

Philosophy: Mending a Broken Promise

by Martin Janello

1. The Promise.

Philosophy for us all. This seems to be the promise of philosophies claiming a capacity of explaining the human condition. Such philosophies come in two principal types. There are spiritual theories that draw a sense of knowledge from the personal experiential immediacies of their founders, proponents, and followers. And then there are theories with scientific ambition that insist on their accuracy by objective methods of factual premises and logical deduction. Such theories might not reserve insight into the entirety of the human condition. But if they are true, as they assert, that truth must apply to everybody within their claimed scope of insight. And so must the consequences they suggest on the basis of such insight. Many philosophies have made such declarations and tried to raise corresponding enthusiasm for the clarity they alleged to have brought to human affairs. And many have failed to convince sizeable followings, let alone their intended audiences. Their reach has been limited by competing philosophies or the intransigence of their marks. But even upon their acceptance, their influence has, after often problematic adventures of implementation, regularly waned or eventually been repudiated. A poor track record for theories claiming truth in explaining and advising on matters of human existence. This record did not come about for lack of time, determination, or opportunity. Philosophy has been around for millennia trying to sell us on ways to think, feel, and act. So how did it come to this?

2. The Inadequacy of Spiritual Philosophy.

Between the two types of philosophy, spiritual philosophy has for extended periods fared better. It has enjoyed higher popularity and has retained such popularity to a higher degree than rational philosophy. That seems to be due to its characteristic of being based on belief. It takes a shortcut to subjective sensory impressions and derives individual feelings of truth. Its dispensation with objective facts and rational thought also dispenses with the work connected to engaging them. In some cases, the intuition of spiritual philosophies may offer guidance that coincides and plays out well in reality. Yet history has proven that the vast majority of such philosophies are not in such coherence. This has regularly led to criticisms and insurrections by believers who rightly or wrongly blame ills in their conditions on failures in the execution of spiritual philosophies. This is particularly so if the spiritual philosophies promise to address such ills. However, there are more fundamental problems to be found in the nature of spiritual philosophies. These problems affect persons heeding their dispensations of reality, and even more so others who do not follow. By their nature, subjective spiritual experiences conveying a sense of truth are unlikely to be shared by others. They spread mostly by instilling belief in their objective factuality that makes them relevant to others. Convincing others to take this leap of acceptance seems difficult. Depending on the circumstances, this undertaking may be helped, but may also be hampered, by claims of direct sourcing or messaging from a superhuman authority. Either way, the perceived objectivity of subjective experiences makes it difficult for believers to admit errors in their experiences,

derived knowledge, or its application. And it makes it near impossible for others to convince them otherwise. It also prevents believers from accepting other viewpoints. For them, there are only those who have experienced the truth and those who have not, and the latter group is wrong if it does not abide by that truth. And if they perceive such truth to be imparted by a superhuman power, believers often connect some kind of mission with that perceived messaging to deal with aberrations from acknowledging or abiding by the perceived truth. Depending on the capacity and determination of believers to impose their impressions of truth onto the objective reality of a society, nonbelievers are in danger of being subjected to overreaching or worse. To preclude this danger, non-believers may try to extinguish spiritual movements. However, they frequently shy away from such drastic measures against a movement while it has not even risen to become a danger. Thus, they may try to contain spiritual movements, bind them into a multicultural society, and engage them in a manner of truce. If such containment is unsuccessful, nonbelievers may have to make concessions in their lifestyle. These may have to reach up to full submission and pretense if a spiritual philosophy and its claim of absolute truth becomes dominant.

But these are uneasy conditions that generate liberation movements among non-believers. And even followers may apply their minds to adapt spiritual philosophies. Spiritual systems know about these tendencies of deviation from their dogma of truth. To preserve that truth and its reign, they govern their realms with an iron hand. This may create explosive friction. But most spiritual systems unravel gradually as nonbelievers and discontented believers become more powerful to assert themselves. Either way, the contrast of subjective origin and claimed objective applicability of spiritual philosophies is bound to cause their downfall if they insert themselves into objective reality and try to shape it accordingly. Nevertheless, spiritual systems usually demonstrate remarkable resilience in this process. And even after they lose control, forms of authority and lip-service tend to survive in societal and cultural patterns. This is because spiritual philosophies and their systems are not based on reason. Their rejection of rational or evidentiary justification makes arguing with them and overcoming them by rational determination difficult. This gives their systems an advantage of persistence even in the face of contraindications.

Recent centuries have seen these dynamics play out. Spiritual philosophies have suffered an accelerating weakening of their influence. The primary cause seems to be the development of humanity, and more particularly its education and information. With the resulting knowledge and mental independence, we have become less fearful, gullible, and subservient. And, freeing ourselves from primitive superstitions, we are better equipped to recognize and reject false philosophies. Ancient spiritual concepts might still be ubiquitous, but increasingly as cultural symbols and less by domination. We cite and observe some of their beneficial principles and carry on some of their traditions. But we largely recognize their foundations as naïve theories and fantasies by our forebears to explain circumstances and events they could not comprehend, predict, or control, and to allay their fears arising from this helplessness. But these issues have been increasingly lifted. And we have seen that a clear understanding of reality and rationality are required and useful in coping with our concerns. So we have progressively less tolerance to identify with the irrational approaches of our forebears. Or our insights into history allow us to call

out their beliefs as manipulative machinations devised to render and keep a populace supportive and docile. Either way, we are ceasing to trust their accounts, promises, rites, and claims of authority. This departure from spiritual philosophy can be explained as an act of growing up and outgrowing the wonder, fantasies, and fairy tales that accompanied our upbringing. We are not putting up anymore with commands of obedience and decline observance without reasonable justification. We demand rational, traceable results even of spirituality.

And in many instances, we turn away from spiritual philosophies in disappointment, disgust, and embarrassment at crimes committed in their name. As we gain more access to historical facts and as our sensitivity to these grows in the course of our development, harsh insights become inescapable. We cannot help recognizing that most spiritual philosophies that rose to power have utterly failed in their claims of benefiting humankind. And we are further compelled to identify them as forces of evil whose pointless, inhumane, and corrupt practices have obstructed and devastated humanity and human potential. Representatives of such philosophies might argue they have reformed or that they were abused by forces not true to the original philosophy. But the fact remains that these philosophies are guilty in consequence of their fantastical accounts to which they attached claims of absolute truth and supreme authority. Their substance and intent enabled, and in many cases committed, unspeakable crimes against humanity. Historical distance and their continuing cultural permeation of us may spare them prosecution or erasure. However, with their record revealed, the withdrawal of respect and trust once held by spiritual philosophies seems irreversible. Their practice and preservation are ever more limited to sanctuaries maintained by personnel invested in them by remaining belief or profession.

