not try.

This pain serves us as a beneficial incentive because it drives us to transform our environment so we experience less pain. Then again, the unreliability of coincidental pursuits might ultimately increase our pain through a frustration of progress and repercussions from the risk and cost we incur. That appears particularly likely in situations where we have already reached a reasonably adequate level of fulfillment and

strain to achieve relatively insignificant improvements. In these situations, we may unnecessarily become victims of our ambitions. Our determination to attain happiness may overshoot reasonable targets and render our pursuit of happiness counterproductive. It may exact more from us than we can accomplish, thus exposing us to hardship and unhappiness. Even if we achieve what we imagine, the return we achieve might not be able to keep pace with our expectations. The exposure to risks and the expenses we incur may exceed the beneficial increments we might be able to attain. We may therefore conclude that our drive to engage in pursuits beyond our control and already settled serendipities should be curtailed in areas where we are reasonably secure.

We may oblige ourselves to undertake cost-benefit assessments before and during all of our pursuits to improve the fulfillment of our needs. Only, such assessments may be of inadequate utility in coincidental pursuits because we might not have enough information to allow reasonable conclusions. This may cause us to take a more general attitude toward our preparedness to incur the vagaries of coincidental pursuits. In building this attitude, we may take either or both of two principal positions to address our shortcomings in fulfilling our wishes. Fulfilling a wish is a function of the variables of our objective and the means for fulfilling it. We can consider that function and its failure from the position of our objective or of our means. Observed from the position of our objective, we may find the cause for our failure to be the lack of sufficient means to reach that objective. When we approach the failure to fulfill a wish from the standpoint of our means, we may conclude that our objective is overly ambitious for our means. Both perspectives may be accurate. They are aspects of the same discrepancy between means and objectives. The underlying circumstances and consequences are identical. We cannot fulfill some of our wishes. However, our viewpoint may determine the strategy by which we may try to improve our odds. Normally, we will initially view our failure from the viewpoint of our objectives. We will strive to gain maximum insight into the surroundings of their prospective implementation, devise the best strategies for their pursuit, and improve the generation of our means. If we realize that we do or might not sufficiently succeed with these undertakings, we may begin to view the remaining discrepancy from the viewpoint of our capabilities. To curtail our pain, we may find ourselves under the pressure to lower and reset our sights toward wishes that we can fulfill or that carry a better chance for fulfillment. To be content with such wishes, we have to address the pain-pleasure mechanism that causes us to be dissatisfied with what we can reach. Instead of or in addition to developing our knowledge, strate-

gies, and means, and relying on coincidental strategies, we may resort to cutting back our wishes. This approach appears to have some merit. Holding on to a wish that brings us unhappiness seems to be counterproductive to our objective of generating happiness. It does not seem reasonable to spend resources and to expose ourselves to pain unless there is a fair probability of adequate reward. It seems logical that, to the extent we cannot effectively and efficiently enhance our capabilities to match our wishes, we should scale our wishes down. As long as we can sustain the principal functions for our needs to a bearable degree, we might be happier if we forwent aspirations of higher and ideal fulfillment. We do not appear to sacrifice much if anything by that renouncement because the risk and expenses involved in reaching higher levels of fulfillment may erase the rewards. The rewards of curtailment, by contrast, are relatively certain. If we pick effectively and efficiently attainable objectives that still provide a meaningful measure of fulfillment, we are not only improving the fulfillment chances for pursuits on which we currently focus. We can also secure means and lower risks for the pursuit of other pursuits or the same pursuits in the future. Although the happiness we obtain in this way may not be at the highest level we can imagine or desire, it might be the highest level we can accomplish. The key to happiness might then be to scale back our wishes to realistic expectations, not to wish what we might not be able to reach, and to be satisfied with our circumstances as they are.

As reasonable as this proposition of adjustment to realistic levels may sound, this proposition itself may be unrealistic. The ability to give up or to scale down a wish we cannot attain assumes that we can control our imagination and can stop asking for more happiness than we can reach. It assumes that we are in control of our perceptions and thoughts. It further assumes that we control our desires and their priorities. However, directing or changing our perceptions and thoughts, whether by instruction or as a consequence of physiological modification of our capacities, is only possible to the extent our needs motivate us. Arguably, such motivation can be issued under the authority of our council of traits. But we will not be able to fundamentally regulate our motivations unless we adapt our underlying emotional traits. Short of such fundamental modifications of our mind, we can limit our wishes only by suppressing them. It might appear that such a strategy should be overall beneficial. It would spare us the pain that flows from an increased risk of failure and loss. It would free our resources from pursuits that are less likely to yield positive results and make these available for the formation of pleasure in other, more effective and efficient pursuits. It would lower our level of fear. Still, a suppression of wishes

requires considerable emotional and distractive resources that are innately unproductive because they oppose our wishes. To prevent ourselves from pursuing a wish, we have to not only suppress the impression of pain caused by our lack of fulfillment. We must also suppress our awareness that we might be causing that malfunction. Even if the chances of success are slight, we assume responsibility for preventing success if we block a pursuit. This suppression is not a limited event. We have to continue to defend our defeatist attitude against hope and the prodding by suppressed aspects of our needs. Additionally, resignation inflicts damage on our happiness because it converts hope into desperation. It turns a potential of failure into a permanent certainty. If we endeavor a precarious pursuit, we might fear that we might fail and we might incur pain from the disappointment, the loss of invested resources, and the consequences of failure. Yet, if we fail to try, we replace a possible detriment with a definite detriment. Resignation has a self-fulfilling dimension. Preventing ourselves from pursuing and possibly fulfilling a wish results in the categorical failure of a pursuit. We may save resources we can use in other pursuits. But the ensuing pain of hopelessness may exceed the anticipated and actualized pain of failure and the pain over the loss of resources that we seek to avoid.

