CHAPTER 7
TRIALS, CONVENTIONS, AND IDOLS

When we look for principles of happiness, it might appear reasonable that we should consider principles that sizable numbers of individuals hold dear and exercise in their own matters to satisfy their existential needs. Turning to such established systems of seeking happiness provides us the relative security that others have already considered and judged certain behavior and circumstances to be satisfactory responses to needs we all share. That a large number of individuals can agree on what renders them happy might signify that they are on to a valid principle of happiness. We might extract common denominators from observations of what makes many or the most persons happy. A practical example would become increasingly convincing as more persons subscribe to it. To find guidance, we would then mostly look at larger groups of similar or identical conduct and try to identify the concurrence of motivations that direct such conduct. We may trust that valid views are expressed in prevailing moral, religious, and legal principles, in written and in unwritten social conventions. We may presume that such principles are applied because they result in happiness. Yet their existence does not necessarily tell us how effective they are in creating happiness for individuals to whom they are applied. Nor does it reveal whether there are other principles that might be more useful.

The reasons individuals apply established standards may not reflect their foremost ideas of happiness. These principles may not have been fashioned to make individuals who are subjected to them happy. Nor may such individuals have selected or acceded to them. Principles may have been imposed by an authority or may have grown as a matter of tradition. They may represent inapplicable, ineffective, or outdated models that individuals are forced to accept if they wish to exist in a particular environment or even if they wish to leave such an environment. Even the apparently free sharing and application of conventions do not prove that these constitute principles of happiness. The underlying grounds not only for consent with preexisting conventions but also for the active shaping of conventions can be resentment, fear, error, insecurity, and any other causes that create or promote unhappiness. Compliance with existing principles or their selection may reflect compromise, containment, adjustment, defeat, or resignation. Individuals living by these principles may conform to them because they regard compliance with them as the best way under the given circumstances to fulfill their needs. Then again, these conventions may only allow modest achievements. They may not reflect what complying or

shaping individuals would do if they could freely imagine and select their path to happiness. Even if individuals should not consider themselves constrained by principles and should regard them as the best solutions they can conceive, the existence of such an accord does not automatically give credence to the agreed conventions as meaningful principles of happiness. Agreement regarding a common denominator of happiness does not mean that the endorsed behavior is effective or efficient. Individuals may abide by paradigms because of their lack of capacity, knowledge, imagination, or effort, or because they have been misguided by others or by themselves. That others share an erroneous outlook does not make it correct. Even if the shared behavior represents a common denominator by which happiness can be produced, it may not constitute a particularly high-yielding denominator. A larger acceptance then does not prove that the shared principles constitute a better or the best possible idea for building, increasing, or maximizing happiness. It seems that there is no great assurance in numbers.

Nevertheless, the common foundation of existential needs that is shared by all humans, their common needs, should render us hopeful that we can find principles that guide us to fulfill a particular type of need better or best. If we wanted to assemble valid principles, we would therefore still look for behavior patterns by which individuals achieve what they consider to be supreme satisfaction or approximations of that state. It seems relatively easy to distinguish certain core behavior patterns that are better suited than others or best suited to fulfill a need if such a need pertains directly to fundamental survival functions. Although some variations may exist, these closely relate to principal shared fulfillment functions. With regard to collateral needs, however, we may find it harder to identify behavior patterns that are universally recognized as superior or ideal. The reasons for such increased variation are not immediately obvious. They may relate to the plasticity of mental structures and processes that form the prevalent setting for collateral needs. With regard to all existential needs, differences in preferences may be due to individual conditions that are not shared. These may be of a permanent or of a temporary nature. Not all individuals share the same intensity potential in their needs, the same individual faculties, the same environment, the same past and current position in an environment, or the same fulfillment state. Even if they share identical needs in principle, the variety of possible combinations of needs depending on individuals' disposition and situation and their setting can lead to different strategies. These differences result in a variety of approaches that yield a variety of objective success and a variety of subjective satisfaction. Even if a large majority should claim that

a behavior conveys superior or ideal happiness, it may not be able to claim universal application. It might be limited to claiming that a path certain individuals have chosen is superior or ideal for them. The failure of some individuals to adopt these preferences demonstrates that even a broadly shared path constitutes only one approach toward fulfillment among others. The existence of possible alternatives poses a problem for us if we try to obtain guidance from the behavior of others to determine which path will provide happiness for us. The consequences of an erroneous adoption may be more than negligible gradations of happiness. What may be entirely helpful for some may be unsupportive, dramatically less helpful, or counterproductive for others. Our differences may appear to define us as much as our commonalities. Hence, our trust that principles of behavior shared by a multitude of persons can show us the way to happiness might be misplaced.