3. The Inadequacy of Rational Philosophy.

While then the inadequacy and related decline of spiritual philosophy can be explained, we may still wonder why rational philosophy should share this fate. One might think the opposite should happen, particularly in times when spiritual philosophy leaves voids to be filled by reason. Most of us do not harbor prejudice against rational philosophy as an idea. Its “love of knowledge” principle sounds reasonable, even essential to most. And most of us carry a vague cultural esteem for ancient paragons of classic rational philosophy and their teachings. However, such esteem increases, but also becomes increasingly vague, the further back we look. The scarcity of source materials for famous ancient philosophies is often stunning, given how much is made of them. And a second shock arrives when we review such source materials and discover they are at best pedestrian and not of much practical help beyond commonsensical insights. This may be hard to believe since the wisdom of the ancients has steadfastly been held in such high mythical regard. We may question who we are to doubt this myth when so much more knowledgeable scholars support it. We may thus try to find some essence in ancient rational philosophy we can carry over into our lives. This is not hard to do because ancient philosophy often poses the first instance in which traditional common wisdom was recorded. We may thus be able to cite a fair number of considerations that give us confirmation. And we might take delight or example in some sayings and attitudes of the ancients that we deem instructive beyond our present considerations. A lot of their writings reflect level thinking and some of them deserve respect for discussing interesting

concepts at such an early stage of human development. Such appraisals might seem patronizing. However, much of the early work on rational philosophy is permeated by ignorance, guesswork, and compensation by fantasy. This cannot be faulted. Humanity had to start systematic rational thinking and science somewhere. And the driving forces of ancient rational philosophy are to be respected and appreciated for ushering in the dawn of such efforts. But it would be unhelpful to gloss over their nascent state of development and imbue them with notions of infallible finality.

One may wonder what the damage from that could be if they indeed carry so little substance. Obviously, very few people bother studying ancient rational philosophy. And their insights are not much heard of inserting helpful advice into our lives. This is telling proof that there is indeed very little to be gained from studying the ancients. Traditional rational philosophy has spent many centuries attempting to squeeze more sense from their works. This has generated libraries of interpretative secondary sources, explaining what they think ancient philosophers meant or may have meant, and debating the results. Traditional rational philosophy has been trying to build philosophical traditions on their initial constructs and rudiments. But it has been bogged down in equivocation and almost religious deference and not dared much to advance in departure from its ancestors or build on their insights. For the most part, it has continued to endlessly squabble over petty, theoretical, and practically irrelevant minutiae. It has turned largely in circles without developing much usable wisdom about issues actually affecting humankind. This has taken place through a network of academic sanctuaries where rational philosophy leads a sheltered, hidden existence on life-support without bothering much about anything beyond its preservation.

This mode of subsistence is not only due to its arcane nature or lack of substance. It is not just a self-perpetuating racket of make-belief, or better “make-knowledge” for no particular purpose. Rational philosophy was for most of history spied on, persecuted, restricted, smothered, banned, and destroyed by traditional spiritual philosophy. Relying on unscientific immediacy of emotional knowledge, spiritual philosophy represents the antithesis to rational philosophy. And it fears and resents the inquisitive questioning, logical discipline, and requirements of proof set forth by rational philosophy. This antithesis and antipathy were bound to and did play out in the history of human development. And for a very long time, spiritual philosophy kept winning this contest. It had the advantage of being first to impress the mindsets of primeval humans. Their ignorance, insecurities, fears, and desires grew extensive imaginations to make sense of it all. By offering imaginary explanations and remedies, spiritual philosophy connected with such imaginations on their level and managed to guide them. It also was able to subdue factual exploration and rational thought in followers before the development of such capacities became a problem for it.

This repositioning of spiritual philosophy posed a difficult obstacle for the beginnings of rational philosophy. Rational explanations were generally only condoned to the extent they supported spiritual doctrines. Rational philosophy could then only subsist in the shadows of coincidental coherence. To not exceed the outline of these shadows, it had to contort itself in self-denial, alignment, and falsification of its procedures and substance. After emerging somewhat from the spiritual shadows during its classical periods, it was soon forced to hide and wait for its return in remote refuges of learning or secluded libraries. Yet such repositories were subject to decay and

willful destruction by spiritual forces who sought to stamp them out recognizing the existential threat rational philosophy posed to them. These dark ages of anti-rational spiritual despotism have only slowly and relatively recently receded and ended, and only in some parts of the world. Only then had rational philosophy a chance to re-organize, reconnect, and voice independent ideas. And it had to mostly undertake this emancipation in carefully measured steps under a guise of ongoing compliance to not provoke a backlash from remaining, still influential spiritual forces.

However, not all rational progress was made by escaped elements. Even the compatible rational tracing and support of spiritual arguments did its part in gradually forcing spiritual schemes to enter the realm of rationality. It increasingly opened these schemes to rational analysis, criticism, contest, and possibly negotiation externally and internally. Thus, rational philosophy did to some promising extent participate in the liberation of human affairs from religious oppression. But its deference to spiritual philosophy in decline extended the reign of the latter and rendered overcoming irrational remnants more difficult. And the timid departures by rational philosophy from religious mandate were ultimately overtaken by the individual and societal rationalization dynamics of developing humanity. This development called for answers to new phenomena and related challenges, many of them of a material and organizational, and thus factual and rational nature. Spiritual philosophy by its antithetical nature was unable to respond constructively to these challenges. But neither was rational philosophy in consequence of its subdued existence. Clearly, the long night of spiritual despotism had greatly damaged and all but extinguished the light of rational philosophy. Once spiritual governance was sufficiently subdued to permit the development of rational philosophy, it needed time and self-care to recuperate. So it might be forgiven for an initial preoccupation with itself in nostalgic attempts at stature. After some time of reconstitution, rational philosophy developed in three principal avenues. One reconnected to ancient beginnings of material sciences eventually developing these into modern sciences. The other tried to proceed in the more speculative traditions of traditional rational philosophy. It soon formed constructs so detached from reality that they resembled concepts of belief, but at extremes of abstraction that made them unapproachable and unfathomable for anyone beyond the circle of philosophers who devised them. A third branch continued the traditional collaborative mode of rational philosophy subservient to ruling interests under non-spiritual societal rulers.

But this continuance occurred not simply because rational philosophy was in a rut or because it could not recover from former spiritual oppression. Nor was it due to the oppression it now faced from worldly rulers. Rational philosophy was indeed a victim of oppression by non-spiritual forces that at times were just as set to suppress dissent. However, as disagreeable and assertive as these might have been, the nature of their power differed in that they could not override rational thought like spiritual philosophies before. Operating in the realm of rationality themselves, they were more susceptible to rational standards and critique than spiritual schemes. By continuing its subservience under these powers instead of measuring them by its own rational standards, rational philosophy placed itself more into the role of an accomplice than a victim. Invested in maintaining and expanding privileges in a new order that valued rationalizations, this branch of rational philosophy sought patronage by interests that could grant such privileges in exchange

for such rationalizations. In their service to ruling interests, interpretative insecurities regarding ancient rational philosophies could be exploited to read into them compatible and supportive content. Such legitimizing references could then serve as foundations for new ideas in support of ruling schemes, thus conferring notions of deep consideration and approval by their heritage.