Another factor that we must consider is the possibility that we might have succeeded if we had not suppressed a wish. As remote as such a chance might be, it is greater than zero as long as we try. If we succeeded in regulating our wishes to acceptable low levels of risk and cost, we might not enhance or enlarge our means much beyond their current levels. To avoid suffering setbacks in our production of happiness from discrepancies between means and wishes, we would largely remain within our current means and our tried and proven practices. Our opposition to diverging from current practices would prevent us from investigating ameliorations. Unless improvements would present themselves to us through pure serendipity without our investment of risks and costs, we would be arrested in our means and strategies. We would detain ourselves from developing more advanced pursuits. We would sentence ourselves to never attain anything except what we already know we can achieve, to never evolve in our knowledge or abilities, to never possess better means, to never improve our happiness.

These considerations may make us reluctant to enter a mode of curtailment. Yet, even if we should be currently satisfied with our circumstances, changes in these circumstances or fluctuations and developments in our needs may compel us to expand our practices beyond our comfort zone merely to maintain our current standards of fulfillment. Changes may challenge us to nurture coincidences of serendipi-

ty or to obtain control through trials. Our exposure to the upheaval of internal or of external settings may require that we prepare additional means to guard ourselves against contingencies. These provisions may also require forays into the unknown, may force us to explore and look for novel solutions so that we can forestall failure in our pursuits. Even without a threat of exigent conditions, our pursuits might not move in repeatable routines. As internal and external circumstances change in the course of regular development, we might have to modify our pursuits to adjust to them. It might be impossible to stop explorations after we have reached a certain level of fulfillment of our needs because the maintenance of that level in an evolving world might require advancement. Even if other conditions rested, our pursuits might create circumstances that call for new ways of coping with them.

Change then does not only arrive as a result of general developments. Many of our pursuits may not permit us to rely on proven and secure mechanisms even if our general context appears to remain the same. Many of the conditions that bear on the fulfillment of our needs may be unreliable. We may not be aware of all factors that regularly or irregularly contribute or detract from our pursuits. We may not know whether reaching a wish is possible or impossible or how probable its fulfillment might be. Even if we have confidence that types of pursuits will succeed one way or another, we might not know how they will be accomplished, what their exact requirements and implications are. To find answers and adjust them in our favor, we may have to embark on a pursuit, may have to become aware of opportunities and challenges, and resolve issues posed by them along the way. That we must pursue our needs to satisfy them implies that we must find resources that we do not already possess or that we must form resources that we do possess into more specific applicable means. That we do not already have the means we require infuses an inherent aspect of insecurity into our pursuits. Even if we had satisfactory means, our consumption of them, their decay, and other instabilities that affect their availability force us to find or create more means and ways to maintain or adjust them. Patently physical resources may have to be located, grown, mined, processed, manufactured, or traded for these purposes. Such activities are subject to changing conditions. The other types of resources may have to be developed to meet challenges of changing circumstances as well. A myriad of factors in us and in our environment may affect our supply of means. While some factors may be beneficial and might help us to secure the same or better types and levels of means, we may have to change our behavior to attain them. Our maneuvers may also have to anticipate intrusions beyond those we have already experienced.

All of these challenges and unpredictabilities to the contrary, it might be possible in time to arrange our pursuits in modes that make them generally stay within safe and predictable margins. We might be able to recycle the means we use to a harmonious rotation. We might coordinate or modify human behavior to decrease interference and to establish mutual support. We might succeed in controlling influences from other biological and nonbiological forces sufficiently to enable a stable existence. Such a setting of human activities that remains within predictable parameters might save us considerable trouble. However, we might have some distance to go before we reach such a state of presumed tranquility and security. Our personal circumstances as well as the circumstances of our species may not allow us to consider halting coincidental forays and reducing our pursuits to what we can already securely obtain and maintain. We may only consider such a reduction in particular sectors in which we deem fulfillment levels to be adequate and if we are assured that nothing will disturb our achievement. But it appears improbable that such a state can be reached, let alone that we would have sufficient proof of its immunity. Even if we could manage all contingencies we have already encountered, we can never be certain that these represent all vagaries that may befall us.