Notwithstanding such reservations, we may consider behavioral patterns at least as possibilities whose broader following makes them worthwhile to explore. The question becomes then how to select from different pathways to happiness that we notice being pursued by other individuals. If an item of common accord strikes us as a principle we possibly may want to guide us in our search for happiness, we may try it. If the application of such a principle in fact brings us happiness, we might be inclined to adopt such principle. We may decide to continue to identify such principles by observations and by imitating trials until we assemble a collection of principles that can guide us in all respects. However, even if we derive a measure of happiness from an approach we emulate, there is no guaranty that it constitutes the best way for us to find happiness. Even if we explore several possibilities, we could only claim that we have found the best way among those that someone else has already established and of which we have become aware. As long as we follow someone else, we do not know whether there might be a personally unknown, existing manner of behavior or a new, generally unexplored manner that better suits our needs. In solely trying and adopting approaches already applied by others in their pursuits of happiness, we may hold ourselves back from finding the best possible way for us. To open ourselves to finding the best possible happiness, we would have to transcend the approaches offered by convention and consider all approaches that could possibly serve our happiness. New strategies that are not reflected in the examples offered by other humans may make us happy, happier, or happiest. We would have to test all of these possible alternatives to find out whether they can improve our happiness. To cover all these possibilities and make our selection, it would seem necessary to engage in a systematic, scientific process.

Using a detailed scientific method, we can establish firm principles for the behavior of an array of occurrences. Once we have formulated such principles and confirmed their application, we can use them as reliable tools for our pursuits. We can plan and implement our pursuits according to their descriptions of cause and effect. Yet, in our reality, our use of such scientific principles is limited. That may be due to the fact that we have not understood all applicable principles. But the problem is often not so much unfamiliarity with the involved science. Rather, it may be that we face an overwhelming multitude of parts and processes whose presence or interaction we cannot ascertain. We may therefore be limited to exploring such settings at a system level that includes parts or all of them. Even if comprehensive detailed exploration is possible, that undertaking threatens to make us lose sight of higher levels of phenomena about which we can find valuable information by exploring them as systems, possibly through interaction with other systems. The interdependent complexities represented by our environment, our body, and their relationship warrant approaching these phenomena as systems. Subdivisions of these systems seem to be necessary or helpful for better study. Regarding humans, our mind and particularly our emotional mind warrant such an attitude at least initially for all reasons that suggest system orientation in scientific research. Human emotions resist their scientific classification. While the rest of our mind can be more readily understood in its reflective and its logical functions, our emotional mind appears to be moved by more enigmatic forces. Additionally, the interdependence of its processes makes it an integrated body part whose interaction with the other parts of our body and our environment we must understand.

If we know little about the inner workings of a system, we can find out about it by testing how it reacts to different conditions. Once we have found a particular reaction, we may test how this reaction behaves when we change circumstances. Because we may not know what causes the system to react in the manner we observe, we cannot safely predict how it might react to different associations. We would have to put speculations to the test. We might build some understanding of involved causes by accumulating knowledge about ranges of behavior and aspects that break acceptable ranges of similarity. In that respect, our exploration of systems is not different from fundamental scientific research. Yet it may lack the certainty of a detailed scientific process that arises from establishing cause and effect and derived principles. System-oriented research may therefore consist of a collection of methodical observations that resembles prescientific methods and may only partly advance to scientific standards of deeper understanding.

The ways we collect experiences about our emotional mind and its correlations with our environment are usually not methodical. We develop such experiences as we are confronted with our needs and try to fulfill them as much as we can. Because of this preoccupation alone, the reality in which we must pursue our needs often allows us neither exhaustive detailed nor system-related research regarding our needs. We may not be able to establish the presence, effects, or interactions of factors within their system, in other systems, or beyond these that might have relevance for the welfare of our emotional mind. Nor may we be able to experience sufficient activity by or interaction within or between such systems or between systems and nonsystemic factors to ascertain reliable knowledge. The completeness and certainty of our experiences may vary widely. Even if we collect a sufficient amount of experiences in a particular setting, an investigation may lose relevance once the external setting in which we pursue our happiness changes or if our internal disposition changes. Because of our lack of knowledge, we must often pursue our happiness based on vague notions and generalizations about us and our environment. We may have to determine our course founded on what we consider possible or, if more information is available, based on probability assessments. We may have to act on the basis of the incomplete knowledge we have derived, or we may defer a decision in favor of finding out more so we can render a better-founded decision later. Depending on our assessment of risk and potential damage, we may plan safety margins into our pursuits.