Similar legitimizations had previously been sought by non-spiritual forces in spiritual lore. While spiritual schemes ruled, legitimizations they conferred were frequently essential to even hold worldly power. At times, spiritual and worldly schemes of power were difficult to separate and some occurred as inseparable hybrids. However, even in these amalgamations, irrational spiritual doctrines tended to dominate as motivation of their promoters or as indispensable instrument. Worldly power was frequently viewed as derivative from a higher spiritual power. This meant that non-spiritual power had to abide by the rules and commands of spiritual organizations. And this dependency formed a core reason why non-spiritual forces sought to free themselves to more fully be in control. Such forces increasingly looked for rational support not only to replace waning spiritual legitimizations, but with the intent to displace their influence. Such strategies to weaken dependence on spiritual powers tightly bound worldly forces to rational legitimizations. Including worldly organization by derivation under a spiritual umbrella had conferred spiritual privileges without rationale. In the absence of this spiritual legitimization, worldly powers were frequently obliged to provide such a rationale to gain or remain in power. Or they realized the convenience or importance of rationalizations of their rule to save them from having to defend against their subjects and competitors with adversarial measures. Relying on their ability to enforce their rule alone as sole rational argument for such rule was either not enough to give their rule sufficient solidity or it forced them to expend such enforcement to secure their rule. To forestall these complications, worldly powers sought additional underpinnings by rational theory in the course of independently caused as well as promoted weakenings of spiritual influence.

In some instances, philosophies conferring such rationales were commissioned and originated with the purpose of serving the powerful. But even if they had an independent origin, they were at risk of being coopted as vehicles for extraneous powers. And, until very recently, they had to comply with censorship by the powerful regarding what they could state, and mandates what they should state. Their success or very existence was often dependent not only on not alienating ruling powers, but serving them. Such impositions by powerful interests worked not only as restrictions on philosophies, but also as incentives to align with those interests. Philosophies frequently decided to avail themselves of power beyond their arguments to help their influence. They sought societal domination to evade questioning, deal with competitors, and find support in their imposition. And even if philosophies started out as countervailing forces, the reality of politics required that they combine with powerful interests, or build sufficient power on their own, to overcome and replace powerful adversaries. This is reflected in a multitude of symbiotic or identical relationships between rational philosophies and interests seeking or already exerting domination. Arguably, this is what philosophy had to do to exist and survive. But it cannot detract from the notion that rational philosophy has regularly been tainted by, or aligned itself with, those in or with ambitions to be in charge, and that it frequently pursued such ambitions itself.

Its variants were frequently imposed by occupying forces or governance from within a society. But it was also sought or accepted without much critical consideration and thus understanding. For extensive stretches of human history, an uneducated, insecure populace seeking guidance and protection in an uncertain and hostile world invested trust in leadership pointing the way and organizing their affairs. These complimentary hierarchic motivations, of running the lives of others and to have them run by others, often combined to broadly support implementations or rational schemes. But even where motivations were initially not geared to support hierarchies or even opposed to them, this instinctive organizational principle reemerged to dominate rational organizations. Its characteristics have had a stifling and falsifying effect on rational philosophy. Regardless of provenance and backing, philosophy has habitually been used to assert, convey, project, and secure power and to control and manipulate those subjected to it. This has regularly led to resistance in those subjects who disagreed with the substance or application of a ruling philosophy and who were not silenced by considerations that it might be prudent to go along.

These originating circumstances and manners of imposition and alignment led to disappointing and often disastrous outcomes in the applications of rational philosophies to human affairs. Submission to and instrumentalization by governing interests have long preoccupied the political branch of rational philosophy, providing legitimizations for such interests by failures to speak up and active support. Individual and societal progress was mostly achieved in spite of traditional philosophies in counter-movements to fend them off, overcome or reduce their oppression, correct their mistakes, or replace them. Such reactive movements regularly originated among victims tortured by powerful interests with the participation of prevailing philosophies or indulgence by them. These were revolutionary movements that broke with traditional concepts.

Arguably, philosophy provided the antithetic catalyst for such movements and thus contributed a necessary dialectic to humanity's progress. As this argument goes, mindsets rising in opposition to failed traditional philosophies made up for their failures, became rational philosophies in their own right, and constitute worthwhile showpieces of philosophy on which we should concentrate. These movements may have developed their counterpoints into concepts that can be called philosophies. And the passage of time renders anything traditional if it can survive, as some of these revolutionary philosophies did in some form. Accordingly, we see aging, once revolutionary movements claimed by rational philosophy as traditional and receiving, together with their promoters, similar mummification treatments and apotheosis as more venerated old doctrines. This may contribute to the fact that ambitions by revolutionary movements suffer the same or similar fate at the hands of traditional philosophy as the theories they sought to supersede, joining them in the dustbin of irrelevance. But this fate also seems to be a result of inherent dynamics. If revolutionary movements do not implode by their overheated reactionary fervor, they seem to cool off and normalize to be reclaimed by preceding conditions or developed into unintended directions. So it is often hard to tell whether they ultimately succeeded in advancing the human condition. Arguably, the upheaval they caused did not yield much, and subtracted from positive results that might have been accomplished by evolutionary pathways. Traditional rational philosophies may take the position that they represent this safer alternative.

Either of these arguments would let traditional rational philosophy off too easily. One presumes that ongoing philosophical progress directed by traditional rational philosophy was interrupted by revolutionary movements. However, this argument is disingenuous on its face. Revolutionary movements came into existence because traditional philosophy failed its promise of improving the human condition. Nor is there support for the reverse claim that traditional philosophy fulfilled an essential function because progress could not have been achieved without societal upheaval, fighting, and hardship. Rational philosophy as a science could have worked up and laid out rational advancements and could have tried to advance humanity with them. Its repeated failures to lead in this direction, its silence about damaging deviations, and its coddling and advancement of power are unforgivable. These failings prompted the creation of counter-movements to step into the role rational philosophy had claimed for itself and many of these movements eventually matured to form a philosophy. But let us remember that traditional and reactive philosophies were not just experiments in a lab. They were used on us and by us with their promise and our expectation they would transport us to a better future. And most of them have failed on a scale ranging from pathetic to monstrous. Some philosophers might have jumped on the bandwagon after seeing it depart. But none of this can redeem the poor record of traditional philosophies in advancing the cause of philosophy. Nor can it compensate for their betrayal of their proclaimed purpose. Let us also recall that counter-movements were often ill-advised, uncontrolled, messy, and extreme reactions to traditional philosophies or their lack of assistance, and that progress frequently came at a high price of chaos before a more reasonable settlement set in. And let us keep in mind that these movements soon were subjected to failings of their own or by reactionary influences. Traditional philosophies were responsible for all this. Not only by eliciting such counter-movements through the repression in which they participated and their failure in offering acceptable terms of human existence. But also by failing to foresee and ushering in the ultimately resulting progress by way of their own integral development.