Having reached an advanced level of development may give us a false sense of security to which we must not succumb if we wish to protect us and our species to the best of our abilities. Settling into an ordered and predictable mode of existence after accomplishing an advanced level of development may cause us to lose the will to react to challenges. We may depend on systems to sustain us as well as themselves. Their interposition may also cause us to lose the aptitude and the means to pursue our needs ourselves, to control the functioning or development of systems we initiate, or to maintain them if they fail. To prevent such a helplessness, we might preserve our competence in matters important to us. But it is difficult to see how a proper level of aptitude could be maintained only as a matter of contingency without its current practical employment. The capabilities we build or leave in place would likely entice us to engage in attempts to expand our levels of advancement. Expansion may then have to be tolerated to maintain our capabilities. Moreover, it may be necessary for our individual and collective survival and thriving because it may permit us to overcome the intentional and unintentional failings of our more primitive conditions. Its facilitation of rising qualities and quantities of resources, the stimulation of our mind by its tasks, and the involvement of cooperative structures and processes to achieve them may create indispensable or at least helpful foundations for human reconciliation.

All these considerations compel the conclusion that we would come to regret it if we did not promote our capabilities. Limiting ourselves to familiar avenues of pursuit may not only curb our capabilities to rise to future challenges and opportunities but it may also diminish our current ability to fulfill our needs. In addition, our impressions of our and humanity's potential may render an easy life short of our potential unappealing. The secure satisfaction of all our needs is bound to generate a sense of monotony and paralysis. This outcome may not be easy to determine because we loathe the fear and pain that are involved in fighting for our existence. Our impression that we should be satisfied with a comparatively secure level of pursuit may result from continuing pain and fear of deficiencies that focus our mind on that goal. It might also be a function of not having experienced fulfillment past insufficient levels. As we approach and reach states of secure, adequate fulfillment that we previously regarded as desirable and spend extended periods in such states, they seem to unsettle us. Our unease may often remain nameless and suppressed. It may appear ungrateful and foolish that we should fight for the fulfillment of our needs only to grow impatient and discontented as we attain adequate levels of it. We may fear that there will be no constructive escape from this state because the risks and costs of exceeding the limits we set may seem to invite anguish. We may additionally fear that our dissatisfaction with achievement may grow if we succeed in pursuits beyond the limits we have set because we would risk exhausting the guidance by our needs. Faced with this prospect where either potential outcome of our innovative forays presents us with pain, we may consider it wise to restrain our pursuits at a point we deem to keep us from incurring the risks of both. But stagnation short of approaching our ideals may not be a satisfying alternative either because we may be cognizant of the risks and costs of limiting our capabilities and because we sense that more happiness might lie beyond the limits we impose on ourselves. Even if we abstain from exceeding the limits we set for exploration or implementation, we are unlikely to succeed in preventing our imagination from formulating possibilities that might bring us added happiness. While we suffer from this temptation, we also suffer because our imagination has not been active in the service of reconciled needs to where it could help us form wishes that can carry us to new levels of happiness.

Having secured our existential requirements to adequate levels and having provided similarly for others may allow our attention and imagination to transcend preceding, more fundamental concerns and to explore higher realms of our reconciled needs. We might be able to think of much that we would like to accomplish and much we would

like humanity to accomplish in addition to securing the adequate fulfillment of proximate needs. These objectives might impress us as substantial new horizons and not as insignificant refinements. Even if we cannot presently define them, we may possess a sense that our familiar struggles may only bring about preliminary conditions that set the stage for far greater developments and levels of happiness of which we only possess vague notions. It seems that we might push on not only because we understand that this is necessary to maximize our chances of individual and collective survival and thriving under the current parameters of our needs but also in part because we are drawn by reasons we might not yet quite understand. Whether and how much we succeed in these developmental challenges may depend on how judiciously we manage coincidental pursuits we apply to advance. To succeed in our existence generally, control may be a decisive factor. Still, wishes that exceed our abilities are necessary to maximize our chances of success, including our control. They can make us more flexible, inventive, tenacious, and ultimately knowledgeable to withstand adversities and attain our potential. We must reach out to coincidental factors to avail ourselves of them as constructive instruments or to protect ourselves from them. We have to use them to fully succeed in obtaining and maintaining what we want and in avoiding or overcoming what we detest. Yet, as much as we may recognize the benefit and the necessity of following our wishes, the discrepancy between our wishes and what we can reach places us in a predicament. Both adjusting our wishes to feasibility and following them to coincidental realms brings us pain. Diminishing our pain requires us to select a path that follows wishes under prudent management of the involved risk and cost.

But even following our wishes in such a restrained manner does not guarantee that we will incur more happiness than pain or that our pain can be reduced to bearable levels. It does not tell us whether our rewards will be worth our pain. Nor does it give an indication whether the progression of our wishes will ever relent, whether we will ever be satisfied. We might be cursed to chase after endlessly escalating wishes and means to fulfill them. The excess of our wishes over our capabilities may continue to depress our happiness, and our failures in coincidental pursuits may continue to endanger our achievements. As a result, our happiness may not dramatically change even as we expand our needs and their fulfillment. We may not be able to escape pain in a lasting manner. The promise of satisfaction that seems to be implied in our needs, the dream of living in contentment and peace, our ideal of happiness as perfection, as rest upon achievement appear to be unreachable. The next chapter explores this topic in more detail.