In many respects, we can only cope with the complexity and variety of our emotional mind and our environment by treating them as phenomena about which we have less than complete knowledge. This appears to lower our chances of finding exact ways of improving and maximizing our happiness. We may substantially ameliorate our pursuits if we can procure scientifically verifiable information from other sources. Beyond that, others may impart nonscientific information to us. We must treat this information with reservation because it might be imparted in the interest of other parties. Nevertheless, if we proceed with caution and insist on sufficient signs of reliability, including such information into our considerations may be helpful. We may find not only technical assistance arising from the experiences of others instructive, but also their experiences regarding the satisfaction of their needs. Here again, we will have to be wary of attempts to influence us according to the interest of others. But we may learn from such experiences. As individuals continue through life, they accumulate an increasing fund of experiences by their pursuits or by being subjected to environmental events. These may give them an improved understand-

ing of their emotional mind in relation to the rest of their body as well as to environmental systems and factors. Less experienced individuals might benefit from such wisdom. It might help them to avoid the pain of hard lessons and increase their opportunities for happiness. While some aspects others learn about happiness might be generally transferable, the utility of numerous insights may depend on a congruence of needs and circumstances that may frequently be missing. Moreover, identifying relevant internal and external commonalities may be difficult if we have not had occasion to find sufficient clarity about our needs and applicable methods and lack experiences we could compare or foresee. Further, there might be differences in personality and circumstances with other individuals of which we may not be aware.

To the extent we cannot recognize guidance in the experiences of others, we are left with our own impressions of what might bring us pain or pleasure. Unless we have accumulated appropriate experiences in relevant aspects, we may have to engage in trials to gain control of our happiness. Yet, when we formulate a wish, our ignorance of how it can be brought about is usually not total. If we have experienced the deprivation and the satisfaction of the related need, we can usually determine two points to which we can connect our comprehension and related circumstances. Even if we have not experienced the full range of pain and pleasure regarding a need, we can produce some construct of experience and imagination. This narrows the focus of our efforts to closing the practical difference between two states of affairs. We may build up from the starting circumstances of deficiencies that we can explore in relative detail to circumstances we have experienced or imagine to constitute the conclusion of a need. We may analyze that end state into components and steps that we already know or imagine to be necessary or useful for its occurrence. Even if we do not have direct knowledge of components that might be involved, we may be able to take reference to similar phenomena of progression and to their components. We might adjust them to the task challenging us. If we possess or can develop knowledge in this manner, we may be able to produce some idea of how a desired result might be brought about. Based on a combination of knowledge and speculation, we can usually think of some framework, reference, or construct, however rudimentary, incomplete, implausible, impossible, or inapplicable it might seem that might apply. It would appear to be exceptional that we could not produce some theory, some vision of what it may take to obtain a wish or to fulfill a need. Even incomplete or inapplicable states of knowledge enable us to improve our position because they reveal circumstances from which we may be able to learn and potentials that we can test.

As we prepare for the construction of a path from the beginning to the conclusion of a need, we divide the process into a sequence of parallel or successive steps or components. In defining these steps, we may be able to call on resources that are already sufficiently defined into means. Where resources are not yet defined accordingly, we put the same method we applied to our larger vision to work to determine what might produce the means that we picture. As an outline of a sequence or a combination of sequences emerges, we can identify tasks that are familiar and appear possible and others that are unfamiliar or unknown to us. Once we have contracted the context of our exploration by isolating the possible uncharted increments, we have to find a way to close these deficiencies. If our own experience fails, we may obtain the necessary knowledge by transfer from others. If that strategy fails as well, we must acquire that knowledge in different ways. Scientific extrapolation might assist us. But the reliability of this method is limited to known ingredients and processes, principles, combinations of components, and systems. Once we introduce unknown aspects into our theoretical development, our anticipatory capacities deteriorate. We may not be able to predict the effect of these new aspects securely even if we identify them. Similarity of aspects may provide us with some reasons to assume similar results. Then again, there may be areas where parallels may mislead us. To understand and reliably cure the deficiencies in our capacity of pursuit, we may have to build new knowledge and skills. Analyzing and synthesizing desired objects and events in our mind and arranging our knowledge of components to build them may assist us to advance our knowledge and practical capability in this area. However, ultimately, we must acquire knowledge through practical observations and testing. Thus, our trials in search for what makes us happy may also have to involve technical trials.

These technical undertakings are limited. Because our trials regarding happiness are described by our experienced starting positions and imagined end positions, the selection of components for technical trials is defined to some extent by the space between these positions. We can further build on our existing knowledge of connecting intermediary steps. As we manage to define the shortfall in our knowledge more narrowly, the type and number of possibilities to cure that deficit through trials become more concrete. There is only a limited array of potential means that can connect to the beginning or end points or intermediary components we have already identified. An even smaller group of these implements has the possibility of bridging them. Moreover, we may only have restricted access to resources. With an accordingly sharpened focus, we may find it feasible to test different means

from the field of possible candidates to cure remaining deficiencies in our knowledge. That we can set up experiments from familiar factors demonstrates that we are not entirely powerless regarding most problems we encounter and that we possess some potential to succeed.