The few advancements humanity managed to derive from these struggles are in the way of common-sense preventative mechanisms. After not offering workable models for the existence of humankind and bringing it to the brink of extinction, philosophies are now rightly viewed as purveyors and enablers of evil or at least a massive waste of time. To prevent further fighting and suffering caused and enabled by or in reaction to them, societies have progressively sought and found pragmatic mechanisms of governance that keep excesses and dangerous adventures at bay. Imperfect as they may be, they are already winning propositions in the minds of their participants if they can prevent the hardships and horrors of the past. Given the record of rational philosophy, humanity has become generally unwilling to listen to anything it has to say, if it had anything more to say. It is no wonder then, that philosophy looks back nostalgically to its origins. Yet a renaissance of a claimed former grandeur of classical origins seems like a mythical mirage. Based on the surviving fragments of these origins and what rational philosophy has made of them, it is hard to tell whether it once had the claimed scientific vitality and relevance. But this does not matter because most of these origins are irretrievably lost. Science has long left and distanced itself from philosophy to be claimed as one of its disciplines. The practicalities and open questions of scientific disciplines carry their own subject matters, considerations, and processes.

The departure of these disciplines has revealed how inept rational philosophy has become solving human challenges. It has lost itself reveling in this mythical nostalgia, conjuring and debating with itself irrelevant theoretical imaginations, or selling its soul to power to experience relevance. All aspects of traditional rational philosophy have flatlined and are only artificially kept alive. All that is left is a pretentious ghost that has lost touch with the real world. Philosophy is dead. And given the pain it has brought in both its spiritual and rational varieties, humanity seems better off.

4. Insight Prevention.

Concluding this is painful. And it seems wrong. How can the idea of love of knowledge become irrelevant. Understanding us and our settings and their happenings is existentially essential. We cannot ignore reality and hope to thrive or even live. We cannot reasonably object to knowledge and we have not lost our desire for it. Rather we are objecting to what has been presented to us as knowledge regarding human affairs with assurances of objective authority. We are objecting to the notion that principles of science can be applied to our existence and how it is lived and that societies can be shaped as if we were interchangeable automatons. Arriving at this point of resistance has taken the entirety of human history up until very recently. Humanity's negative attitudes toward both spiritual and rational philosophies have taken form over time as a result of its accumulated experiences with them and their varieties. We particularly tend to mistrust more recent philosophies that we can identify as sources of debacles in which we have been caught up or which we directly or indirectly observed. But increased experience and better access to information also show us more clearly how philosophies reaching further back caused similar damage for similar reasons. Reviewing and in part experiencing a long line of negative examples of both spiritual and rational philosophy have jaded us at a cost. For a long time, humans wanted to trust that the correct, true philosophy exists and just needs to be implemented correctly or that they are witnessing it in a present development of the human spirit. Only after having been disappointed again and again in our high hopes have we reluctantly given up on such ideas, or at least we have become apprehensive. We have found that many ideas promoted by philosophies are simply inapplicable, if not to us all, then a great many of us. If these were indeed competent to improve people's lives, would they not have to become successful on account of their merit? Maybe that posed a problem in closed societies of the past. Then, many signed on merely on the basis of its advertisement or impression without true understanding and practice. But growing education and expanded information should have enabled us to connect with philosophies with which we can identify. To the extent philosophies are applicable to us, this is observable. We can readily find instances in traditional philosophies with which we agree. However, as the entirety of a philosophy of which they are a part comes into view, most of us find insufficient congruence in our mind to subscribe with our existence to it. This may be due to reasons specific to each philosophy. However, a more fundamental reason shared by all is that they attempt to apply one some person's philosophy to others who differ in important respects. This fundamental problem haunts all philosophies. It is caused by their clinging to notions of objective truth in human affairs, either by authority of spiritual inspiration or as a matter of rational deduction from universal premises. One way or another, they all try to push us into their molds to make us fit.

If philosophies are not already aware of this problem from the outset, they are bound to become aware of it by their reception. While some individuals may gravitate toward them, many others will not. No philosophy has ever been able to convince all individuals to which it deems itself applicable. And often philosophies fall markedly short of that goal even if they are relatively successful. Further, even the most successful philosophies have trouble getting their followers to apply their instructions as intended. This threat of insufficient permeation in breadth and depth makes philosophies resort to auxiliary measures beyond their message itself. Forcing subjects into compliance might be a justifiable course for some of them. But this is difficult to do and may be impossible. By its nature, compulsion will not convince many subjected to it and rather cause resistance that weakens the implementation of the philosophy. Thus, most philosophies take a more subtle tack. They may direct circumstances to herd us into their direction. Or they may try to entice us with a variety of marketing efforts. If they are already established in a society, they may use its education and information systems to perpetuate themselves. Whatever their efforts to recruit or influence us might be, one intent permeates all of them: Restricting our choices.

Wherever we look, philosophies attempt to prevent us from inquiries that might not turn in their favor. Regardless of venue, they are not offered to us in a true sense of free examination, in keeping with the love of knowledge motto the translation of the word philosophy implies. We were not educated, permitted, or encouraged to question or dissect traditional philosophies and freely make up our own minds about them, the ways of the world, and our ways of life. They never really wanted us to probe their claims of emotional immediacy or unassailable premises and logic. After all, they were convinced they are true and any questioning would only stand in the way of implementing that truth or constitute a waste of time. These convictions are not even much tested when philosophies fight one another because they do this more in a manner of tribal warfare than with an intent of propelling the cause of philosophy in an argument. Very little genuine effort is spent by them on comparing the details of their components and concepts. If such comparisons occur, they usually take the form of conclusory slants. And often, philosophies seemingly enter into truces that direct their efforts toward reserving and convincing their already claimed audience and not one another's subjects. Quite apparently, philosophies avoid attempts to dismantle one another for fear of deeper probing into their own weaknesses. Critical review is also prevented when they are instrumentalized, or instrumentalize themselves, in the service of interests that seek to support their power through them. And criticism is most categorically discouraged when philosophies seek to impose or secure themselves. When we look closer, we find that we have been serially cajoled and conned by traditional philosophy, and systematically prevented from uncovering such constrictions or doing much about them. We are bound to discover that "Philosophy For Us All" has mostly been a false advertisement by unscrupulous schemes to sell us on somebody else's philosophy in an effort to give it or prolong its life. Maybe this was undertaken with the idea that this might benefit us. However, despite any claims to the contrary, traditional philosophies never meant to equip or help us to decide whether we want to accede to them or what we might want instead. Their overarching intent has been to foil, not further, our self-realization, to make us their instrument and not to become master of our affairs. We were targeted to be functionaries for them to reach requisite implementation momentum.

When we explore the concept of self-realization, we can recognize why traditional philosophy had to take this stance. We find that we will not all come to the same conclusions about how we want to live and what is important to us. Our identities are not interchangeable punch-outs that can be mechanically arranged and put to work according to an overarching schedule. We can see that we have a lot in common and that these commonalities are to be respected and advanced for everybody's sake. But we also want to be respected for our qualities as perceiving, thinking, and feeling centers of consciousness with the ability and will to contemplate and find our way. We want to bring this individuality to bear, even in supporting our commonalities. And we want attention given to the fact that we are unique in our person, experiences, capacities, and circumstances and our resulting needs and wishes. We want to be free to live our life. We want to be asked and reasoned with, not told and ordered. Observing individual differences and their connection to our thirst for freedom suggests that we should discard the idea that one and the same comprehensive philosophy could apply to us all. This realization spells the end of any philosophy that claims to cover the human condition beyond basic commonalities for us all. It also spells the end of any philosophy that tries to coax or force us into compliance in disregard or circumvention of our considered approval. The transgression by traditional philosophy of this limitation, its overbearing disrespect for us, and its sheer incompetence have led to its demise. We don't buy anymore there could be a philosophy for us all. More than that, we have come to the conclusion that philosophy as an organized effort is not for us. The philosophy store has gone out of business. Its worn-out shop sign has been taken down and placed in storage.

5. Modern Materialism.

So where does this leave us? Traditional structures governing us on the basis of philosophies have increasingly conformed with our realization that these philosophies do not serve us and that we must cope without them. They may continue to practice superficial conformance with a set of traditional ideas, but in a bid to hold on to power increasingly abandon their former intensity and rigor in exchange for popularity. In this undertaking, they may reform their agenda. But this is unlikely to succeed. The combined void of passable ancient and more recent philosophies has given way to a new breed of philosophies. These are imposed by those who currently influence and guide societal circumstances or trends and economic or technological advancements. These philosophies mostly serve the interests of those who promote them or their benefactors. Such interests largely consist in making their projects or themselves more successful and powerful. The objects of their pursuits, and their pursuits, seem to become values in themselves around which their philosophy, or pretense of philosophy, is built. Grander visions are only explored and fostered to the extent they show perspective for their objectives. Most of this hardly seems new. One can readily attach similar characterizations to traditional philosophies. Only, there generally seems to be now much less effort put forth by philosophies into convincing or oppressing their marks. This is because their main instruments and justifications are material conditions and prospects. Their proponents can shape their targets' outlook by creating realities or perspectives on realities that without much more shape such outlook. Technological and economic factualities of modern circumstances and their developments and consequences largely seem to make the

populace's alignment inevitable and theoretical foundations unnecessary. Some of the forces that drive such factualities may still offer a layer of explanations and encouragements to mollify the populace into going along with reduced friction. But only to some extent and for some time might it be necessary to convince subjects of practicalities resulting from facts. This is aided by policies that make them believe the benefits of growth and innovation outweigh their downsides.

The new kinds of philosophy seem to generally dictate how we live by an apparent logic of human development. Not even the most powerful forces seem to be able to prevent or significantly influence this logic of potential and its realization. If something is possible, it will sooner or later be tried and applied. This leaves in many cases much to be considered how, where, when, and toward which purpose it should be applied. Individuals who are affected by these issues should be able to have a say in them. But the driving forces of development tack their decisions of what they deem best uses onto generic potentials. They may apply them for the good of humanity as they see it in harmony with their personal objectives. Or they may try to justify more self-serving directions by claimed inescapability. Either way, initial developmental concealment, ownership, novelty, and intractability of these issues and decisions leaves us out of contention. This is not to say there is a grand conspiracy by developmental forces. Rather, economic and technological dynamics may give rise to seemingly irresistible directions. But enormous acceleration potentials of economic or technological innovations can convey enormous wealth and power to a relatively small number of entrepreneurs at their forefront. Some may be able to move developments into avenues that others must follow to remain competitive. Or the potential of a development is visibly too lucrative or powerful to leave it to others. So a number of actors pursue it in separate but parallel or similar movements. Together, these players, their games, the high stakes, the rules by which they play, and the fast-moving outcomes they produce tend to sideline anybody else. This includes traditional government that is ill-equipped to know how to regulate innovation and growth or exert sufficient clout. It may not even be useful anymore as an instrument in securing competitive advantages or controlling other aspects of the developmental setting so that they become or remain conducive. Driving developmental forces become powerful enough to make and control their own weather and the conditions of those around them. This reduces most of their public relations efforts to clearing the way for competing variants of the same practicalities, distractions from their domination, and celebrations of a general belief in a better future through economic and technological progress. One might hesitate to call these motivations and practices philosophies. Nonetheless, underlying all this are some people's ideas of how they and we should live that continue philosophy's historical patterns of disenfranchisement and patronization.

These factual pressures and related policies seem effective. Most of us just want to get by and succeed in settings over which we seem to have ever diminishing control. And we are resigned to the idea that, in order to do well under such circumstances, we have to conform to rules and facts set by others and more anonymous developmental trends. Such apathy and subservience may be welcomed by those newly powerful to shape our circumstances. To the extent forces that used traditional philosophy for their purposes survive, they may try to usurp or participate in this control and use it to replace receding directability of us under traditional philosophies. Maybe

those in charge have always used philosophy to influence their subjects that there is little or nothing that should or can be changed about them being in charge. But historically this was often helped along by beliefs in a greater context, system, purpose, or imagined reality and future, regardless of whether we were held under the influence of a spiritual or rational philosophy. These beliefs in a higher purpose regularly justified our subordination and suffering in our minds. However, for most of us, such high concepts or connected motivations have become illusory. We have become beaten and blunted by pressures seemingly inherent in the modern world, where our value is reduced to our economic and technological capacities and other social dimensions wither from this prerogative. We do not believe in anything anymore and do not believe it would make a difference. We have developed ambivalence about our future and the future of humanity in its extrapolation. We are not sure whether current economic and technological trends will kill us or secure our survival. All we know is that we are relegated to working the system engulfing us as well as we can to do as well as we can. We are on our own. This disillusionment, focus, and isolation serve those in power or with ambitions of power well. It reduces us to functionaries in their machinery and evokes notions of dystopian conditions to which we are helplessly exposed.