Although trials offer a useful and ultimately the only way to expand our knowledge, they are not without disadvantages. Our objective in undertaking them is to expand our management power, to understand and control additional aspects of our world. Yet, to gain that understanding and control, we have to create settings and undertake acts that are beyond our understanding and control. Our control over the events we set in motion in experiments is by definition imperfect. We experiment because we do not have a firm grasp on what we are about to test. We lack full knowledge and lack the capacities resulting from such a knowledge. Experiments could result in material setbacks and inflict lasting damage on our efforts to fulfill our needs. In our attempts to achieve understanding and control, we may set incalculable and uncontrollable reactions free. Some settings may allow us to contain such hazards effectively because we can forecast the demeanor of at least some components based on an established range of observations that encompasses similar conditions. However, if we test ingredients or settings with reduced or no prior experience, we may be unable to contain these risks effectively. We may encounter such situations particularly in systemic settings with unknown components. Because we may not be able to emulate such systems on a smaller scale, we may be unable to reduce the risk by scaling down the experimental setting. In addition, the variability of systems due to unknown factors may make it difficult to find a useful understanding that can be translated into control. Even if we can control a system, the control of variations may demand continual testing. Further, the requirement to try varied constellations to gain understanding and control may create or invite the very repercussions that we seek to avoid by trials. Avoiding risks of negative consequences might be difficult because finding adequate results might be elusive. We may not know whether or to what extent we will find what we are looking for before we embark on a trial and confirm that what we find performs effectively or efficiently for our purposes. We may have to test a range of constituents and of constellations to determine what will or will not work and which positive results will improve or optimize our pursuits. If dangerous combinations exist in the field of our inquiry, we will come upon them in the course of comprehensive testing. Trials then present an inherent risk that we might lose control in attempts to expand control. Deleterious consequences may outstrip the potential benefits of better control.

These threats may prevent us from engaging in trials and may thus induce us to forgo an expansion of our capacities. More reasonably, they may move us to set conditions that take the potential of detriment and failure into account when we engage in experimentation. Before we employ trial methods in a situation beyond our control, we must explore closely the type and magnitude of uncontrolled factors and our ability to narrow them. To prevent failures from derailing us, we may want to engage in methods that are reversible or at least terminable and permit us to recover from involved losses. As long as we plan our activities so we can extract ourselves from them without too much damage, we may allow trials to exceed our control. Our general focus would be to give up only as much control as we need to advance our search without materially jeopardizing the achievements we have already reached or hope to reach. Where we might exceed that principle, we must decide whether the risks we incur are in reasonable correlation with the result we seek and its likelihood. Our considerations must exceed the narrow confines of the experimental setting at hand. They have to take account of potential effects of trials on our extended environment and the possible repercussions we may suffer as a result. Repercussions may occur because our actions may directly or indirectly impair or destroy means or sources of means that we require for the pursuit of our needs. They may also consist of defensive measures that resist our infringements or respond to the infliction of damage.

Unless we carefully manage risk, experimentation may not be a very promising method to achieve happiness. Still, all our care cannot eradicate the fact that we cannot entirely know the results of our trials before we engage in them. Although we may be able to apply foresight and precautions based on experiences and deductive insights, we may not have sufficient knowledge and control to avert all negative consequences. Some, and at times significant, risk may remain. We cannot wholly avoid incurring that risk. Experimentation may at times be the only way to advance an objective. Advancing it may not be optional. It may be existentially required. Even where such stakes are not indicated, we may have little choice but to sustain risk if we want to develop our capabilities and to improve or maximize our happiness. That drive appears to be so strong that we individually and collectively are committed to experimentation and inclined to incur inevitable risks.

In addition to incalculable damage we might incur from uncontrolled experimental reactions, trials may impose significant losses on us because we may invest resources in their pursuit that are not compensated by their outcome. Trials may be completed without reaching a satisfactory result, yield only partial success, or call for the expendi-

ture of disproportional resources to accomplish success. They can be involved, lengthy, and potentially costly proceedings with indeterminate outcomes. We may succeed in limiting our cost exposure if we already have some knowledge of the trial subject and trial environment. Yet the remaining undetermined nature of our undertaking may still engender significant resource requirements that might not or not adequately be rewarded. Experimentation in regions that are not already sufficiently definite in their possibilities can strain our resources because of its lack of predictability. Particularly if trials require the pursuit of multiple variants, a sizeable segment of our investments might flow into strategies that will not advance a cause. Even a small number of variables may confront us with extensive trial requirements. These negative factors are increased if we are not merely searching for minimum adequacy but for an improved or maximized result. In that case, we would not stop once we have found a workable solution. We would continue to experiment until we can establish a result commensurate with an exalted standard or the best possible solution. Depending on the number of possible alternatives, trials may therefore present a potential that we may lose our way and our resources in trying strategies that do not work or that are not optimized to fulfill our needs.

Direct costs and collateral damage may then involve us in trials that threaten to cause more damage than benefit. Often, determining the risk of loss or its possible magnitude is difficult before we engage in trials. It may be unproblematic to discern and dismiss trials that are clearly ineffective or damaging. We may be able to render such judgments based on our experiences, the experiences of others, or after a partial pursuit. Notwithstanding, as long as a manner of pursuit might serve the fulfillment of a need, we may not be able to exclude it as inapplicable or inferior before its conclusion. We may only know upon completion of its suggested path how objectively successful it can be and how happy its manner of fulfillment can make us. We cannot ease our burden by categorically excluding paths that include disturbances and pain. They may be worth pursuing because their yield may be superior. The proper measure of whether our investment is worthwhile may only become visible when a wish is finally being fulfilled and the net gain of pleasure is tallied. Further, we may only know upon completion of all other paths with a reasonable potential how each pursuit compares. Our experiences during the implementation of an approach may not provide clear indications of the ultimate success or happiness to be achieved. Distinguishing effective objectives and strategies from less effective, ineffective, or damaging objectives and strategies might be difficult before they reach completion because their yield is by def-

inition incomplete. Even if we pass judgment only at the end of a pursuit, we cannot be assured of our assessment. A path may display disturbances and pain during its implementation that are not systemic to the pursuit. Rather, they may be caused by coincidence through intervening circumstances that happen to intersect with our path or avoidable omissions, detractions, or other errors. In other pursuits, certain disorders and pain may be systemic. Our negative experiences in either type of pursuit may make it difficult to judge the relative or absolute capacity of a pursuit to convey satisfaction to us. Pursuits with co-incidental deficiencies may become proficient if we can limit or avoid these deficiencies. Pursuits with systemic problems may be modifiable to where these problems are diminished or eliminated. Even in the absence of such issues, we would have to evaluate whether and by how much our strategies could be improved. To explore and judge the potential of alternatives, we may have to try them, learn from them, and adjust them to our preferences and situation. In the advancement of our happiness, such a comprehensive approach seems unavoidable.

Experimentation and suffering its potential fallout may then be an arduous and at times painful manner of acquiring knowledge and skills and reaching our objectives. It would appear to be an inefficient tool to identify principles of happiness. The vagaries of trials require us to invest much of our time, effort, and other resources. Even if we cautiously monitor results, they may require us to commit many mistakes and to suffer extensive frustration and unhappiness on the way to finding what will make us happy, happier, or happiest. We have to be prepared to live our existence in an experimental state of pain until we have found what we are looking for. Trials may carry an important and indispensable function in vital circumstances where we have little other indication of what will work. But they do not seem to represent a promising regular technique to determine what we want and how to reach what we want. The demands and consequences of embarking on alternatives that do not serve our happiness as well, do not serve it at all, or even damage it threaten to overwhelm us. Even if we succeed in securing some measures of success, we may become bogged down in futile pursuits. We may run out of energy, time, financial or other resources, out of opportunities, out of life if we follow this method. We may recognize the importance of experimentation in exploring subject matters that are more definitely accessible to scientific methods. Only, explorations of happiness often involve issues of such complexity and variability that trials may not lead us easily to success. For these reasons, we may decide that we must look for less exasperating means of insight in our attempts to ascertain what will make us happy.

In the apparent absence of other available methods, many of us prefer therefore to take guidance from conventions we observe in our environment. Although these may not guarantee happiness and may not maximize it, we may believe that established patterns of behavior hold a better promise of deriving principles of happiness than following our imagination and playing through all possibilities with potential. If happiness follows at least in part principles that are transferable among humans, it would make sense to explore avenues already traveled. Other individuals may already have gone through similar trials in their search for happiness. They may have extracted valid principles of happiness over time. We may concede that looking for solutions in the largest common denominators might not necessarily work for us. Still, we may maintain the hope that we might be able to discern patterns that apply to us. We should be able to find helpful constituents for the fulfillment of each existential need that we can adjust to reflect our goals. Taking account of established patterns by which other individuals pursue their happiness may at least narrow the field of alternatives and help us to render our experimentation more manageable.

Our trials are further confined because the principal choices for experimentation may not be as extensive as they seem in theory. Even if we might be able to overcome some limitations, our resources may be limited by our capacity and by the environment in which we pursue them. To succeed with the pursuit of our needs, we have to adopt pursuits that can prompt conducive responses from that environment. We have to adjust our experiments and pursuits according to what we can undertake. Aside from matters of absolute impossibility, our individual capacity and our environmental capacitations are mutually influencing each other or they have that potential. This phenomenon is not limited to us individually but also applies to groups of individuals and to humanity as an entirety. In its development, humanity increasingly shapes its surroundings by individual pursuits. The commonality of existential needs and conventions that reflect them should have increasingly cast our existential setting into conformance with common needs. Since the same fundamental needs motivate us, there may only be incremental differences between the results of our pursuits and already existing conventions and conditions. Diverse individual expressions of common needs may have found reflection in such a system as well because differences have existed all along and demanded consideration. They may have affected standards of how to find fulfillment of common needs by giving rise to a range of strategies that accommodate individual particularities. We may attempt to build our happiness based on such a traditional groundwork of convention and reality.