6. A New Beginning.

However, as compellingly as this mode of existence might line up in our experiences, it is not inescapable, at least not terminally. The described conditions constitute a useful, and possibly necessary pre-stage for positive evolution. The liberation from traditional philosophical concepts and the reflection of our outlook onto ourselves prepare us for a new beginning. They enable us to build our personal philosophy in an effort to claim authority over ourselves and our affairs. Our extreme deprivation of freedom and perspective by anonymous or abstract forces motivates us to more seriously consider what we can find in ourselves and our relationships with our more immediate environment to improve our situation. Instead of letting our surroundings dictate our existence and outlook, we might consider and reserve the right to find alternatives. Alternatives that are not dictated by economic and technological potential and the means necessary to attain them. But those that reflect more accurately our humanity. Philosophy of the human condition can only be useful if it focuses on us and our concerns as individuals, our socialization with other humans, and what we need from our more extended environment. This will in parts require large-scale cooperative efforts. But these can only reliably grow from our individual consideration and realization of what our circumstances, needs, and wishes are. Apparently, we each have to “love to know” how to live so we can find out and replace ignorant trust, fearful obedience, resentful suspicion, helplessness, and resignation with the clarity and instructiveness of knowledge. This prospect places philosophy into its proper role, centered in our mind and existence. This strategy can succeed to a useful extent if we act alone. But its multiplication can create a ground swell for more extensive positive change. Philosophy is for all of us after all, just in a different sense. We are no longer buying philosophical concepts that take us for a ride to parts unknown. Instead, we take over the philosophy shop to design and build our own conveyances. And we drive these into directions and to destinations of our choice. It is time then to pull the tarnished old “Philosophy For Us All” placard from storage, polish it up, and put it up to get people’s attention.

7. Reviving Traditional Philosophy?

Many of us will want to orient themselves about worthwhile stops and ends as well as conducive travels, and we will have to learn how to drive. But engineering and building our conveyance is a task new to most of us as well. All this may seem a bit overwhelming. But it is not like we are completely new to these tasks and our settings. We already know much about us, our likes and dislikes, our needs. We have learned the tools to cope for many situations. And we have observed and criticized other people's philosophies and adopted some principles of our own. We probably have already some good ideas where we want to go and what areas we want to avoid. We also can listen to and verify the suggestions of others. And traveling will further educate us. New risks but also new opportunities await. The adventure of new experiences and how we react to them forms a big part for our attraction to moving forward. And the driving part will take care of itself. After all, we are designing and building our vehicle. So we will know how it works. Which brings us to the vehicle of our philosophy, the mechanics of it responsible for actually moving us along. We may ask ourselves whether we will have to reinvent the wheel and everything else about it? Of course not. We are not inventing transportation itself, but merely its forms and ways to make them more conducive to us. To enable this accommodation, we have to make a few decisions.

The most important determination we have to make is that we are getting our own conveyances so we are not dependent anymore on vehicles, schedules, itineraries, and actual transportation provided by others. The second decision is that we decide to make our vehicle more reliable and adjusted to our purposes. To many of us, this may appear like an impossible feat. And this is what traditional philosophies and even their countervailing movements want us to believe. They instill in us propositions that we do not possess the wherewithal to become and move independent from them. But the conveyances we now devise for ourselves come naturally to us if we let them. They are logical extensions of our person. Their design flows from our needs and wishes and the complementary resources we find or can shape. We can know and will further learn how to build and live our existence if we trust and listen to ourselves. However, before and while we are building our conveyances, the fundamental undertaking is then to truly familiarize and reconcile us with ourselves. The second step is to include our surroundings, our means and ways, in this undertaking. Obviously, the parts and tools we can readily use, obtain, or build will need to be surveyed. And the terrains, climates, and other conditions where we want to travel or which we have to traverse will have great influence on the type and features of the vehicle we design. We may look at historical and current philosophies operating in such circumstances to glean ideas. But we must take charge of this process to make it our own. We will need to carefully consider all aspects presented to us to determine whether and how they fit into our personal philosophy.

Even though traditional conveyances are out of commission or we decline to get on board with them, we may benefit from identifying and extracting components we can use. A serious obstacle to reuse is that many systems and components were designed, built, and operated with faulty, inefficient, or ineffective components. So we must question which aspects, if any, can be salvaged with confidence they will contribute to successful travel for us. We might also try to repair or update parts of traditional philosophies. The problem with all this is that we are doctoring around

in a junkyard of vehicles that were unreliable and often disastrously unsafe on the road and failed to reach most of their promised destinations. And we often would need to investigate why they suffered this fate. We might not initially know whether and how much the propulsion itself, its operation, unforeseen occurrences along the way, or itineraries, travel guides, and maps we find in these vehicles contributed to their ending up on the scrap heap of history. Determining the weak points and errors and working to fix and improve them would require that we study and become experts in them. Such an investment seems misplaced. All this attention to failed systems would put us in danger of getting similarly lost as traditional philosophy. And it would preoccupy us with continuing the same debates their problems have posed for humankind in the past.

We can and should certainly look at and learn from the old ways and their accomplishments and mistakes. But, given the altogether negative results they have heaved upon us, it seems prudent to not dwell on them any longer than we must to learn their lessons, and to then decidedly move on. The systemically demonstrated failure of traditional philosophy and the waste, damage, and suffering it caused have plagued humans and humankind long enough. By these consequences, traditional philosophy has disqualified itself. Consulting its discredited permutations invites them to extend their generation of dissatisfaction and calamities. We might not be concerned coping with the philosophies themselves. However, virtually all have been, and in some cases still are, conveyances driven by powerful interests with continuing commitments to their travels. Such interests may pursue and welcome reconstitution or continuation of their ways under a new license. And they might try under the guise of helpfulness toward our travels take us for a ride after all according to what they have in mind. And what new insights could we realistically hope to find from searching through traditional philosophies? They already were chewed through ad nauseam when people had to grapple with them. Insightful critiques are already available. And these point out that their positive aspects were commonsense insights that were impossible to deny by them or became pronounced as a result of their denial. We can and should take along such clearly promising components. However, to move forward, we must leave behind the ballast and hazardous waste that has so long kept us from freely moving forward. We need to get it out of our lives while preserving our memory of it to keep us from revisiting or generating more of it.

8. Wondering What To Do.

So where does this leave us and how do we proceed? With all the bad wrought by philosophy, there is also a history of inspiration connected to it on which we can draw. Humanity's yearning and struggle for a better life have continued throughout the ages despite at times monumental impediments. An indomitable spirit persists in attempts to fulfill the promise of human potential for thriving. Overall, progress has been slow, uneven, and marred by setbacks. We have been like children, afraid of the world and trusting it at other times, erring in these and other choices for lack of experience and judgment, and often not knowing what to do. But we have been learning from our mistakes. We can detect that humankind and our life circumstances are developing into the right direction. But we are also put on credible notice by our experiences and history that this may not succeed if we do not personify, defend, and actively advance this spirit. The question we must ask ourselves is whether we take up this challenge and conduct it in a proper manner.