The evolvement of a system through generations in which conventions and our environment have melded into each other to create one contiguous environmental setting may make it appear reasonable for us to respect and to adopt the provisions of such a system for the pursuit of our happiness. We seem justified to grant it a presumption of correctness and wisdom that might surpass what we can derive, at least with regard to the pursuit of common existential needs and the range of individual pursuits it accommodates. Yet, in embracing such a strategy, we might overestimate the common sourcing of prevailing practices and their openness to the accommodation of idiosyncrasies. Although we may be able to discern a general development in that direction, we may also be compelled to point to pervasive conditions of pain engendered by error and intolerance that have permeated human evolution. This means that we cannot trust tradition and have to view it with progressing reservation the longer it reaches back into human development, at least until we reach genetically optimized instinctive levels. We may overrate our ability to distance ourselves from prevailing practices to the extent they do not cover the requirements of our needs. That may be because we may overestimate our proclivity to establish critical distance, to test alternatives, and to implement changes that reflect our resulting insights. We may even be convinced that our setting fulfills all our needs and that we do not possess differentiating desires. Our approval of conventions may not be deliberate. Our entrenched existence in an environment and familiar ways to cope in it and our relative unfamiliarity with alternatives may preclude us from realizing how uncritical we are in our acceptance of our surroundings and their ways. We may be so thoroughly influenced by the physical, cultural, economic, religious, ethical, legal, and political standards of our environment that we adopt them as ours without awareness.

Even if we preserve idiosyncrasies in our needs, we may consider that we benefit in some ways if we behave in conformance with given standards. We may conform for fear of repercussions. We may fear embarrassment, economic and social difficulties, marginalization, exclusion, violence, loss of freedom, dislocation, or diminishing chances in an afterlife. But the pressures of agreeing with conventional objectives and manners of pursuit may also be subtler. It may seem possible that we could pursue different paths from those most traveled in a society. There may appear to be sufficient freedom within the parameters of permissibility set in a society. There may be some tolerance toward others who do not pursue their happiness in conformance with conventional pathways. Still, within these confines of what is permissible or accepted, there are usually narrower parameters of customary,

entrenched, generally approved ways. Established structures and processes, as well as the failure of these and of individuals conforming to them to advance deviating practices and individuals may encourage conformance. They may make it more difficult to pursue or maintain idiosyncratic behavior or to find sufficient happiness with it. By placing ourselves outside the regular pathways of a system, we may have to relinquish the assistance and tools that may exist for more regular manners of pursuit. We may struggle more to advance our happiness independently than as a participant in conforming activities. We may have to maneuver separately or carve out exceptions from established methods. This decision may place a heavy burden on our ability to advance our interests even if these do not clash with ordinary pursuits. It may require increased investment of resources and produce increased risk of damage for which the benefits of alternative paths do not adequately compensate. Thus, even if such paths are available, the selection of adequate alternatives may be small or nonexistent. This realization may make us conform because working within governing conventions diminishes our exposure to insecurity and other detriments. Although we would sustain adjustments to pursuits, the convenience and security of conventional paths and structures may confer higher degrees of happiness than we could hope to gain from deviating practices. We may therefore give up pursuing idiosyncrasies to the extent they interfere with the benefits of a conventional existence.

Arguably, this is not the only consequence we may deliberate. If conventions and the related environment do not reflect our needs, we might consider changing them. However, implementing such change may be problematic because we have to persuade affected individuals that they would fare better under our proposed modification. Interests that would be detrimentally impacted would have to be compensated, which would reduce or might extinguish the utility of change. Further complications arise from the correlation between conventions and environmental expressions they have produced, as well as by impositions of independent conditions that might have partaken in forming both. Resulting ingrained factualities may call for substantial resources and determination to surmount difficulties in implementing a change. We may not succeed in changing minds unless we can give a credible perspective that our plans can succeed. Because change may involve a period of upheaval and uncertainty, we must at least warrant its reliable management. Beneficiaries may have to tolerate a temporary decline of benefits. Progress may be marked by inherent problems, extraneous interferences, and residual resistance. The interruptions and volatility involved in change may amplify the reservations of many individuals.

Before we might convince others, we have to first convince ourselves. Even if adjustments of conventions and environmental aspects might appear desirable, we may not be able or willing to pursue them. We may fear that the results are too uncertain or that changes cause unintentional consequences. We may further believe that the potential result does not stand in reasonable proportion to the required effort. Changes may demand resources that we alone or in conjunction with others may not possess or have an ability to develop. We may not be willing to risk our resources, wellbeing, or existence in an attempt to alter a system that might oppose such change. To pursue our own path despite such obstacles, we might remove ourselves from an unsatisfactory environment and generate or insert ourselves into another that may be more conducive to our requirements. In, or as a result of, a change of venue, we may have to give up benefits and face a potentially wide range of adaptation pressures. This may prompt us to question whether we can fare better in such an alternative environment.