Looking at history, prior generations have found this difficult. At times, it seemed as if the world had begun to be transformed by movements focusing on critical thinking, guided by this spirit of liberation and aspiration. Humanity appeared to liberate itself from external and self-imposed delusion, suppression, and depression, and it seemed set to reach for higher levels of conscience. But many of these movements were too tentative, incomplete, or divided among themselves, received insufficient support, or were resolutely crushed. More than that, many were inherently flawed, or their fledging phases were taken over by opportunists who perverted and used them to promote themselves, their philosophies, or ill proclivities. Liberation movements against current oppression often resulted in new oppression and further derailment of the human cause. As reactions to previous outrages, they often swung to compensatory and punitive extremes.

Over time, such extremes settled into more moderate conditions. And traditional philosophies often came around as well. Aware of the spirit of liberation and threats from its suppression, they tried to incorporate it and some of its assertions and manifestations into their constructs. These influences often consist in the recognition and protection of fundamental human requirements and corresponding fundamental rights. In their claim of comprehensive coverage, traditional philosophies already tended to include such evident, familiar truths into their theories. And those that lacked in their recognition sought to alleviate adverse pressure by assenting to them. They might have done this with genuine acknowledgement of their legitimacy. In many instances, however, basic conditions and paradigms were incorporated because they had to be addressed. They were worked into the constructs raised by philosophies as utensils giving them support or dealing with possible dissent. Or they were cited to appease prospective and current followers and lead them into trusting the rest of a philosophy's less or not evident assertions.

However, respect for individual humans and their needs has regularly stood in the way of their attempts in building larger constructs with a higher order and purpose on the backs of humans. Placing the human at the center of care and inquiry has thus been a rocky road marred by lip service, false acknowledgments, and often inaction or active betrayal. But it has made progress in modern times. As the grander schemes of philosophy, in which humans were not at the center or mere subjects of higher powers are abandoned, we can detect growing acknowledgment and even championing of human welfare. By and large, it is this emphasis on human affairs by non-traditional movements that is responsible for the demise of traditional philosophies. Practical human rights movements have been advancing a principled conscience that can be described as a philosophy limited to securing and enabling basic human affairs. Beyond that, some surviving traditional philosophies are trying to change their tune in a bid to remain relevant and reinsert themselves into a world that has passed or is passing on their sacrificial and inhumane theories. These are ongoing processes that fare differently in different parts of the world. And despite advancements in the acknowledgment, defense, and support of human needs and corresponding rights, many systems still fall short of fully embracing them as their fundamental principles.

To further advance and safeguard the victory of humanity, it is necessary that we cleanly focus on basics of human nature and the principles they imply. If we want assistance from traditional philosophies in this undertaking, we need to marshal their mentions of basics and run them by

our consideration and judgment. Depending how these basic aspects are cited and worked out in a particular philosophy, they might constitute constructive remnants on which we can build. How will we be able to identify such useful aspects? Their occurrence in multiple philosophies might give us indication that these might be fundamental principles of human existence. Another filter would be whether we can recognize them as general principles of human existence that are applicable to us and everybody else. Such recognition should come easy. We might think we can skip this step because basic needs and rights are self-evident. But their acknowledgment and protection has only recently become a widespread phenomenon. They are therefore often still unsettled and in flow even in our minds, at least in their scope and depth of protection. Even if we believe we can fully define a human need and corresponding right, going through the process of actually doing so is a necessary stage for finding a proper footing for our philosophy. No matter whether they are currently secured or still need to be achieved in our society, we must be sure in our mind what these basics are. We must have a clear vision of the basic principles by which we intend to handle ourselves. We must be able to compare them to the lists and definitions by others in an effort to find a common basis. And we must make a plan on what we intend to insist right from the beginning and what we can leave to subsequent consensus advancements. We must understand how needs and rights compete in and among individuals and groups and how this competition can be best resolved. When we try to produce such descriptions of basics, we may discover we are not as secure in naming, defining, and correlating its entries as we thought we might be. Endeavoring this already places us ahead. Still, it is not an easy task. If traditional philosophies addressed basic human needs or rights, they often did so in a perfunctory, axiomatic manner without much discussion. And many discouraged or did not encourage us to actively consider basic issues of human existence. As a result, our knowledge about what can be done to make this a better world remains underdeveloped even at fundamental levels.

How we make this a better world depends not only on our understanding for common human concerns. An equally important issue is how our actions help to address these concerns through active support and protection. And, as important as these fundamental truths are, they are far from defining the entirety of the human spirit, but rather describe, as their designation indicates, only its basis. How we live our life upon these foundations is up to us. For our own protection and the protection of others, the common principles of human existence limit and to some extent dictate how we should behave. This leaves a vast area of how we conduct our life for us to decide. But we cannot recognize and harmonize either set of components and form an intent to act in accordance, unless we can see them clearly in our mind. In order to arrive at that point of clarity, we must begin with a consideration of the basics for our personal sake. Assembling a complete list and definition of these in our mind, and discussing them with others to learn and arrive at a consensus with others about them, forms an indispensable foundation for developing our own constructive philosophy. We require the stable foundation of a secured and mutually respected existence to develop our individuality to its fullest constructive potential. Therefore, ascertaining fundamental human requirements and rights serves not only our ambition to make this a better world, but directly provides a basis for the maximization of our personal thriving. Altruism and selfish motivations then join proving that they in essence are parts of the same insight.

9. The Risk of Impasse and Regression.

Not going through this systematic motion in devising our personal philosophy puts us at danger of making mistakes. But so may trying to establish proper foundations under our efforts. Since we are initially establishing basics common to all humans, we seem well-advised to include all humans or the widest possible sampling group into the process of distilling these. We may think that if a principle is universally applicable, we should be able to get everybody to agree. However, this may embroil us in a drawn-out, frustrating process of trying to reconcile disagreement. We will have to account for remnants of largely discarded philosophies or schemes using them. But we will also be confronted with underlying tribal and hierarchic perversions, superstitions, lack of education, deprivation, confusion, and human vices and weaknesses in a variety of respects. These deleterious conditions have frequently shaped philosophies and at times were their direct source and motivation. They have not been abolished, only possibly contained. They continue to pose a threat to even get started with a derivation of our own philosophy. And they may well prevent us from finding an adequate number of similar-minded individuals to build a society on the basis of common fundamental notions about human affairs. And even if such commonalities should have been achieved, they pose a risk of reversion into old ways and attitudes we thought were superseded and forever left behind. Some of these obstacles may prevent us from achieving consensus on even the most basic principles of human existence. But we must not be deterred by these difficulties. Realistically, not everybody is beginning that process with a clean slate and the same outlook at the same time. They may not even be on board with the new beginning we have chosen. We have to account for different states of individuals and focus on common notions we can create now with the perspective of building further commonalities on this basis. For the time being, we can rally those in agreement on certain fundamentals to form communities based on these agreed basic principles. These communities can provide mutual support and protection of principles we regard as fundamental to our existence and thriving. And we can hope that their model will influence others to agree as well. But this is not the end of our responsibility if we want to create a better world. The existential core concerns of humanity from and around which our personal philosophy is being built command us to rigidly protect and support basic needs and rights wherever such rights are under threat of being irreparably damaged. Where such concerns of human existence that are non-negotiable among reasonable humans are violated, we will have to intercede on behalf of those who cannot help themselves. If we fail to draw and hold this line against evil, nothing else we do will matter since this proves that we are unwilling to defend humanity, our humanity, and ultimately ourselves. Our philosophy based on our humanity means nothing if we are unwilling to defend that humanity. Basic principles that have already found widespread acknowledgment up to this point can serve as base line for this process. But we must be prepared to support and defend basic human values even without such consensus.