As long as we can reach a bearable level of satisfaction for our needs in our current system, we may therefore relent. We may decide that we are better off conforming to what is commonplace and what is possible and permissible. Compared to the benefits of compliance and detriments of noncompliance, aspects where our happiness deviates may appear insignificant to us. We may consider certain external and self-generated restrictions on exploring and on acting upon our differences with established conditions as a fair trade. We may engage in or allow the contortion or suppression of at least some of our wishes that we know or suspect to be capable of ameliorating our happiness so we can fit in and fare as well as possible under the reigning circumstances. We may even avoid exploring our idiosyncrasies for fear that our full awareness of them might cause us problems. But we may also be cognizant of our environment's shortcomings in relation to our wishes and still carry on in its preservation through collaboration. The system may keep us at bay by offering sufficient rewards for compliance and discouragements regarding noncompliance, change, or secession. Our willingness to accede to an existence in such a system may grow with increasing benefits accruing from remaining in it. Such benefits alone may discourage us from prosecuting alternatives. A thinner margin of benefits may raise the risk of systemic upheaval. But even a thin margin of benefit or a detriment from compliance may not deter us from compliance. Even if a system leaves us free from exterior limitations to build a more satisfying existence within that system, to change, or to leave the system, these possibilities may remain theoretical for us. A system may be so inculcated into us and we may be so dependent on

it that we may not be able to conceive alternatives. Allegiance to the system may have been absorbed from or imparted into us by parents, peers, communities, religious, governmental, and educational institutions, as well as general economic, cultural, social, and security conditions. Even if we know that it weighs on our happiness and can conceive of alternatives and understand how to implement them, we may lack conviction that these would fulfill our needs better. We might resent and fear the as of yet unexperienced quality of an alternative even if we could gauge the risks and costs in obtaining it. We may therefore align ourselves with a system even at a considerable harm to our happiness. Often, though, we are not aware of the mechanisms that exert this cost and prevent us from deviating because we are conditioned to perceive them as normal circumstances or causes of our happiness.

Hence, even if the established parameters of our system are not favorable, we may not seriously question them and only find fault with some aspects of their implementation by us or others. To optimize our happiness within the strictures of a system, we may attempt to adjust ourselves not merely to its requirements but to its ideals. For guidance concerning these ideals, we may look to individuals who have found a successful existence in the system. We may try to find someone with whom we can identify who already seems to live in a way in which we imagine we could become happy. We may try to emulate individuals whose life we deem to be happy and most appealing to us. We may be attracted to persons who appear to possess what we regard as indicators of happiness. We may consider individuals to be successful if they have earned material wealth, if they command respect and acclaim, if they are smart, skilled, and self-assured, if they have a thriving family, if they attract friends and love. Our observation of these and other attributes of successful individuals makes us want to model ourselves after them. They become our idols. We may attempt to copy the mechanisms, the pursuits by which we presume our idols to have achieved success. Yet rarely do we know whether our idols are happy and how much the perceived manifestations or causes of their happiness effect the satisfaction of their needs. Nor do we know whether we would be happy in their position and how much the perceived manifestations or causes for their happiness would reflect on our happiness. If we were able to fully or at least essentially copy the personal and environmental attributes, developments, and achievements of our idols, we might find out whether their way of life can make us happy. Only, in many cases, we are unable or unwilling to follow the path that led to the accomplishments we venerate. Rather, we may grasp at superficial, outward causes or manifestations of their status and strive to copy these.

Even if we do not have a personal idol, we can fall into a similar thinking by idolizing a lifestyle we observe. By finding or creating circumstances similar to those we perceive to work in the production of happiness for others, we may focus on attaining appearances of successful pursuits instead of these pursuits themselves. By pursuing implements that signify accomplishment or the capacity of fulfillment, we hope to fulfill our needs. Because frequently outward appearances of successful pursuits are all we can detect, we may place ourselves under the illusion that these contain a key to happiness. We may assume or hope that a shortcut to them will infuse us with the happiness we impute. We may have difficulties understanding that this may be an illusion, that outward signs of happiness may be byproducts or consequences rather than grounds for happiness. We may fail to see that, even if the examples we pursue can be causes for happiness, they may only carry that function once other, more important needs are already being fulfilled. The circumstances we cherish may represent a state where individuals whose needs seem to be securely met engage in frivolous, luxurious pursuits. We may also discount the possibility that they might engage in them as detractions because they cannot fulfill other, more important needs. By emulating characteristics of such a stage, we are signaling to us and others a status of fulfillment that we in reality may not possess. Understanding that status symbols are illusions may not come easily because we can often point to needs they fulfill. We must recognize that their pursuit may keep us from pursuing more important needs and from more meaningful and necessary means to fulfill our needs. The longing and false sense of achievement they convey to us may prevent us from trying to understand our true requirements.

That we would deem it necessary to seek and emulate idols or status symbols, that we desire to be somebody else, demonstrates how much our ability to understand and fulfill our needs is lacking. We focus on creating the stage sets and characters in and through which we hope we can play out our ambitions. Yet, when we arrive at the stage and try to assume the role we had dreamed would change our life, we may be disappointed. We may realize that we were so busy building outward appearances and mannerisms that we forgot to think of the play we wish to enact. We may have failed to develop the underlying plot that brings the sets, the characters, us to life. Even if we succeed putting on a play, we may realize that this is an existence of pretense. We may recognize the error of our assumption that the environment with which we surround ourselves and taking on a character in it will engender a change in us or for us that can make us happy. Nevertheless, we and other actors in our environment may encourage us to live

our existence as a pretense. The system in which we live may use our tendency of self-delusion to create compliance. It may encourage us to seek idols and status symbols that bind us into its mechanisms. In addition, more particular forces that populate or govern the system may use and manipulate these tendencies in us for their pursuits.

Our intrinsic weakness to be misled by superficialities is being used and manipulated by advertising. If advertising informs us of the function of objects or events as means for our needs, it can be useful. It can afford us necessary or helpful information that allows us to determine whether and how they can be used in the implementation of our wishes. However, advertising is disposed to intentionally or unintentionally exceed this function. It may not or not exclusively assist us with information for building realistic plans in which the advertised object or event can take a useful place. Rather, it may encourage us to discount, if only for the moment of purchase, the entire sequence of steps necessary for attaining an objective and the function of the advertised item in such a sequence. It may persuade us to identify an advertised object or event with the result of satisfaction for a need even though such a relationship is attenuated, conditional, or nonexistent. Advertising has made an art and a science of that short-circuiting, of not selling us goods or services so much as a dream of a happier existence. By characterizing products as capable implements to partake in the lifestyle of our idols or in more general ideal circumstances, it uses our desires. It may also use our fears of losing or not attaining the fulfillment of our needs. By reinforcing, guiding, and defining these desires and fears toward a particular product, advertising undertakes to foreclose and to supersede our rational judgment regarding the functionality and value of an advertised product for us. It tries to motivate us to acquire means or engage in strategies that are not properly adjusted or optimized to our needs or our circumstances or that do not offer us adequate return value. It may take advantage of our confusion about our needs and manners of fulfilling them. Advertising can only influence us because we do not possess a clear concept of our objectives or how we wish to satisfy them. It uses that weakness to have us advance the purposes of someone else. In that abuse, advertising may not differ from other sources that try to utilize us. But its marketing of goods and services to us can be particularly successful because it can build on our naturally occurring illusion that we can create fulfillment and avert unhappiness by obtaining symbols of fulfillment. The tactics of advertising may not be limited to the marketing of goods and services in a commercial setting. They may extend to any kind of social context in which individuals or groups attempt to influence others to

accept their suggestions. Accepting a suggestion requires those receiving it to recognize its implementation as a means in their pursuits, as a reflection of their needs and wishes. Ideally, they would fully consider the causes, requirements, and implications of a suggestion. However, such a thorough contemplation might apprise them that a suggestion lacks in its basis, does not benefit them or at least not to the suggested extent, and that its primary objective is to serve others. In such circumstances, parties that are interested in having their suggestions accepted might divert our attention from closer examination and implant a pretense of achievement by tactics similar to advertising.

The question then becomes how we can avoid falling victim in our search for what will make us happy to external as well as our own deception. We may abstain from unverified claims and ideas. We may search for more comprehensive personal and situational matches with others, and we may emulate their activities more substantively. In this manner, we might be able to find some helpful guidance. Still, courses of action others have taken could only provide secure guidance if such persons shared all applicable external and internal circumstances with us. We may have difficulties ascertaining what these features are and whether they are shared. In the absence of that knowledge, we might focus on identifying individuals with as many similarities to us as possible. But we may struggle to find persons with sufficient likeness. The number of possible pertinent variables among individuals may render an identification with others illusory. Even if matching persons existed, it is improbable that we would be able to determine that they exist, except possibly as a matter of coincidence. Evaluating whether we match other persons might require a detail of intrusion into our and their private aspects that few might tolerate. Even if we found similar individuals, they might not have much suitable guidance to offer because their experiences are fused to their circumstances over time and to their previous choices. Moreover, we would have to find individuals with matching personalities and experiences who have selected one of each of the possible choices at a point very similar to what we are facing. This impossible sampling requirement appears necessary to gain a complete understanding of the potential consequences of our choices. Yet, even if we could find such examples, it is unlikely that we could build a workable concept of our happiness from them. We would have resigned to topical imitation instead of developing a concept of what can make us happy. Therefore, following others is not a reliable mode for pursuing, improving, or maximizing our happiness. This threatens to leave us without effective and efficient guidance. The next chapter addresses how we might begin to recover from this discouragement.