There are signs that this movement and ambitions to find a new beginning on its basis are gaining momentum. What seems missing is a broad readiness to take the necessary steps back and find a systematic approach of the kind laid out. Our stance toward traditional philosophies and against the threat of their recurrence have made our undertakings on behalf of a better future largely

reactive up to this point. We have been largely occupied with securing our freedom. We have found out what we do not want and many of us have rallied against it. However, the novelty of the challenge to consider and determine our own affairs has also made us feel ill-equipped to replace them with concepts of our own making. Some replace discredited guidance by traditional philosophies with shortsighted, poorly considered paths. Or we choose to ride along with others to see where it takes us. Or we resign to rudderless pursuits that strike our fancy without a deeper plan. However, these unordered modes of existence are insufferable for most of us and thus relegated to the fringes of societies. With traditional philosophies discredited and waning, we have moved on to cope and make due with the material world without any philosophy.

This has allowed principles of this materiality to rule us and our world. Many of us have settled into a life of material accumulation and consumption. And those of us who have not secured material wealth largely envy those who have succeeded for such a lifestyle, and try to reach or emulate it. It is hard to say whether we created this setting or whether we have been conditioned to it. However, the interaction of these factors grants extraordinary resilience to the resulting system. Resigned to or supporting its direction, we tend to act opportunistically according to what we deem beneficial without much critical thought. We blend into its dictates and conveniences to make the best of our situation. Only, our reduction to material functionaries keeps us far from making the best of it. While our minds were adrift, we and the forces to which we have ceded our sovereignty have been creating and permitting circumstances that threaten our well-being and survival individually and as a species. Many such conditions result from our material requirements, sacrifices to secure them, and inattentiveness to consequences. These degradations and predations are known or could be known with some effort. But the unrelenting promotion of material over other concerns and our focus on current conveniences make us gloss over detrimental consequences. We want to believe that materiality will continue to thrive in its demonstrated prowess and we will continue to benefit from it. Even if we detect trouble, we are at a loss to fathom what else could help us. So we trust it will subside by the dynamics of the system, or that those in charge will make it go away. This may lead us to trust others with all the risk this carries. Yet, we already are unwittingly entering that risk. Our apathy leads to let others manage, or not manage, our world, or use it for their purposes, while we bury our heads and hearts in private lives whose limited ambitions focus on more immediate concerns and reaches.

Our shortsighted behavior and the conduct of powers to which we abdicated is bound to increase environmental and economic damage, societal decay, oppression, unrest, war, and individual suffering. But rather than addressing this growing menace, we may double down with diversions, willful ignorance, and illusions of salvation. Assisted by electronic gadgetry, we may retreat into fantasy worlds, metaverses, as they already are advertised to us and engaged in by many of us. The escape potential offered by these false realities, contrasted by the often daunting challenges of correcting, retrieving, and securing our life and the lives of others, make us turn away even more. We keep ignoring that our and humanity's fate cannot improve if we keep ignoring them. Conditions are likely to deteriorate until we use our minds and hearts to their given capacity and focus them on identifying and addressing our nature, purposes, and challenges.

10. Addressing our Fate.

Possibly, we will only be ready to expand our mind and put in the necessary work after the refusal of our responsibilities reaches extremely uncomfortable levels. But such levels are sooner or later certain to result from our derelictions, if not for us then future generations. At that time, saving ourselves, them, and humankind may be much more difficult, less effective, or even impossible. And we will have wasted precious time and opportunities by our willful negligence, delay, and wasteful behavior. Confronted with the prospects or reality of these menaces, we may finally decide to seriously look for solutions and reorganize our existence into a considered one. But how can we muster at that urgent instant the requisite competence for implementing proposed solutions, let alone find comprehensive enlightenment to apply this capacity? We must carefully train our philosophical and practical capabilities in and over time so we can prevent or address these troubles. And even without such urgency, our life is limited and passing. The longer we wait living it as our own, the more of it is irretrievably wasted. As we consider more deeply when we should engage creating our personal philosophy for our life, all indications point to the now.

Many of us are aware that our current unconsidered behavior is unlikely to propel us into a better future. To the extent we have given up on traditional philosophies, we look for inspiration and practical guidance elsewhere. This demand is so strong that a self-help industry has risen to supply mostly general instructions or topical recipes for aspects of our life. These often consist of overstated commonplaces or gimmicks. They frequently try to make us believe our condition can be defined and improved by a few rules or principles. Or they stress the importance of particular aspects of human existence. It is up to us to determine our concerns, find coverage for them, evaluate the aptitude of such propositions, and reconcile them with all other aspects of our life. Most of us are not ready to make such an involved commitment. We sample ideas, possibly granting them cursory trials, but mostly discard them after they have served our curiosity. Given the spurious nature of many offerings, our failure to take them seriously might be a blessing. The few books or passages worth reading are buried in nonsense, filler, or hyperbole. Thus, sampling self-help books is unlikely to help us much in putting together our own philosophy.

There does not seem to be a substitute for going through the motions of consideration ourselves. Although we may take note of what others are thinking and doing, in the end, we will have to understand and confirm whether their suggestions work for us. And likely, many objectives and their pursuits will require us to devise personalized solutions of our own. It is our life, and we are responsible for developing our concept of it. Sources can supply material for this undertaking. But replacements or shortcuts only prevent us from developing a considered philosophy of our own. To the extent advice can be legitimately given for the development of our philosophical capabilities, and suggestions can be legitimately made for consideration in their application, philosophical authors are tasked to give assistance. Taking up this call, I have written a foundational work to help in both respects. My book *Philosophy of Happiness* focuses on enabling readers to develop their philosophical abilities and put them to constructive use. It is also meant to support them in critically evaluating other philosophies and pursuits. Information about my work is available on its dedicated website, <https://www.philosophyofhappiness.com>.